



**2016** MIDWEST URBAN DESIGN CHARRETTE

**AKRON, OH:  
POST-INNERBELT INVESTIGATIONS**

# **CHARRETTE REPORT**



Kent State University's  
**Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative**

## SUPPORTED BY:

**City of Akron**  
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# I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**From October 14-16th, 2016, students, staff, and alumni from Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC), Lawrence Tech University, and Cleveland State University worked closely with community members in Akron, Ohio to envision new design futures for the Innerbelt Highway site. Splitting into four teams, charrette participants worked quickly to generate four unique urban design proposals for the site over the course of three days.**

The Innerbelt Highway site is a unique urban space directly adjacent to Downtown Akron - a linear submerged trench that comprises 30 acres. As of October 2016 the north end of the roadway was in the process of being decommissioned, and the site's future remained undecided. The Midwest Urban Design Charrette's four teams each proposed distinct site plans and component development ideas in order to highlight the site's range of opportunities.

The first site proposal, **Woven Belt**, organizes new development in the middle of the Trench built up to existing street level through fill. New roadway connections stitch the eastern neighborhoods into the Downtown across this development zone, while a large-scale water feature and a recreational park space anchor the north and south of the Trench site. This proposal examines opportunities for using the site and its surroundings year-round, including ideas for activating the public space in the winter through program and maintenance.

**Future Elevation** focuses on strategies for activating the Innerbelt roadway itself, in order to spark perceptions of the site as a new civic gathering space within Akron. Additionally, this proposal suggests inventive ways to use topography and fill to create a playful landscape and mediate the change in elevation; and strategies for retrofitting existing buildings adjacent to the Innerbelt site in order to acknowledge new development.

**The B.E.L.T.** proposal, which stands for Bringing Everything Local Together, is organized around a weaving angular ribbon which acts as a connector of major and minor nodes along the Trench and on either side. The Ribbon loosely arranges developable program and small public interventions along the site and into the Downtown itself, particularly along Quaker Street. B.E.L.T. also examines possibilities for stormwater management on the site, taking the form of a series of stepped terraces integrated with housing.

The fourth proposal, **The Spine of Akron**, focuses primarily on the Innerbelt trench itself rather than adjacent development. The proposal treats the trench as an opportunity to create a new civic spine that acts as a centralized connector of disparate assets on the east and west side of the existing highway. By breaking the trench into three zones - health; commerce; and culture - the Spine creates large and small scale areas for Akronites of all ages, backgrounds, and interests to gather and celebrate the rebirth of an infrastructural space.

Finally, the **implementation** section consolidates some of the ideas from all four schemes into short-, mid-, and long-term actions, as well as splitting a consolidated site plan (largely based on the Woven Belt scheme) into related phases. These actions can be pulled out and executed individually depending on funding and timing of related Downtown investments.

Taken as a whole, **Post-Innerbelt Investigations** shows the residents of Akron a wide variety of potential futures for their former highway site, in the hope that these visions of the possible will reveal some of the inspiring opportunities in this important urban place.

# II. BACKGROUND

## CONTEXT

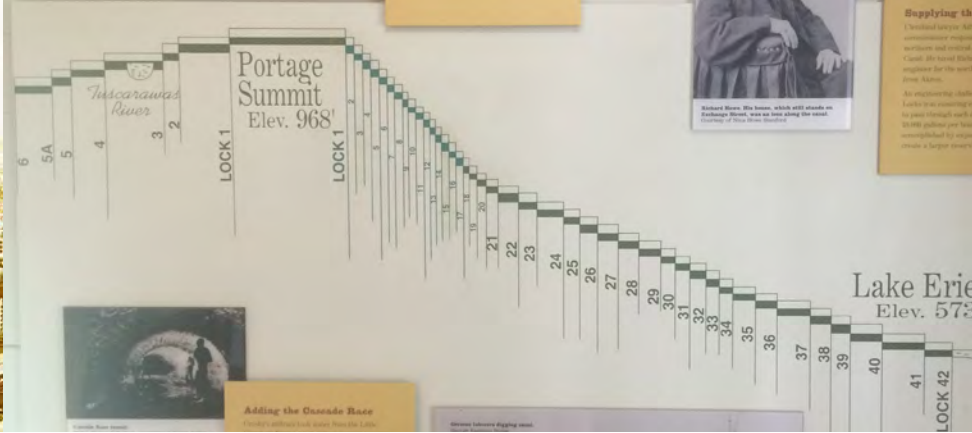
Every fall semester, Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative (CUDC) leads a workshop in a Northeast Ohio community dedicated to addressing the area's urban design needs. The workshop, known as a "charrette," offers a unique opportunity for KSU graduate students to work side-by-side with the CUDC's professional staff, partner universities, invited alumni, and local community members to generate a future vision. In 2016, graduate students from Lawrence Tech University and Cleveland State University joined CUDC students for the fifth-annual Midwest Urban Design Charrette, a collaboration .

## BACKGROUND

Akron is a mid-sized city in Northeast Ohio with strong roots in three distinct eras of American industry: canal shipping; automotive; and polymers. As of 2015 Census estimate, Akron has a population of over 197,000, making it the fifth-largest city in the state of Ohio.

Akron derives from a Greek word meaning "high place." It was founded along the natural ridgeline which divides the Great Lakes Watershed from the Mississippi Watershed, and became the summit of the developing Ohio and Erie Canal at its founding in 1825. Directly north of Downtown Akron, visitors





can still see remnants from the series of locks leading downhill towards Cleveland and Lake Erie (*above right*). The Towpath from the canal is now an important multiuse pathway well-used by pedestrians and cyclists. The city's strategic importance in the shipping of the 19th Century led directly into its important role in the manufacturing of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in producing rubber and tires for the automotive industry.

Known as the “Rubber City,” Akron was the home of four of the largest tire manufacturers in the world, most notably Goodyear. That company’s blimp is still a symbol of the city’s identity to many Akronites (*above left*). By the 1980s, most of the tire industry has moved away from Akron, but that industry’s local knowledge,

infrastructure, and manufacturing specialization have been leveraged for emerging polymer technologies. The University of Akron, located directly east of Downtown, provides research and support for the polymer industry, including opening the a College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering, and a National Polymer Innovation Center.

In 2016 Akron was awarded a \$5 million TIGER grant to redevelop its Main St in the Downtown area into a complete and green street, with dedicated bike lanes and landscaping to address stormwater runoff. Additionally, the city was recently awarded one of only four “Reimagining the Civic Commons” grants from the JPB, John S. and James L. Knight, Rockefeller, and Kresge foundations, and will use the money to revitalize the downtown section of the Towpath Trail, among other improvements.<sup>1</sup> As a result of these and other new interests, Downtown Akron, previously marked by a plethora of parking garages and relatively high commercial and retail vacancy, is experiencing new invigoration in the larger civic psyche.



## SITE

The Innerbelt highway, State Route 59, is a six-lane 2.25-mile spur constructed during the Urban Renewal era of Akron’s history based on a projected population increase that never emerged. Instead, the city’s population shrank over the next few decades, from its peak of 290,000 in 1960 to 198,000 today, a loss of 31%. The highway, designed for 100,000 vehicles per day, today carries roughly 18,000. As a result, the northern mile of the Innerbelt - never completed, underutilized, and adjacent to a Downtown seeing new vibrance and investment - is slated for removal and reconfiguration. Many Akronites have ideas for how to best use the resulting 30 acres of urban land, but no definitive program or site plan is yet determined, creating a unique opportunity for design exploration.<sup>2</sup>

The Innerbelt site blocks the neighborhoods to the northwest of Downtown, with little to no access for pedestrians and cyclists, even to and from the Towpath,

which cuts north. Citizens who wish to cross do so one lane of infrastructure at a time, as evidenced by tracks in snow (left). The highway trench is in the process of being reconfigured and removed from vehicular traffic patterns, with the side frontage roads under construction to become one-way streets heading in and out of the Downtown. The roadway surface itself will remain, at least in the short-term while site program, design, and redevelopment plans are underway.

As for what can happen at the site and on the

roadway surface itself, there are many ideas, but not yet defined plans. As a way of starting the conversation, in 2015 the Knight Foundation funded a most unusual dinner on the roadway surface, an event called "500 Plates."<sup>3</sup> The event, spearheaded by artist Hunter Franks, used the roadway as a backdrop for a 500'-long table and invited attendees - from all 22 of Akron's neighborhoods - to envision a new, creative future for the Innerbelt site area. Some of the most popular ideas to emerge include green spaces, open-air markets, gardens, mixed-use development, running trails, and housing.<sup>4</sup>





Additionally, the Knight Foundation has recently awarded several grants to investigate turning the highway into a bike park and a forest space, among other ideas. The site is seen, correctly, as a unique and once-in-a-generation opportunity to radically rethink a large important space directly adjacent to Downtown. With careful planning and meaningful urban design connections, the site could be restitched into the downtown urban fabric so effectively that the Innerbelt becomes just another vibrant urban neighborhood for the city of Akron.

- 1- [http://www.cleveland.com/architecture/index.ssf/2016/11/finally\\_a\\_downtown\\_akron\\_plan.html](http://www.cleveland.com/architecture/index.ssf/2016/11/finally_a_downtown_akron_plan.html)
- 2 - <http://thestyle1972.tumblr.com/post/143599041430/rebuilding-akron-a-photo-journey>
- 3 - <http://www.500plates.com/>
- 4 - <https://neighborland.com/akron/innerbelt>



**ABOVE:** The Towpath Trail leads into Downtown Akron along Quaker Street, crossing one of two marginal roads now reconfigured into one-way urban streets.

**ABOVE LEFT:** The full Innerbelt as originally planned was never constructed, leaving an underutilized Interstate spur lacking meaningful connectivity.

**BELOW LEFT:** The 500 Plates event, Oct 2015, brought Akron residents from all 22 neighborhoods onto the Innerbelt roadway to envision possibilities for the site's future.

# CHARRETTE PROCESS

## WHAT IS A CHARRETTE?

The word charrette refers to any accelerated collaborative session in which a group of designers drafts a solution to a design problem. Charrettes serve as a way of quickly generating design solutions while integrating ideas from a diverse group of people.

## SCHEDULE

### FRIDAY, OCT. 14

- 9:30am Arrive in Akron
- 9:30-11:30am Team tours of focus areas
- 1:30-3:00pm **First Stakeholder Meeting**
- 3:00-4:30pm Teams regroup & begin design framework
- 5:00-6:30pm Dinner at Luigi's
- 7:00-10:00pm Work session / Develop preliminary site concepts
- 10:00pm All teams pin up; strategy meeting for following day

### SATURDAY, OCT. 15

- 8:30am Breakfast
- 9am-12:30pm Work session
- 12:30pm Box lunch
- 1:00-6:00pm Develop Draft Presentation for Sunday's Stakeholder Meeting
- 4:00-5:00pm **Community Feedback Session of Draft Presentation**
- 6:00-7:00pm Dinner
- 7:00-11:00pm Work session for final presentation graphics

### SUNDAY, OCT. 16

- 8:30am Breakfast
- 9am-1:00pm Finalize Stakeholder Mtg Presentation
- 12:30-1:00pm Working lunch
- 1:00-2:00pm Setup for Public Meeting
- 2:30-4:00pm **Public Meeting to present Draft Urban Design Proposals**
- 4:00pm Pack up presentation materials and leave Akron

### THURSDAY, OCT. 20

- 5:30-7:00pm **Final Public Presentation of Urban Design Proposals**



### **CHARRETTE TEAMS**

In order to quickly generate a range of design ideas and possibilities for the Innerbelt site, all students and staff were divided into four teams. Each team consisted of a mix of students from different institutions and disciplines, and each was led by a CUDC staff member. This shared geographical focus meant each team was free to explore distinct concepts and generate unique site plans for the Innerbelt, allowing community stakeholders to see a broad range of possibilities.



## CHARRETTE GOALS:

The charrette will focus on developing a vision for the redevelopment of the Innerbelt Removal site. Charrette collaborators will examine the current Innerbelt site and its linkages to the Downtown, surrounding neighborhoods, and the larger region, and determine program, density, infrastructure, and character of new development & green space.

**How can a piece of highway previously perceived as a barrier be transformed into a meaningful connector, a piece of cohesive urban fabric, and a place in its own right?**

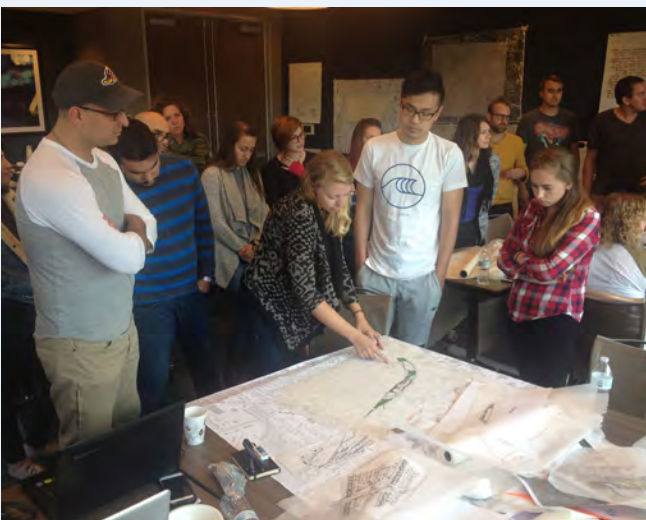
## KEY ISSUES:

**TOPOGRAPHY.** Akron is much hillier than Cleveland, along the Cuyahoga River Valley. The Innerbelt itself is sunken below the grade of the adjacent downtown. What challenges and opportunities do these topographic shifts create for new development & green space?

**RECREATION & REGIONAL CONNECTIONS.** Akron is an important stop along the Towpath Trail, a multiuse recreational trail from New Philadelphia to Cleveland heavily used by cyclists. Other recreational connections include the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, the Ohio and Erie Canalway, and the Cuyahoga River. How can development on the old Innerbelt site capitalize and grow these existing recreational opportunities? What other green space possibilities exist?

**GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE.** Though an interceptor tunnel 150' below the highway handles most of the existing stormwater load, the site's topography and grading create the potential for new green infrastructure and water features. The existing Ohio and Erie Canal passes into the Downtown just east of the Innerbelt, a piece of hydroengineering that could be complemented by its modern equivalent. How does the management of water become a feature and an asset of the new development?

**TEMPORARY USE.** In the short term, while traffic reconfiguration takes place, this provides unique opportunities for temporary or short-use programming on the vacant highway. Last year 500 people ate a meal on the highway, and funding is in place to investigate turning the highway into a bike park. What other temporary or short term uses could this unique infrastructural space encourage? How can that be leveraged into successful long-term placemaking?



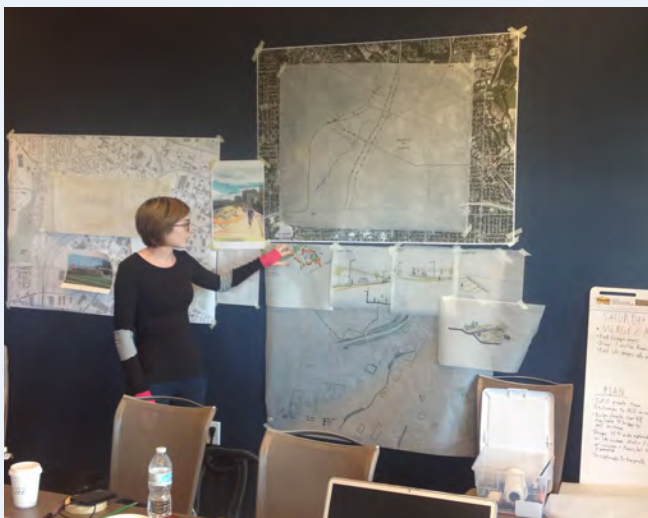
## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK:

### OPPORTUNITIES:

- **CONNECTIVITY:** especially to west side neighborhoods (Highland Square), towpath, bike network, etc
- **HOUSING:** for a diverse range of people/income
- **WALKABILITY:** for all ages
- **AFFORDABILITY:** not just with housing, but also recreation, green space, etc
- **GREEN SPACE & RECREATION:** more outdoor activities & recreation spaces near Downtown
- **WINTER:** Ideas for how to utilize site throughout all four seasons

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- Green infrastructure will be more difficult along Innerbelt trench (bedrock), but possible along ridges/hills on the side (better infiltration)
- The Innerbelt removed a historic African American community; don't ignore diversity, social justice & healing in new development
- Improve perception around Akron General
- Find a way to address the buildings along the Innerbelt that face away
- Address the entry into Downtown along W Market St - bad for cyclists/pedestrians



PROPOSAL 1:

# III. WOVEN BELT



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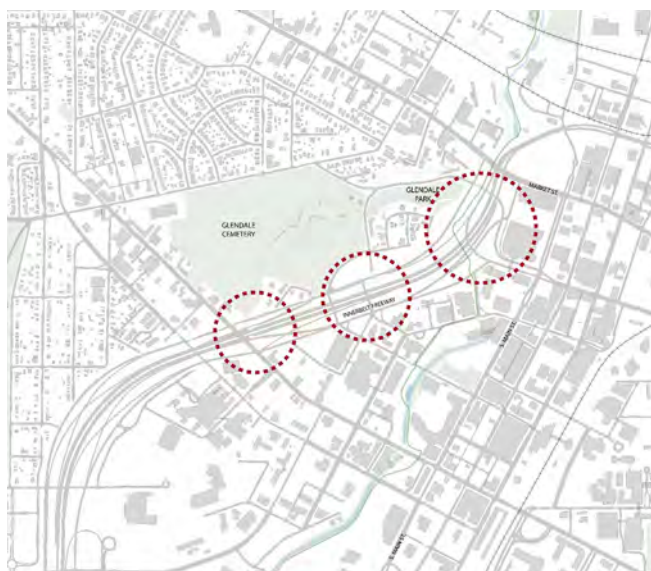
## ORGANIZING IDEAS:

1. Improve connections between residential west side and Downtown Akron
  2. Provide new housing options to support a diverse community
  3. Encourage asset-based programming year-round
  4. Envision strategies for the short-, mid-, and long-term organic growth
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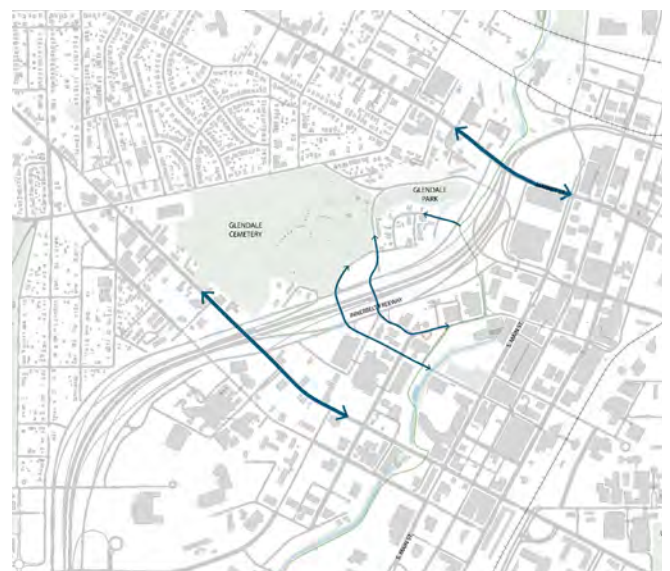
### EXISTING CONDITIONS

Currently, the Innerbelt divides neighborhoods to the north and west from Downtown Akron, with few opportunities to cross the trench. As traffic is removed from the roadway, though, the zone in between can and should take on new opportunity for cross-connections in multiple modes: pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular.

**Bottom Left:** Three groupings of infrastructure exist currently to cross the Innerbelt trench; these create natural nodes that new development can expand.



**Bottom Right:** Existing major east/west connections across the Innerbelt site are Market Street, to the north, and Commerce Street, to the south. Across the site itself, State Street and Center Street serve as smaller local connectors; however, as part of the reconfiguration of the roadway, the State Street bridge is slated for removal, leaving only Center Street, which terminates on the west side of the trench at Rand Ave by a large parking lot.

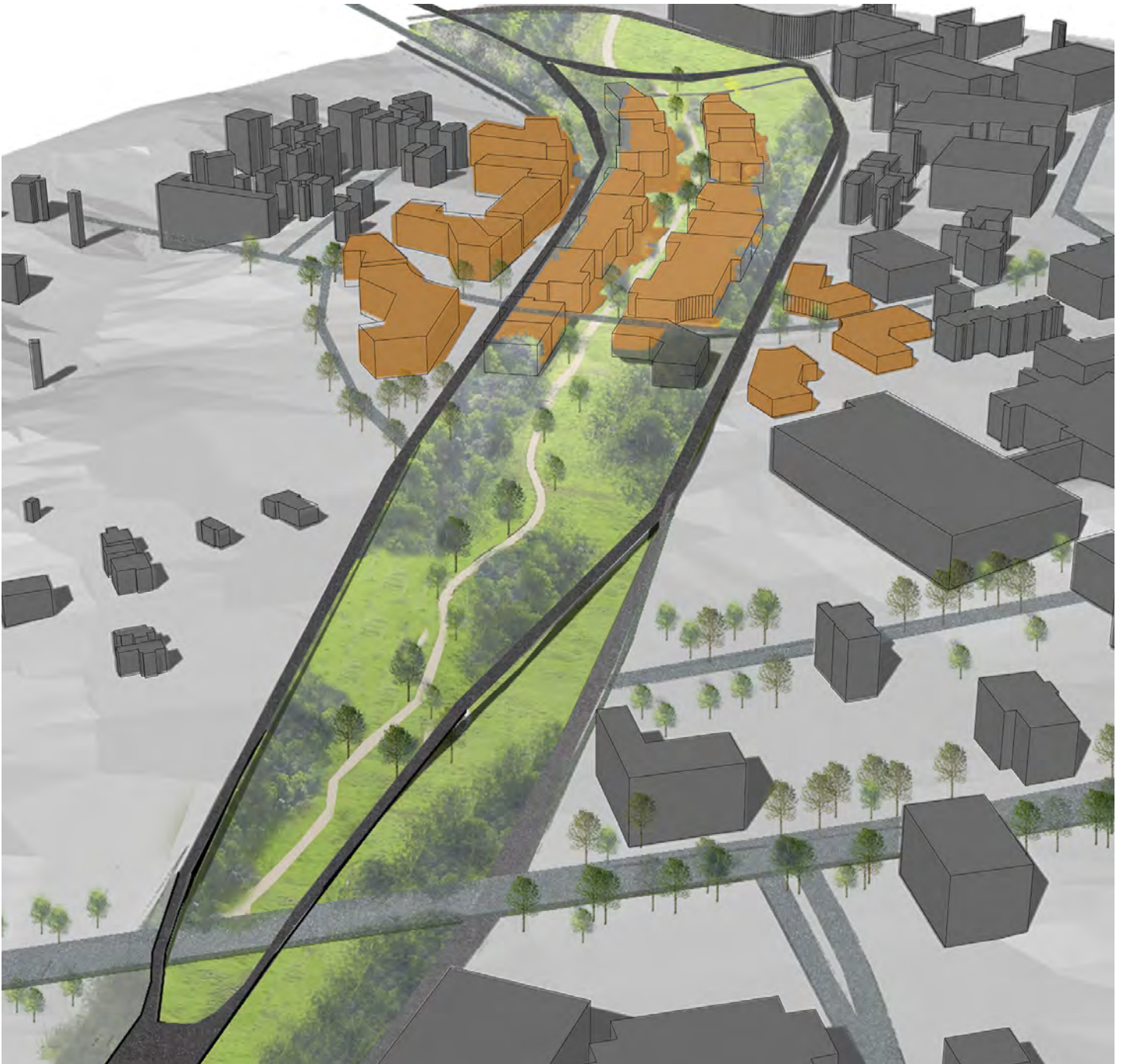


## CONNECTIONS

A mix of new mixed-use development, clustered around the center of the Innerbelt site, and programmed green spaces, to the north and south, will act as connections between the east and west sides and across Dart Ave and Rand Ave. The new development, plus the linking of W Center St and Locust St into one continuous roadway, will act to stitch Downtown Akron into the West Hill neighborhood and beyond.

## STRATEGIES:

1. Integrate Towpath throughout Downtown
2. Enhance the weak links along major corridors
3. Explore options to re-weave the Innerbelt
4. Create a park as hub at the confluence of the historic streams







## PRECEDENTS

The Woven Belt team studied other projects from cities around the world that also integrated recreation and green space into large infrastructural projects. Each existing precedent inverts the typical barriers all too common with linear and vehicular infrastructure; instead, the projects break up the large scale and materiality of the existing projects with new greening, multiuse paths, water elements, and opportunities for connection across and along the sites. All of these strategies are applicable in the case of the Akron Innerbelt site.



**Top left:** Placa de les Glories | Barcelona

**Middle left:** Braided Valley | Elche, Spain



**Top left:** The Underline | Miami, Florida

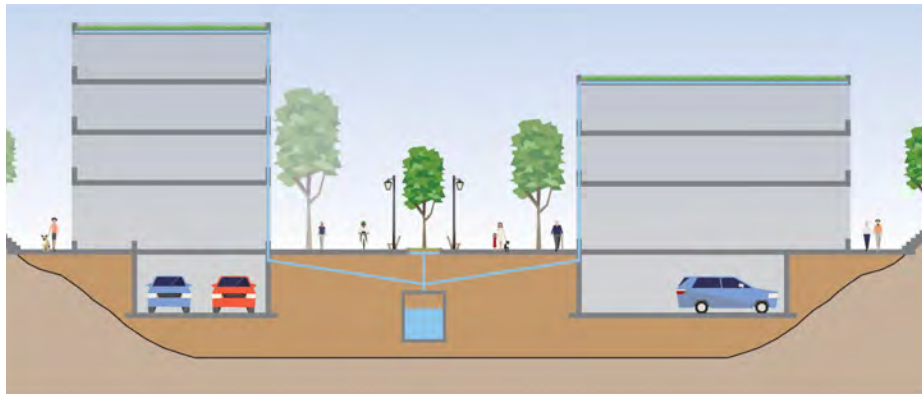
## GRADING

A key feature of the Woven Belt plan is its approach towards regrading the existing trench.

**RIGHT:** New fill could be brought to the center of the site, around the W Center St bridge, which will be replaced with an at-grade roadway. The gradient from the existing trench surface will bring the center development up to the same height as the surrounding city fabric, allowing a more seamless connection from Downtown to the West Hill neighborhood and beyond.

**BELOW:** Regrading the site opens up new opportunities for recreational uses along the site. Gently sloping trails, hills, and even sledding in the winter will create new spaces for discovery along the former trench.





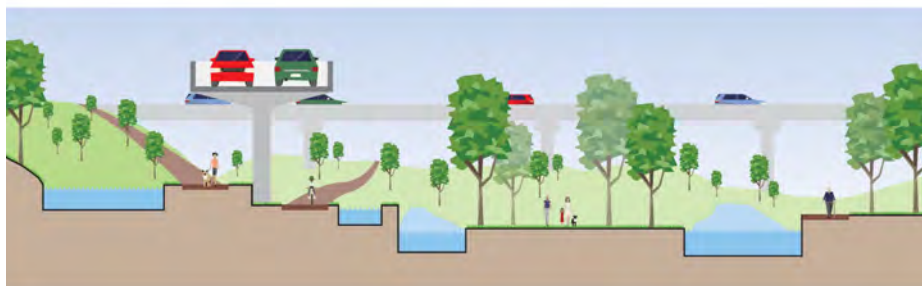
**Above:** New mixed use development can take advantage of the infill grading for underground parking and water cisterns, as well as easy pedestrian crossing from Downtown to the West Hill neighborhood.

## DEVELOPMENT

The central mixed use development can be three- to four-story structures with a mix of housing types above and neighborhood-scale mixed use below. The space in between the buildings becomes an opportunity for recreational pathways and greening. By clustering development together in the middle of the site, rather than scattering it along the entire trench, the scheme creates a new walkable urban neighborhood as a destination at the edge of Downtown.

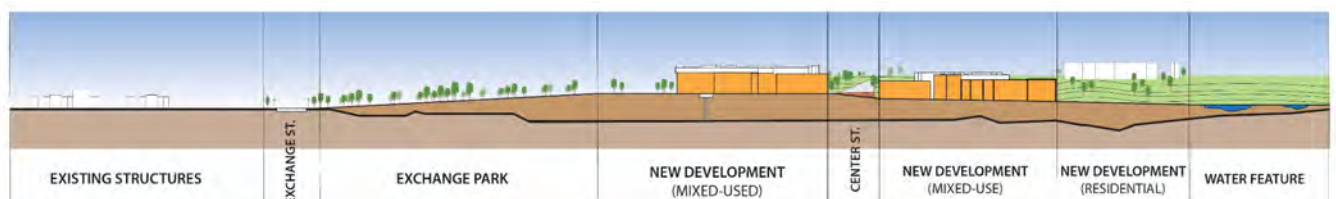


**Above:** Exchange Park, to the south of the new development, will create a large green space at grade that allows for a tree canopy at the height of passing cars.



**Above:** The northern park space includes new water features and recreational trails braided with existing vehicular infrastructure above.

**Below:** A longitudinal section along the former Innerbelt Trench.



## HOUSING

Any new housing development at the Innerbelt site should consider a wide range of unit types and sizes, in order to encourage as diverse a range of new residents as possible. Accessibility, affordability, and a diversity of unit size and location should all be considered in order to create opportunities for all Akronites.

### STRATEGIES:

1. Propose housing typologies and amenities to encourage “aging in place”
2. Integrate affordable housing throughout Downtown, rather than concentrated in one place.

### PROPOSED HOUSING MARKETS:

- **Innerbelt:** Market rate for young professionals
- **Roundabout:** Affordable, inter-generational housing
- **Oak Park:** Family-focused infill housing
- **Bowery Street:** Market rate for Millennials



Stockholm, Sweden



San Diego, California

**ABOVE RIGHT:** New housing typologies can be integrated into recreation and open space in a deliberate way that creates dense but very livable neighborhoods.

**BELOW RIGHT:** An important consideration for any new housing development is to allow for a wide range of new residents on the site, particularly including strategies for aging-in-place. Architect Matthias Hollwich recently published *New Aging: Live Smarter Now to Live Better Forever*,<sup>1</sup> a book proposing strategies like these six for designing buildings and cities that consider the elderly. Many of his strategies encourage the sorts of social interactions and healthy behaviors



## YEAR-ROUND PROGRAMMING

Any new development on the Innerbelt site needs to take into account all four of Northeast Ohio's seasons. Ideally, any Akron open space plan will integrate programming ideas and maintenance plans for creating livable urban spaces year-round, not just in summer. Below are some examples of projects, real and proposed, that take advantage of winter conditions to make exciting and unique recreational opportunities within the city center.

## STRATEGIES:

1. Leverage existing anchors for programming ideas (health-based, music history, ethnic groups)
2. Orient new development to maximize sun access to outdoor parks and public spaces
3. Design public spaces to support winter activities (skating, lighting installations, temporary events) and mitigate harsh winter conditions (wind, snow, ice, etc.)
4. Create maintenance plan for priority pedestrian and bicycle routes
5. Encourage sledding at prime topographic spots

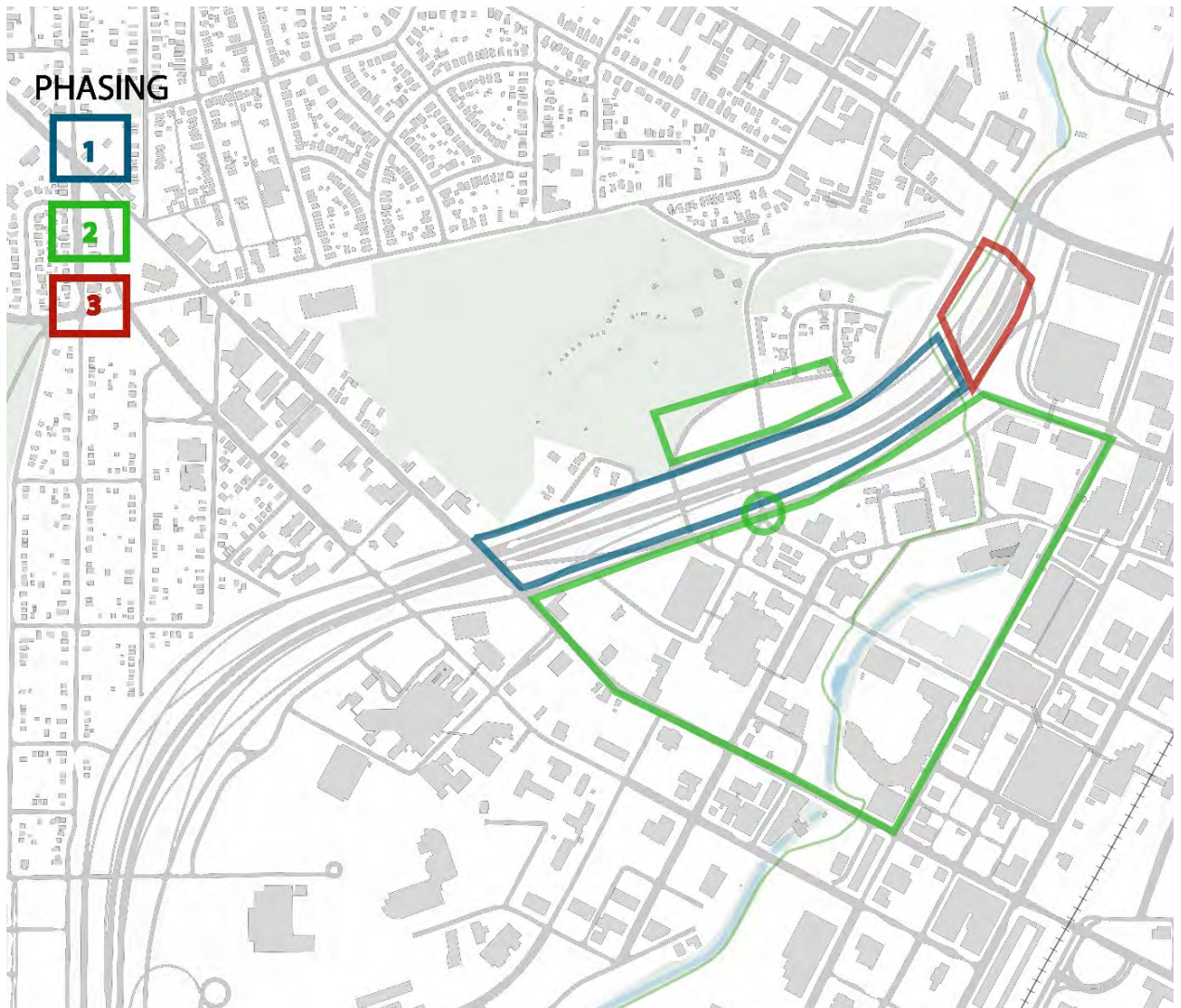


## SHORT TO LONG TERM

In the short term, the roadway itself can become a testing ground for new recreation and development. As the site gains traction as a destination, longer-term development and infrastructural investments can build on successes.

### STRATEGIES:

1. Temporary interventions to draw attention and test novel ideas
2. Develop long-term plans based on peculiarities of prior implementation steps



## SITE PHASING

The Innerbelt roadway itself should be the focus of short-term development, especially temporary uses, new grading, and green space. Once the Innerbelt begins to be developed, larger urban connections and infrastructure can build on the site's energy and stitch new development back into Downtown and existing neighborhoods to the west. Finally, in the third phase, the northern section of the former Innerbelt can be converted into a circular water feature, creating a new civic hub.



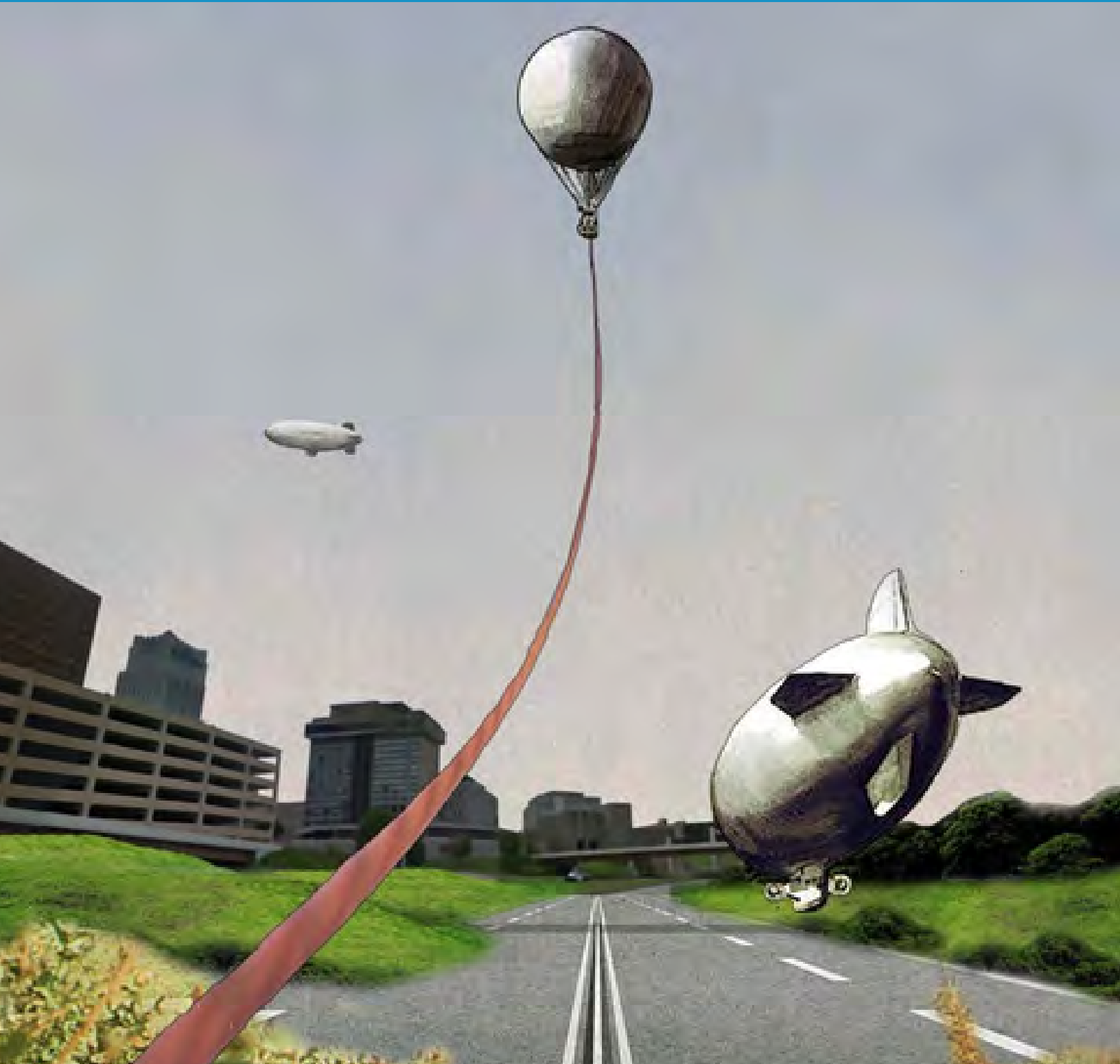
### FINAL SITE BUILD-OUT

In its final build-out, the Woven Belt scheme creates a cohesive urban fabric at the center of the former Innerbelt site such that the Trench is no longer perceptible. New roads and a roundabout allow for increased connectivity for multiple modes from Downtown north and west. Meanwhile, two distinct park spaces to the south and north of the development area create opportunities for year-round recreation and a large-scale water feature that pays homage to Akron's canal heritage.

PROPOSAL 2:

# IV. FUTURE ELEVATION

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## ORGANIZING IDEAS:

1. **TEMPORARY STRATEGIES** to inform long-term development
  2. **MOVING EARTH** for new topographies
  3. **INFILL** along the Innerbelt trench
  4. **BACK AS FRONT** in a two-sided city
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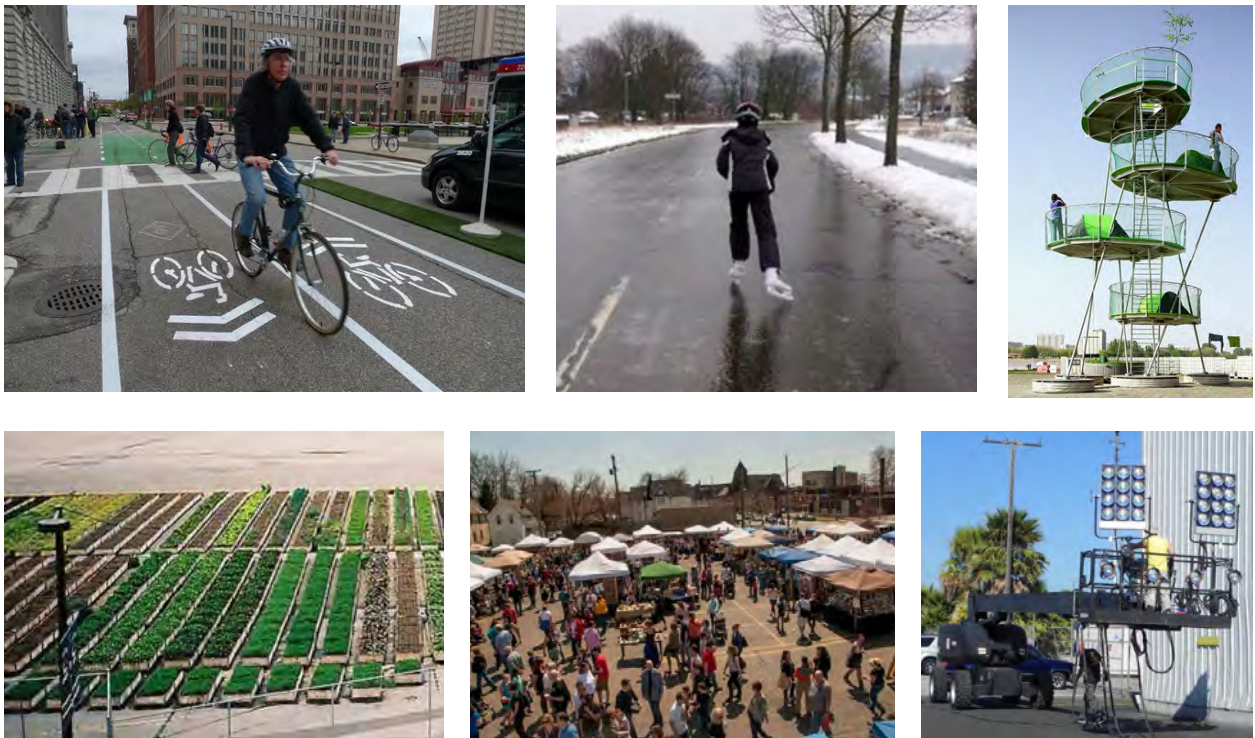
### SITE ANALYSIS

Before beginning their design work, the Future Elevation team first researched what existed on the site before the Innerbelt was constructed. Historic maps overlaid on the existing street (BELOW) showed a more complete grid on the northwest of Downtown, plus a few key connections across, mainly on Locust Ave. These historic connections led the Future Elevation team to reinstate some of these original streets back onto the newly vacated Innerbelt site in a way that honors the original neighborhood that the roadway removed.



## TEMPORARY STRATEGIES

An important consideration for any redevelopment process is phasing: what needs to happen first, so that city residents and developers alike are drawn to grow the project further? Particularly in the case of the Innerbelt, short-term activation of the roadway can create a sense of place and a new destination for the larger Akron region. Drawing inspiration from activities and parks elsewhere, the Future Elevation team brainstormed inexpensive and playful strategies for sparking interest in the Innerbelt in the short-term, in order to seed larger-scale and more expensive development in the future.

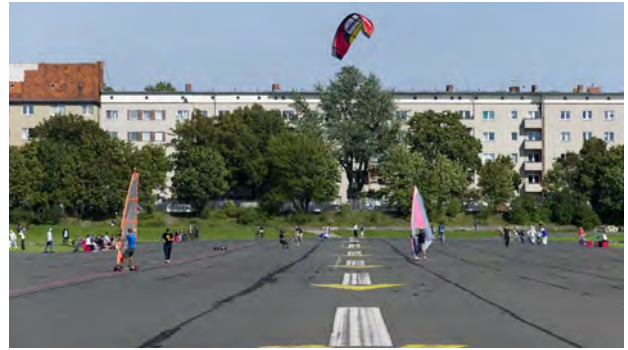


**ABOVE:** The Innerbelt Roadway surface provides opportunities for many different activities that can activate the site in the short-term, drawing Akronites from all over the city. Clockwise from top left, some of those activities might include: riding bicycles; ice skating; getting up high for views; filming a movie; hosting a flea market; and growing vegetables.

**RIGHT:** Even in the short-term, the Innerbelt roadway should be designed and programmed for all four seasons. Inspired by the light hand used at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin (above right), the linear roadway surface can be painted and activated with a wide variety of recreational uses. In the winter, its length makes it perfect for ice-skating and cross-country skiing.



Copyright Iain Masterton



**Above:** Tempelhof Airport in Berlin, Germany: a vacated air field now acting as a large community park space. Minimal interventions, like paint on existing asphalt, guide activity for visitors without constraining alternative uses.



## MOVING EARTH

Currently, Akron is in the process of drilling a new 6,000'-long, 27'-diameter sewer tunnel directly below parts of Downtown and the Innerbelt. The project, estimated to cost \$1.4 billion, is necessary to eliminate overflows of the city's combined sewer system in intense rain events.<sup>1</sup> The soil excavated from this project could provide a new opportunity for the Innerbelt: what if the fill could be used on-site, rather than paying to ship it elsewhere? Landscape designers use topography and new fill for many uses that could easily be replicated here for new recreation, connection, and viewsheds.



**BELOW:** With a scale model of the site and a proportionate quantity of clay representing the available soil, the team modeled a few alternatives for how far the material could go on the site. Where the existing State St bridge will be removed, the team proposes a new land bridge. Elsewhere in the trench, the fill could be used to generate sculptural and playful topography that encourages exploration and highlights views to Downtown.



1 - [http://www.cleveland.com/akron/index.ssf/2015/11/akron\\_breaks\\_ground\\_on\\_6000\\_fo.html](http://www.cleveland.com/akron/index.ssf/2015/11/akron_breaks_ground_on_6000_fo.html)





## INFILL & PATHWAYS

**LEFT:** New Innerbelt development should take the opportunity to connect the Towpath Trail with pathways into west side neighborhoods, near where pedestrians already cross the highway to get into Downtown.

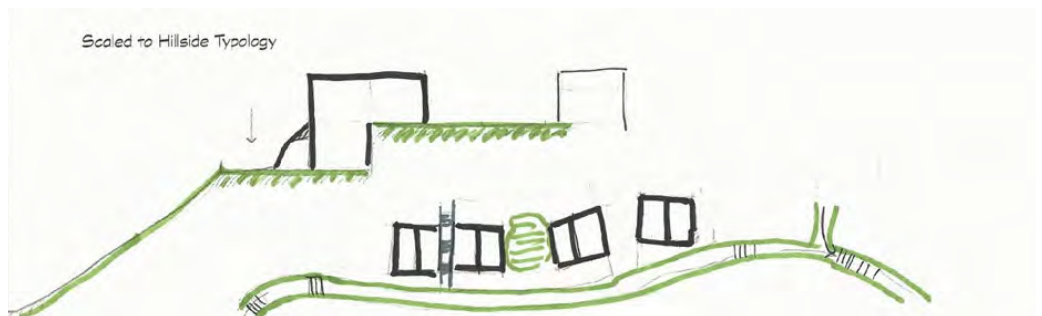
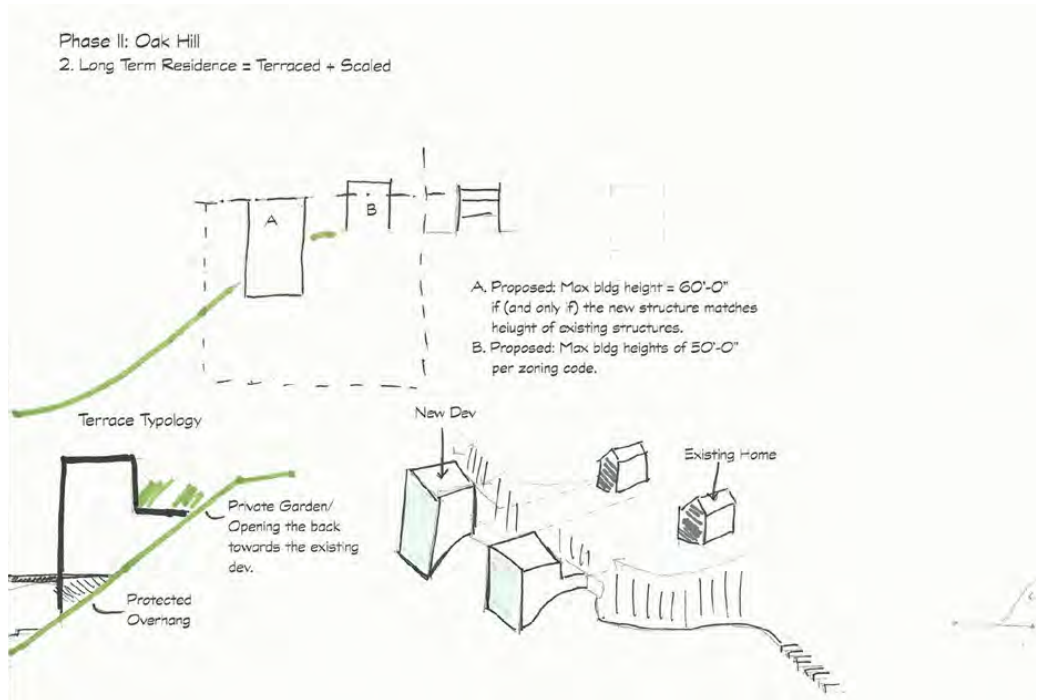
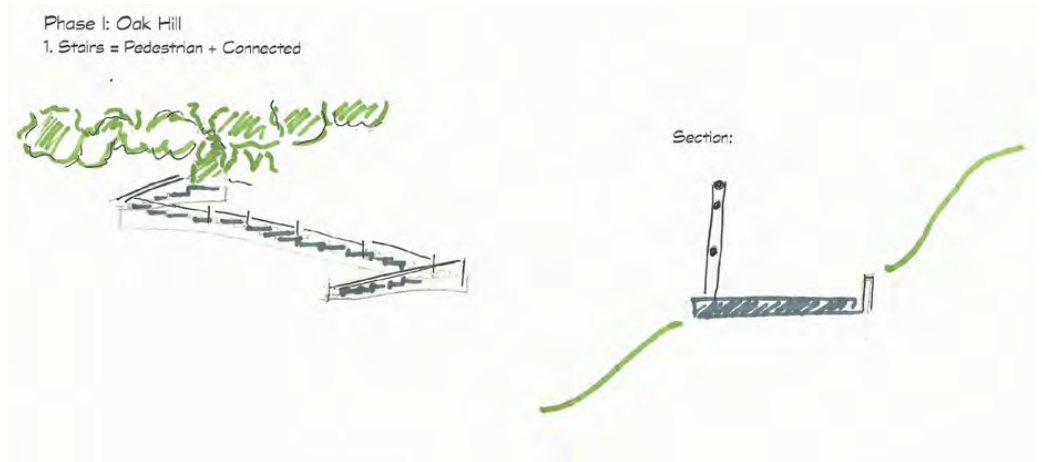
**BELOW:** The final site with topography and greening strategies



## INFILL

Though the Future Elevation team highlights much of the Innerbelt itself for recreational uses, the surrounding hillsides are prime locations for infill housing. The team breaks down infill development along the hillside leading up to Oak Hill according to phasing.

**Phase 1**, top, creates a series of pedestrian-friendly stairs that formalize the pathways already in use between the neighborhood and the Downtown. **Phase 2**, middle and bottom, begins to build out along these pathways with terraced homes using overhangs and private gardens to capitalize on the sloping hillside.





**Above:** Site plan showing the final potential buildout on either side of the Innerbelt trench, including a new State St land bridge and a reconnected Locust St.



**Above:** Examples of the types of low-density housing that could easily adapt to the Innerbelt hillside



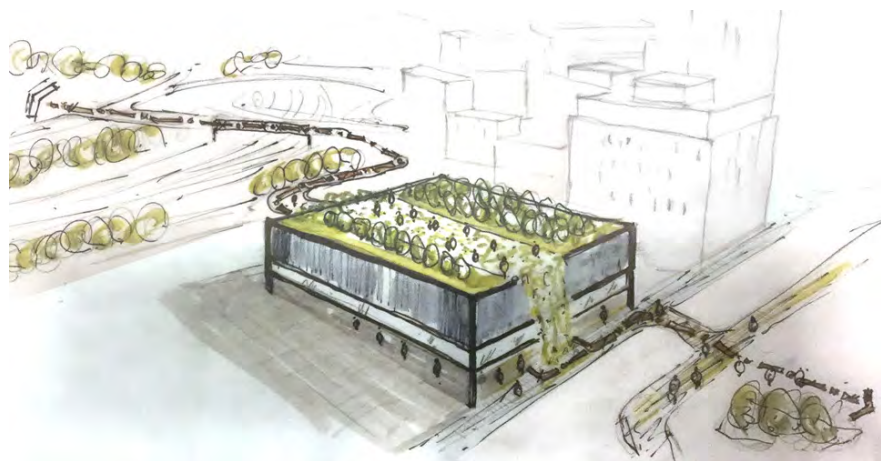
## BACK AS FRONT

One of the primary challenges of redeveloping the Innerbelt site is addressing the existing buildings that functionally face away from the site, towards the Downtown. With new development comes the opportunity to retrofit these buildings to embrace both Downtown and the new Innerbelt development at once.

**TOP:** Quaker Street is a prime site for inviting Innerbelt site visitors, as well as Towpath users, into Downtown. By greening the street and breaking up the parking garage wall with a grand civic stair up to Cascade Plaza, pedestrians have a newly seamless experience of traversing Akron.

**RIGHT:** Another way to create a unified linkage between Downtown and the Innerbelt is to utilize the rooftops of existing buildings as public space for views and access, as in the Arcade at 80 W Bowery St.

**OPPOSITE TOP:** Even parking lots and vacant space can be programmed and redesigned to act as newly welcoming “front door” into Downtown.







DEVELOPMENT	LOCATION A - OAK HILL	LOCATION B - INNERBELT DEV	LOCATION C - DOWNTOWN
<b>PHASE I - 1-2 years</b>	stairs	<b>inflatable architecture, temporary installations. minimal changes to exg innerbelt infrastructure</b>	highlighting connection points through minor design interventions
<b>PHASE II 5-7 years</b>	<b>long term residence, buildout on hillside (likely time frame)</b>	early terraforming, sewer project relocation. hardscape program	<b>arcade bldg activation</b>
<b>PHASE III 10-15 years</b>	full connectivity of oak hill to downtown w/ developed units that create neighborhood identity with suggested provision of services within the city proper	landing pad for the goodyear blimp dynamic public space w/ strong infrastructure and connections while maintaining character	fully activated pathway, YMCA engagement, civic theatre, pedestrian bridge connecting lock 3

DESIGN	LOCATION A - OAK HILL	LOCATION B - INNERBELT DEV	LOCATION C - DOWNTOWN
<b>hardscape</b>	connected and pedestrian focused	existing to remain, reconfigured painting and signage to make comfortable/usable for residents. ADDRESS: entrance points to the innerbelt space itself	stairwells and reconnection (backs to front)
<b>softscape</b>	shared greenspace, point of experience @ top of hill	minimal, focus of phase II. reconfiguration and sloping...	soften edges, gradual addition
<b>built object</b>	terraced into hillside and scaled appropriately to the neighborhood, AND addresses interior of neighborhood	bridge saving/reconfiguration	activated built spaces. renovations to and for public access to the arcade building, connections on a pedestrian scale to YMCA

PROPOSAL 3:

# V. THE B.E.L.T.

BRINGING EVERYTHING LOCAL TOGETHER

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## ORGANIZING IDEAS:

### 1. **ECOLOGICAL Infrastructure:**

stormwater management, landscape buffers

### 2. **SOCIAL infrastructure:**

event spaces, communal pathways & nodes, temporary use

### 3. **FLEXIBLE infrastructure:**

easy to implement components & ideas

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#### **SITE PLAN**

The overall site design consists of a series of nodes which expand on existing conditions, linked with infill program and a series of pathways across and along the site. The primary pathway, indicated in yellow, acts as a sort of unified ribbon which stitches back and forth across the Innerbelt trench, creating moments of discovery.



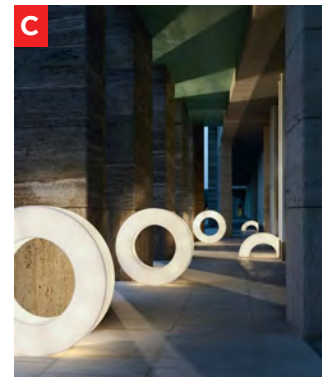
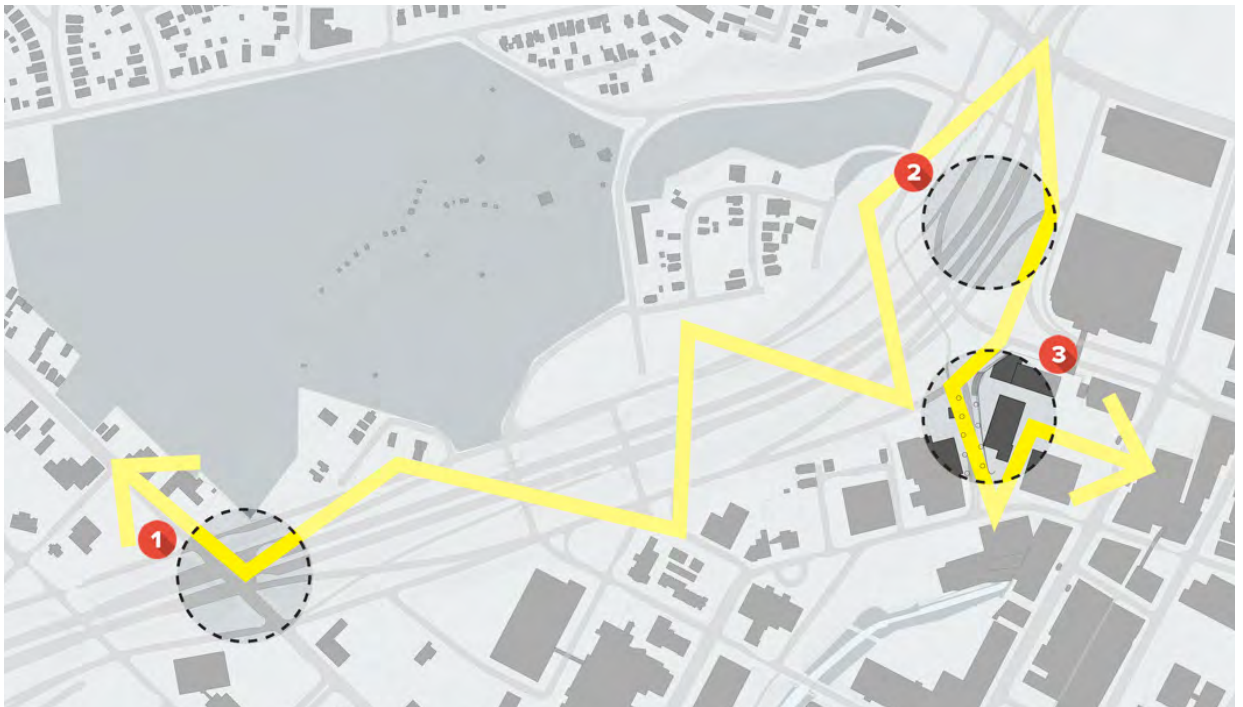
## CONNECTIONS & NODES

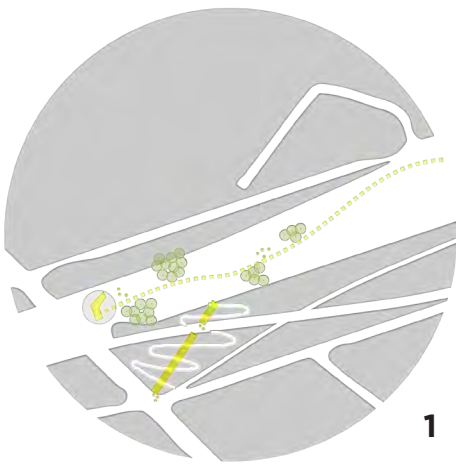
The B.E.L.T. scheme hypothesizes that a uniform top-down master plan across 30 acres, with multiple funding sources, may not be as realistic as a more flexible series of interventions that can be implemented as needed. Instead, it identifies a series of major and minor nodes that can act as gathering places and connections across the Innerbelt site. These minor nodes can take on various forms as opportunities arise, and can become playful moments of discovery that entice visitors to continue along the pathways from one node to the next.

**OPPOSITE TOP:** Each of the three major nodes highlights an existing point of connection or opportunity within the Innerbelt site's infrastructure.

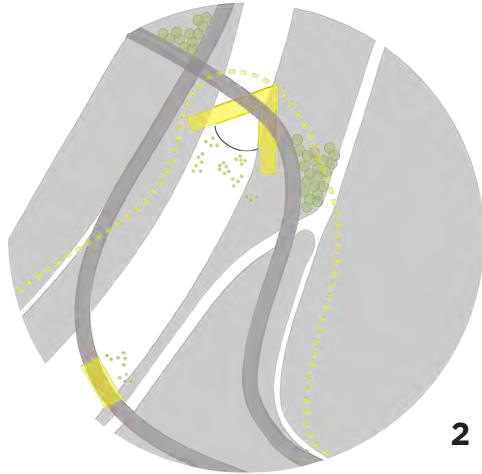
**BELOW:** The yellow ribbon path and other light interventions snake through these three nodes to comprise a light-handed master plan.

Precedents studied take the form of viewing platforms (A, G); unique trails (B, F, H); lighting (C); navigable topography (D); and hybrids, like a pathway that becomes a boardwalk that becomes a long winding table (E). Each of these existing projects act as inspiration for the Innerbelt site.

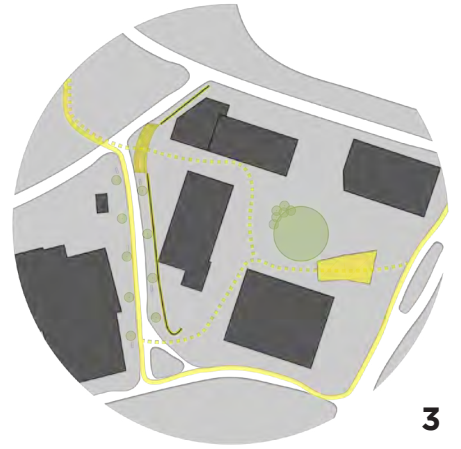




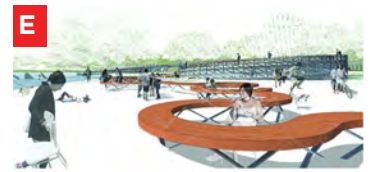
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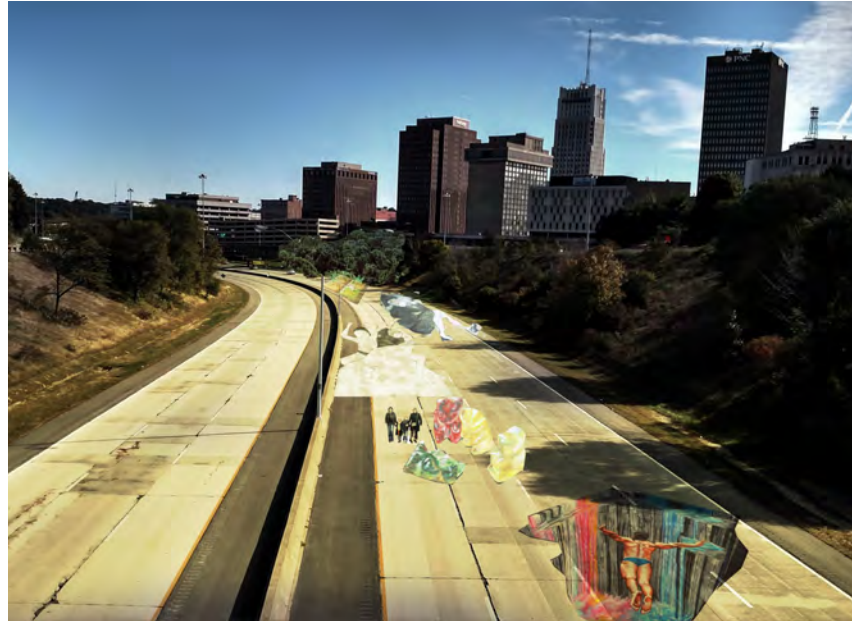


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## SHORT- AND LONG-TERM

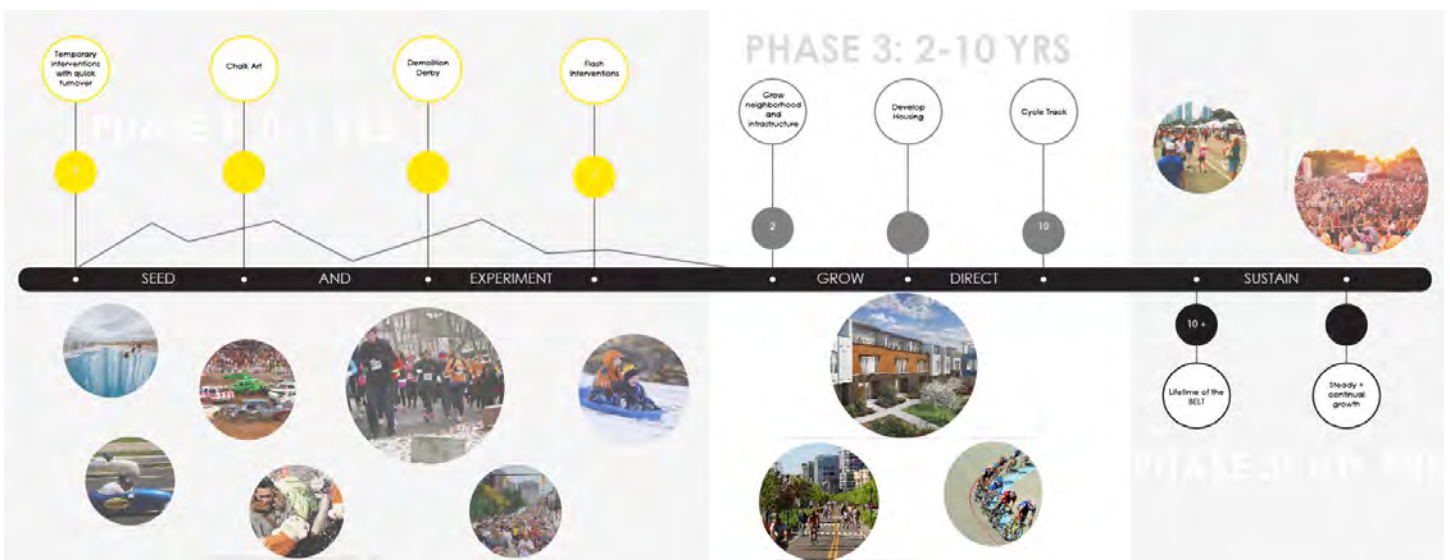
Short-term art pieces and installations along the roadway surface build the sense of the Innerbelt as an experimental destination and highlight local artists and fabricators (*RIGHT*). Longer-term, the yellow “ribbon” pathway acts as an organizing element for a series of small-scale interventions - some ecological, some recreational, some aesthetic - that can be implemented as funding and partnerships emerge (*BELOW*).





## PHASING

Robust programming and physical improvements should both be pursued in tandem in order to raise development interest and civic activity alike - neither can exist without the other. The B.E.L.T. phasing plan, *BELOW*, separates both programming and development into three major phases: **Phase 1**, 0-1 years, experiments with programming and pop-up interventions in order to both seed future growth and experiment. **Phase 2**, 2-10 years, focuses on growing neighborhood development interest and beginning larger-scale infrastructural improvements, like multi-use trails and a cycle track. **Phase 3**, 10+ years, focuses on sustaining the Innerbelt as a unique and complete neighborhood, maintaining and growing its identity in the larger Akron region.





## IDENTITY

Consistent color and imagery can create a cohesive branding and identity throughout the Innerbelt site and surrounding redevelopment.

**RIGHT:** Urban furniture like lighting, bollards, bike racks, and other objects should be designed in tandem to create a new modern identity.

**ABOVE:** On a site like Quaker St, this branding can snake along the street and up a new grand stair into the back of Cascade Plaza, bridging the Innerbelt and Downtown with a pedestrian-friendly facelift.



LIGHTING



BOLLARD



BIKE RACK

**AKRON BELT**

LOGO







## STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

On-site stormwater can be harnessed and held in a way that pays homage to the city's siting at the summit between two major watersheds. Water management is part of Akron's canal heritage.

**ABOVE:** On-site, cistern terraces can be integrated with public steps and ramps in order to highlight and celebrate the management of water in Akron.

## HOUSING TYPOLOGIES

Multi-story rowhomes and 3- to 4-story multifamily buildings can be organized along Dart Ave to allow for on-street access opening up to the central recreation space (*above left*). The steep drop-off into the trench can be highlighted through the use of terraced buildings like these precedents (*below left*).



PROPOSAL 4:

# VI. THE SPINE OF AKRON

NETWORKING ASSETS

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## ORGANIZING GOAL:

To create a new asset to bolster the existing assets of Akron, fortifying it as a good and healthy place to live in the imagination of Akronites and to change the perceptions of Akron to the larger region.

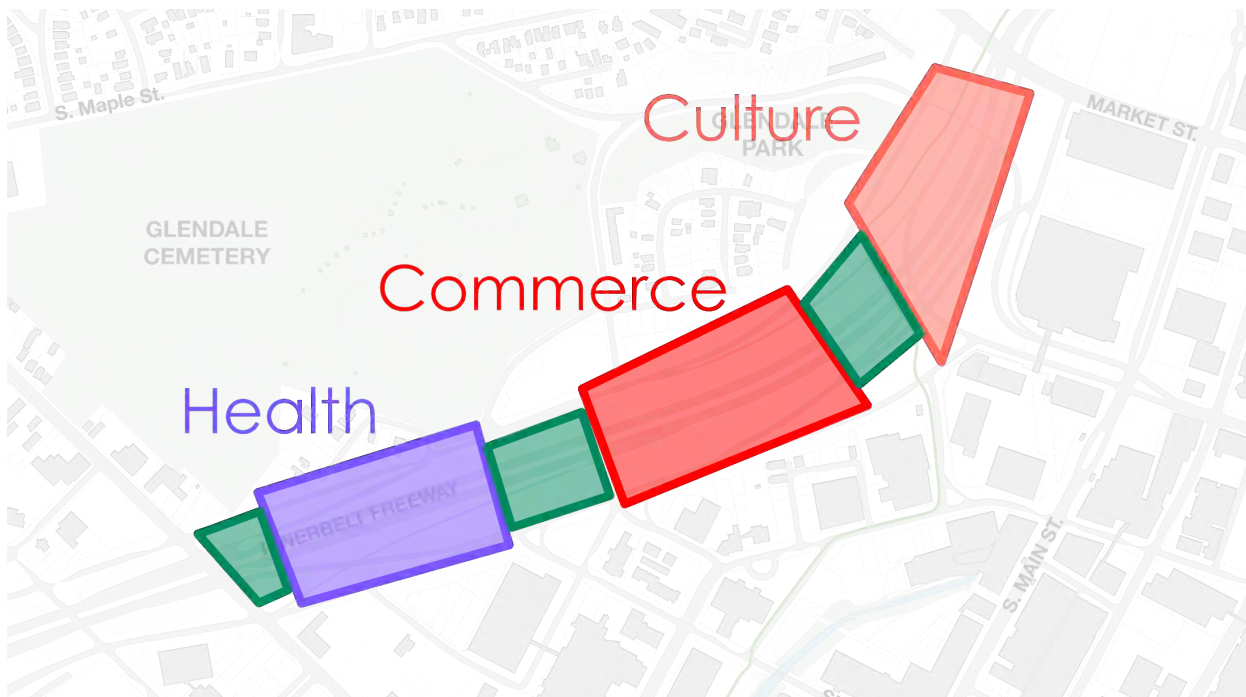
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In this proposal, the site has been divided into three zones: **Health**; **Commerce**; and **Culture**. The areas in between these zones act as connective tissue along the Innerbelt Trench. *[see diagram, below.]*

The Spine of Akron focuses primarily on opportunities to redesign the area within the Innerbelt trench itself. As a linear space, the decommissioned roadway may be too uncomfortably large to hold continued public interest without creating distinct amenities and zones along the trench. To address this

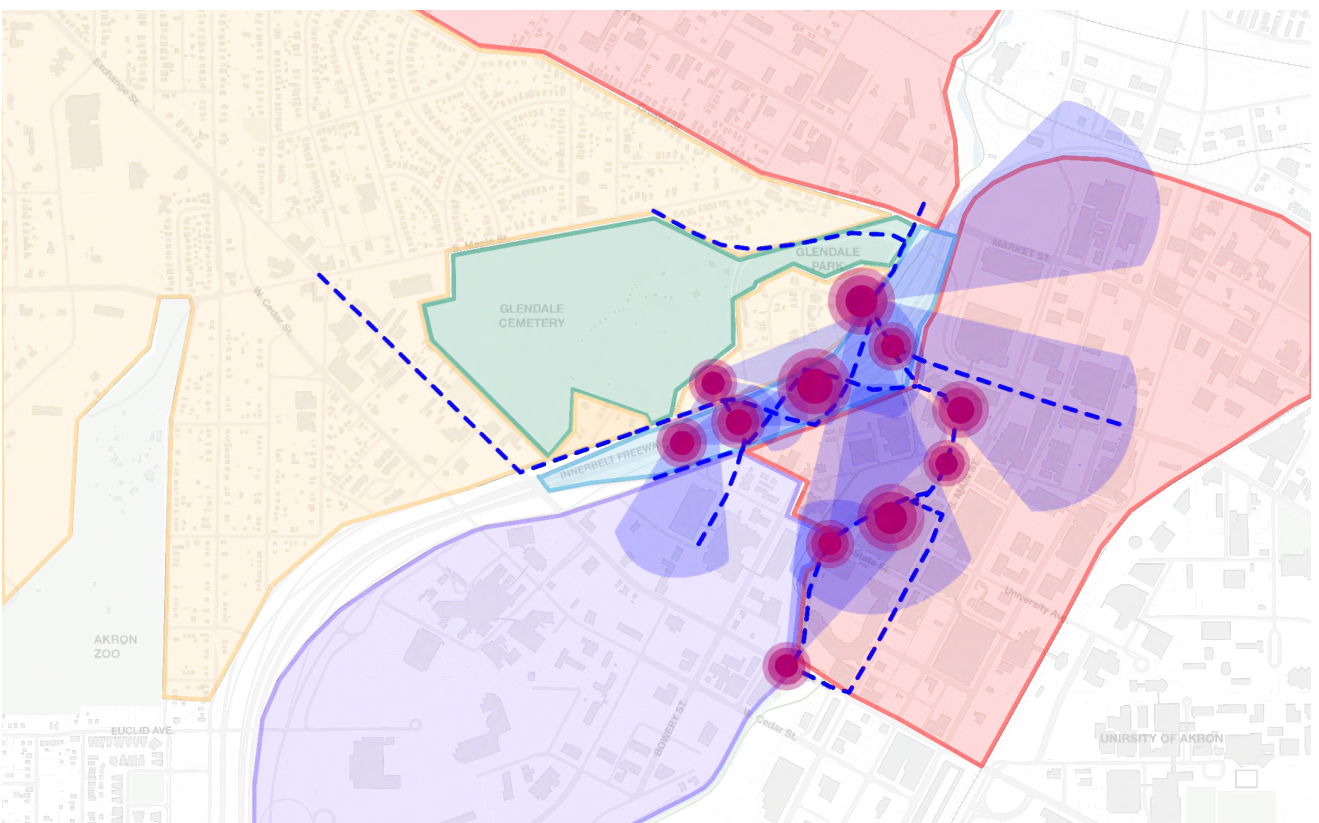
need, the scheme creates specific aesthetic and programmatic identities for each of these three zones that serve as destinations for the greater Akron region.

At the same time, however, this scheme acknowledges the appeal of vacant and abandoned infrastructure, and allows for the transition areas between the three primary zones to act as spaces of controlled decay. In this way, the memory of the Innerbelt as a large-scale piece of infrastructure will remain all along the new site.



## SITE APPROACH

The team analyzed the trench and adjacent major zones of Akron for “hot spots” of assets and views; connections; and barriers. *(bottom)* Other cities’ linear spaces serve as places of respite and recreation, even when directly adjacent to a busy Downtown. Often these precedents follow alongside rivers or railroads *(below)*; Akron’s Innerbelt trench is idiosyncratic for being a vehicular roadway instead. Still, if the transition areas in between the three major zones are designed with a light hand, the ensuing landscape growth can act as a natural contrast to the more formalized park spaces.





## HEALTH

In the southernmost zone along the trench, directly adjacent to health centers like the Akron Children's Hospital and Akron General, the site can be transformed into a collection of engaging recreation amenities, both large and small. Playgrounds should include equipment for all ages, not just children, in order to encourage exercise for everyone. Sports fields and tennis courts draw residents onto the site from the neighborhoods to the north and west of Downtown. Finally, a multiuse exercise path can originate in this Health Zone and wrap its way up into the rest of the site, creating a closed circuit for joggers, walkers, and other health-conscious Akronites.





## COMMERCE

The new commercial zone will host lively urban shopping experiences like bazaars, flea markets, and holiday markets (examples below) - unique events that will draw people to the site from the greater Akron region and

beyond. Light flexible infrastructure like stalls and canopies will be accessible for vendors. A new pedestrian bridge will cross over the vendor zone in order to encourage crossing of the site at multiple levels and provide views over the crowd.





## CULTURE

The final zone, the Cultural Zone, becomes the northern anchor of the site, and the area most easily accessible from the existing Downtown, particularly Cascade Plaza. Public art like murals and sculpture will be integrated into the park space as a dedicated Cultural Garden for Akron. Formalized spaces for performances, both small and large, can be nestled into this landscape as well in order to serve as gathering spaces for important events, holidays, and civic celebration.



**VERTICAL CIRCULATION**

The opportunities for navigating the trench's topography are most apparent at bridge intersections. Pathways and bridges that privilege pedestrians and cyclists create a safe and unique

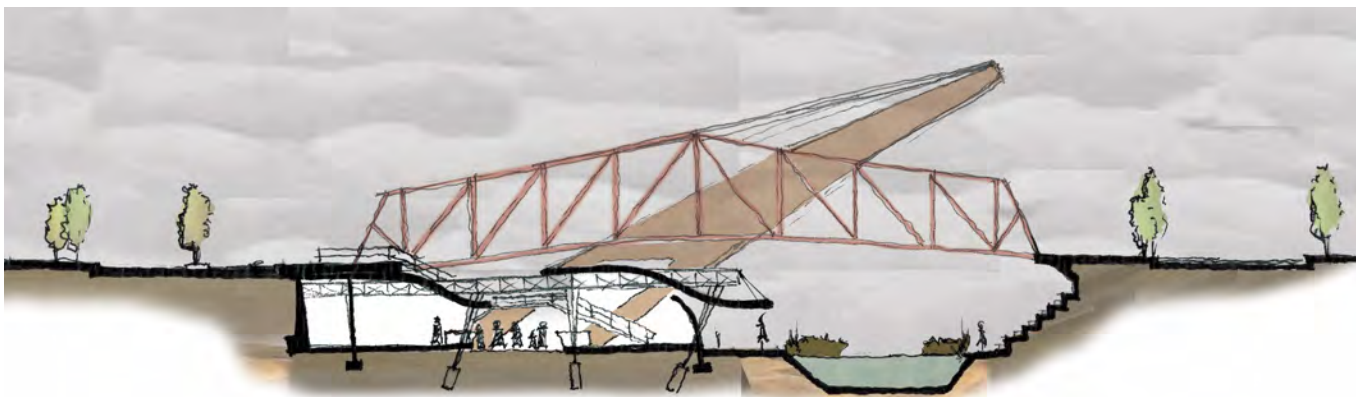
way of navigating the site. Specific programmatic destinations are on the ground level, with circulation occurring along and above, in order to create views and an interweaving of movement.



**CULTURAL GARDENS**

The cultural gardens act as an extension of the Towpath into a larger gathering space. The new multi-level access allows for views to the skyline, and a unique pedestrian network playfully updates

downtown Akron's existing "skyway" legacy. The proposed towpath extension brings the cyclist more directly into Cascade Plaza, avoiding Quaker Street and vehicular traffic.

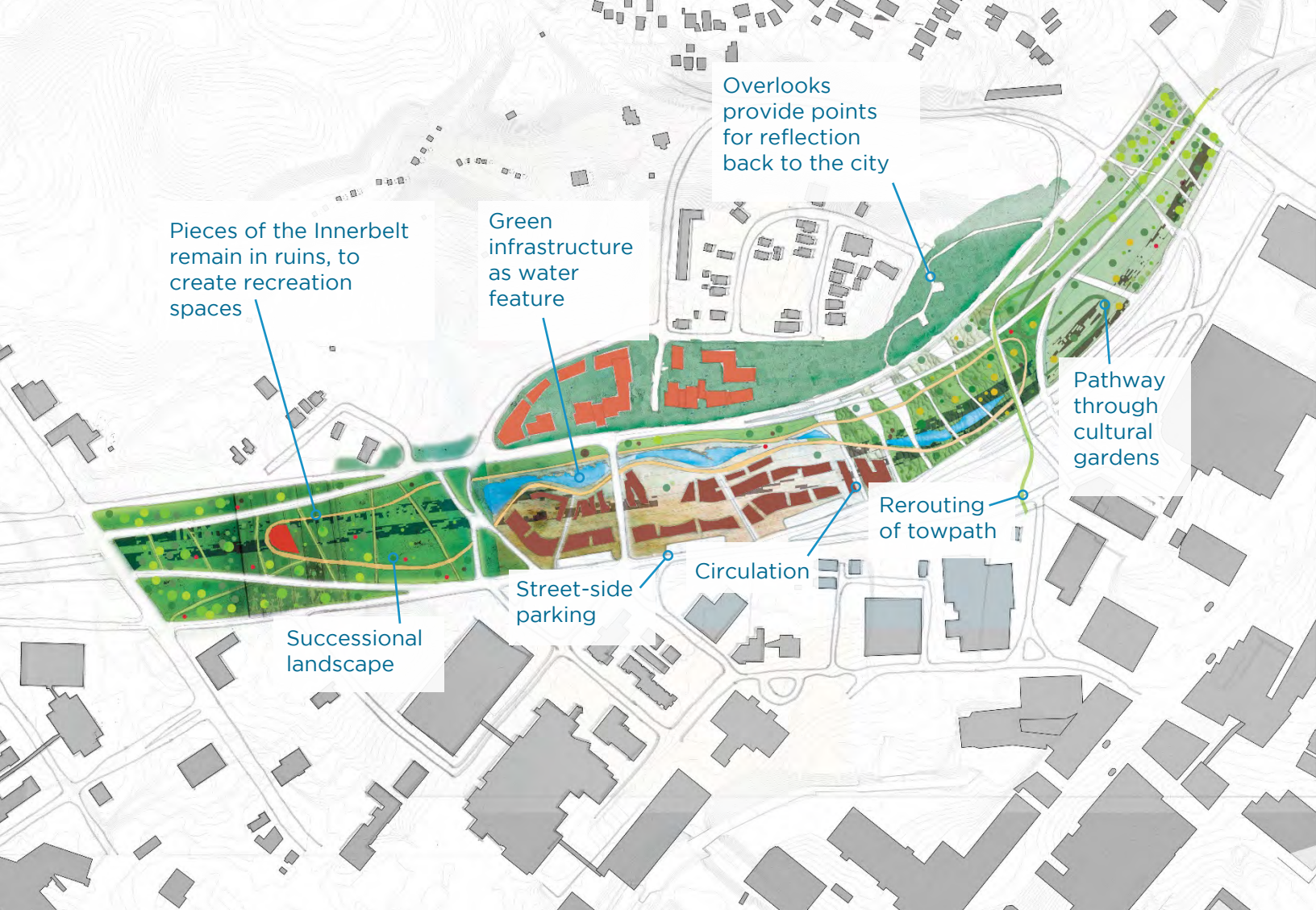


**TEMPORARY & PERMANENT COMMERCE**

Permanent commercial development and a flexible, temporary market area accommodate a wide range of browsing experiences along the Spine. Re-purposing the State Street bridge as a pedestrian-only byway

keeps the Glendale neighborhood connected to Akron and encourages alternatives to driving. Parking is accommodated along the new marginal roads.





## FINAL SITE PLAN

In its final full built-out, the Spine of Akron becomes a large-scale park with new small-scale development integrated along the former roadway trench. Pathways and new water infrastructure zig-zag across and connect each zone. Though each of the three zones have distinct identities and programming, they transition seamlessly in order to provide a continuous city-wide amenity.

# VII. IMPLEMENTATION

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**In this section the four schemes are consolidated, phased, and broken into specific actions. Suggested leadership and some possible funding sources are also included to translate the charrette’s larger design ideas into manageable, implementable goals.**

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Though each of the charrette’s four schemes all take different approaches to the Innerbelt site, many of the specific ideas from each scheme are flexible enough to be pulled out and implemented individually, or in close coordination with each other.

For the purposes of this document, the phasing plan uses the Woven Band scheme as a primary master plan, adding in other teams’ ideas about connections into Downtown, topography and fill, and temporary use of the roadway surface itself. The Woven Band scheme proposes an ambitious but doable density of mixed use development. This development, containing both housing and neighborhood amenities, could begin to act as a revenue stream for the major infrastructural and landscape investments of new park space and a new large-scale water feature.

The final master plan is broken into three phases:

- **Phase 1** focuses on short-term programming and lays groundwork for landscape and topographic investments.
- **Phase 2** builds the first half of new development at the heart of the Innerbelt site itself, and in conjunction develops a formal park space and water feature at either end of the existing trench.
- Finally, **Phase 3** is the final build-out of the site and its surrounding connections into Downtown and the western neighborhoods, creating a new seamless neighborhood and a world-class civic park space.


## SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (+1-2 YEARS)

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The first two years of the Innerbelt redevelopment should focus primarily on activating the roadway and adjacent side berms with a series of small-scale events and pop-up programming. This can kick-start a sense of place and a larger civic awareness for the site that will prove crucial for longer-term development. At the same time, specific landscape actions - utilizing the fill dirt from the new sewer infrastructure to create new topography and raise the base level of the trench, planting trees in anticipation of future park spaces - will anticipate longer-term investment.

Finally, as Main Street is redesigned and Downtown Akron continues to gain in activity and vibrancy, the zone between the Innerbelt and Main Street should be a secondary focus. Quaker Street and connections from Ash St to W Bowery St, particularly through the arcade building at 84 W Bowery, are important connectors between the Downtown and the Innerbelt, and even in the short term these connections should be examined and strengthened.

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Create consistent development guidelines for new development

Develop consistent identity, branding, and street furniture palette for site

Bring sewer tunnel soil onto site and hold for future topographic form-making

Crosby St

Activate the roadway surface with lighting, flea markets, recreation, movies, festivals, etc. to attract Akronites from Downtown and the broader region

Formalize pathways up hillside to west side neighborhoods, especially to/from Towpath Trail

GLENDALE PARK

MARKET ST

Plant trees along important Downtown and on-site connector streets

Incentivize redevelopment of buildings fronting on new Innerbelt site - facades or full rebuild

Incentivize green roofs on Downtown buildings adjacent to Innerbelt for views

University Ave.

BOWERY ST

W. Cedar St.

UNIR



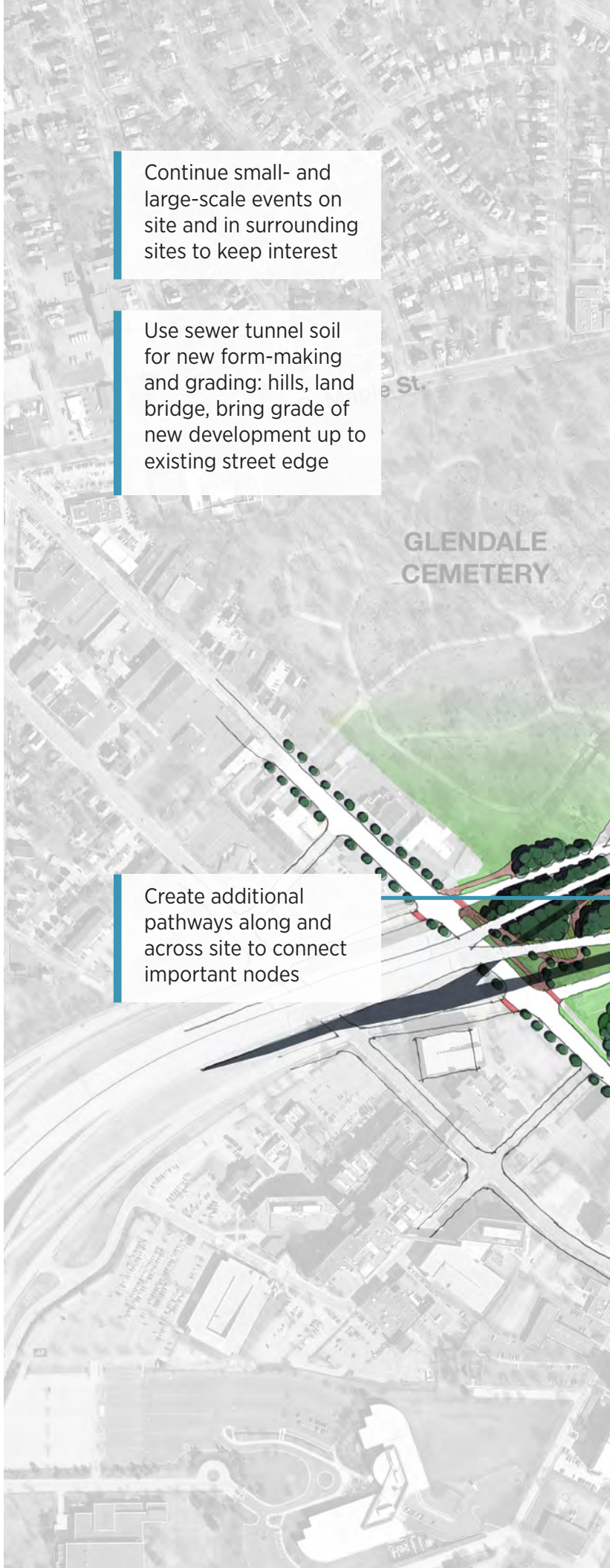
## MID-TERM ACTIONS (+2-5 YEARS)

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The second phase of the Innerbelt redevelopment should begin to bring in new higher-density mixed use development in order to create a revenue stream for the project. Important large-scale urban design moves here include creating a roundabout at Center St and Ash St and reconnecting the Childrens' Hospital across the site to the north; and implementing the water feature and park spaces to the north and south of the Innerbelt site.

These investments will capitalize on the existing programming at the site by formalizing the space into a large-scale park. In turn, this infrastructural investment will create more interest and demand, which will then drive the final phase of development adjacent to the site and Downtown.

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Continue small- and large-scale events on site and in surrounding sites to keep interest

Use sewer tunnel soil for new form-making and grading: hills, land bridge, bring grade of new development up to existing street edge

Create additional pathways along and across site to connect important nodes



Connect Locust St across Innerbelt; potential for new Roundabout

Begin developing water feature to highlight Akron's canal heritage

Focus new development on the Innerbelt site itself and along important connections into Downtown, especially behind 80 W Bowery St

Redevelop and green Quaker St for more pedestrian and bicycle access

Expand green space interventions beyond extents of trench to connect into Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods

## LONG-TERM ACTIONS (+5 YEARS)

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Long-term, the Innerbelt site becomes both a city-wide destination for open space, recreation, and programming, and a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood in its own right. New development can spread from the former trench site north and south into the surrounding blocks, particularly along the new connections at Jeanette/Dawes and Center St/Locust St. These north/south connections will stitch the Downtown into its western neighborhoods.

Other important connecting streets into Lock 3 Park and to Main St should also receive new streetscapes and landscaping treatments in order to more seamlessly extend the Downtown into the new Innerbelt and beyond.

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Large-scale city events held on-site, ex. fireworks, etc.



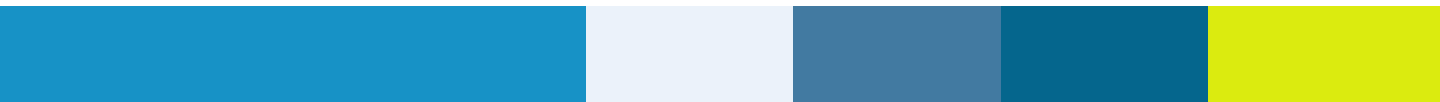


Full build-out of development, focusing on area to the northwest of the Innerbelt and on important parcels between Innerbelt and Downtown

Develop civic staircase from Cascade Plaza down to Quaker St and Towpath Trail entrance

Full streetscape redevelopment between Innerbelt and Main St







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## 2016 AKRON CHARRETTE

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Kent State University's  
**Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative**