

Fall Seminar ARCH 4/507; Winter Studio 4/585; Spring 4/586

This studio explores community building through two avenues. The first avenue is the design of a multi-tenant commercial building supported by a Community Investment Trust. The CIT is an innovative tool developed by Mercy Corps NW to encourage small-scale neighborhood investment in real estate, empowering low-income residents to participate in and benefit from the revitalization of their living environment. It is a form of “crowd-sourcing” capital designed explicitly to benefit a project’s immediate neighbors and foster long-term financial planning. The first such project developed by Mercy Corps NW, “Plaza 122,” will serve as our model as we look for appropriate neighborhoods and specific buildings for our own design work. John Haines, the outgoing executive director of MCNW and pioneer of the CIT model, has agreed to work with us in understanding and pushing his work forward.

The second avenue of community development we’ll be looking at is the adaptive re-use and expansion of an existing building in the target neighborhood(s). The vast majority of existing buildings worldwide are neither energy-efficient nor earthquake resistant. As an urban design strategy, adaptive retro-fit and re-use of public buildings can increase community resilience to climate change; provide earthquake-hardened infrastructure during an emergency; reduce some of the visible effects of gentrification; and validate the many layers of Portland’s multi-ethnic and rapidly unfolding history.

There will be a preparatory two credit fall seminar during which we’ll engage with staff at MCNW, structural engineers and other consultants, and map potential sites for exploration during the winter and spring quarters. We will have some opportunity to interview and interact with community groups in our target neighborhoods. Students will work in groups to document site systems, programmatic and structural possibilities, and then develop individual manifestos to guide their design directions.

The terminal studio itself will take these manifestos as the starting point for detailed architectural and social proposals integrating both community investment and adaptive re-use strategies into a cohesive whole. The winter will be devoted to exploring multiple strategies for site redevelopment and intensification in a “rapid-prototype” format, culminating in a preferred direction at a schematic level. Digital and traditional media will be used hand in hand, with an early emphasis on physical models at small scale, alternating with “stress-testing” these massing models against our understanding of the financial framework of the CIT. The spring term will develop the preferred prototype into a detailed design, which integrates program, landscape, structure, enclosure, mechanical, financial and finish material systems into a final proposal. Mid-term and final reviews will invite design professionals and other consulting experts to respond to student proposals from multiple perspectives.

Finally, we will be contributing to the One City: Many Futures effort coordinated by architectural curator, writer and critic Randy Gragg. Though still undefined in scope, this contribution could include showing students work as part of Design Week Portland in spring of 2019.

