

# Community-University Collaborative Visioning

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Since its inception in 1984, the Hammons School of Architecture at Drury University in Springfield, Missouri, has been committed to community engagement and active learning within the regional community. The architecture curriculum requires that all architecture students complete a funded semester-long community-based applied learning experience in the fourth year of the five-year professional Master of Architecture program.

The Center for Community Studies was established by the Hammons School of Architecture in 2000 to further support this commitment to civic engagement and community-based active learning in the regional community. In 15 years, the Center has completed 61 regional community service projects. These community/university collaborative projects are designed to benefit the community through the collaborative development of long-range visions for community improvement, as well as provide an educational experience for students. The design and planning studies produced by the students provide conceptual guidance and visualizations of what the collective visioning effort could become. They point out issues that the community would have to overcome to successfully implement the vision, highlighting emerging regional and national trends that could impact the process. The Center for Community Studies then offers the recommended strategies for implementing a phased development for long-range community planning.

The collaborative visioning process assists the community by:

1. Organizing the community
2. Establishing a Visioning Advisory Committee in the community
3. Providing the community with a detailed assessment of their challenges and assets
4. Educating the community by exposing them to previous studies of comparable communities that were successful in improving similar issues
5. Helping the community members articulate and discuss their values and priorities pertaining to the improvement of their community

6. Allowing the community to assess “what if” scenarios related to various vision strategies through the visualization and testing of some of their vision choices
7. Providing them with a visioning report or “Visioning Toolkit” that documents:
  - the grassroots process
  - the research
  - the implications of their choices
  - the recommendations that the Visioning Advisory Committee can use to create the community’s vision and to apply for project funding

### **Community Visioning Approach**

At Drury, *Arch 417: Community Studio* is an experiential course that provides an exploration of real-world community-based architecture and urban design programs. Managed by the Center for Community Studies, the approach facilitated in the course is collaboration, collective decision-making, and experience. The collaborative learning environment is fostered at many levels among students, faculty, community members, and experts/consultants.

All community projects in the Community Studio are undertaken by a group of three to six students. The student team works collaboratively with the community’s Visioning Advisory Committee to investigate the community issues, research precedent communities, and document the physical condition of the community. They meet with the Community Advisory Committee to develop a sense of the community’s values, needs, and wants; and they identify and talk with the community stakeholders. They also seek ways to involve any individuals who may not be represented in the advisory committee or formal discussions.

Throughout the semester-long collaborative visioning process, the Student Team meets with the Visioning Advisory Committee and members of the community at four open community forums. Each of these public meetings are held to educate the community of issues affecting the visioning process for their community; to illustrate the positive and negative aspects of the evolving collaborative vision proposal; to clarify the community’s values, needs, and wants; and to provide multiple avenues for receiving feedback from the community members. There is one introductory meeting with the committee and four public meetings that are held approximately one month apart in the following sequence:

#### **Introductory Meeting**

The Introductory Meeting occurs early in the semester. This is the first meeting between the Student Team and the Visioning Advisory Committee and city officials. At this meeting, the Visioning Advisory Committee organizes a tour of the town and surrounding community to present assets, challenges, and history

#### **First Community Meeting**

The Student Team presents their initial reports to the community at the First Community Meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to validate their interpretation of the community’s assets and challenges as they have researched them and to present their research related to similar communities. The Student Team prepares 15-20 large (24 in. x 36 in.) computer generated presentation boards and a PowerPoint presentation for the community meeting. The presentation boards are

left with the committee to display throughout the community between the formal community meetings to continue the visioning dialogue.

### **Second Community Meeting**

At the Second Community Meeting, the Student Team presents the possible visioning strategies for the improvement and long-range development of the community. These vision strategies are looking 15-20 years into the future to assist the community in projecting their thoughts beyond current day-to-day community issues. The students encourage them to envision how their community can continue to evolve and improve for a better future over the next 20 years. At this stage, students again prepare presentation boards that are left with the community.

### **Third Community Meeting**

The Student Team presents the refined visioning proposals at the Third Community Meeting. Their research and design ideas are reviewed and discussed, and feedback is solicited from the community for further refinement. The discussions also assess the community's understanding of the visioning process and the implications of future development. Again, students prepare presentation boards for the community.

### **Fourth Community Meeting**

At the final community meeting, the Student Team presents their 20 Year Vision recommendations to the community. The students review the collaborative process that engaged the community in developing the long-range vision plans and then present the recommendations they have created in response to the community feedback. These recommendations are presented as follows:

Given the collaborative vision generated during the semester:

1. What are the **issues** that the community must address in order to implement the vision?
2. Why should the community be **concerned** about those issues?
3. What does the Student Team **recommend** that the community do in response to those issues?

The community is presented with a 200-300 page Visioning Toolkit that explains the process, research, precedents, visions, and recommendations of the study for the community. This Visioning Toolkit will be used by the Visioning Advisory Committee to prepare the community's actual vision after the Student Team departs. The Student Team also presents the community with 15-20 large (24 in. x 36 in.) computer generated presentation boards of the final vision for community use.

A digital version of the report is provided on a DVD, which includes all of the photos taken of the community and the community meetings, all of the presentation board images from the entire semester, and the large presentation posters representing the final visioning recommendations. The Visioning Toolkit and DVD become archive material, to be used by the community for public relations, funding applications, and community support activities.

### **Student Participation**

At each of these formal public community meetings, different members of the Student Team are

responsible for making the PowerPoint report and presenting it to the community. This allows all members of the team an opportunity to receive formal instruction about preparing materials and developing a presentation. Each student gains practical experience giving public presentations to the community group. Furthermore, depending on the needs of the community project, the Student Team may develop and administer a range of community participatory decision-making techniques. This could include visioning workshops, online surveys, one-on-one discussions, and written sticky note feedback on the presentation boards. During the course of the semester, the Student Team will typically make an additional four to five community visits to meet with community members, hold workshops at the schools, do more in-depth field analysis, and photograph the community and activities. In total, the Student Teams are typically in the community seven to ten times during the semester.

### **Addressing the Need**

The Community/University Collaborative Visioning efforts of the Center for Community Studies provides a cost-effective service to the regional community of southwest Missouri, an area dominated by small rural communities that have experienced significant change in the past several decades, both growth and decline. Many of these smaller communities do not develop systematic planning strategies, and what planning they have is often based on the most recent issues or problems.

Although the farming communities may be in decline and the youth moving away to larger, more culturally and economically vibrant communities, the social capital in these rural communities remains strong. There are also communities in this region that find themselves in a situation of rapid growth, where change is overtaking their community faster than they can adapt physically, culturally, and socially.

Likewise, the architecture, planning, and community development professions are all rapidly changing as global and regional trends impact local communities. The population shift from smaller to larger communities, due to economic, cultural, educational, and generational influences, is a nation-wide phenomenon and will change the way we practice and work with our clientele. The new professionals must be more empathetic with the customer, and approach community design and planning challenges more collaboratively. Drury University students participating in *Arch 417: Community Studio* as part of the Master of Architecture program learn by applying their skills to real community solutions, and develop as individuals to become educators in the communities where they work. The Center for Community Studies, Hammons School of Architecture, and Drury University strongly support the continued development of students as leaders in an engaged community.

### **Case Study: Westside Route 66 Corridor Study, Springfield, Missouri**

During the spring of 2015, the Community Studio of the Center for Community Studies was contracted by the City of Springfield's Planning and Development Department and the Westside Neighborhood Betterment Association to assist them in the explorations of conceptual strategies (visions) for the physical, economic, and social renewal of College Street/Route 66 from Kansas Expressway to Chestnut Expressway. The expanse of this corridor is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Complete Corridor



Eighteen third-year Drury architecture students worked collaboratively with members of the community and city to:

- Document the Westside community's current physical, economic, and social context
- Document the significant impact that Route 66 has had and continues to have on the community, city, and America
- Conduct interviews of the business owners along College Street and the home owners along Olive and Walnut Streets to develop a deeper understanding of the community's concerns, desires, and priorities
- Identify the community's assets and challenges through a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis
- Research precedents of other communities with similar assets and challenges to learn how they have responded and the positive and negative effects of those responses

The Student Team continued to implement the course directives as they collaborated with the community stakeholders and developed the community visioning plan. During the semester, the students:

- Prepared a series of 24 in. x 36 in. presentation boards for each public meeting that documented the context analysis, Route 66 influence and history, interview responses, research precedent findings, and the initial assessment of the SWOT analysis
- Organized and held four open community forums to discuss "what-if scenarios" or visions with the community members attending (approximately 30 community members at each forum)
- Developed a report for the city and community that presented the issues and concerns associated with the mutually developed vision strategy and the recommendations for the improvements to the Westside College Street/Route 66 Corridor

Several conceptual strategies have been proposed to help shape this new image and identity for the community and corridor. Figure 2 represents the students' rendering of each of these proposals.

Figure 2. Route 66 Site Plan



The proposals prepared by the students included the following:

- The development of a mixed-use housing, retail, and event destination at the west end of Jordan Valley Park, with the boundary streets Kansas Expressway, Fort Avenue and College and Olive Streets was proposed. This complex would be linked to the downtown area via the greenway trails, College Street, public transit, and at a future date, a possible light-rail intercity line. This area would also have direct connection to Jordan Creek, Jordan Valley Park's West Meadow amenities, the historic Route 66 corridor development, and city center life. These connections would make this conceptual development ideal for young professionals and college-age users.
- Between Kansas Expressway and Lexington Avenue, the Center recommended that the existing commercial area should be retained and expanded. This area contains businesses that serve a citywide clientele. Also in this area is the business of Mr. Guy Mace. Mr. Mace has a collection of approximately 60 vintage cars that he has restored and wishes to display. Currently, Mr. Mace is displaying his collection in his warehouses on Walnut Street. The Center has conceptualized the establishment of a car museum located directly on the College Street/Route 66 Corridor that would serve as a major attraction for the area. The proposed car museum location is adjacent to the College Street Café, where their proximity would promote a stronger customer synergy between the two establishments. If this were to develop, we believe that it would have a positive influence on the surrounding properties and stimulate the economic vitality of this section of the Route 66 corridor. Figure 3 depicts a student's rendering of the car museum.

Figure 3. Car Museum



- As you proceed westward along College Street, there is a three block area that is a mix of housing and businesses. The Center recommends that this area continue to be used as predominately housing and that whenever possible, housing should be inserted. This infill housing could be new character-appropriate single-family units along the College Street corridor as well as ancillary dwelling units (ADU) along the alleyways. In recognition of the national trend towards smaller housing units, the Center also encouraged the introduction of micro-housing units in pocket neighborhood settings for both young families and elderly empty-nesters. The streetscape throughout the housing area and other sections of the corridor would be lined with trees, have places to sit and socialize, would have improved lighting and sidewalks, and accommodate the mobility of all community members.

- Again proceeding further west, the area between Park Avenue and Forest Avenue has been conceived of as a second retail and housing area. However, this retail area is conceived of for the primary use of the Westside community members. It would contain small cafes, a bike shop, local specialty shops, a church, a veterinarian clinic, an entertainment gathering area, some housing units, an entrepreneurial center, and several Route 66 motor courts providing motel rooms for travelers.
- Between Forest Avenue and Clifton Avenue the Center conceived of this area serving as the community services area. In this zone of the corridor would be an early childhood development center, a community center, a youth after school center, a recreation center, play fields, an elderly pocket neighborhood, retail and offices for health care professionals, and a symbolic tower structure to signify the center or “heart” of the community. This section of the corridor would be linked via the improved streetscape and network of greenway pedestrian and bike trails that run throughout the community. This area was conceived of as the “family room” of the community. The zone was the community’s place to meet, greet, socialize, collaborate, and help one another.
- The last zone along the College Street/Route 66 Corridor was from Clifton Avenue to Chestnut Expressway. This section was conceived of as a major gateway into the city of Springfield and Route 66 corridor. The site is prominently visible from both directions along Chestnut Expressway and the College Street Corridor. The Center has proposed that this gateway become a major landmark along the Route 66 highway and within Springfield by reintroducing the iconic outdoor drive-in theater form and event at this location. The screen of the drive-in would be seen from a great distance and draw attention to this Route 66 junction. The structure of the theater screen has been conceived of as a large scale display case full of Route 66 memorabilia: a car, gas pump, road sign, neon lights, 3-dimensional map, etc. The drive-in would be located in a large memorial park commemorating the “Mother Road” as it travels across the country from Chicago to Santa Monica. Along the walking and biking trails would be commissioned sculptures representing each state along the journey and telling its part of the tale of Route 66. Figure 4 depicts the students’ rendering of the screen.

Figure 4. Rendering of Park



## Conclusion

Throughout the spring semester of 2015, the Center for Community Studies and Community Studio team worked with approximately 120 Westside community members, nine city officials, the University of Missouri-Extension Environmental Design and Housing State Specialist, and the faculty from the Hammons School of Architecture on this project. The 18 students in the Community Studio each averaged 20 hours per week throughout the semester on this community study, equating to 300 hours per student and 5,400 hours of community work for all 18 students. These total hours equate to an investment of \$41,310 at the minimum wage rate of \$7.65 per hour and a \$270,000 investment in the community if the community utilized an architect's office charging \$50 per hour. The City of Springfield provided a total of \$2,000 in project funds to cover direct expenses, and the Center for Community Studies provided additional funding of \$1,500 for this project.

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## Author

**Jay G. Garrott** is a Professor and Director of the Center for Community Studies, Hammons School of Architecture at Drury University. Professor Garrott was the Founding Director of both the Hammons School of Architecture and Center for Community Studies. He has taught architecture for 42 years and has served as an administrator for 26 years in professional architecture programs. Professor Garrott is a registered architect with a professional Bachelor of Architecture from Texas A&M University and Master of Architecture from North Carolina State University. Professor Garrott has given many presentations on community/university collaborative partnerships as a vehicle for promoting reciprocal applied-learning opportunities in academia.