

Downtown KC Art Markets:

the Orenda (Spirit of Place) and Epic Artist Incubator PopUp Markets

The Kansas City, Kansas/Wyandotte County administration requested that we assist them with the development of two projects in 2017/2018. First, the city received a Local Initiatives Support Corporation Kansas City grant to develop an arts-focused retail incubator. Dotte Agency was retained to purchase, design, build and install a revised shipping container with KU architecture students in arch509 taught by Nils Gore. The second arts-related project was to jointly develop a proposal for the Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge for the 2018 competition. The Public Art Challenge pushes cities to see art as a tool for change and making cities healthier. A student named Jessie Jacobe assisted with the design development and drawings; Matt Kleinmann assisted with brainstorming with the community partners at the initial meetings. This project focus has brought a wide variety of non-traditional partners together demonstrating the value of the design process to work together towards a shared goal. This narrative is the proposal that we helped develop for the submission. (*Fig. 01*)



Fig. 01 | Meeting at ArtsKC with local artists and city leadership for initial grant planning.

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Kansas City, KS (KCK) sits at the heart of a nation, but lacks a central home to showcase the “Orenda” - or ‘Spirit of a Place’ in the Wyandot Indian language. (Fig. 02) KCK, like many urban communities, suffers from population decline, property devaluation, and poor public health outcomes. However, it is coming together to revitalize its depressed downtown area. (Fig. 03) To help redevelopment efforts, KCK and its many partners are

creating a couple of community gathering spaces in the downtown area: one adjacent to Dotte Agency and the Epic Clay Arts studio in a pocket park and another along the main street in downtown Kansas City that is envisioned to host a farmers’ market, as well as performing, culinary and visual arts that both attempt to reconnect surrounding neighborhoods on a pedestrian scale.

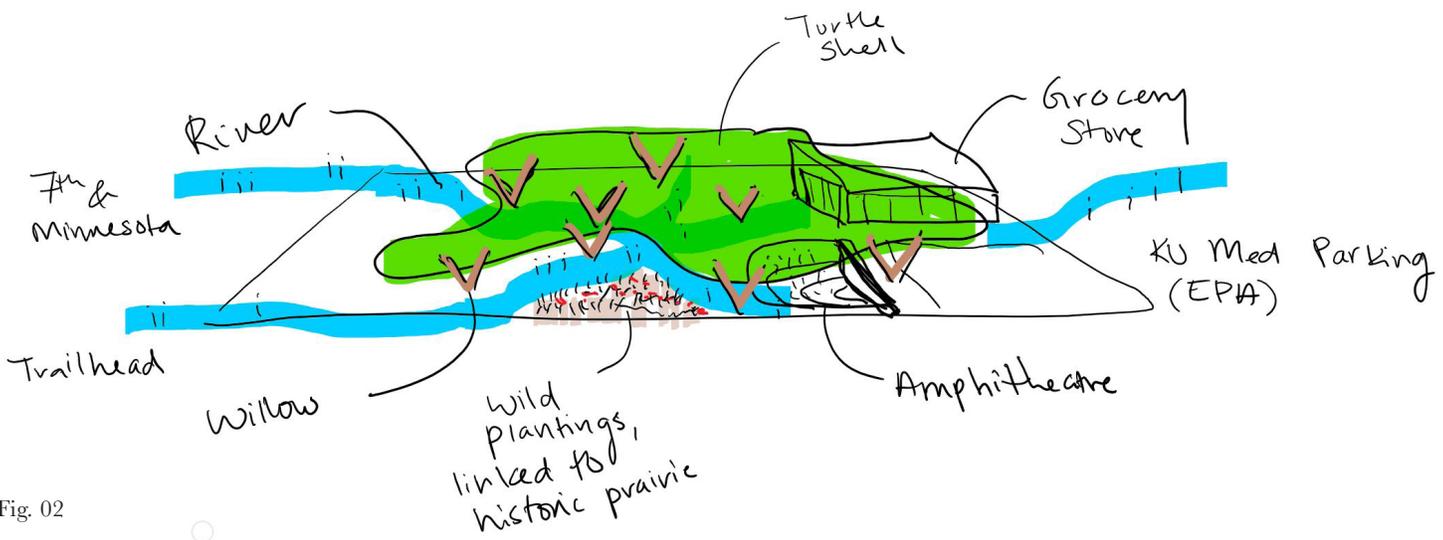


Fig. 02



Fig. 03 | Minnesota Avenue, adjacent to the selected site, is currently scheduled for ‘Complete Street’ improvements. This image well illustrates the need for improvements to better accommodate the pedestrian and aesthetic appeal. The selected site is currently a large parking lot that is under-utilized and in a prime location for better

use. These pictures reveal property devaluation and the need to re-define and energize the depressed downtown. New programming with a new coop grocery store, and an arts-based public space, farmer’s market, access to healthy food and community event space can be well accommodated on this site.

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For the Epic Arts-based retail incubator, the site at Sixth and Taumomee had early / mid-century industrial buildings which housed local businesses. (Fig. 04) At some point in time, the corner buildings were removed and now the site exists as a pocket park called Epic Park which is owned and operated by Community Housing of Wyandotte County (CHWC). The site has developed over the last few years as a small park that offers space for artists at Epic Clay Studios to work, a performance space (built by KU architecture students under Nils Gore's guidance), and a place where recently an artist's

sculpture has been installed. (Fig. 05) The 'Sixth Street Arts Corridor' is envisioned to support local neighborhood activities and various art programs. (Fig. 06) The process has been developed to strengthen a set of stakeholder interests alongside the Unified Government, the small business development group, the community institution development, event programming (the DASH KCK 5K event held in conjunction with the Kansas Public Library/Library In the Park event; the Latino Arts Festival and general business development.



Fig. 04 | Strawberry Hill Retail District, circa 1930.



Fig. 05 | Community engagement event at Epic Pocket Park adjacent to Dotte Agency.



Fig. 06 | Strawberry Hill District illustrates open areas the extent of the district west of I-70 and south of the downtown area. The figure-ground study illustrates that the neighborhood is mostly in tact

with predominantly, small single-family homes and a key retail/institutional areas connected to the downtown area. Vacant land-bank properties are indicated in green.

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This project focuses on the LISC Quality of Life Plan that identified “fostering small business growth” as a high priority of the Downtown Shareholder’s group. This project is imagined to increase the group’s capacity to market Downtown Kansas City, Kansas as an innovative location that partners with local residents to build advocacy and support skills for an improved, healthy

built environment. In Fall 2017, a series of engagement events were initiated (*Figs. 07 & 08*) to encourage resident and leadership participation to develop ideas and rally support for the development of this project. The core concept is to purchase a shipping container and convert it into a small retail store. (*Fig. 09*)



Fig. 07 | Students from Nils Gore’s studio present their PopUp Arts Incubator ideas at Chief Properties to area residents.

Fig. 08



Fig. 09 | Student rendering shows the proposed Arts Incubator with arbor in the Epic Pocket Park.

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True to its name, the Orenda Market will host the full spectrum of the arts, from visual to performing, that feature the spirit of this place. (Fig. 10) Rotating sculpture exhibitions will be incorporated around the “town square”, welcoming local and regional artists to showcase their work to the adjacent neighborhoods

and the entire KC region. Murals will be added that reflect the rich and diverse immigrant histories of the area, attracting visitors and residents alike to the space. In addition, the new farmers’ market pavilions and an improved streetscape will reflect the area’s natural heritage to further the connection to place. (Fig. 11)

Fig. 10 | Community wide view shows key connections of the design proposal at the Food Hub intersection: connecting two neighborhoods, Turtle Hill and Strawberry Hill along 5th Street; and connecting the

main street, Minnesota Avenue to the Kansas River. The nearby Huron Cemetery is a significant Native American burial ground adjacent to the transportation hub for the city and nearby institutions.

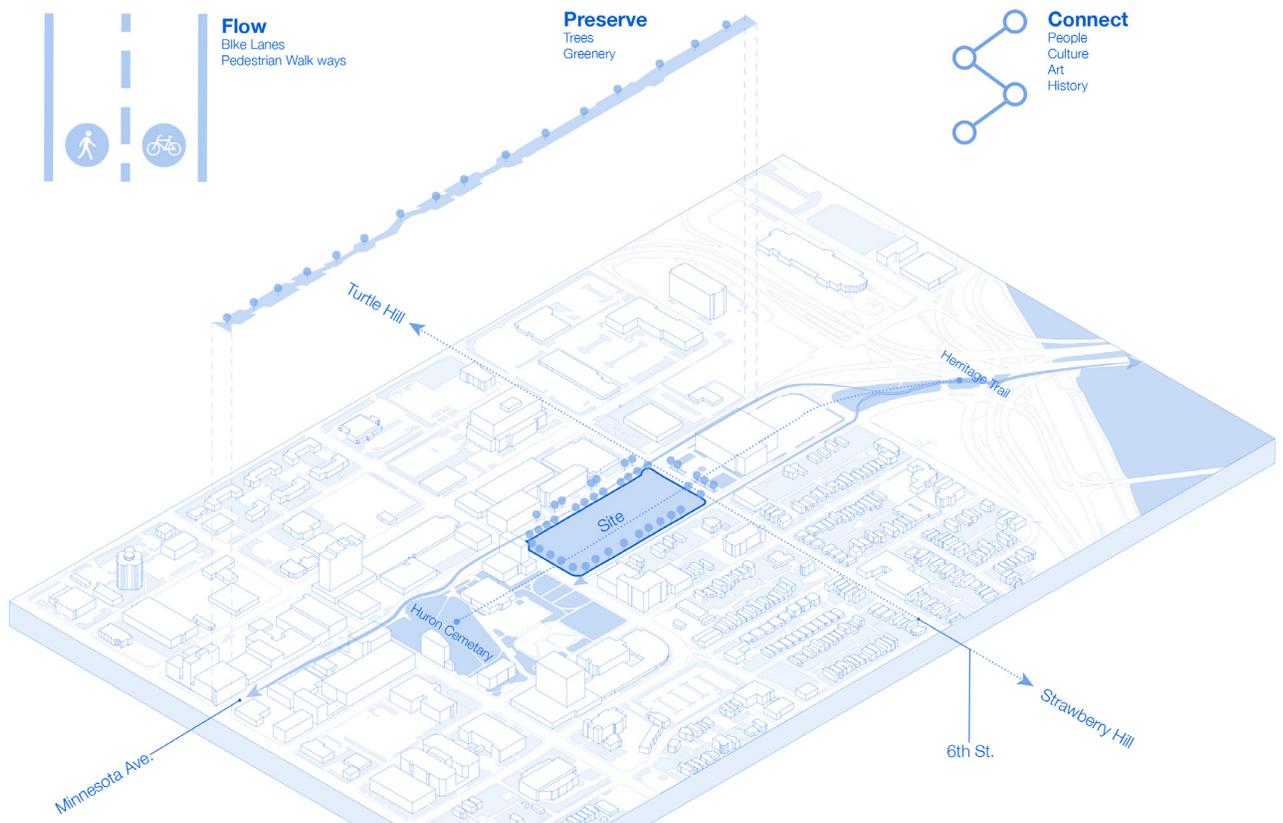


Fig. 11 | This view illustrates the intended development of the block between 5th to 6th Streets and Armstrong to Minnesota Avenues.

This project proposal includes a new grocery store with farmers’ market and art park.

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All art aspects of the project will be managed by a design committee for the arts formed as part of the development process for this front porch to KCK. The committee will ensure the spirit of the community lives beyond the timeframe of the initial art programming funded through the grant. The Orenda Market project brings sustainable art programming into a community with the lowest health ranking in the State of Kansas. A new co-op grocery store development planned on the same block supports the farmers' market, providing much needed access to healthy foods, and community event spaces.

This project is envisioned as a community effort that will be representative of the residents of the area and inclusive of the history of earlier generations. This Creative Placemaking project, "Orenda Market— The Spirit of the Place", will utilize public art and will bring many community activities to this one-block area

consisting of approximately three acres. It will include a farmers' market, public performance space, and permanent and rotating public art, such as murals, sculptures, and a fountain. (Fig. 12) This will emphasize and build upon the diverse community and neighborhood assets that are already in existence. The quality of this project would be ensured through input from leadership of a new Art & Design Advisory Council (ADAC) and will be supported by the expertise of ArtsKC – Regional Arts Council (AKC). ArtsKC, in existence since 1999, is a non-profit regional arts council serving the five-county region that includes KCK. Its focus is to promote, support and advocate for the arts. It recognizes that arts are an economic driver that bring diverse people together and can be used as a tool for community development. The ADAC members will be diverse and representative of the community. ArtsKC will help in coordination and the ADAC will have direct oversight from the KCK, as owner.



Fig. 12

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Some of the key artists and historians proposed for the ADAC include Jose Faus, Vania Soto, Shai Perry, Nedra Bonds, Janith English and Don Wilkinson. As an example of diverse leadership, Jose Faus is an originator of many multicultural murals in the region, Janith English, a Wyandot Chief, represents the Native American Wyandot Nation, Nedra Bonds, a fabric artist, shares her messages about social justice and the need to preserve history such as the Quindaro Underground Railroad and Shai Perry is an artist that operates a gallery at the KCK Community College.

The overarching goal for this project is creating a space for the community to actively engage around diverse cultural experiences, from food to music to art. The goal is also creating community connections that can foster economic development and establish a base for future development in the downtown. (Figs. 13, 14 & 15) Research in public health also demonstrates the health benefits of increased social cohesion—residents meeting each other in public spaces. In an area with some of the lowest health outcomes in the state, the Orenda Market will bring people together to celebrate their cultural identity through art and food.

The Orenda Market will create a vibrant community space that will encourage the next wave of revitalization. This will ultimately lead to increased foot traffic, increased occupancy at the neighboring hotel and usage of the convention center, increased access to healthy foods, and an increased quality of life for KCK residents and visitors alike.



Fig. 13 | Several community murals and various art sculptures have been installed in the downtown area in the last few years. A ‘gateway’ element (top image) has been installed at the entry to this area, near the selected site.



Fig. 14 | Key institutions such as the Public Library (upper left image) have established presence along Minnesota Avenue, near the selected site. The recently vacated federal Environmental Protection Agency building (lower left image) has been recently purchased by the University of Kansas for various health-related programs. Private companies, such as the Childrens’ Campus of Kansas City (upper right image) and the Kansas City Board of Public Utilities (lower right image) have recently built new, award-winning buildings adjacent to the selected site. There’s strong momentum of public and private investments that would benefit from expanded arts-related initiatives in public spaces.



Fig. 15 | Some housing adjacent to the site (left image) remains vacant; while other new housing infill project (right image) have been inserted near the site.