Designing Intergenerational Communities

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What elements are essential to make our existing communities livable for all ages?

WHAT WE DID

After bringing together industry experts to discuss, envision, and create a framework for BoomTown, we tapped Gensler design teams from Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., to create visualizations for two communities: MacArthur Park (see images below and at right) and Ivy City in Washington, D.C. (see images on pages that follow). Our conceptual designs are tools for changing the built environment to expand opportunities for existing community members and encourage intergenerational living and connections.

THE CONTEXT

BoomTown is a new community model for all ages. Our goal is to implement transformative solutions for all people within existing urban communities. The built environment must be planned and developed to support interactions across generations, cultures, and socioeconomic groups. Stakeholders—including developers, investors, policy leaders, and local community members—are turning to multigenerational community solutions that drive collaborative innovations that can improve residents' health and longevity.

MacArthur Park, Los Angeles

BEFORE

AFTER

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1 Encourage safe and calm traffic patterns using audible signals and clear pavement transitions for pedestrians. (below)

2 Integrate and coordinate surrounding residential, business, and health care networks for people of all ages throughout their lifetime. (below)

3 Support existing local vendors through designated structures and lighting to create a haven for intergenerational engagement. (above)

4 Provide ample space for the community-conscious programming of events and festivals to minimize isolation and foster social connections. (above)

5 Establish a sense of place through design elements that celebrate the history and culture of the existing neighborhood. (above)

6 Leverage existing transportation infrastructure to access services and area amenities. (above)

THE RESULTS

We created speculative design solutions for BoomTown in partnership with the Milken Institute's Center for the Future of Aging. In Los Angeles, our proposal would completely reform how MacArthur Park serves its community. Space would be reallocated to accommodate a playground, outdoor classroom, fitness center, and other community-focused amenities. A central hub would then leverage the area's most valuable assets—reasons why people come to MacArthur Park in the first place.

To foster age-inclusive development in Ivy City, Washington, D.C., we reimagined spaces and programs to better meet residential, health care, and educational needs. For both communities, we proposed the creative reuse of space to support the community and facilitate sustainability.

BEFORE

1

a
b
c
d
e
Existing residential

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AFTER

2

3

Ivy City, Washington, D.C.

DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

We have to make better use of space.

In Ivy City, significant parcels are dedicated to usage that provides little benefit to community members. Change does not mean outsourcing necessary but unseemly functions, but reappropriating local sites. For instance, vertically storing city-owned vehicles creates additional city blocks for many residential typologies.

Community engagement is integral to our vision of change.

In MacArthur Park, we wove street vending into the neighborhood tapestry to explicitly create space for vendors to do business. Our conceptual future for MacArthur Park reimagines the built environment as facilitating what is already in the community—people and the cultures they bring with them.

No matter which way you look at it, designing for all ages is the right choice.

Health care is moving toward decentralization, digital access, and individual wellness. Technology is providing unprecedented changes to how we access services in our daily lives. Although isolated environments for elders are the norm, we propose smart, integrated living environments as an alternative.

1 Consolidate industrial and municipal facilities to create hubs for (a) creative work environments, (b) health care, (c) centralized public space, (d) mixed-use residential, and (e) education. (left)

2 Soften and buffer major adjacent highways and rail yard with green space. (left)

3 Revitalize existing residential areas with green pocket parks. (left)

4 Build a rooftop community garden to create spaces for shared affinities across generations.

5 Strengthen local transportation networks for greater access to hospitals, universities, and local recreation.

6 Provide a centralized, easily accessible health and wellness center to promote healthy living.

7 Expand and revitalize the historic Crummell School to foster civic and social engagement.

8 Create commercial space for coworking, maker spaces, and continued learning.

9 Devote ample public space for community programming with outdoor exercise equipment for all ages.

10 Provide affordable residential options that embrace inclusivity and diversity.

11 Integrate residential housing with retail shops, services, and entertainment venues.

WHAT'S NEXT

We continue to share our results with the contacts we made during the research process and engage in follow-up dialogues. With these findings, we also plan to create a guide to share with prospective clients, which will clearly identify the technical and functional issues that need to be resolved to deliver a successful design.

2005

Gensler establishes a formal research program to support explorations outside day-to-day client work.

2007

Gensler's 2008 U.S. and U.K. Workplace Surveys find a direct connection between workplace design and business performance.

Gensler Los Angeles launches four high-profile research projects focused on building performance and sustainability, growing the program significantly in both scope and scale.

2008

Gensler's new Workplace Performance Index™ (WPI) survey tool receives trademark status.

2009

Gensler's research program is rolled out to all practice areas, funding projects ranging from the student experience to building envelope performance.

2011

Gensler Research establishes a formalized RFP, review, and publication process open to all staff, dramatically expanding project breadth.

Gensler's research into "hackable buildings" wins NAIOP Office Building of the Future competition, a project focused on building reuse.

2012

Gensler is invited to present research on innovation, education, and workplace design at the Harvard Learning Innovation Laboratory.

Yearly Research Process

Call for Proposals → Grant Awards → Progress Reviews → Peer Reviews → Final Reviews →

2013

Gensler Research convenes a SXSW EDU panel on campus design and student learning.

Gensler Research expands its global footprint, funding projects in China, India, and Latin America.

2014

Gensler publishes its inaugural **Research Catalogue, Volume 1**, which wins People's Choice in the 2014 Gensler Design Excellence Awards.

Gensler's Legal Innovation Lab wins the Association of Legal Administrators' IDEA (innovation, development, engagement, and advancement) Award.

The "London Underline" concept, developed as part of The Future of Metro Transport research, wins the award for Best Conceptual Project at the London Planning Awards.

2015

Gensler researchers participate in the Robot Petting Zoo at SXSW, showcasing their Mobile Unmanned Printing Platform (MUPP) prototype.

The Gensler Research Catalogue, Volume 1, wins Graphis Annual Design Competition Merit Award.

Gensler Research receives 173 proposals for research funding, the most in the program's history.

2016

Gensler publishes **Research Catalogue, Volume 2.**

2018

The growth and influence of the research program leads to the founding of the Gensler Research Institute.

2019

Fifty-four research projects are documented in **Research Catalogue, Volume 3.**

THE GENSLER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Gensler Research Institute is a collaborative network of researchers focused on a common goal: to generate new knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of the connection between design, business, and the human experience. Through a combination of global and local research grants, and external partnerships, we seek insights focused on solving the world's most pressing challenges. We are committed to unlocking new solutions and strategies that will define the future of design.

RESEARCH TEAM

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IMAGE CREDITS

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