RODNEY HARDY PORTER
A Model Urban Park Design for Cultural Expression
(Under the Direction of MARY ANNE ALABANZA AKERS)

This thesis investigates the redevelopment of a culturally sensitive urban park design for the South Market Street Park in Asheville, North Carolina. The thesis supports evidence that creating an urban park space for cultural expression can generate cultural awareness, economic development and aid in reestablishing a cultural community. This thesis establishes a set of design criteria that if used properly will ensure a successful culturally expressive design. The redevelopment will also help to eradicate a blighted physical space and replace illicit behavioral conditions with a culturally sensitive redesigned space that will ultimately rejuvenate a positive reputation of a cultural neighborhood. A landscape design was completed which utilized design elements, such as a symbolic fountain, tribute wall-panels, a timeline inscribed in a seatwall and a section of railroad track to symbolize and commemorate the numerous contributions African-Americans made in the development of Asheville and their neighborhood, "The Block".

INDEX WORDS: Landscape architecture, Urban design, Culture, Cultural expression, Asheville, North Carolina, African-American, African-American history, The Biddy Mason homestead, Los Angeles, Ninth street pedestrian mall, Miami, Piazza d'Italia, New Orleans

A MODEL URBAN PARK DESIGN FOR CULTURAL EXPRESSION

by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There is a virus that is spreading across the nation. It is in part a reflection of

America's successes, as well as a tribute to the growth of the nation. However, "sprawl"

is also a cultural virus that is taking away the ethnic life once so prominent in the urban

cores. Sprawl has taken away the cultural heart of many cities because people are drawn

out of the urban cores to the suburbs, which in turn weakens urban ethnic communities.

Due to this cultural deterioration of urban neighborhoods, there has been an increasing

interest in rebuilding specific urban cores back into the cultural and economic centers that

had once existed there. These public spaces in cities throughout the nation are the prime

location for creating awareness of cultural development. The city is a place of many

cultural institutions and serves as a rich environment for cultural and ethnic development.

Urban development practices, such as standardized streetscapes and more popular

business marketing strategies, have sterilized the environment and dulled ethnic cultural

values into common trends for social acceptance. Amos Rapoport suggests, "there needs

to be a cultural connection to a city in order to free it from the confines of the man-made

environment" (Rapoport, Human 346). The lack of a cultural connection is exactly what

causes a city to lose its special identity with its inhabitants and history. For example,

Boston is redeveloping and growing at such a fast rate that it is increasingly hard to

recognize the historic and cultural elements of the city. Boston's numerous ethnic

cultures and historic sites may well remain intact, but interests are drawn towards the

modern function of the city. Although the city's Chinatown was developed as an ethnic and cultural center, it is now shadowed by mainstream businesses that are beginning to take over that neighborhood.

Serving the logos of corporate advertising and economic development, a city often does not promote any place for different ethnic groups to find their identity and feel accepted. Walter Hood, a landscape architect whose work focuses on cultural expression, raises a good question for our cities, "in this era of standardization, how do we expect to reflect and serve diversity in a landscape" (Hood, Urban 70)? In order to achieve place identity, the urban environment needs to attract and promote ethnic and cultural peoples. An ethnic culture's, "presence provides a large part of the vitality, diversity and identity in the contemporary scene"(Hough 162).

Urban public spaces are one of many places where place identity and ethnic awareness can and should occur. These locations in the urban environment promote cultural identity. "The city's culture can be used to express the individual identities, character and uniqueness of its people and is able to contribute to the development of a sense of place" (Wansborough and Mageen 187). Public spaces contribute to city life by providing environments where people can freely express their ethnic cultural traditions. These public spaces, "reflect the complex interaction of natural and social forces which provide the basis for natural and cultural identity" (Hough 115).

In many urban public spaces there is an increasing need to redesign and reestablish ethnic cultural centers. These improvements are important steps to regaining urban cultural life. This environment serves the important function of expressing the values of the people, their cultural history and providing a space for their activities

(Rapoport, <u>Human</u> 321). Public spaces should become locations where particular groups of individuals or cultural institutions (be it ethnic neighborhood, racial or social group) can express themselves. This expression needs to be evident not only in a social context but also in a physical manifestation, which uses designed elements to promote ethnic histories and influences.

<u>Purpose and Methodology</u>

The purpose of this thesis is to reveal that designing a public space for cultural and ethnic expression and representation can generate cultural identity, expression and preservation. As Rapoport suggests, "one of the purposes of culture is precisely to define groups and stress their differences; it serves both to integrate and separate" (Rapoport, <u>Human</u> 249). However, without providing a place to define culture or not attempting to define it in a public setting, certain groups are not allowed to express their beliefs and history. By renewing an urban neighborhood's cultural tradition and history, it can generate physical, economic and social development (Wansborough and Mageen 184).

This thesis will look at the redesign of a public park in an urban African-American neighborhood. The redesign will attempt to reflect the rich cultural patterns and history that once prevailed at this site. Renewed cultural awareness in certain urban environments will revive important public spaces that have been subjected to inadequate homogenization of open space design (e.g. common streetscape scenes, overused dancing fountains and promotion of uncomfortable spaces).

In many urban neighborhoods today, there is still a failure to recognize the role that African-Americans play in the physical and social development of our society. As Luis Aponte-Pares indicates, "we live where space and time cross to provide complex

figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (Luis Aponte-Pares 94). It seems rather inappropriate to neglect the history of African-Americans in urban spaces because of the assumption that they did not help contribute to its initial development. What appears to be an issue with many urban neighborhoods is that when unacceptable uses occur, society looks down upon those spaces as being negligent. What is most likely occurring are faulty designs and programs which do not provide an opportunity for proper usage and representation. Walter Hood mentions that, "social injustices are created when certain users are ignored and not provided for in the park, sometimes causing conflicts when unprogrammed uses occur" (Hood, Urban 8).

The redevelopment of an urban neighborhood will not only help the rest of the urban community become aware of the space's importance, it will also generate civic identity, community pride and cultural and ethnic heritage (Luis Aponte-Pares 97). The placement of cultural elements in a public landscape design will promote awareness of its cultural and historical significance of the space.

Application to "The Block", Asheville, N.C.

Today, the lack of cultural expression in urban public spaces is evident in many cities across the United States. The urban plaza of Latin American and European countries has historically been a strong representation of cultural and democratic processes. American urban open spaces often misrepresent diverse ethnic and cultural identities. Asheville, N.C. offers a prime example of a culturally rich urban environment that has lost its character due to improper public representation.

Eagle Street, in Asheville, has always been dubbed "The Block" by its users and the city alike. Figure 1.1 indicates the relationship between "The Block" and the rest of downtown Asheville. This historic neighborhood was once a business and cultural center for the African-American population of Asheville. Portions of the neighborhood are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, while other parts are rundown and vacant. The neighborhood's deterioration is coupled by the homeless, violence, drug-activity and alcohol abuse. The outcome of this has been severe for the development of the neighborhood. The buildings in the neighborhood, which once housed much of the business and economic development activities of the neighborhood, are vacant. This has resulted in the loss of the neighborhood's cultural and ethnic values.

Figure 1.1 – "The Block" in context to Eagle Street and downtown Asheville
(www.mapquest.com)

In recent years, Asheville has become the economic center for Western North Carolina and has grown by the thousands. This growth has spurred urban development

and the redesign of urban open spaces. Though this has turned many sections of Asheville into a popular location for entrepreneurs and artists, there is still a lack of development along "The Block" area. "The Block" has, for years, been notorious for drug activity, winos and vagrants. Due to the increased level of illicit activities on "The Block", the Asheville Police Department has recently established a substation across the street from the South Market Street Park. This neighborhood, once a strong cultural center, is now dislocated from the rest of Asheville's unique diversity. The people who once lived and thrived in the neighborhood do not go back and the original sense of place that was present no longer exists.

This thesis will incorporate cultural expression into the redesign of the South Market Street Park located on "The Block"(Figure 1.2). A redesign of this space will hopefully provide a safe place that expresses the rich cultural and ethnic history of the neighborhood. By redesigning this space for cultural expression and by using the past as an asset for development, the community can regain a sense of identity and have a collective feeling of ownership.

Figure 1.2 - View of South Market Street Park looking NW (Photograph by R. Porter, 2000)

The cultural design project will also become a healing space for "The Block". The establishment of a culturally sensitive design will intend to clean up this now dangerous and unattractive site. It will also provide a space for future residents of the community to recreate the cultural identity that has been missing for years. "The Block" is a non-residential neighborhood that would benefit from a community park and mixed-use redevelopment. The South Market Street Park redesign can be used as a focal point for the future development of residential units in the neighborhood. Improper use will be pacified while the newly designed park will be able to attract people who are respectful of the space. This sense of respect and ownership will in turn lead to neighborhood stability and economic growth.

The thesis methodology consisted of historical research and the identification of social and historic cultural elements, through secondary sources, site visits, informative conversations with neighborhood leaders, and user analyses. Research on successful cultural spaces was conducted and used as a reference for establishing the design. This methodology ensured that the redesigned public park on "The Block" could become a space that reflects a cultural heritage, generates community development, and brings out the important contributions of African-Americans in the history and development of Asheville, North Carolina.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters that lead up to the development of a culturally sensitive design project. The first three chapters describe the sociocultural connections of cultures to their environment, the objectives behind a culturally sensitive designed space, and the elements that help to make cultural designs successful. The next section describes a number of culturally designed spaces that have come to successfully

reflect the important cultural contributions of a group of people to the rest of their

community. The following chapter delineates the design criteria necessary for a

successful cultural design and the research methodology taken to establish a proper

culturally expressive design. Chapter Six provides background information on

Asheville's African-American history. This chapter also describes the important

contributions and efforts of community organizations to help redevelop the African-

American neighborhood. The thesis culminates with an in-depth analysis of the existing

conditions of "The Block" and a proposed design that displays and symbolizes the

neighborhood's cultural history and traditions.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIOCULTURAL ISSUE OF PLACE

Culturally sensitive park designs not only reflect unique neighborhood qualities, but also educate users on the cultural history of the place. The inclusion of ethnic cultural elements in design provides a rich environment that connects the significant cultural history of a neighborhood with its users. Matthew Wansborough and Andrea Mageen support this argument by pointing out that culture has become a more prominent feature of the urban landscape (Wansborough and Mageen 184). Both locally and globally, culture is seen as playing a vital role in place-marketing strategies by representing the identity of a city and, through its expression, demonstrating the city's qualities, with the result of both attracting investment and improving civic pride (Wansborough and Mageen 184).

The design of public spaces can include symbolic elements to indicate the social status and identity of a place in relation to the rest of the urban environment (Rapoport, Human 9). This generates civic pride, economic development and neighborhood revitalization, while observing the ethnic contributions of a particular cultural group to the culturally designed space.

The application of culturally sensitive design and ethnic representation in public spaces is an important and necessary tool for individuals in order to establish a positive identity with that place. In many neighborhoods where public spaces have become derelict, there is no link between the space, users and the ethnic cultural and/or history

(assuming there was a cultural history prior to development). The positive connection

people feel between themselves and a space ensures the space's future success.

The link between a space's cultural and physical makeup creates a bond with the

users and ensures their future concern for the space. This bond will bring the

neighborhood together and generate an appeal to the space and respect for its facilities

(Rapoport, Human 254). The built environment links the unique cultural elements of the

community to one another, while expressing it in a physical form. Rapoport suggests,

"the environment is a form of non-verbal communication and the physical setting is not

only an expression of culture but also a link to it" (Rapoport, Human 326). The ability of

a physical setting to express the cultural background of its users becomes a significant

element to examine when redesigning urban spaces.

The built environment has the ability to connect with its users. If a positive action

is occurring in a park space, it will draw in people. Although built environments often

create cultural connections for its users, it might also draw people who find the space

intriguing but who do not connect with it in a personal manner. Often, this lack of

personal connection generates further lack of knowledge and respect for the space, which

in turn prohibits the design from promoting its positive characteristics.

Imagine a run-down urban neighborhood where the local park has become a

location for frequent drug deals. A bench is now home to two homeless and the tree that

once provided shade is now an erect stand of twigs. The park does not promote positive

characteristics. This depressing image is a common scenario in many urban

environments. Simply because spaces are public and designed for public activities does

not mean that illicit activities should take place there. More importantly, local officials

ignore these urban spaces by simply hiding these activities from the more acceptable parts of town. Society puts these individuals in contempt by forcing them to less adequate parts of town, where the illegal activities can take place without interfering with daily activities. Robert Sommer states, "A society compensates for blurred social distinctions by clear spatial ones – physical barriers, keep-out signs, and property restrictions" (Sommer 9).

The argument alludes to the fact that numerous urban spaces are overlooked and ignored in development. Unfortunately, many of these are places that have strong cultural and ethnic traditions. New corporate centers are given more attention while these cultural spaces deteriorate, giving way to illicit activity. If neglected public spaces become effectively redesigned areas of cultural expression, they will generate community development, cultural awareness and civic identity. The public plazas, parks and squares of the urban core should begin to look at reflecting the cultural history of the place (Hood, Urban 6). The "city is ideally a series of areas of varied cultural and subcultural character," and that is something which needs to be reflected more often in the urban environment (Rapoport, Human 355).

In any context of design, the notion of "sense of place" comes into play. It is especially important for a design to be tied to that sense of place. "Being tied to place involves stability and a sense of investment in the land because one's well being and survival depend on it"(Hough 35). When a public space is "rooted" in the user, it allows the user to personally connect with the hidden meanings of the place. By being "rooted", the space becomes a permanent link between the user and their ethnic cultural history.

Edward Relph implies that having roots in a place establishes belonging, security, equality and responsibility (Relph 38).

There are many social spaces that are unique to a particular group of users. The involvement in this place also serves as a mechanism for development and social control. Users become outcasts when they are not tied to a place. It is important for a designer to recognize this in any design situation. If a culturally sensitive design is not "rooted" to its users then it might become a derelict space. People will respect a place if they feel that there is a personal connection between the space and the ethnic history that is represented. Michael Hough indicates that if a design is tied to the user's roots and that user identifies with a place, a tradition can be established (Hough 58). "These traditions provide the best opportunities for an investment in one's own place, in the community and the land" (Hough 58).

Understanding the sociological interactions between the users and their space is very important in designing a public space. The way that people relate mutually in a space is an indicator of how well they fit into the environment. Bobby Wilson suggested in his essay that "the role of social interaction is a critical clue to people's movement in a space" (Wilson 137). This can be described, for example, by the study of racial discrimination that leads to the spatial segregation of users and other activities (Wilson 137). If a public design does not allow all individuals to experience its meaning then it can segregate the people who do not connect with the hidden intentions of the space.

Asheville's South Market Street Park, which is located in an African-American neighborhood, does not invite outside users into the space because it has become segregated from the rest of downtown. In order for a public space, such as South Market

Street Park, to respectfully display cultural values and attract a diversity of users, it should display an "image" that all potential users can identify with. Edward Relph indicates, that if a place has "high imageability" then it becomes more of a commonplace and can be recognized by its users as unique (Relph 35). The term "high imageability" refers to the ability of a space to attract users to its unique qualities regardless of who is in the space.

Landscapes that represent a certain cultural phenomena, often referred to as *ethnographic landscapes*, are effective in displaying the development of a society's place and provide it with purpose and meaningful attachment (Melnick 12). If individuals have a cultural connection to a landscape, they will become stewards of it and work to better understand the role they play between the space and its cultural significance. For example, the Hispanics develop environments that are full of cultural expression. In New York, the Hispanic barrios are an example of this. There are a number of "casitas" built in vacant lots that are places where Latinos come together and practice their ethnic and cultural customs. Figure 2.1 depicts the community area of a typical *casita*. The *casita* is a successful Latino cultural oasis because they are unique to the cultural traditions of the Latinos (Aponte-Pares 94-111). Similar environments can be found in Latin-American countries where they are also places of strong community interaction. They reflect a Latin cultural tradition and they serve as a place to unite that society's members within a diverse urban environment. This cultural development displays their rich history and creates a bond among neighborhood residents. Strong ties between culture and environment generate strong place attachment (Aponte-Parês 95).

The interaction between people and their environment is a result of how that space provides security and meaning. The development of a space's purpose is important so that an outside user can confront it without being intimidated. Rapoport suggests that, "as the environment becomes more legible through appropriate codes and meanings it frees people for other interactions and behaviors" (Rapoport, Human 340).

Figure 2.1 - A typical *casita* found in a Manhattan barrio (Aponte-Pares 96)

As indicated earlier, for a space to be successful, users have to be "rooted" in that space and feel a sense of belonging. When a design is rooted it links individuals with the built and social surroundings. The place becomes unique when it genuinely reflects the atmosphere of the user's and the space's history. This application to South Market Street Park will create a lasting cultural environment that reflects the initial culture of the neighborhood and attracts people from all over Asheville. The exhibition of the neighborhood's roots will generate attachment, a sense of respect and connection.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL DESIGN

<u>Cultural Neighborhoods</u>

The purpose of this thesis is to redesign a dilapidated urban park. The park is located in a once thriving African-American community which unfortunately now has a bad reputation. Community-based organizations and the cultural centers in the neighborhood have a strong commitment to address this neighborhood's current blight. This thesis proposes that introducing cultural elements into a "blighted" urban neighborhood park can improve its quality by reflecting its ethnic and cultural histories.

The cause of this so-called "blight" is not unique to Asheville's Eagle Street community. It has been the outcome of ineffective city government and urban social qualities in many of our nation's cultural neighborhoods. Take for example, the Bronx in New York City or the slums of Chicago. Even more cultural examples are found in Latino districts and China Towns. It appears that these neighborhoods are not integrated into mainstream American life. Steve Pile indicates that, "ghetto space is confirmed of racial disconnection that continues to grow"(Pile 19). Neighborhoods, like "The Block," Bronx or Harlem are continually segregated from the rest of the city so that their decline is inevitable. A space can become segregated when outsiders are apprehensive about interacting with people who have different cultural and social traditions. The lack of unity between the segregated space and the rest of society presents a conflict that continually exists. The lack of social unification and support from the surrounding community not

only initiates blight but confirms the improbable condition of a poor neighborhood to regenerate itself.

Cities need to focus more of their attention on developing spaces that represent their rich cultural heritage and traditions. By doing so, these neighborhoods are able to gain support and recognition from the surrounding environment. Steve Pile mentions in his book, Unruly Cities, "segregated neighborhoods can be dynamic and a source of potential and promise" (Pile 187). By creating such dynamic spaces, these communities will generate respect from the outsiders as well as institute a sense of pride among the community to continue to improve itself. As the community redevelops itself, the rest of the urban fabric will recognize the positive results and identify the community with the rich cultures it inhabits rather than solely by its dysfunctional elements. Walter Hood, a landscape architect and urban designer who designs spaces for "blighted" urban neighborhoods charges that cities need to, "promote change by concentrating on the collective and individual familiarity for each component in relationship to place or culture" (Hood, Urban 6). The urban environment is such a unique genre of cultures that are always interacting with each other. They should be allowed to change in order to express their cultural heritage and generate community identity (Hood, Urban 6).

Displaying unique cultural qualities can lead to a successful urban neighborhood design. Culture defines a person's historic relation to a social manifestation. It is an expression of customs that are performed by individuals. These customs, if instituted, become a link between history and representation. In the urban environment, culture is a symbol of uniqueness, diversity and a link to the past. There are cultural neighborhoods and villages that go about their daily lives practicing traditions that generate pride, unity

and representation in mainstream society (e.g. China Town in Boston, German Village in Columbus, Ohio).

In neighborhoods, such as "The Block", history links culture and ethnic traditions with individuals who have experience with that space. It so happens that in urban locations the historic neighborhoods are the areas usually rich with cultural tradition. Little Italy and China Town in San Francisco, the Irish blocks in Boston, and Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, are just a few locations that display cultural traditions as well as function historically as being representative of its members. Figure 3.1 displays the cultural traditions of a Chinese-American neighborhood. These historic neighborhoods need to be maintained and integrated into their surrounding environments in order to

Figure 3.1 - Entrance gate into San Francisco's Chinatown
(http://gocalifornia.about.com/travel/gocalifornia/bl_ctownphoto_gate.htm)

continue to support cultural development. "The purpose of maintaining old parts of town is to link us with the past – to enhance one's knowledge of a place's cultural roots" (Hough 187). If ethnic neighborhoods exist with support from the rest of society they will help foster future cultural development.

As indicated earlier, the expression of culture in urban neighborhoods generates civic pride, identity and representation. The problem with many historical and cultural urban spaces, that have fallen into ruin, is that they do not have the opportunity to represent themselves productively. In the 1960's, Urban Renewal took care of removing many "problem" neighborhoods, yet it also displaced the cultural traditions that once thrived in those places. When individuals are taken out of their cultural environment there is no longer the need to express their ethnic traditions. Instead, what often happens is cultural traditions are in contempt because social stereotypes tend to distort them. It becomes harder for members of the displaced community to display a cultural tradition or ethnic history when they are different from what the majority of society is used to accepting.

Sterile urban and suburban environments typically do not promote social and cultural awareness. Neo-traditional neighborhoods and urban spaces often do not reflect the vibrant traditions and ethnic atmospheres that are usually present in culturally manifested neighborhoods. The outcome of this is a neighborhood whose only unifying characteristics are the similarities between the buildings and the cars parked on the street. Cultural neighborhoods have a "rootedness" that ties the inhabitants to a rich tradition of uses and cultural events (Lynch, Managing 193). The roots that are present are what keeps the cultural development strong and long lasting. Being culturally and socially

rooted to a neighborhood promotes diversity within a sterile surrounding and generates a sense of pride and uniqueness.

The cultural neighborhood, be it African-American, Italian, Chinese, or Latino, needs to be represented within the entire fabric of the urban environment. When people are knowledgeable about the cultural diversity within their community, they are more willing to accept ethnic groups as part of the mainstream fabric and do not regard them as secondary citizens. A culturally rich community generates pride, which allows visitors to associate a positive connection between the space and its ethnic and cultural qualities. When users of a neighborhood park are culturally attached to it, there is greater stewardship for it. The promotion of cultural ideas draws visitors into the space where they can recognize the important cultural qualities of the space and see it as a unique element of their society. Steven Pile testifies that "by concentrating and exaggerating different histories and geographies, cities intensify social relationships" (Pile 11).

Many ethnic neighborhoods in the country have lost their rich cultural identity because its members have become woven into the mainstream fabric of society. The cultural traditions in these neighborhoods are jeopardized because of certain stereotypes that society imposes upon its members. In short, when members of a cultural neighborhood lose their ability to recognize their cultural traditions, the neighborhood no longer provides a cultural service to the rest of the community and permanently loses its identity with the past. For example, if Chinatown no longer had Chinese residents, the cultural neighborhood would lose its association with their cultural traditions and become more mainstreamed. When ethnic people leave their cultural neighborhoods, the physical environment is no longer able to support any remnant of its cultural traditions. This lack

of rootedness between people and their physical manifestations is what creates the loss of culture and gentrification in our society.

To prevent this loss of culture, there not only needs to be social changes that allow for cultural traditions to become commonplace, but physical changes as well. These changes should help to support and represent the cultures present in society. The changing of the physical environment to display cultural traditions and stories provides a backdrop where people can culturally represent themselves. The physical spaces can just as easily display cultural heritage as do the social implications. For example, the adobe huts in Tanzania tell us lots about the bushmen's culture If the bushmen were forced to turn these huts into brick houses, the bushmen would no longer have the cultural link to their traditions as before.

Designing physical spaces to reflect cultural history creates a sense of ownership and respect among its users. The surrounding community will also recognize those spaces as symbols of the cultures present and admire the uniqueness of that space. Plazas in Spain and across Europe all represent the rich culture that is unique to those locations. The plazas themselves, however, are physical locations that an outsider (tourist) can recognize as being unique and manifesting rich cultural traditions. If they were not present then it is doubtful that the cultural and ethnic traditions present in those areas would have been established in the manner that they display.

In the United States, public urban spaces should reflect the social qualities of the users. Through the use of symbols, public urban spaces should also represent the rich ethnic and cultural qualities that are found in them. These spaces need to display historic figures, relive cultural traditions and be programmed to express community significance

and awareness. Individuals who use the space then might become aware of their cultural heritage or more importantly become aware of someone else's cultural heritage. In the long run, by instituting cultural expression into urban spaces, they will generate user pride, provide awareness and a sense of will towards the space. By redesigning urban spaces in such a way, the "blight", that is common amongst many cultural neighborhoods, will disappear and the vibrant community that once existed will reappear. The spaces, provided they work to incorporate positive cultural qualities and community representation, will be able to draw people back into the urban core and regenerate welfare and pride.

Significance of Culturally Sensitive Design

The approach to culturally sensitive design encompasses many facets of behavioral, social and symbolic attitudes. A design for cultural expression has to be sensitive to the physical environment, while reflecting the social and cultural history of the neighborhood where it is located. Culturally sensitive design is an expression of a group's tradition which is represented by a studied composition of the physical elements and programmed events. It has to, on one hand, be able to tell a story about a particular group of individuals as well as be, "able to link a city's cultural life with the built environment" (Wansborough and Mageen 187). The design must symbolize historical traditions and be a space for cultural awareness where generations of users will recognize the importance of the design and ensure its future use. Peter Rowe indicates that for a culturally sensitive site to become a quality expression of its users, "it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only, it must transcend the life-span of mortal man"(Rowe 63).

The establishment and significance of a culturally sensitive design is an important step in the design process. The design must emphasize the local histories and, "encourage 'rooted' information" (Lynch, Managing 185). The elements incorporated into the design must reflect a sense of ownership and focus on the issues that make that place significant. To determine the design significance and appropriateness, the historical and future identities of the site have to ensure that the design will continue to be sensitive to the values of future users. The design also has to, "involve value judgements – most specifically, whose values are to be served" (Webb 12). The incorporation of clear values into the design will instill in the users a sense of quality and respect towards the design elements. The design needs to clearly display the cultural values of a group so those users do not interpret the design in other ways.

The Issue of "Space"

All individuals perceive their surrounding spaces as unique. They present different meanings for people, generate certain behavior and attract various types of user's cultural traditions. When attempting to be sensitive to cultural context, it is necessary for the design to be used by the culturally sensitive and to be open for interpretation from other outside users. The failure of a space to reflect the cultural history of a group will prohibit other users from experiencing the cultural importance of the space. Amos Rapoport suggests that there are three types of spaces in urban design: symbolic, behavioral, and social (Rapoport, Human 13). Providing for these three elements altogether in a culturally sensitive design can ensure the success of the space.

Symbolic Space

The incorporation of a symbolic space is important in a culturally sensitive design. The use of symbols in a design, which will be discussed later in greater depth, can allude to the rich history and stand for significant cultural aspects of the space. Amos Rapoport explains that a symbolic space needs to exist in and of itself;

> without being physically demarcated so that in order to understand spatial symbolism we must look at it in terms of the people concerned since, except for those who understand the symbolism, such space may be indistinguishable from other forms of space although its meaning or evaluation may be quite different (Rapoport, Human 13).

A design can have a certain style, position, or layout which is significant to some cultural tradition or historic layout of something. Through the incorporation of a symbolic space, a design can reflect a historic time or important event. A symbolic space can also be referred to as a space that is important because of a historic development or consequence of that space. For example, a design might symbolize some Native-American ritual ground, because it happens to be on a former burial ground. The design would symbolize a connection to the ritual and spell out to the user its significance.

Behavioral Space

Designed spaces can also generate a certain type of user behavior. The designed space initiates a type of behavior and affects the people who use it (Rapoport, Human 13). Playgrounds are a good example of the quality of a space to generate certain behavior in its users. They allow children to have an individual association with the space and to uniquely express themselves without being manipulated by social issues. The playground serves a designed space that promotes and develops user interaction and

awareness. Rapoport states, "environments do not determine human behavior and feelings, but act as inhibitors and facilitators of appropriate behavior" (Rapoport, Human 357).

Behavioral space can also be used in terms of a design that was created to generate a certain type of behavior or rather to change the behavior of the existing situation. A design that incorporates and approaches a "behavioral space" has the ability to generate an appropriate behavior from the users of that space. The vagrants and winos of South Market Street Park are behaving in a particular manner that instills displeasure for other users. The positive behavior that will be generated from the cultural design will help to eradicate any illicit activity in the park. The ability of users to behave positively in a culturally sensitive environment will further generate appreciation and interest for the design. The type of behavior in a designed space indicates the quality and effectiveness of the design in relation to the community in which it exists.

Social Space

Social spaces have become a significant factor in generating social patterns among users. The social interaction of the public allows a neighborhood to express itself and be a place where people can relate to other people without judging their spaces and cultural qualities. Rapoport mentions that the patterns of society help to establish spaces and their current social conditions (Rapoport, Human 13). The South Market Street Park is an example of a space that supports what Rapoport mentions. The park has historically been a place of illicit activity and the Asheville community at large has always recognized this. This negative outcome has prevented the park from being associated with a positive, quality public space. Asheville's negative association with the space

continues to generate a black cloud over it, further promoting inappropriate use and misrepresentation from the community. A culturally sensitive design should approach the social issues of a space in order to correct or identify any conditions, which might contribute to the design success.

A cultural design should take into account the impression of what society makes of the site as well as what the users make of the site. Society imposes its views on a space and if those views are negative a redesign would more than likely not be accepted by society. This would further jeopardize the ability of a culture to be expressed through a design. A redesign of the park will also not affectivity curb its blighted conditions, if it is not able to change society's negative view of the park. A newly designed space might be an immense step up from the original space, but it will still continue to harbor the derelict conditions because it has not solved the social problems of the space. The ability of Asheville to recognize South Market Street Park as having a cultural significance and perform as a positive contributor to the community, it will then be successful.

The purpose of generating a culturally expressive design in the South Market Street Park is to change not only the site, but also to change how Asheville views it. Positive design applications which address the negative issues that the Asheville community has with the site (ie. drug activity, vagrants, prostitution, unfriendly physical elements) will then generate community support and enable the space to become a successful expression of the rich ethnic and cultural histories present. This would allow the Asheville community to experience and better understand the history of the African-Americans in Asheville.

Establishing a Culturally Sensitive Design

When designing a space for cultural representation, it is important that a holistic approach is taken in order to address as many cultural elements as possible. The designer should take into account all of the important factors which contribute to the community's character and cultural history. The entire design should look at historical elements, present trends and possible issues that may be generated from the design. Culturally sensitive designs also need to be approached from both an outsider and insider perspective. If a small urban park does not allow for a significant experience, where all community members can take part in its unique cultural atmosphere, then it will continue to be a space unsupported by the people. This will be the case with South Market Street Park in Asheville, if it cannot be redesigned to provide a significant and meaningful experience for all users.

A majority of the Asheville community has already dubbed the space as derelict, so any future changes must first wash away the problems that potential users associate with the park. This means a redesign must remove negative drug activity, generate neighborhood development, hold positive social events in the park and promote itself as a unique cultural center. This will allow users to feel comfortable and it will be easier for them to recognize the cultural symbols implemented in the design.

When a culturally sensitive park design does not offer a positive experience it will not succeed as a significant public space. A design must be able to link an experience with its users for acceptance. The lack of a significant experience for users of Asheville's South Market Street Park will turn this space back into what it was. A park alone will have no effect on the problems of delinquent users, vagrants and violence unless it relates

to the broader community's need for the space to be safer, cleaner and a symbol of positive cultural expression (Seymour 150). If a redesign of South Market Street Park does not address the issues that make it a negative space now, then it cannot succeed in generating community development and a positive culturally sensitive design in the future.

When a design is not unique to that space, it can also become stale and boring to the user. Walter Hood mentions that for a culture-based design:

> Manipulating space to reinforce a standard "acceptable" series of uses can render a space lifeless. Life exists within the context of space, and spaces are changed by use. Any transformation of the site needs to reflect the people who use it (Hood, Landscape 5).

Designed spaces that attempt to represent cultural manifestations need to be able to identify with the users and vice-versa, the users need to be able to identify with what is being expressed in the space.

Another crucial element in the establishment of a culturally sensitive design is making sure that whatever approach is taken, it allows for a modern interpretation of the past. Hood suggests that, "the key to diversity within these built environments lies in the reshaping of these archetypes to reflect contemporary needs and values" (Hood, Landscape 5). The absence of a modern view of the space will render it incompatible with its contemporary needs. The inability to express the space in new terms will result in a cosmetic makeover, that on one hand looks good but on the other does not allow for the internal function of the space to be rejuvenated.

It is also important to make sure the culturally sensitive design allows the cultural community's users to feel at home while also allowing others to be able to be absorbed in

the space (Rapoport, <u>The Meaning</u> 29). The South Market Street Park design should become a place where all African-Americans feel welcome, while at the same time the entire Asheville community feels welcome and is accepted in the space regardless of their ethnic group.

A culturally sensitive design will continue to be enjoyable if it allows people to adjust to the physical and social experience of the space. That is not to say move a bench here or there, but rather let the users become comfortable and do things that they like to do. A park is more enjoyable when it allows users to generate an impromptu activity that enables them to become personal with the space. If a space is too contrived it will not be warm and welcoming. Such contrived design will not allow the user to read the social and cultural relationship of the space and the overall theme.

<u>Elements of a Cultural Design</u>

One of culturally sensitive design's major forms of communication is through its use of materials and their ability to tell a story. How do the materials reflect African-American culture? How does the use of this pattern indicate a history of the space? Amos Rapoport points out that, "the use of materials communicates meaning over and above space organization" (Rapoport, <u>The Meaning</u> 139). Materials in a general sense can indicate status, conditions and respect. If they allude to some meaning and have an appeal, then the user will enjoy the site and associate it with a good feeling. What Rapoport further suggests is that the spatial structure does not display the meaning as well as the social structure indicated through the use of materials (Rapoport, <u>Human</u> 270).

The proper use of materials is important in a space because they become the symbols that not only attract the user but also display the rich cultural history of the area. A cultural design must use symbols in order to communicate the cultural significance of the space to the users. Through symbols a story can be told. Symbols act as physical elements that help people be more able to remember the space. Rapoport mentions that using symbols in culturally sensitive designs is a, "major form of cultural information, and transmit many non-verbal messages which, if read, understood and obeyed elicit appropriate behavior" (Rapoport, Human 326). The incorporation of symbols, expressed through a design element, establishes an image of the place. Symbols identify a place with its surroundings and link the design to its users and the overall theme.

Luis Aponte-Pares indicates that the images generated in a designed environment, "are sources of memory and tell the story of 'who belongs' and whose 'heritage' is to be preserved" (Aponte-Pares 111). These images are the designed elements that reflect the symbolism of a particular story or important historical resource. For example, a particular plaque in the ground can illuminate a historic figure that once played an important role in the space. Paving patterns can display art patterns that were a cultural tradition among a group of people who occupied the space. Murals can tell a story. Benches can be designed to be a symbol of the natural environment. Certain trees and shrubs can be symbols that reflect the landscape that once existed in the space. In the case of "The Block", a design symbolizing musical instruments would reflect the rich jazz history of the neighborhood.

Furthermore, culture depends on the use of symbols to serve as historical markers. Symbols can indicate important historical events that led to a particular outcome in the

neighborhood. They might also be used to exemplify a person who has been a positive

influence in the community or contributed a lot to the success of the neighborhood. For

example, a paving pattern of a horn could symbolize a particular jazz artist or a piece of

outdoor art could be symbolic of a community event. In Asheville, there is section of

concrete imprinted with various human and animal footprints and a group of stone

sculptures (Figure 3.2). The concrete design symbolizes the trail that Native Americans,

pioneers and animals traveled on which crossed through Asheville. The stone sculptures

symbolize the history of the famous author, Thomas Wolfe, and indicate where his

father's stone monument shop once stood. The use of symbols, through various

mediums, can generate a sense of community appreciation and become the elements that

Figure 3.2 - Design elements symbolize various events and people in Asheville's history
(Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001).

people recognize the space with. Matthew Wansborough advocates that:

> Cultural quarters should be characterized by good urban design and by
>
> a vital and vibrant public realm. This is achieved by creating art that
>
> engages and involves people with the environment in or to contribute to
>
> a greater understanding of the area (Wansborough and Mageen 193).

The use of symbols and informative design elements are important features in displaying the cultural environment of a particular area. When symbols are incorporated, they securely link the design to a particular story, event, individual or community. In order for the design to be successful though, the surrounding uses must be compatible with the space. In other words, a space cannot attract people unless the surrounding spaces are enjoyable to be around. It would seem ineffective to rejuvenate a small park in a neighborhood, if the buildings surrounding it are deteriorated. A culturally expressive and sensitive design cannot attract people if it's not cultural. That is, if people cannot experience the designed space and be comfortable with it, they will not be able to remember its significance and the symbols that connect it with a particular culture.

The ability of the surrounding community to develop a community park is important. If there are shops or offices in the vicinity of the park, then it will draw in people. If people are drawn into the community, they will recognize the neighborhood as being significant. They might then, visit the park space that has been designed to represent the history of that neighborhood. From this, they will associate the space with a community and it will survive. An exciting space with dullness around will not attract people, but if its surroundings generate activity then it will see activity.

The support from the community is as an important element to the success of a cultural design as is the design itself. In order for outside users to come in and experience

the place, the insiders have to approve of the space. They have to introduce their own

ideas into the space because it is essentially created for them. There is no need to create a

culturally sensitive space, if it is not going to foster awareness from the community. It

will subsequently become another derelict space and attract the delinquents that mostly

occupy the space. Community support generates awareness in the space. They also serve

as the historical liaison to the space's cultural and ethnic traditions and history. The

immediate surrounding community's involvement will ensure that there is proper

representation of the history of the people through the symbols expressed in the design.

"Good small urban parks could contribute to the interest, variety and attractiveness of

neighborhoods. They could be an affirmative force for counteracting blight and slum

generation" (Seymour 7).

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES OF CULTURALLY SENSITIVE AND EXPRESSIVE DESIGN

Piazza d'Italia: New Orleans

The Piazza d'Italia, located in New Orleans, "was designed to commemorate and monumentalize a cultural component of the city, specifically one that has been directly linked" to the history of a district of the city (Filson 20) (Figure 4.1). For three years, Architect Charles Moore and the Perez Firm joined efforts on the design of the Piazza d'Italia and it was finally completed in 1978.

Figure 4.1 – A summer festival at the Piazza d'Italia (Webb 187)

The Piazza has, on one hand, served as a space that represents the Italian-American community of New Orleans. Where on the other, it has become an icon of dissent with concern for its "authenticity" and rooted connection between the culture's history and the space that it occupies (Claiborne 20). Claiborne mentions, "the idea of asserting ethnic identity through design is shallow unless it recognizes the importance of cultural identity"(Claiborne 20).

The Piazza was constructed to, "relate the rich and complex ideas and values that are so easily associated with Italian communities"(Harris 13). It was designed as a place for identifying and expressing the heritage and cultural traditions of Italian-Americans. Robert Harris regards Piazza d'Italia as a place where, "the references are both local and present, distant and historical and culturally continuous across time" (Harris 14). Michael Webb describes the plaza as a, "playful ensemble of pavilions, colonnades and gateways surrounding a cobbled circle, and a fountain that spills out as exuberantly as the Trevi over a stylized relief of the Italian Peninsula" (Webb 188) (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 - Relief of the Italian "boot" (Littlejohn 8)

The space is "rooted" to link the users of the space with the history behind its

meaning. The design elements, through a provocative, elaborate and artsy approach,

serve as a reminder of the Italian architecture style. The design also playfully displays a

map of Italy. The map is a symbol that Italian-Americans and other Americans can

associate with. The association between users and elements of the space is an important

and essential feature for this design to be culturally significant and "a source of pride for

many local Italian-Americans" (Carr et al. 204). Figure 4.3 illustrates this association.

Figure 4.3 – Children play on the St. Joseph Fountain shaded by the stylized columns
(Jackson 7)

Piazza d'Italia is woven into the urban fabric of New Orleans. The plan in Figure

4.4 shows how the Piazza d'Italia becomes a part of its urban neighborhood. The Piazza

is situated in a small, but richly designed plaza whose boisterous elements immediately

display the cultural importance of the site. Sets of large columns line the circular space

and are accented by spirals in the pavement. They are fashioned in the typical Italian

Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders and their large proportions control the scene. The

columns, in a burlesque manner, mimic the historic Italian ornate designs (Figure 4.5).

There are some which appear to not be from any order, but symbolize and create the feel

of a "mock temple," almost placing you in a small Venice (Littlejohn 8).
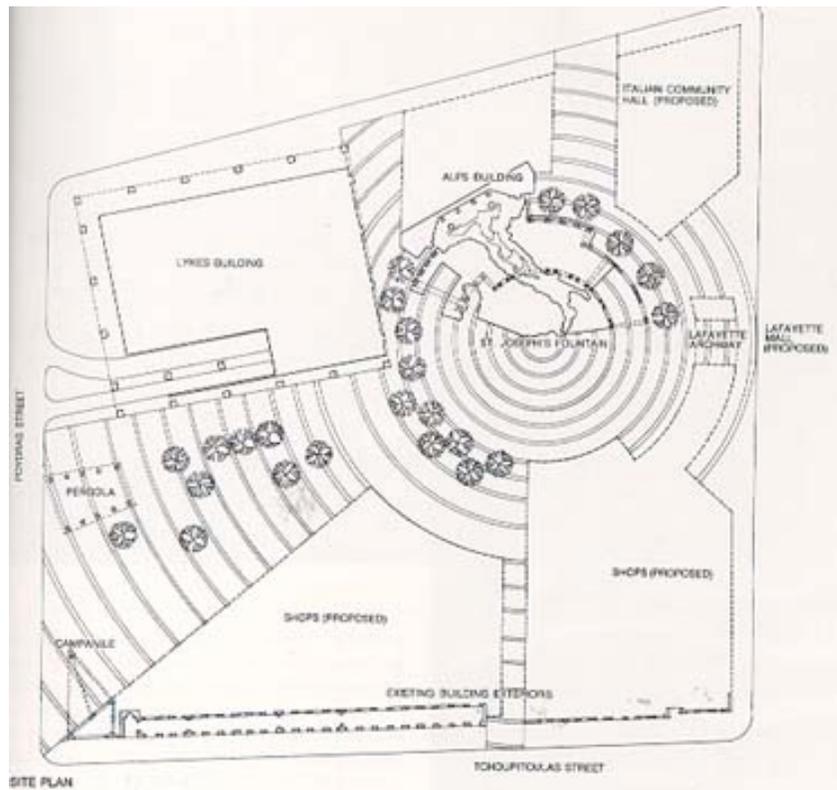
Figure 4.4 – Plan of the Piazza d'Italia (Favole 77)

The "St. Joseph Fountain" is the focal point. Water flows over a geographical

form of Italy and becomes a stage where the design and users interact. The shallow pools

of water make it an ideal location for children to play. It has a soothing sound that drowns

out the city noise. The map of Italy, made of colorful tiles, is a design tool that

immediately displays the link between the physical environment and the Italian-American

culture. Each layer of the fountain is a different color and appears to be a relief map that illustrates the physical form of Italy.

Figure 4.5 – Steel columns with a sectioned marble base (Favole 79)

The neon light tubes bring a modern element into the design by illuminating the traditional replicas of Italianate columns. The lights shine bright disco-like colors onto the columns. Figure 4.6 illustrates the illuminated columns. Although this is not necessarily Italian, the space is unique and engaging. The black and white concentric rings along the floor terminate at the tip of the "St. Joseph's Fountain". The rings draw the eye into the space immediately to the map of Italy. Because the eye is naturally drawn

to the map, visitors immediately recognize the significance of the space and its

relationship with Italian-Americans (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.6 – Neon lights wrap around the arches and columns (Favole 76)

The plaza uses symbolism through "overlapping and transparency", which

exposes, through the loud and confused colors, a "historical motif" in an untraditional

way (Norberg-Schultz 15). Tammy Griffin notices that, "there are columns and archways

that looked to me like the grandeur of Ancient Rome, but symbolic of the topography of

all of Italy and Sicily with the River Po flowing in the center" (Griffin 16).

Piazza d'Italia is a landmark example of a culturally sensitive design project. It

has been acclaimed for its whimsical approach to the Italian culture. It also has its share

of limitations. Since completion in 1978, the plaza has lost many of the elements that are

essential for it to successfully reflect the Italian-American culture. The design has

become a place for vagrants and the hardscape material no longer supports the fountain or

detailed elements (Littlejohn 8).

Figure 4.7 – Concentric rings blend in with each alternating layer of the fountain,
drawing the visitor's eye into the space (Webb 187)

The design has also been criticized for lacking a "traditional iconographical

control" and not serving the ability to reflect culture (Baird 12). George Baird mentions

that the elements that make up the design are so erroneous of the true Italian-American

culture that the design does not succeed (Baird 12). He states that the design is, "ironical,

fake, and self-mocking on all levels at once, the Piazza d'Italia loses iconographic control

so to speak" (Baird 12). Michael Webb boldly states in contempt of critics of Piazza

d'Italia, "Older Italians hated the neon; a few liberals were upset by what they felt was an

ethnic slur, as though authentic Corinthian columns were sacred to the Italians" (Webb

188). Stephen Carr, in defense of the design contests that, "despite its possible flaws,

Piazza d'Italia seems a refreshing departure from the typical modernist plaza, stripped

down and devoid of meaning" (Carr 206).

A number of users and critics alike, believe that the colorful and illuminating design does not truthfully reflect the culture and ethnic tradition of the Italian-American culture present in New Orleans. Jay Claiborne asks, "does the design encourage cultural identity or is it kitsch" (Claiborne 18)? To many it might appear as a glorified cultural design, but what is important is the attempt, by the designer, to bring out a cultural entity and display it to society. It makes members of the community aware of the significance of the Italian-American community. Claiborne again asks if, "the design symbols and motifs are valid rallying points for the community or simple stereotypes that insult the "authentic" traditions" (Claiborne 18)?

The Piazza d'Italia, like many public spaces in urban cores, has also been damaged by the "blight". This cultural design is situated in a region where there is little economic development. This further accentuates the inability of the space to provide for the users. A culturally expressive design must generate awareness for a particular group and continually link them to their cultural ancestry. The Piazza was designed in part by Italian-Americans, and to ensure its future success should become an engaging space that continually reflects their cultural ideals.

The Piazza d'Italia incorporates many of the criteria for a successful, culturally sensitive design. Comfort is attained in the openness of the space and its ability to be a pleasurable place. It is a space where city dwellers can escape the typical urban life and relax in an invigorating cultural space. The Piazza's eye-catching shapes and colors engage the user. The fountain allows visitors to discover the geography of Italy while details provide hidden links to Italy. The plaza fosters a strong "rootedness" that enables a mental and physical connection with the cultural history of the Italian-American in New

Orleans. The final significance of the plaza is its ability to gain community approval while at the same time giving something back to the community. The existence of a positive environment develops community support and security for future use.

The Piazza d'Italia is a significant design because it allows the Italian community to call a public space theirs. Their rich cultural and ethnic heritage is displayed through a culturally sensitive design that reflects the multicultural background of New Orleans, yet is unique to a particular group of people. It is successful in part because of the modern representation of classical elements, yet symbolic of the Italian culture. The jolly forms of the design beckon ethnic significance. Doug Ashe states, "the principles it forwards and its appreciation of our local heritage and environment should be studied as a responsive approach to design theory (Norberg-Schultz 16).

Ninth Street Pedestrian Mall: Overtown, Miami

The Ninth St. Pedestrian Mall links Miami's historical African-American community with Miami's business district. The neighborhood was historically the center of African-American commerce and culture in South Florida (Thompson 39). The mall spans from Ninth St. for two blocks along a Metro rail corridor (Figure 4.8). The design was intended to be a "catalyst" for redevelopment (Thompson 40), and an effort through art and design "to uplift the race"(Shabaka 12).

The Overtown mall was created in part as an "African folklife village that would turn Overtown's past into a regional tourist attraction celebrating the contributions of African-American's to Miami" (Thompson 41). Prior to the design, Overtown was in economic and social despair. Due to the slum-like conditions in Overtown, it was never given the chance for public acceptance and cultural development (Thompson 41).

Figure 4.8 - Overtown connector with a vibrant "Kente" paving pattern (Thompson 38)

The main design feature that contributes to the expression of African-American culture is the "Kente" paving pattern that extends throughout the Overtown corridor. Figure 4.9 shows the detail and cultural symbolism that went into the paving work. Brightly colored concrete pavers are laid resembling a weaving pattern, which forms "an abstraction of the continent of Africa" (Thompson 40). The Kente pattern is installed to reflect a "common ancestry" among African-Americans in Miami (Thompson 41), while the eye represents a cultural connection to Egypt or the subsahara.

The opposite end of the mall incorporates an abstract terrazzo paving to symbolize the energy of the community and warmth of sun (Thompson 40). The joyful and welcoming paving patterns stress the importance of user respect for public spaces and helped clean up the blight and slum-like conditions of the neighborhood. The

patterns comfort the user, while telling a story about the culture of the African-American in Miami.

The site includes other culturally based design elements that reflect the Overtown community's rich culture. Sets of benches mimic African drum shapes and allude to the musical traditions of Overtown (Thompson 40). They are painted in rich colors that help to create a sense of pride and joy in the space. Figure 4.10 exemplifies the rich colors used in the hardscape elements.

Figure 4.9 – Symbolic and cultural meaning expressed through the creative use of design materials (Thompson 41)

Another cultural element found in the Overtown design is a grouping of palm trees that, "symbolize, if somewhat obscurely, the progress of black people in the New World" (Thompson 40). They are situated in the pavement as a triangular grid to mimic the growth of the African-American community. The palms create a natural attraction to the space and provide shade along the walk. A plan of the Overtown corridor, Figure 4.11, vaguely shows the patterns of trees and the overall paving scheme of the site.

Figure 4.10 – Overtown's colorful pedestrian connector (www.wrtdesign.com/transit)

Gary Moore, the artist who collaborated on the design with Wallace Roberts and Todd Assoc., incorporated a series of bronze relief medallions that were then imbedded into the terrazzo-paving pattern (Thompson 42). The medallions tell stories celebrating the cultural history of Overtown (Thompson 42). According to the Miami-Dade County internet site, "future planned additions to the mall include streetscapes for the Overtown Folklife Village, a multi-use performance plaza for Lyric Theater, basketball courts, and a sculptural Overtown Tower" (from http://www.co.miami-dade.fl.us).

Figure 4.11 – Plan of the Overtown Pedestrian Mall (Thompson 9)

The Ninth St. Pedestrian Mall richly displays the criteria necessary for making a successful cultural design. The use of symbolic materials and rich colors generate a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere. Discovery and meaning are clearly displayed in the mall through cultural images hidden in the colorful paving patterns. Cleanliness and openness initiate a safe environment and numerous sitting spaces allow for a sense of privacy in a public corridor. The hardscape structures engage the user and help them to understand the history and traditions of the African-American culture in Miami. History is incorporated in the design to connect the cultural community with the past and use it as a tool for generating racial pride, cultural expression and community development.

The Overtown neighborhood grew as a result of racial segregation and the slum conditions erupted due to Urban Renewal efforts (Thompson 40). The design cures the

common cultural and physical trends of blighted areas and is an oasis of cultural activity. Gary Moore points out that recreating history can lead to more blight if it does not look to the future role of African-Americans (Thompson 42). The provocative modern design interprets Miami's black history and uses the past as a "springboard to the future" (Thompson 42). J. William Thompson indicates that Overtown Pedestrian Mall should be, "added to the short list of landscape architecture that attempts to make a difference in poor, inner-city neighborhoods" (Thompson 43).

The Biddy Mason Homestead: Los Angeles

The Biddy Mason Homestead is located in the heart of downtown Los Angeles. The neighborhood where Biddy Mason grew up has, like many ethnic urban areas, has deteriorated and become blighted. Power of Place, a community development organization, joined efforts with the community to fix up the neighborhood and turn it into a "place that connects the life of a remarkable woman with family, history, community and the city's urban landscape" (Hayden 187). Biddy Mason became famous for a number of reasons. According to Dolores Hayden, she was the founder of the Los Angeles African Methodist Church and a talented midwife (Hayden 170). Mason built on the site her brick house (now a parking lot) and was a contributor to the previously thriving African-American Neighborhood (Hayden 1986). A redesign of the area has opened up the space to pedestrians and used art and design elements to generate awareness of the rich cultural history.

The Power of Place organization turned a small alleyway, where Mason's house once stood, into a walkway that expresses the history of this woman as well as the culture of African-Americans in Los Angeles during the early 1900's. Figure 4.12 shows a plan

view of the site. The expression of African-American's culture is not an old concept, but one that Hayden says, "for too long the history of the African-American in Los Angeles has been restricted to small groups" (Hayden 173). The outcome of a small representation is a space with rich cultural history that is often inaccessible and improperly displays the true atmosphere of a culture.
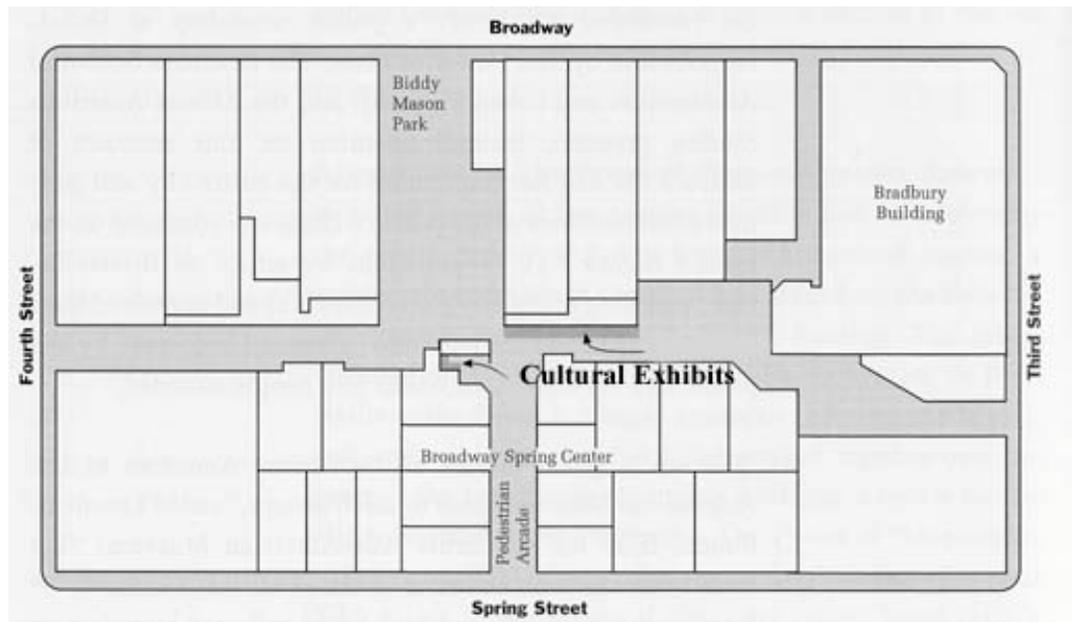
Figure 4.12 - Plan of the Biddy Mason alleyway (Hayden 174)

The Power of Place installed, with the help of an artist, a series of walls as a tribute to Biddy Mason's life. The wall is 81-feet-long and titled, "Biddy Mason: Time and Place" (Hayden, 1995, p.181). According to Hayden, "the wall transformed a marginal alley behind several large buildings into a significant public space" (Hayden 181). The wall becomes an important tool for expressing cultural and ethnic community history. It also becomes a reflection of a culture which expresses itself to the entire urban surroundings.

The wall is divided up into decades and each section tells a story of Los Angeles'

development, African-American community development, and " the story of Mason's

walk across the country, her arrival in Los Angeles, her pursuit for freedom, and her

thriving practice as a midwife" (Hayden 181). Figure 4.13 shows the wall installation.

The use of a wall is a positive design tool to tell the story of a cultural community. More

than a painted mural, a designed wall can incorporate documents, cast structures, images

and symbols of the community. Mason's wall had documents and images imbedded into

it, and cut out sections that resemble the tools a midwife would have used (Hayden 181-

186). Figure 4.14 shows an example of this.
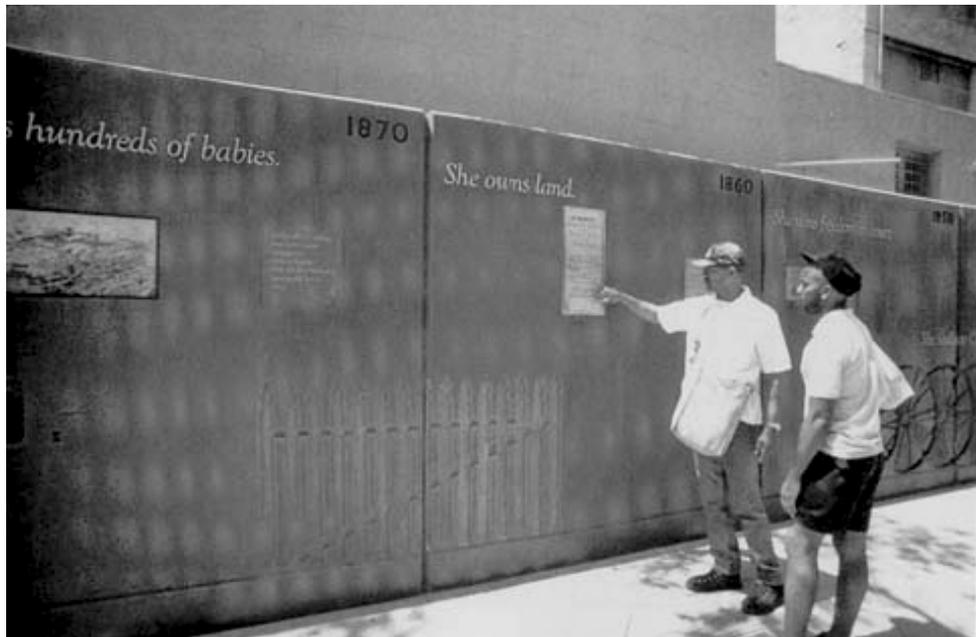
Figure 4.13 - Interpretive stone wall revealing a timeline of Biddy Mason's life
(Hayden 183)

The Biddy Mason wall is a culturally significant structure that, "proved especially

successful in drawing citizens to claim the history as their own" (Hayden 187). The

structure provides viewers the chance to symbolically experience the vast and profound

culture of Biddy Mason's neighborhood. The designed wall and walk enable the user to

discover the historical and cultural contributions of Biddy Mason to the African-

American community. The neighborhood redevelopment and incorporation of the

interpretive wall generates community respect, pride, knowledge and development in the

area (Hayden 181).
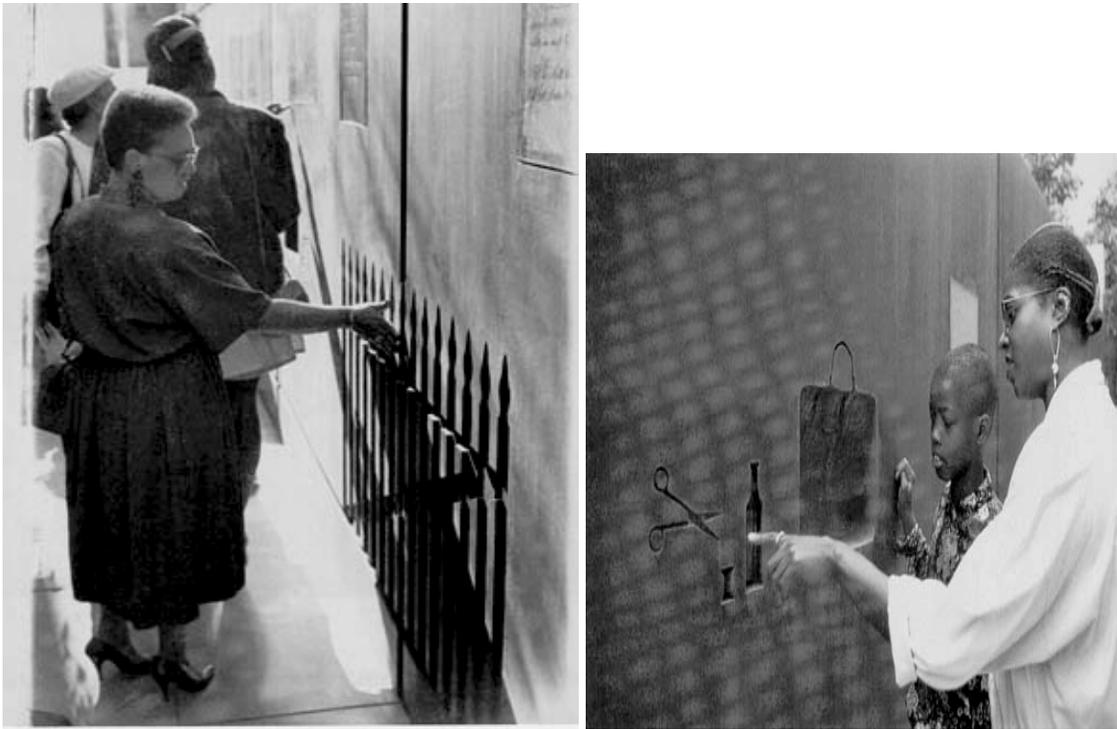
Figure 4.14 - Gate print in the interpretive limestone wall (left) and symbols of Mason's tools as a midwife (right) (Hayden 184)

Incorporation of Case Studies with South Market Street Park

The case studies display the successes of culturally sensitive designed public

spaces. Ethnic heritage, cultural traditions and community attraction are the basis of a

culturally sensitive design. The previous case studies provide examples of culturally

sensitive designs that allow for community development and cultural awareness. These cultural public spaces are useful references for developing a design that expresses the rich African-American culture history of "The Block."

The successful cultural design elements found in the case studies will be the basis of redesigning the South Market Street Park. Their ability to supply the essential criteria for a cultural design enables them to be useful examples for "The Block". They support the theory that culturally expressive spaces provide unique displays of ethnicity and cultural heritage that will ultimately promote community development and awareness.

CHAPTER 5

DESIGN CRITERIA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design Criteria

All designs must follow a standard set of criteria for adequate results. These criteria will facilitate the adaptation of the design, while representing the cultural history and tradition of the neighborhood. The design has to be approached so that it looks at all facets of the space and reflects the rich tradition of the neighborhood including its users, surroundings, and essential elements. In the case of "The Block", the criteria developed for South Market Street Park stems from a number of elements as cited in several culturally sensitive design case studies. The elements of criteria listed in this thesis also stem from Donald Appleyard's seven points to a successful streetscape (Appleyard 243), Kevin Lynch's elements for creating a sense of place in time (Lynch, Managing 28) and from the Project for Public Spaces, Inc. list of management improvements for public spaces (Project For Public Spaces 53).

The criteria applied to the culturally sensitive design of the park on "The Block" are; Comfort, Relaxation, Engagement, Discovery, Safety, Claimed Space, Meaning, Connection, Historicity and Community Development. These ten criteria are essential ingredients for a successful public space design created to represent a cultural group. Although these guidelines are applicable to any park setting, they are essential in redesigning a park for culturally sensitive design. They encourage social, physical and

mental applications of the space and help to make the cultural contributions of the neighborhood clear to the user.

Comfort

When we think of comfort it can be expressed in physical and mental forms. The physical expression of comfort alludes to seating and ease in movement through the space. Comfort provides a sense of pleasure, which allows for easier personal associations with the space. The lack of comfort prevents users from using the space and from experiencing the cultural story portrayed through the design. Comfort is also a security measure that will initiate future use of the site.

Relaxation

Relaxing environments are essential for people to feel comfortable in any space. Public parks allow individuals to escape the city's pressures and enjoy elements of life that are often lost in urban centers. If a park space is not relaxing it will discourage user acceptance and prevent the promotion of the design's intentions. To understand the successful symbolic association between the space and culture, the user must feel relaxed and comfortable. Kevin Lynch mentions, "Do people feel at ease in a place, so they can act normally?"… "Only then is that place accessible" (Lynch, Managing 21).

Engagement

Engagement is essential in order to gain the attention of the user. More importantly, programming the space for energetic activities will build a positive reputation and attract users. The ability to experience a continually engaging space helps to bring out the cultural message of the designed space.

Discovery

Discovery promotes spatial engagement. If a designed space is stale and unattractive, users will be less likely to become responsive to the symbolism. When a design does not connect the space with the user, there is no sense of discovery. Spatial discovery ought to provide for a diverse learning experience where the user connects with the elements of the design. To prevent stale landscapes, designers should introduce new elements that will trigger a connection to cultural history. Discovery entails legibility. The ability of people to read the landscape will promote the discovery of elements hidden by designed symbols and metaphors. Discovery generates attraction and people's desire to search for connections and new meanings found in the space. Discovery will further cultivate cultural development and community growth.

Safety

South Market Street Park is currently not promoted as a safe place for visitors. This lack of safety instigates violence, vagrants, drug dealing, and vandalism. Designed spaces that are open, well lighted, accessible, and respected become safety zones that encourage positive use. Project for Public Spaces, Inc. points out that, "very often, the presence of undesirables, the location of an empty unlighted area, or the lack of a person who seems to be "official" cause people to have highly exaggerated fears about the safety of downtown, relative to actual statistics" (Project For Public Spaces, Inc. 7). Feeling safe in an environment positively influences the eradication of violence and illicit activities. If the design incorporates safety, then users will feel comfortable in the area and future use and support of the space will be secured.

Claimed Space

Incorporation of claimed space develops a temporary sense of ownership and claiming of space. The importance of providing a temporary claim of ownership lies in the user's ability to be responsible over some space. The blighted conditions of "The Block" area are due to; for one reason, a lack of respect for the space. This lack of respect presents problematic situations ranging from of trash disposal and tree carving to other unfavorable activities such as outlandish behavior in the park and the consumption of alcoholic beverages. User consciousness and a sense ownership will ultimately establish respect for the space. User participation in the design process aids this also. In the case of a culturally sensitive design, the exhibition of cultural elements will provoke the community to have a sense of claimed space because it alludes to them. Pure sense of ownership makes the user a steward of the space they use

Meaningful Experience

A meaningful experience is essential to attract users for an extended period of time. If meaning is absent in a design, it can by no means enable people to engage in the cultural history of the neighborhood. A meaningful experience inspires the user to return to the space. Meaning is implemented in a design through metaphors, symbols, rules and actions. These are essential for providing engagement between the site and user. Meaning is a connection between the design elements and the history and culture of the people occupying the space.

Connection

When a cultural design has "connection," it links the outside community to the local cultural atmosphere. It also links the relationship between the cultural history of the

neighborhood with the surrounding community. Connection further prevents a design

from becoming too distant from its actual purpose. The ability of a cultural design to

relate to a "whole" culture enables it to deliver its message to the entire community.

Stephen Carr points out that, "important connections can derive from an individual's

personal history but they can also stem from the history of a group in an area where

connections to other members enhance and shape the experience of a place" (Carr 202).

Such connections will insure "visual consistency" and continuity in the

neighborhood's design style (Rapoport, Human 383). Connections with other parts of the

community are also important, when attempting to incorporate any racially segregated

space (Pile 182). When society can look at a space and recognize it as a piece of the

whole, it will be respected.

Historicity

The addition of historicity in design makes sure that the design focuses on the

history of the neighborhood and the local culture. The word historicity means – having

historical authenticity (Webster's Dictionary, 1981). In order for a design to be classified

under the historicity category, it must incorporate this authentic representation. A

culturally sensitive design that addresses important cultural facts will link the members of

the community with the design. Misrepresentation of such vital cultural information

though will cause the design to fail.

Community Development

It is essential for a cultural design to have the support of the surrounding

community. The South Market Street Park will receive public acceptance, if "The Block"

is developed and open to the surrounding community. Community development will

ensure that the designed space is economically and physically supported by its surroundings. If there is a redesigned space located in a ramshackle neighborhood, it will not adequately represent the meaning behind the design. Once again, it will become a derelict space because there is no other attraction to bring outsiders into the space. Community development generates economic growth, community membership, respect, and representation. Community development will push out the blight, which has taken over 'The Block," and enable rich cultural regeneration.

The purpose of such criteria insures a successful, culturally sensitive design that engages people in the space and represents the cultural and ethnic history of the neighborhood. These criteria help guide designers when attempting to create an appropriate space where, "the armor of daily life can be partially removed, allowing us to see others as whole people. Seeing people different from oneself responding to the same setting in similar ways creates a temporary bond" (Carr 344).

The culturally sensitive design should also make sure to determine the "cues" which identify the group as being unique. It should be open-minded and open-ended so as not to forget and segregate community attributes (Rapoport, Human 326 & 356). The absence of determining the ideals and group logistics will prevent the criteria from ever establishing itself in a design. The cultural regeneration of a space must involve these criteria, but also "link it with more mundane services, such as public transport, crime prevention, street maintenance, as well as the integration of hard infrastructure with a variety of "soft uses, events and activities" (Wansborough and Mageen 191).

Methodology

  When creating a design in blighted areas, such as South Market Street Park, designers need to take into consideration the feelings and desires of the people in such a community. Designers should not impose their solutions onto a community. Ethan Kent, Director of Project for Public Spaces in Washington, D.C., stated in an email message that, "what should happen and never does is to ask people what they want, observe how people are using their public spaces positively and then design the space to support those uses. Only then is there a feeling of ownership and true cultural identification" (pps@pps.org, e-mail correspondence, 1/30/01). When spaces are designed to support the individual's uses and actions, only then can it become a space of true ownership and cultural identification.

  Although such suggestions seem viable, there is something wrong with their application. There is no relevance to the cultural history of the place. Rapoport states, you "need to know the cultural knowledge" in order to represent the identity of the place (Rapoport, The Meaning 75). A design based simply on what the users are doing does not indicate a cultural connection to the space.

  The research methodology for this thesis not only observes the physical life in South Market Street Park, it also looks at the historical qualities that once made "The Block" so unique. This research was in part obtained through informal meetings with the YMI Cultural Center director and staff, Eagle/Market St. Development Corporation, and members of the neighborhood. Obtaining necessary information also involved library research of archived articles from the Asheville-Citizen Times newspapers and meeting with members of the Eagle St. Community.

A critical issue with culturally sensitive design is determining how an outsider can design for a culture without judging the space. How can designers justify their design, if they are not members of that social group? This is a legitimate question and can be addressed if the designer focuses his or her attention on public involvement and historic research. According to Jeffrey Fahs, "The outside designer has one advantage over their clients. Those who have lived within the study area for many years often take it for granted"(Fahs 21). Community members will not realize that change is needed in their neighborhood because they have grown accustomed to the conditions that surround them. It will become a simple task for an outsider to determine the cultural qualities of a space that make it unique (Fahs 21). Fahs further mentions, "On the other hand, it will be difficult to ascertain the cultural significance of these elements he or she has identified as being unique" (Fahs 21). To a certain extent this is true but a design cannot fully represent a cultural group if there is no input from the groups members. It is necessary to encourage community participation in order to insure that the design does not fail or insult the neighborhood's traditions.

The methodology and approach of generating a culturally sensitive park design took into account the aura of the community. It is important to create a design that provides for the whole community and for every potential user of the site. If some users are omitted from the design process, cultural misrepresentation may occur.

As mentioned earlier, designers must consider citizen opinions when generating a cultural design strategy that will properly represent the public. "Because culture is inherently dynamic, this approach must also include temporal reference which can inform

the designer of present day needs and desires but also on their expectations for the future"

(Fahs 22).

Another approach to proper cultural design development is to look at the

historical make-up of the community. This involves determining the cultural and ethnic

contributions people have made to make the neighborhood unique. Information about

significant historic figureheads, public events and activities that have made notable

contributions to the area were gathered.

According to the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation, "The Block"

once supported a number of residential units and distinct shops, but Urban Renewal

displaced many neighborhood traits and economic trends (David Eggleston, personal

communication, 2/5/01). The incorporation of the history of "The Block" is a crucial

design element in order for a space to become a link to its culture. Kevin Lynch suggests,

"it would be necessary to investigate and illustrate the degree to which the existing

landscape preserves traces of the past and how legible those traces are" (Lynch,

Managing 189). This information enables a strong relationship between the design and

the cultural and ethnic history of the neighborhood.

Furthermore, it is important to analyze the surrounding environment's relationship

to the site in order to determine, if it has impacted development and contributed to the

current conditions (Fahs 22). What are the Asheville community's perceptions and

stereotypes of the African-American neighborhood? How has the inclusion or exclusion

from the city contributed to the downfall of the neighborhood?

A series of site visits were conducted for the South Market Street Park in order to

gain more knowledge about the park structure. These visits included visual observations

of what the current users are doing, where they were doing their things, and how they did them. Although it would be beneficial to change the user actions that are currently going on in "The Block", they need to be dealt with in the design in order to prevent them from reoccurring in the future. Photos were also taken of current site conditions and surrounding neighborhood structures (See Appendix A for photos).

South Market Street Park is located in a historically African-American neighborhood. In the past, "The Block" was a rich business and economic center for Asheville's African-Americans and generated a rich cultural tradition with a legacy of strong community interaction. A number of community organizations have put forth the effort to restore the neighborhood, which in turn has been instrumental in initiating redevelopment of the area. These organizations, as well as the leaders of the community, are valuable resources in order to gain insight into the true atmosphere of the space. Informal meetings with representatives from these organizations provided insight for the design development. The personal information gathered will ensure the proper representation of the cultural history and traditions in a positive implementation of the design.

One such organization was the Eagle/Market St. Redevelopment Corporation, which is trying to rejuvenate the neighborhood into a successful cultural oasis. Interviews with members of this organization provided insight into the history of the space but more importantly, provided information on what they believe really needs to be changed and how to go about doing it. They answered questions regarding how to get rid of the current blighted conditions, what the members of the community would like to see in their public space and how such a community would most likely use it.

In addition, brief and informal interviews were held with members of the YMI Cultural Center, including director Oralene Simmons. The YMI Cultural Center is a landmark facility that encourages development of the community. Historically it housed a drug store, office building, YMCA, apartments, music hall and sports facility. The YMI Cultural Center now is in charge of preserving the rich African-American cultural heritage in the neighborhood and promoting their traditions the Asheville community. The YMI Cultural Center provided information on the history, development and contributions of "The Block" to the entire Asheville community. Their involvement with Eagle Street businesses and African-Americans has served as a positive role model and contributor to the future development of the neighborhood. They hope to turn the neighborhood back into a vibrant community, rich in cultural expression and pride.

Another method used to research the conditions of the site and to get a sense of community was conducting interviews with several community members. On one hand this method proved to be a very difficult task because of the site's history of illicit activity and disregard for outsiders, but on the other, it was an informative process. The park users were not very informative but other members of the community were.

The interviews with park-users, store owners and African-Americans provided some helpful information on what the community would like to see in the South Market Street Park. Such interviews also allowed me to understand how the space functions and is viewed by the public at large. Many of the individuals who use the site do not respect it as a public space and do not associate with the historical and cultural life of "The Block", therefore, they unfortunately contributed little to my interviews. The process of communicating with some users proved to be more daunting than anticipated. A possible

reason for this is the lack of residents found in the neighborhood today, who might use the park. Also, the lack of residential and office units surrounding the park prevents the users from contributing to the welfare of the neighborhood. The simple fact that residents of the community do not use the park indicates a loss of community pride towards the space. There is also some animosity towards designers who want to redevelop a site that has only been a haven for the illicit activities. The interview process with older community members provided positive results. They were very helpful and appreciated the attempt to redesign the site with cultural awareness in mind.

A standard set of questions was used during visits to the park and meetings with community leaders. They included questions about the atmosphere of the space, uses of in the park, the overall feeling towards the park and how the rest of Asheville might view it. A list of questions asked during interviews can be found in Appendix B.

The final method used to generate a culturally sensitive design was researching case studies of public spaces that have been designed with a particular cultural group in mind. The case studies exhibit what can be done to successfully express a cultural group, historic events or an important individual. The elements in their designs can be used as a basis for redesigning the South Market Street Park. The case studies, more importantly, support the argument in favor of cultural expression in urban park design.

The methodical use of community input, site analysis, historic research and case studies are important tools in establishing a culturally sensitive design. Such information can be integrated to create a quality design. The flowchart in Figure 5.1 indicates the steps taken to develop a design for this thesis. The information, gathered from such research, helps in redesigning the space to positively display the Eagle St. Community's

cultural and ethnic traditions. Omitting any of the steps taken of the above-mentioned steps could contribute to an unsuccessful design that disregards the cultural history and influences of African-Americans in Asheville and the rest of Western North Carolina.

Identify
- Cultural expression as a design need
- Design for sociocultural representation

Need
- To apply design for cultural expression to a cultural urban park space and rich African-American neighborhood

Public Involvement
- Community Organizations
- Interviews
- Government Organizations

Design
- Purpose & Methodology
- Guidelines
- Sociocultural/Cultural Design
- Objective of culturally sensitive design
- Elements contributing to successful design
- Criteria
- Community involvement

Research
- Conducted library visits
- Interviews with community organizations
- Personal experience
- Site visits

Case Studies
- Support research
- Support design
- Evidence of success or not

Analysis
- Site/Setting
- Behavioral
- Physical

Criteria
- Standards to ensure a successful design

Synthesis
- Determine "design-worthy" features
- What needs to be incorporated into the design?
- Importance of Case Study relevance

Design
- Incorporate design strategies
- Compile information gathered

Figure 5.1 – Methodology Flow Chart

CHAPTER 6

SOUTH MARKET STREET PARK IN CONTEXT

Asheville's African-American History

Asheville is located in a valley between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Great

Smokies (Figure 6.1). This rich river valley was once home to bands of Shawnee and

Cherokee Indians (Mead 21). The city of Asheville became an incorporated town in

1797, and soon became the trade distribution center for Tennessee, Georgia, and the

Carolinas (Mead 21). Prior to Asheville's township, it was a favorite place for pioneers to

set up camp because of the rich natural resources it offered and the accessibility to major

trade routes. Asheville became a place where Native-Americans, African-Americans and

white settlers alike came together to engage in trade and commerce.
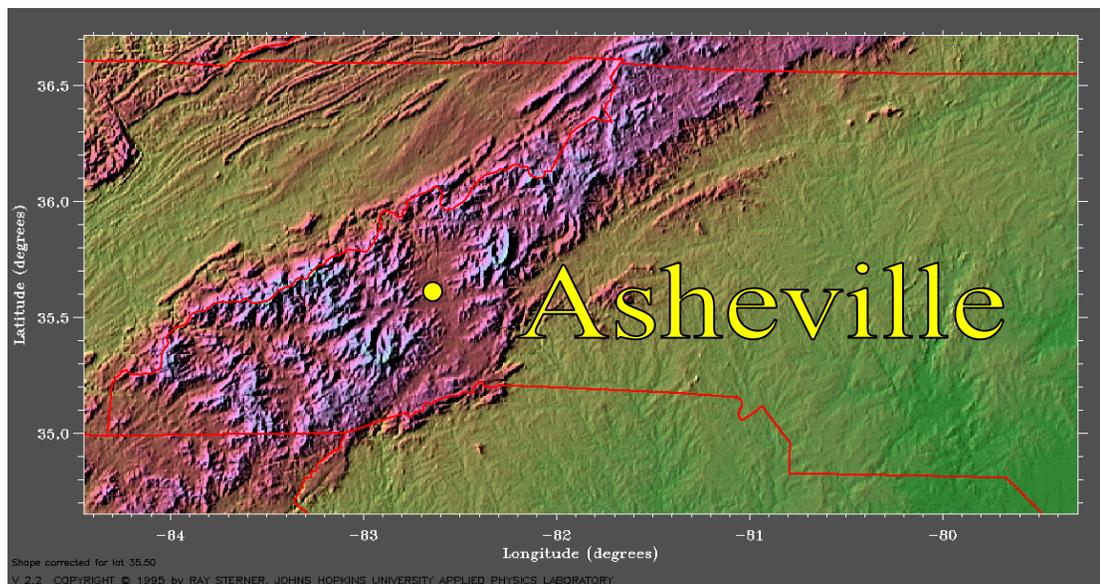
Figure 6.1 - Asheville/Western North Carolina
(www.epa.gov/ceisweb1/ceishome/atlas/northcaroline.html)

In the 1800's, Asheville began to grow rapidly and quickly became a center for wealthy entrepreneurs. Milton Ready states that by the mid-1800's Asheville had become a tourist and recreation center and a place to escape the "sultry piedmont of the South" (Ready, Asheville 39). By 1830, the Buncombe Toll Road was completed by 1830 and soon there after a railroad was built through the county that opened up the city for faster and easier trade (Ready, Asheville 53). By the end of the 19th Century, a number of grand hotels and residences, including the spacious Vanderbilt Estate, were being constructed (Ready, Asheville 43).

George W. Vanderbilt helped turn much of Asheville into an oasis for fine living. His influences as an entrepreneur would not only benefit the wealthy citizens of Asheville, he would also leave an indelible mark on the African-American community in Western North Carolina. The Biltmore Estate was one of the largest employers in the city and the mansion's construction contributed greatly to the growth of the African-American community in Asheville (Ready, Asheville 43-51) (See Figure 6.2).

The role of African-Americans as pioneers, and contributors to the growth of Asheville, is overwhelming. Asheville's first African-Americans became the backbone of growth, culture and success in Asheville (Ready, Asheville 53). "Indeed it was the presence of large numbers of blacks and immigrants in Asheville that gave it a sense of otherness that set it apart from surrounding counties" (Ready, Asheville 61).

Today Asheville is home to approximately 70,000 people and is considered an important cultural and folk art center in the Southeast (Pantas 141). Asheville is growing as a business center too and has historically been known for its textile and manufacturing plants. In the past ten years, Asheville's downtown has gone through cosmetic and

economic changes and had significant success in infill development and public space design. As downtown businesses develop, there is also a change in the social structure of the city. Asheville has become a popular destination for many people seeking a new and "alternative" lifestyle.

Figure 6.2 - Biltmore Estate was constructed and staffed by numerous African-American laborers (The Biltmore Co. 15)

The "earthy" or folk-based growth of Asheville has increased the need for cultural and historical awareness in the city. The city was historically also home to a rich Greek and Jewish culture (Ready, Asheville 61). Today Asheville is home to "a coat of many colors" where numerous cultural groups are found including Latino, Chinese, Russian, African-American, Native-American and Greek (Ready, Asheville 61). The multi-cultural appeal of Asheville has prompted a "renaissance" that plans to redevelop the downtown into a place that reflects the cultural, ethnic and historical qualities of the city ("Pack" B1). The continued ability of Asheville to connect with its cultural heritage will strengthen the city as a vital cultural center in the Southeast.

African-Americans have made a significant contribution to Asheville's rich cultural heritage. According to Milton Ready, "the first blacks came to the Asheville region with the Indian traders as early as the 1670's" ("A History" D1). Then around the 1700's more African-Americans came with traders from Virginia, Charleston and Augusta (Ready, Asheville 53). In the 1730's, African Americans and Cherokees settled in Flat Rock, North Carolina, a small town outside of Asheville, as both slaves and free men (Ready, Asheville 53). African-Americans have played a large role in the development of Asheville. Their influence began during the days of railroad construction and it continues to be apparent as they and others helped establish Asheville as a major tourist destination in the Southeast.

African-Americans continued their important role in the development of Asheville through the 1800's. "Blacks came in three waves to Asheville", following years of slow development (Ready, Asheville 53). The first wave began in the early 1800's when the Buncombe Toll Road (Buncombe Turnpike) was being constructed (Ready, Asheville 53). This road helped to establish Western North Carolina as a major trade center in the Southeast, and "shifted the region's economy to corn and livestock" (Ready, Asheville 21). African-Americans provided labor in clearing roads and working on farms to raise cattle and livestock. The Buncombe Toll Road would later aid in the economic growth of Asheville, as well as be a passageway for people to move to the city. The Buncombe Turnpike became the greatest source of African-American growth in Asheville (Ready, Asheville 53).

Although the Civil War and lack of funds and urban growth prohibited the African-Americans from establishing themselves in the city, the African-American

contributions to Asheville began to grow in the beginning of the 1880's (Ready,

Asheville 53). In 1881 a railroad was built to cut through Asheville, and with it a strong

African-American community arose. "Blacks furnished the majority of the labor for the

railroad around the Asheville area" (Ready, Asheville 37). Figure 6.3 depicts the labor

conditions of the project. "The railroad brought large numbers of section workers to the

mountains, with this the demand for public education grew" (Ready, Asheville 53). The

population rise, caused by the railroad, provided the means for African-Americans to

develop as a strong community.

Figure 6.3 - African-American convicts provide the grueling labor of laying a railroad
though Buncombe County (Ready 36)

The third wave of African-Americans came to Asheville in the beginning of the

1900's when Asheville began to establish itself as a rich tourist and resort community. A

number of African-Americans began to move to the region to work for the Biltmore

Estate and Grove Park Inn. The Grove Park Inn, in particular, became a popular place for

African-American laborers (Figure 6.4). The construction of such sites provided

numerous jobs for African-Americans. Following construction of the Biltmore Estate,

George W. Vanderbilt reworded the hard work of his African-American workers by

commissioning a community center to be built for them (Ready, Asheville 57). It was

called the Young Men's Institute (YMI) and would become a symbol of the strength of

Asheville's African-American heritage (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.4 – African-American workers at the Grove Park Inn, Asheville
(Ready 48)

African-Americans played a significant role in helping to establish Asheville as a

major mountain attraction at the turn of the 20th Century. Racial prejudices, were an issue

in Asheville and like African-Americans all over the country, they were denied the right

to an education. In 1887 Isaac Dickson, the son of a slave mother and Dutch father, was

appointed to the Asheville School Board (Ready, Asheville 53). This began the process

that allowed African-Americans in Asheville to receive an education. An African-

American school was established in an abandoned building on Beaumont Street in

Asheville (Ready, <u>Asheville</u> 53). This structure was located not too far from the South

Market Street Park, which borders Beaumont Street. By 1924, Asheville would have

more than four African-American schools (one being the first school for women) and

become the educational center for African-Americans in Western North Carolina (Ready,

<u>Asheville</u> 54). Dickson became known as the "Father of Black Education" in Western

North Carolina (Ready, <u>Asheville</u> 58).

Figure 6.5 - Young Men's Institute 1893, the architecture style resembles structures
located on the Biltmore Estate (Historic Resources Commission 50)

In 1917, Asheville's most prominent African-American school burnt down and in

its place Stephens-Lee school was built (Ready, <u>Asheville</u> 45). The school rose to

become "the center of black culture and education throughout the mountains" (Ready,

<u>Asheville</u> 54). It was a strong school that was supported by many counties and its liberal

arts curriculum. By the 1930's, the school became known for its music and drama

programs and was a center for Asheville's African-American community (Ready,

Asheville 54).

Stephens-Lee soon became a symbol of the struggle for equal rights in Asheville.

During integration, city officials closed Stephens-Lee school, in order to restructure the

school system (Ready, Asheville 54). The outcome of this was tragic for the African-

American community because the school had stood as a "symbol of black achievement,

independence and culture" (Ready, Asheville 54). The integration of Asheville High

School at this same time would, on the other hand, also eventually be seen as an excellent

opportunity for Asheville's African-American population. Asheville High School

allowed for a better education and greater opportunities for success, once the African-

Americans graduated ("A History" D4). The development of education was a significant

step for Asheville's African-Americans and it helped their community become a strong

influence on the city's development.

The church is another symbol of strength and growth of African-Americans in

Asheville. Three churches in particular contributed to the enrichment of the African-

Americans. The Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, St. Matthias Episcopal Church

and Calvary Presbyterian all contributed a major part of the development of the African-

American community (Ready, Asheville 55). Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church has

historically been the center of religious activities in the Eagle Street neighborhood

(Figure 6.6). The church has contributed to a number of community development projects

and is the backbone of Asheville's rich African-American community. St. Matthias

Episcopal Church offers another link to the Vanderbilt Estate. George W. Vanderbilt

funded the church construction so that African-Americans could receive "the Episcopal

experience" (Ready, p.56). According to Ready, the church was built because African-Americans could not attend Episcopal churches in Asheville with white congregations (1986, p.56). James Vesper Miller, who was a famous local contractor, mason and educator, built St. Matthias Episcopal Church. The church's architecture is regarded by many as outstanding and rivals the craftsmanship of any structure on the Biltmore Estate (Ready, Asheville 56). The Calvary Presbyterian Church is also a significant contributor to the African-American legacy in Asheville. The church's former pastor, Dr. Charles A. Edington, was a popular leader in the African-American community and was known as the "Pastor of Eagle St." (Ready, Asheville 56). These churches provided a sanctuary for the ongoing contributions of Asheville's African-Americans.

Figure 6.6 - View looking East down Eagle St. of the YMI, Old Asheville Foundry and Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church respectively (Historic Resources Commission 52)

Milton Ready states in an article on African-American history that, "outsiders frequently are startled to find that there are black mountaineers, too, and they have been

in Western North Carolina for as long as others"("A History" D4). This quote

exemplifies just how little the African-American culture and tradition is portrayed in the

community. The fact that people are startled to hear about the contributions of African-

Americans proposes the need for more cultural awareness of them.

Eagle Street, "The Block"

Eagle Street is located off of Biltmore Avenue and South Market Street in

Asheville (Figure 6.7). Eagle Street gained its name from the Eagle Hotel that was built

in 1814 (Langley 16). The hotel was a major stopping point for traders and housed the

local Western Union Office (Langley 16). Once this hotel was gone, a vibrant

community, rich in cultural history, community pride and a positive symbol for the

African-American in Asheville arose. Eagle Street was considered the hub of the

community because of the many unique restaurants on the street and, more importantly,

because of the YMI and Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. These facilities were and

continue to be significant places for African-Americans in Asheville.

Figure 6.7 - South Market Street Park in relation to "The Block" and Eagle Street
(www.mapquest.com)

Eagle Street is also known as the "The Block". "The Block" consists of the entire African-American neighborhood including Eagle Street. Its unofficial boundaries run from Pack Square South to Beaumont Avenue, and from Biltmore Avenue East to South Charlotte Street. Figure 6.8 shows a site map of "The Block". The main streets of "The Block" however can be regarded simply as the area running along South Market and Eagle Streets, including South Market Street Park. Many years ago, "The Block," as local community member Benny Lake states, "was a respected place, it was the Auburn Ave. of Asheville" (Personal communication 2/17/01).

In the mid-1900's, "The Block" grew to be a place of great importance in the African-American community throughout Western North Carolina. It used to be a "booming section of town with a flurry of diversified, black-owned businesses" ("Eagle St." D1). It was a place for African-American entrepreneurs to start up businesses, a sanctuary for jazz and African-American entertainment, and a place where the whole family could go and enjoy themselves ("Eagle St." D1). According to Henry Robinson, a frequent reporter of Eagle Street events, "'The Block' was home to the Asheville Social Club, Negro Democratic Club and the Waiters and Bellhop Club" ("Eagle St." D1). These facilities provided entertainment for African-American adult in the neighborhood and were signs of the strength created from the rich community bond.

Eagle Street has served as the ethnic and cultural home for many African-Americans in Western North Carolina and continues to be a symbol of their influence on the city. There are numerous influential individuals that have come out of "The Block," and they can be attributed to the success of the neighborhood ("Eagle St." D1). A brief list of them includes, BJ Jackson who was the first black man to establish a business in
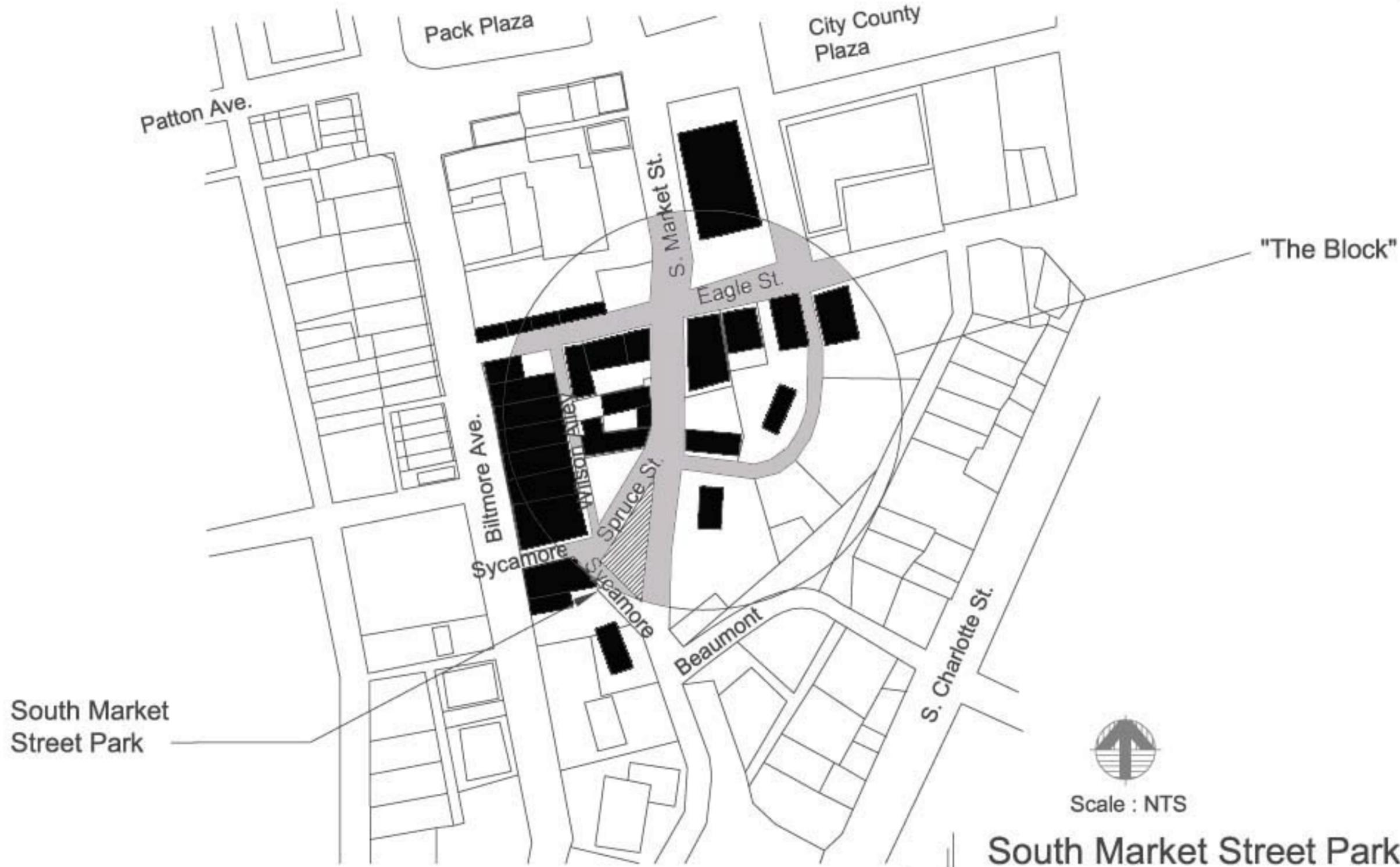
Pack Plaza

City County Plaza

Patton Ave.

S. Market St.

Eagle St.

"The Block"

Biltmore Ave.

Wilson Alley

Spruce St.

Sycamore

S. Sycamore

Beaumont

S. Charlotte St.

South Market Street Park

Scale : NTS

South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina
Figure 6.8 • Site Map

(Note: Based on Original Tax Map obtained from; Buncombe County Tax Office)

Asheville and Newton Shepherd who was the first African American to hold public office

in Asheville ("Blacks" D1) (See Appendix C for a list of Asheville's influential African-

Americans).

Today tells a different story of "The Block", though. Henry Robinson indicates

that "The Block" has always stood as a symbol of the strong and pride-filled African-

American community of Asheville, however today the neighborhood stands for

something else ("Eagle St." D1). "The beehive of activity that characterized the street for

more than 50 years is no longer there. Drug-dealers, prostitutes, and winos are in the

majority and it is a day to day struggle for the few businesses remaining there" ("Eagle

St." D1). Robinson goes on to further say that, "today there is hardly a glimmer of the old

times on Eagle St.. The faded lettering on the windows serves as a reminder of the

character of a street befallen to time and circumstance ("Eagle St." D4). The lifestyle that

was typical of the neighborhood back then soon became overtaken by drug-users,

prostitution, and winos. "The Block" has a blight that is currently preventing the

neighborhood to thrive as a cultural center. "Years of significant changes in the social

and economic patterns have diminished the area's commercial viability, architectural

fabric and unique sense of community" (Historic Resource Commission of Asheville 4).

Figure 6.9 samples the scene on Eagle St. today.

"The Block" has always had to fight with its surroundings for respect. In a

meeting with older "block" citizens they described that Urban Renewal displaced many

of the residences in the neighborhood, which had a lasting negative effect on the close-

knit African-American community (2/17/00). Children were relocated to new schools and

new public housing neighborhoods were erected. Asheville's downtown had gone

through a number of negative changes and prior to the 1980's, the downtown

development and economy was lackluster. Business vacancies were common throughout

Asheville, which compounded the downfall of "The Block". The economy of downtown

and its poor condition only heightened the blight that would eventually effect "The

Block".

Figure 6.9 - View looking West up Eagle Street (left), and a sign on the front door of an
adjacent bar (right) (Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)

Eagle Street's most successful businesses, including the YMI, closed their doors

and long-standing members of the African-American community were forced to relocate

to new housing developments. Downtown was no longer a place to go shopping, find

work, or maintain a historically rich cultural neighborhood. When there were no people

on the streets, enjoying a soda or candy at the YMI Drug Store or eating "some of the

best Southern cooking to be found anywhere" at Alexander's Eating House, the blight

was able to take over the neighborhood ("Eagle St." D1). Soon derelict activity presided.

Prostitution and drug dealing became dominant in the neighborhood and owners of closed bars on "The Block" resorted to hustling for money. David Eggleston remembers, they "ran numbers out the back doors because that was all they could do for money and nobody was watching" (personal interview 2/5/01).

The loss of the cultural heritage that was once so unique to Eagle Street was a blow to the cultural security of African-Americans in Asheville. No longer was the African-American represented by a profitable, culturally rich, tight-knit community. The wave of crime and a few violent acts further dislodged the community from Asheville's urban fabric. It is unfortunate that a majority of people in Asheville associate the neighborhood with the illicit activities that have recently taken place on "The Block" are the main things today rather than its rich past.

Figure 6.10 - View of South Market Street Park from an adjacent hill
(Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)

The South Market Street Park (Figure 6.10) is the location where the most notorious problems on "The Block" are found. If it were a place that represented the "true" and historic atmosphere of the community then, it would become a leading force in the redevelopment of the entire neighborhood. The expression of cultural and ethnic history in the design of the park will help to educate users of the importance of the neighborhood and its link with Asheville's cultural legacy. Already there has been an attempt at this by some of the community organizations. Three plaques have been placed into the pavement, and a bronzed wall relief, depicting the history of African-American education in Asheville, is placed on a garage wall (Figure 6.11 and 6.12). These monuments give descriptions of community members or events that have made significant contributions to the development of this African-American neighborhood. These are useful design elements that help to educate the Asheville community on the history of the site but because there is no draw for the Asheville community to come into the neighborhood, few actually see them. That is why a culturally based design that expresses the community's historic culture is important and desperately needed.

The integration of cultural expression in the redesign of South Market Street Park will generate community pride, create an awareness of the historic contributions of the neighborhood, display cultural traditions and activities, and bring people from outside the neighborhood into the space. The influence, of the supportive community using the space, will help displace the vagrants and crime in the area and make it a safe place for all citizens of Asheville. The installation of historic and cultural elements will also provide an amiable backdrop for community events. By positively representing the community through a design, users will respond to the space and have a connection with

it. The park restoration will also help contribute to the regeneration of structures and
businesses in the neighborhood. The ultimate outcome of the design is for the space to be
"rooted" in the neighborhood and help to tell stories, represent heritage, display problems
and make apparent their contributions to society.

Figure 6.11 - Two of three plaques in the paving by the Asheville Urban Trail describing
the historical contributions of African-Americans to Asheville (Photograph by Rodney
Porter, 2001)

Figure 6.12 - A bronze relief titled "The Block" by Winston Wingo was placed in honor
of African-American history (Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)

In the past ten years, Asheville has seen an enormous resurgence in its downtown development. Businesses have moved back into the urban core at a rapid rate, which has created a growth in population and economy. Many of Asheville's vacant downtown buildings were remodeled and adapted to fit the growing needs of the city. This has enabled the commercial areas in downtown Asheville to return to the rich commercial area it used to be. The majority of the commercial growth has taken place along Biltmore Ave., which is just West of "The Block". Figures 6.13 and 6.14 show the current land use and businesses located in the vicinity of "The Block". This growth for Asheville has prompted many community members to look at the historical qualities of the city before they are lost permanently to excessive growth. The Asheville Historic Resources Commission states:

> With the recent renewed interest in a downtown renaissance, development pressures are now presenting the potential loss of historic fabric to a neighborhood which stands as a monument to the history of African-American social and commercial life in Western North Carolina (Historic Resource Commission 4).

Asheville is redeveloping at such a rapid rate that real estate developers are now looking at many of the old condemned buildings on Eagle Street for investment purposes (David Eggleston, personal communication, 2/5/01). If the historic neighborhood cannot support itself physically, nor in the eyes of Asheville's social scene then it will no longer be able to represent itself as a positive historical entity.

The blight has to be eradicated before it can return to its former status of an upstanding community. This takes time, capital, and great amounts of effort on the part of African-Americans and all Ashevillians. The renovation of buildings and the promotion

Commercial

Residential

Mix Use

Religion

Abandoned/Vacant

Government

Community Facility

Parking

Scale : NTS

(Note: 1995 Arial obtained from Asheville City Planning Office)

South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina

Figure 6.13 • Land Use (Arial)

"The Block"

Legend:
- Commercial (red)
- Residential (magenta)
- Mix Use (orange)
- Religion (cyan)
- Abandoned/Vacant (gray)
- Government (blue)
- Community Facility (green)
- Parking (tan)

South Market Street Park

Eagle St.

Biltmore Ave.

Wilson Alley

Spruce St.

S. Market St.

Sycamore

Sycamore

Sycamore

Beaumont

Scale : NTS

(Note: Based on original Tax Map obtained from; Buncombe County Tax Office)

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ◆ Asheville ◆ North Carolina

Figure 6.14 ◆ Land Use (Map)

of economic development in the neighborhood will generate public approval for the neighborhood. The renovation of one facility or one building cannot do the whole job for the community. The entire community needs to be restructured and represented in a way that will draw merchants back into "The Block". The simple presence of positive community action will also help to curb blight. Vagrants and derelict activity will stop or be relocated because it will no longer be tolerated in the neighborhood.

<u>Community Organizations</u>

Young Men's Institute (YMI)

The YMI, as mentioned earlier, "has served as the hub of activities for black people and other minorities" ("Eagle St." D1). On the National Register of Historic Places, the unique qualities of the YMI, as an African-American community center, have existed since it was first commissioned in 1893 by George W. Vanderbilt (Figure 6.15). The building stood almost alone on what is now known as "The Block" and resembled many of the structures that were built on the Biltmore Estate (Ready, <u>Asheville</u> 57). This unique structure was home to the YMI Drug Store, which was noted throughout its history as, "the place to be, where it was like one big family" (Barbara Williams, personal communication 2/17/01).

The YMI was also home to shops, parlors, barbers, residences and eventually the YMCA ("A History" D1). Figure 6.16 shows the YMI as it used to be at the turn of the 20th Century. Benny Lake recalls the YMI was a place, "where everyone was respected, talked politely and a place to show yourself off to the community" (personal communication 2/17/01). He further mentions that when the facility's upstairs were

Figure 6.15 - YMI Cultural Center (center) looking South from South Market Street. The structure is unique in downtown Asheville, and resembles the typical Biltmore Estate architecture style (Photograph by Rodney Porter)

Figure 6.16 - Photo of the old YMI drug store and soda fountain, circa 1910 (Ready 59)

turned into the YMCA, "it was a place for emerging basketball stars, all the great North Carolina black athletes came to play here" (personal communication 2/17/01).

Though the YMI has historically been the center of the African-American community in Western North Carolina, it has also had its share of trouble. When "The Block" began its deterioration, the YMI was also affected. The facility gradually gave up its businesses, the YMCA moved, and the famous soda fountain stopped operations in the drug store. The eventual closing of the YMI would further promote neighborhood disintegration.

Following years of disrepair during the 1960's and 1970's, the YMI soon opened its doors again. "A coalition of churches, with the support of both black and white communities, bought the YMI in 1980, restored the building, and reestablished the institute as the YMI Cultural Center" (Asheville Parks and Recreation 1). The YMI Cultural Center became "the pivotal point for progressive change in the neighborhood" ("Eagle St." D1). The YMI Cultural Center would again symbolize the rich history that was generated on Eagle Street. Robert Wiltshire, a YMI Cultural Center supporter and founder, stated, "we are on the verge of a new day for Eagle Street, it is a commercial district that can play an equally competitive role in the future of a revitalized downtown Asheville"("Eagle St" D1). What he was referring to are the contributions that the YMI Cultural Center would soon give back to the neighborhood's culture (e.g. Goombay Festival, jazz performances, art shows, community events and city-wide awareness, etc.).

The YMI Cultural Center has sponsored numerous events that have brought recognition to the rich cultural legacy of the African-American neighborhood. The "Goombay Festival" is one such event. It celebrates the Caribbean influences on

Asheville and the African-American community. The festival also "honors the Caribbean tradition in which slaves were freed for one day"(Asheville Parks and Recreation 1). During events, such as the Goombay Festival, numbers of people are drawn to "The Block" where music, dance, food and traditional clothing are important parts of the event.

An event that provided a great deal of information for this thesis was the "Tales Told: Soda at the Drugstore" lecture. This information session brought together leading members of the African-American community to tell stories about what "The Block" used to be like. The information gathered at these sessions was used to document the history of the neighborhood. The panel of speakers spoke about life when "The Block" was in its heyday. The former YMI Drug Store now exists as a picture gallery of historical photographs of "the young and old, the prominent and the unknown, the men and women who helped create our city's life" (Asheville Parks and Recreation 1). The "YMI Cultural Center produces theatre, dance, and music concerts, maintains several permanent galleries and exhibits, and makes the second floor gallery available to numerous artists for special exhibitions" (Asheville Parks and Recreation 1).

The future goal of the YMI Cultural Center is to "give history back to the community, and be a place where young people can come and learn about the rich historical legacies of the African-American in Asheville (Personal communication with YMICC staff 2/17/01). Events, such as the "Tales Told: Soda at the Drugstore", will generate tangible recognition of the neighborhood, while also developing a stronger need to preserve its "roots".

The Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation

The Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation, located adjacent to the South Market Street Park, is another organization that is striving to curb the blight of "The Block". Figure 6.17 shows the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation buildings and site locations of the entire Eagle St. neighborhood in relationship to the park. The Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation's mission is to: "(1) Address and remedy the blighted condition of the area know as "The Block", Asheville's historic African-American Community District, and (2) create an atmosphere conducive to decreasing the rate of unemployment and increasing the availability of affordable housing for residents" (David Eggleston, personal interview 2/5/01). The Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation uses a "holistic approach to positive economic and social change" and is comprised of grassroots community leaders, City of Asheville affiliates and property owners (David Eggleston, personal interview 2/5/01). Another goal of the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation is to redevelop the distressed neighborhood through a collaborative effort, acquisition and building rehabilitation, eventually eliminating the appearance of "blight".

The City of Asheville established the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation in 1993, to help renovate and secure a positive future for the for the historic community. David Eggleston, of the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation, mentions that a collaborative effort to buy vacant buildings and turn them into mix-use facilities is the goal of the organization (personal interview 2/5/01). This effort will help to cure economic problems and develop an appeal for the neighborhood. The

South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina
Figure 6.17 • Site Locations

(Note: Based on original Tax Map obtained from; Buncombe County Tax Office)

(Note: 1995 Arial obtained from; Asheville City Planning Office)

Scale : NTS

Asheville Police
JA Wilson Bldg.
Ebony Grille
Campbell Bldg., Club del Cardo
Mt. Zion Church
YMI Cultural Center
Asheville Foundary Bldgs.
New Ritz Bldg./ Black Masonic Temple
Daily Bldg., Goombay Hdqts.
48 S.Market St.
Jones Convenience
Blue Moon Bakery Bldg. et.al.
EMSDC
Asheville Police
Roger's Plumbing Bldg.

Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation also hopes to "prevent crime through environmental design" (David Eggleston, personal interview 2/5/01). The intent of the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation is to redesign the neighborhood's infrastructure so that it reflects the historical quality of "The Block", while allowing a more amiable place for public interaction. According to David Eggleston, "the blight is not going to disappear unless the issues confronting the entire "Block" are addressed" (personal communication 2/5/01). It is the hope of the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation to make the neighborhood a positive place that will attract positive people. This will help cure criminal activities and eventually eradicate them forever. The new population of residents is intended to be comprised of multiple classes with a majority being African-American. There is no way to predict who would move into the rejuvenated neighborhood. However, as trends have proved in other cities, a majority would most likely be the middle to upper class people who aspire to live in a rehabilitated urban neighborhood.

The Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation and the YMI Cultural Center are both very influential organizations that are striving to renovate Asheville's historic African-American Community. Their efforts can bring back to Asheville a historic neighborhood that will intensify the city's unique characteristics. Rich cultural life will be reintroduced into the neighborhood and help give African-Americans a reason to go back to their "roots".

CHAPTER 7

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH MARKET STREET PARK

<u>Existing Conditions</u>

South Market Street Park is located in the heart of "The Block". It is a triangular space that is bordered by South Market Street, Beaumont Street, Sycamore Street and Spruce Street (Figures 6.8 and 7.1). The park is South of Eagle Street and somewhat outside the heart of "The Block". It is surrounded on all sides by the backs of large buildings, and to the East by a rundown convenience store, junk-car lot and condemned Foundry building. The deteriorated space is the only public park located within the Historic Eagle Street District and serves as a visual reminder of how "The Block" has deteriorated (See Appendix A for a complete series of existing photos).

The South Market Street Park was originally a gasoline station. In 1985, the gas tanks were removed and the City of Asheville turned it into a park. It was the hope of the city to create a space for the African-American members of the community, as well improve the neighborhood by removing the vacant gas station (Allen Kolf, Asheville Parks and Recreation Department, personal communication 1/30/01). The space was also constructed in order to remove derelict activity from the neighborhood's vacant buildings. It was completed in 1985 and the YMI Cultural Center and the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church were present for the dedication.

Buncombe County
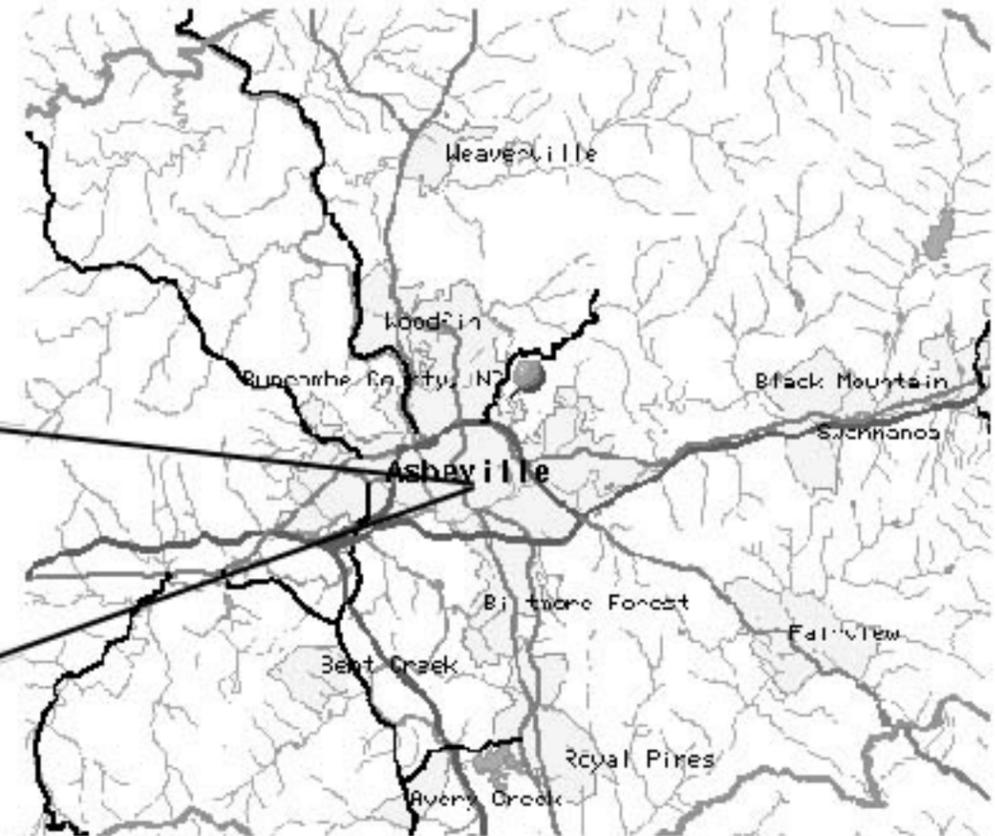
(from www.asheville-nc.com/map.htm)
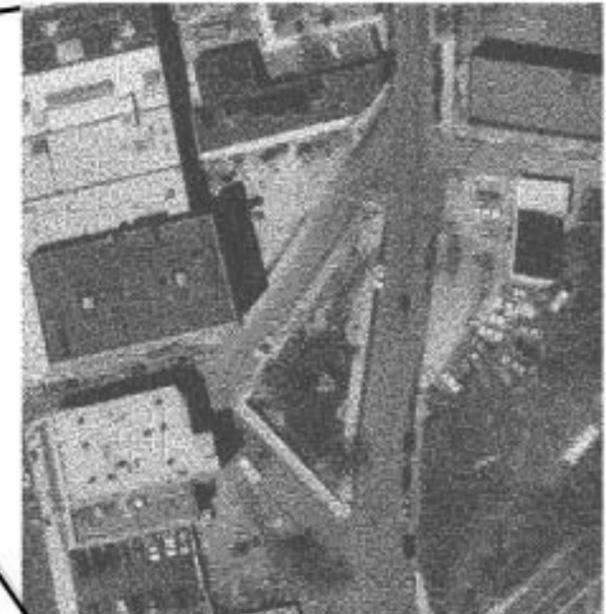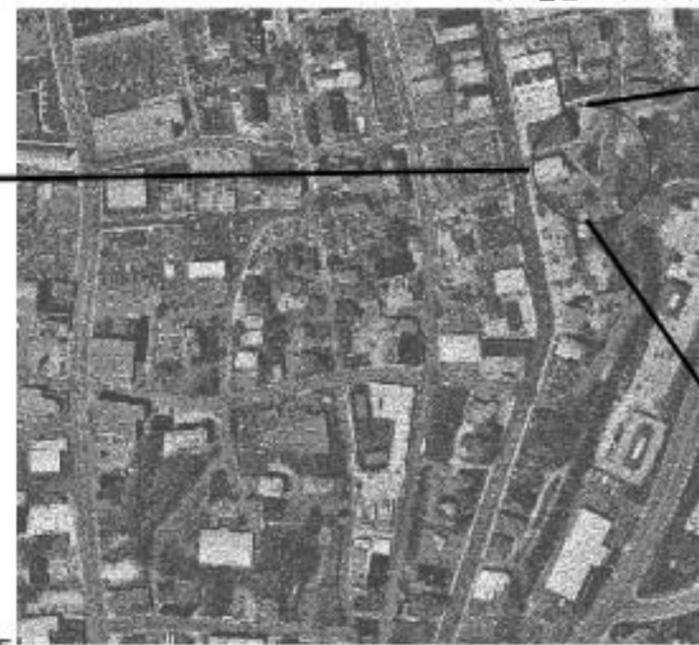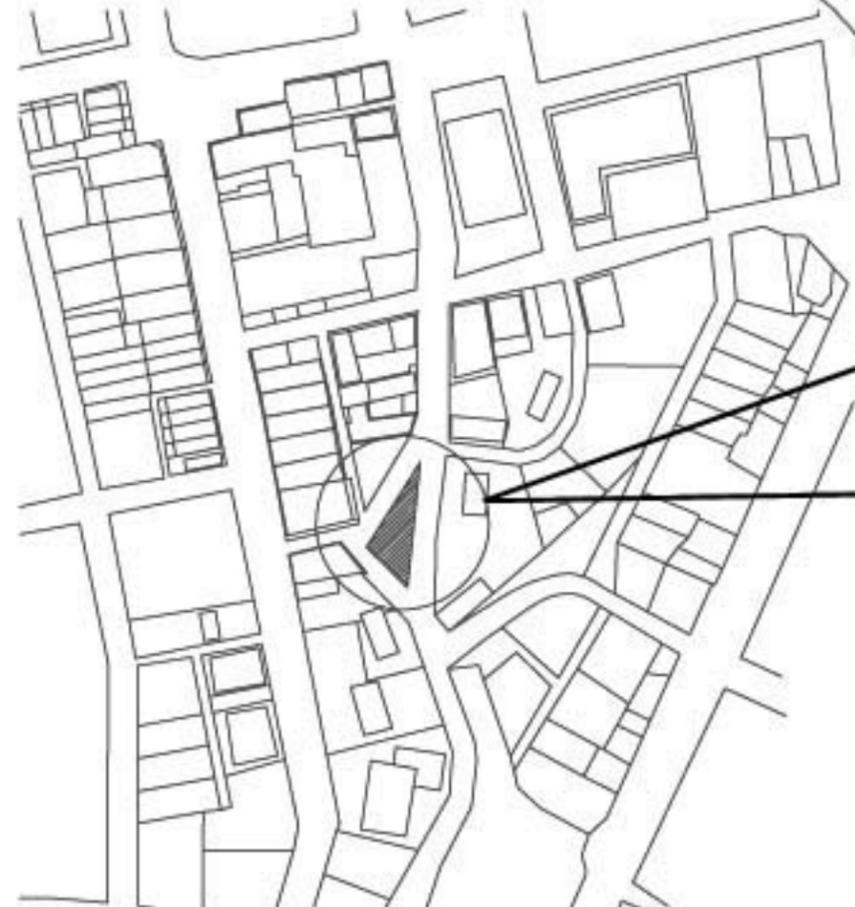
(Note: Based on original Tax Map obtained from Buncombe County Tax Office, 1995
Arial obtained from City of Asheville Planning Office)

scale: nts

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ◆ Asheville ◆ North Carolina
Figure 7.1 ◆ Context Map

The South Market Street Park, like much of "The Block" soon became a haven for vagrants and was considered the "illegal drug center of Asheville", according to Lt. John Kirkpatrick of the Asheville Police Department (personal interview 3/13/01). The park caters to drug-users, winos, prostitutes and violence. This space is considered by many as this neighborhoods main stumbling block when trying to improve its image (Allen Kolf, personal interview 1/30/01) (Figure 7.2). The Asheville community, at large, links the park to the entire African-American community, which further puts constraints on building Eagle Street back into a cultural center. After all, who would want to go visit a historic cultural neighborhood and be surrounded by illicit activity? Although the intentions of the park were good, it has done nothing to improve the quality of this neighborhood. In fact it has only further damaged the area's reputation.

Figure 7.2 - View looking Northeast of South Market Street Park (Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)

The establishment of the YMI Cultural Center and the Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation has contributed minimally to getting the park back on its feet. The space is used frequently for neighborhood meetings, the Asheville Symphony has a concert there each July, and in the summer a few church services, given by local ministries and Mt. Zion Church, are held outdoors in the space. The attempts of organizations to make themselves present in the park are positive uses of the space, although temporary ones. Though such events are working to promote a better environment in the park, they still have had no effect on curbing the blight found in this space.

In April of 2000, the Asheville Police Department opened a Central District Station adjacent to the park. According to District Commander Lt. John Kirkpatrick, "the simple presence of the Police Force has contributed greatly to decreasing the problems of violence and drug use in the space and in the neighborhood" (personal interview 3/13/01). An interesting fact to point out is the main Asheville Police Station is located between South Market and Eagle Streets. The crime rate in "The Block" was so high that the Asheville Police department decided to intervene and clean up the neighborhood. In conjunction with community organizations, the police want to return "The Block" to a cultural heritage center for Asheville.

The presence of the police substation has had a positive effect on terminating the illegal acts of the park users. Lt. Kirkpatrick stated, "there has been a enormous curb in violence, with no reported incidences in over 8 months, and prostitution no longer exists in the neighborhood" (personal interview 3/13/01). He also adds that, "drug dealing is down, but it is hard to catch all of the problems in the park unless you baby-sit the users"

(personal interview 3/13/01). Oscar Newman points out, however, that, "the problems facing [The Block] will not be answered through increased police force" (Newman 1). He indicates that the reason why many public spaces are going through a downfall is because of a deterioration of social mechanisms that contribute to the life of the space (Newman 1).

There are several factors that contribute to South Market Street Park's problems. The first, and most obvious one, is the fact that the neighborhood, in general, is no longer as populated as it used to be. Despite the efforts of the Mt. Zion Church, YMI Cultural Center, Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation and police department. The influence of a positive community atmosphere has deteriorated over time and more or less no longer exists. The people who use the park are not members of the community. Although users are present and might be African-American, their presence in the park is not because they want to connect with and understand the history and culture of 'The Block". Lt. Kirkpatrick indicated, "the people who use the park do not care about the neighborhood and its history…if they did, then these activities would not be taking place" (personal interview 3/13/01).

Another factor that contributes to the illicit activity of the park is Jones' Convenience Store located directly across the street (Figure 7.3). Lt. Kirkpatrick mentioned that, "if Mr. Jones closed down his store or stopped selling single bottles of alcohol, then there would a lot less winos in the park" (personal communication 3/13/01). The store allows the homeless, vagrants and winos to purchase alcohol directly across the street from the park. Due to the park's close proximity to a liquor store, many homeless people end up using the park as a consumption area rather than what the park was

established as. Currently, Jones Convenience Store is under litigation for a nuisance

infraction (trash, community disturbance, and alcohol related incidences) which could

result in its foreclosure (Lt. Kirkpatrick, personal interview 3/13/01).

Figure 7.3 - Jone's Convenience Store/ Asheville Cab Co. adjacent to South Market
Street Park (Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)

A final factor that prohibits the park from being a successful space is the space

itself. First, South Market Street Park is situated behind a number of large buildings and

has very little building frontage. The views into the space are mediocre, while the views

out of the park look at an abandoned car lot and the backs of crumbling brick buildings.

Figures 7.4 and 7.5 show the unimpressive views from the South Market Street Park. If

the park had more buildings looking onto the space then more eyes would be surveying

its scene. Such surveillance would generate a greater sense of security in the park and

attract positive users (Newman 15). Second, because the park is located on a steep slope, a retaining wall is used to keep up its Western side. The large concrete wall, with large buttresses, extends fully on two sides of the park and at its highest is 9.5 feet. Figure 7.6 shows the retaining wall and its dominance over the park. This is overwhelming in the small space and is a problem for security. Behind the security of the wall, drug dealing takes place and homeless set up their beds. The sidewalk along Spruce Street (Figure 7.7) is newly paved and has a new curb cut, however, power-poles sit in the sidewalk limiting access for anyone. Finally, the park's design elements are worn and outdated. The red maple trees and famished dogwoods do not provide ample shade for users and the benches are falling apart. Street lighting is minimal and often does not shine on the areas that require the most light (See Figure 7.11). The ground is often littered in the mornings until a City of Asheville maintenance crew comes and cleans it up. The paved walkway is cracked and in some places non-existent. In many areas of the park, where there was grass, now there is dirt.

Figure 7.4 View Roger's Plumbing Building (vacant) from South Market Street Park, notice the boarded windows and crumbling brick (Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)

Figure 7.5 View looking Northeast out of the park, taken from the neighboring parking lot (Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)
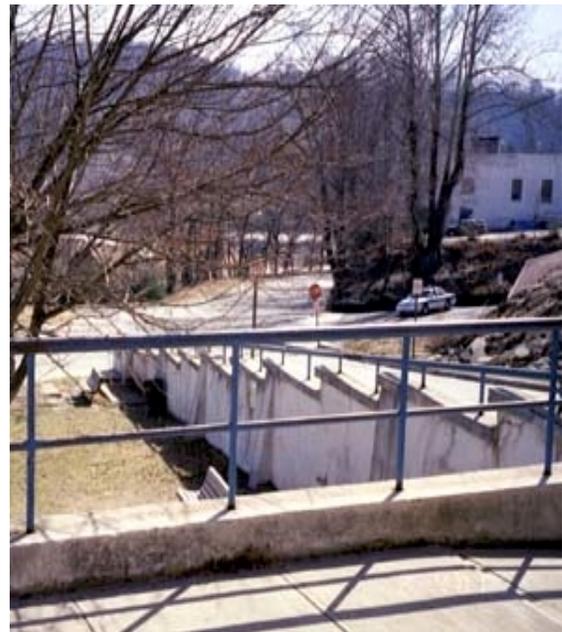
Figure 7.6 - Views of the foreboding concrete retaining wall from its highest point in the park (Photographs by Rodney Porter, 2001)

Figure 7.7 – View down Spruce Street with power-poles in the sidewalk (Photograph by Rodney Porter, 2001)

The existing conditions of South Market Street Park are issues that need to be contemplated when creating a new plan for the space (Figures 7.8 and 7.9). A thorough physical and behavioral site analysis found numerous patterns that might act as additional contributing factors to the existing conditions. First, the physical analysis indicates that much of what occurs in the park is caused by the existence of the retaining wall (Figure 7.10). The wall not only creates a drab backdrop, it also promotes the ongoing activities of the users. It also plays an important role, along with the surrounding buildings, in casting heavy shadows onto the space. Parking lots surround the park that establishes a direct conflict with the pedestrian movement. Vehicles were observed parking on the curb of the park, presumably so people could talk with one another and as a pick-up place for day laborers. The numerous sitting areas are dirty and occupied by uncomfortable deteriorating wooden benches. The hardscape elements are also deteriorating. Curbs are cracked, the retaining wall is chipped, trashcans are broken and the concrete-paver footpaths barely exist. The existing vegetation is sparse and contributes a great deal to the

negative feel of the space (figure 7.11). Streetlights provide inadequate lighting at night and buildings and the retaining wall aid in casting shadows during the day (Figure 7.12).

The results of a behavioral analysis depicted that the physical conditions contribute to the user actions within and surrounding the space (figure 7.13). Numerous unsightly objects contribute to a space that is negatively perceived. These include: the retaining wall, large telephone poles and numerous power-lines cutting through the park, deteriorated buildings, a junk car lot next to a dirty store and a parking lot. Parking spaces that surround the park conflict with the pedestrian flow. Many times people were observed standing and mingling in the streets. The convenience store also drew park users who were observed consistently walking to and from the store. A number of individuals were observed returning to the park from the store with beverages in brown paper bags (presumably alcohol). Lastly, park goers were observed occupying certain locations of the park. Most likely the reason for this is, (1) the pedestrian flow is centered around a group of benches and where the retaining wall height provides seating, (2) there was a shorter distance to the neighboring convenience store and (3) the wall provided protection from observing derelict acts.

A redesign of the South Market Street Park will allow the park to better serve the Asheville community, as well become a factor in bringing cultural life back to "The Block". Design elements that make the space comfortable and open will honor the users. Elements that reflect the rich history and culture of the African-American neighborhood will make visiting the park an exciting and positive experience. The culmination of the redesign and community efforts to redevelop "The Block" will support the park's ability to become a cultural oasis.

gravel parking lot

street parking

Sycamore Street

To Biltmore Ave.

Wilson Alley

light pole

gravel parking lot

concrete walk

concrete walk

plant bed

retaining wall

railing

18" conc. pavers

drain

power line

light

trash can

bench w/o back

3 *Cornus florida*

5 *Acer rubrum*

lawn

Spruce Street

bench w/ back

wall buttress

railing

18" conc. paver

plant bed

retaining wall

pole brace

hydrant

hp ramp

curb/gutter

manhole

South Market Street

concrete walk

light pole

Scale : 1" = 20'-0"

South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina

Figure 7.8 • Existing Plan

Concrete Retaining
Wall (9.5' tall @ corner)

64.2' t.c.
67.5'
66.3'
58.0'
64.2'
62.2'
57' t.c.
60.2'
57.1'
60.1'
67.4'
58.2'
54.6'
53' t.c.
58.2'
56.1'
67.5'
67.3' t.c.
52.5' t.c.
53.0'
56.3'
54.8' t.c.
57.5'
67.3' t.c.
61.5'
56.7' t.c.
60.0'
67.6'
60.3' t.c.
67.1' t.c.
63.1'
63.4' t.c.
66.6' t.c
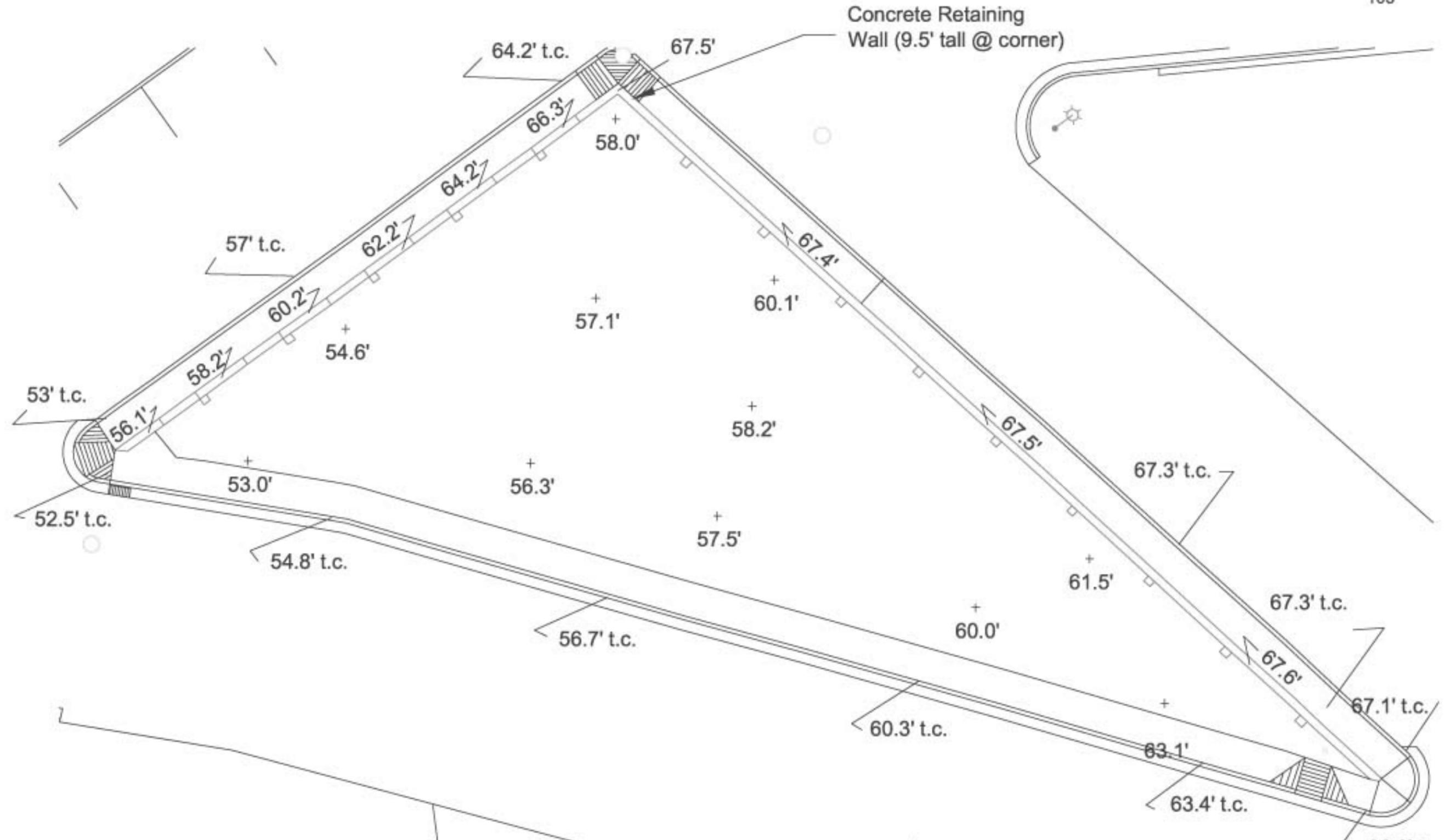
(Note: Add 2000' to number for true elevation)

Scale : nts

South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina
Figure 7.9 • Existing Topography

Wilson Alley

Sycamore Street

Spruce Street

South Market Street
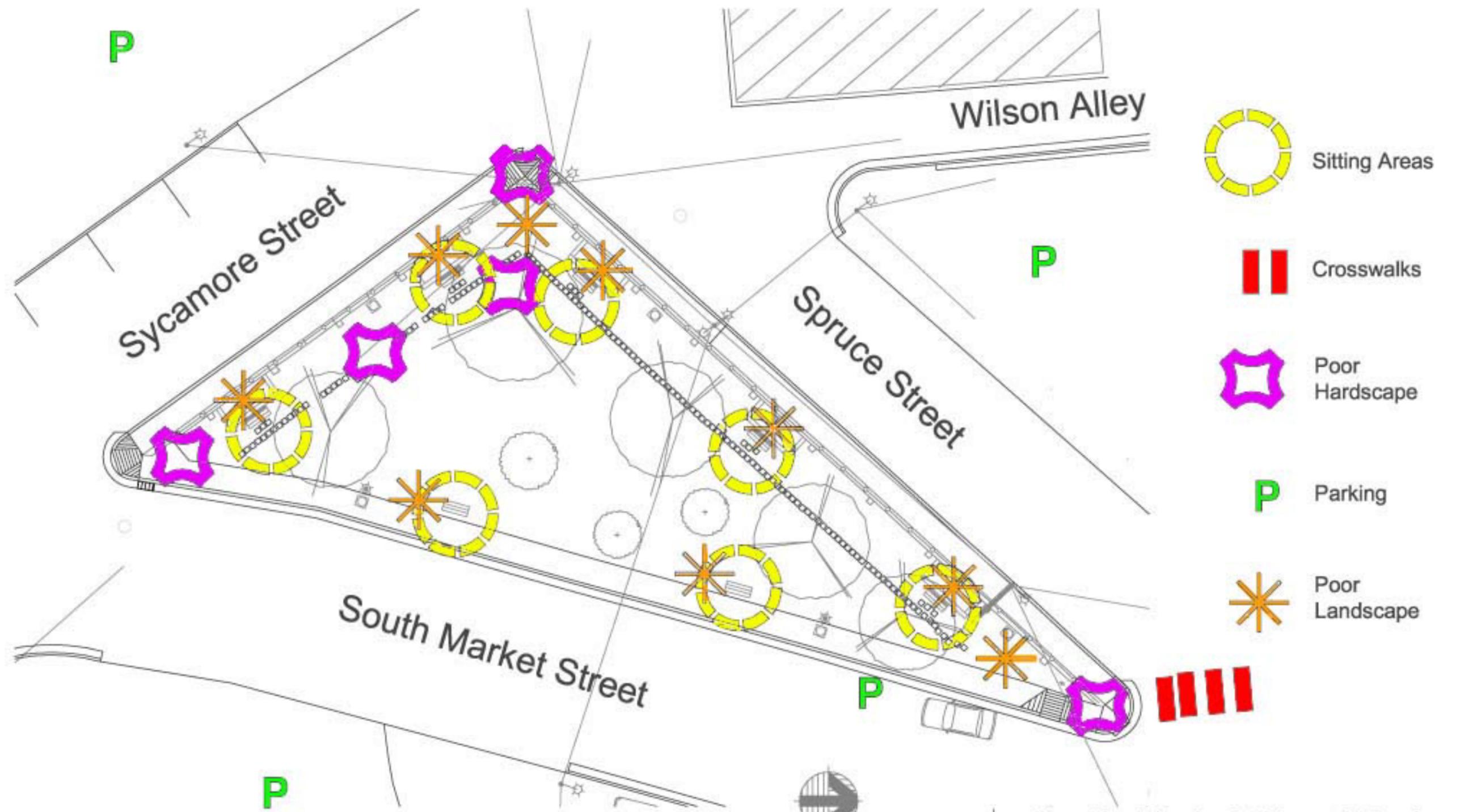
Sitting Areas

Crosswalks

Poor Hardscape

P Parking

Poor Landscape

Scale : 1" = 20'-0"

South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina
Figure 7.10 • Physical Analysis

Wilson Alley

Sycamore Street

Spruce Street

Grass

Tree Canopy

Empty Planting Bed

Acer rubrum

South Market Street

Cornus florida

Scale : 1" = 20'-0"
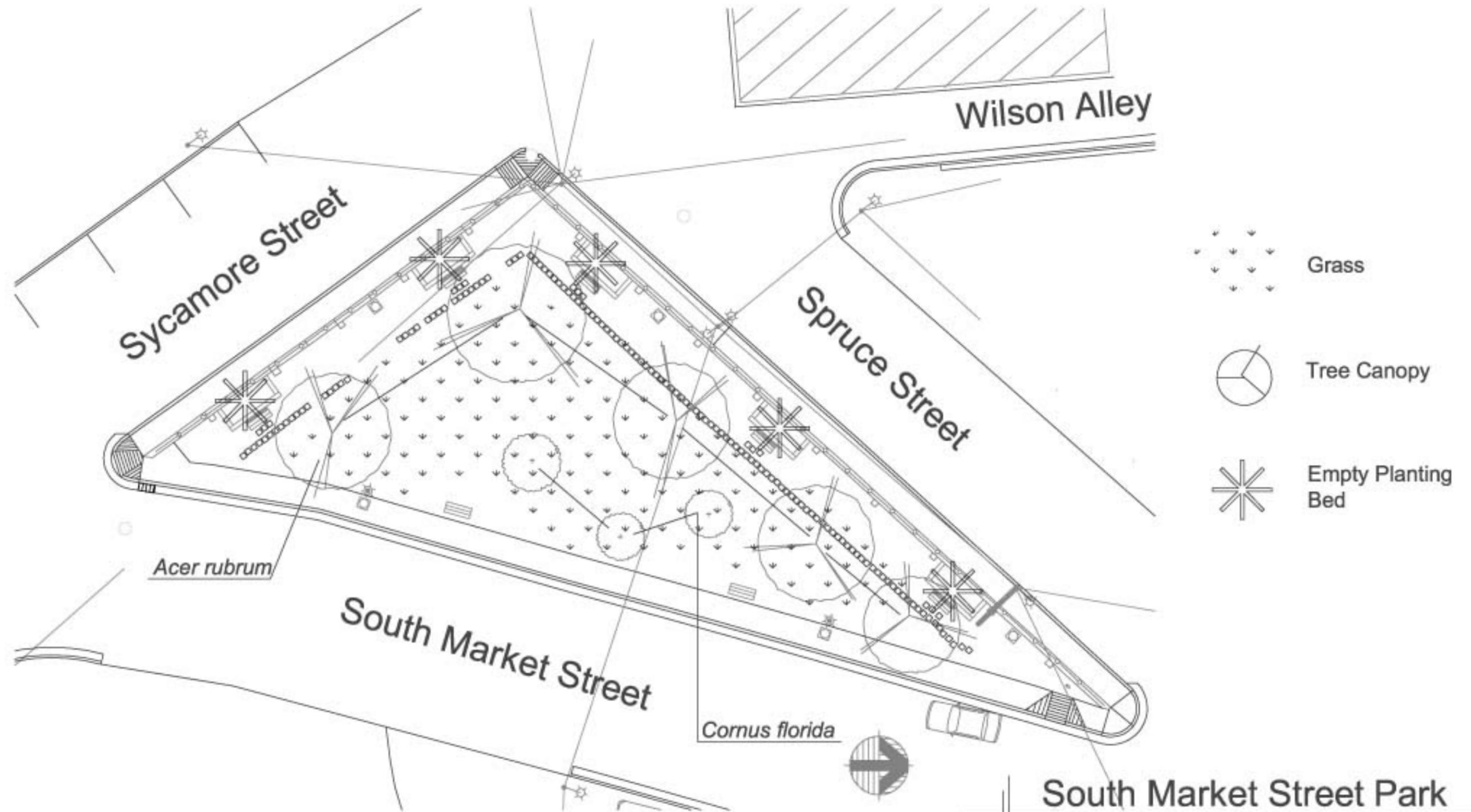
South Market Street Park

South Market Street ✦ Asheville ✦ North Carolina
Figure 7.11 ✦ Existing Vegetation
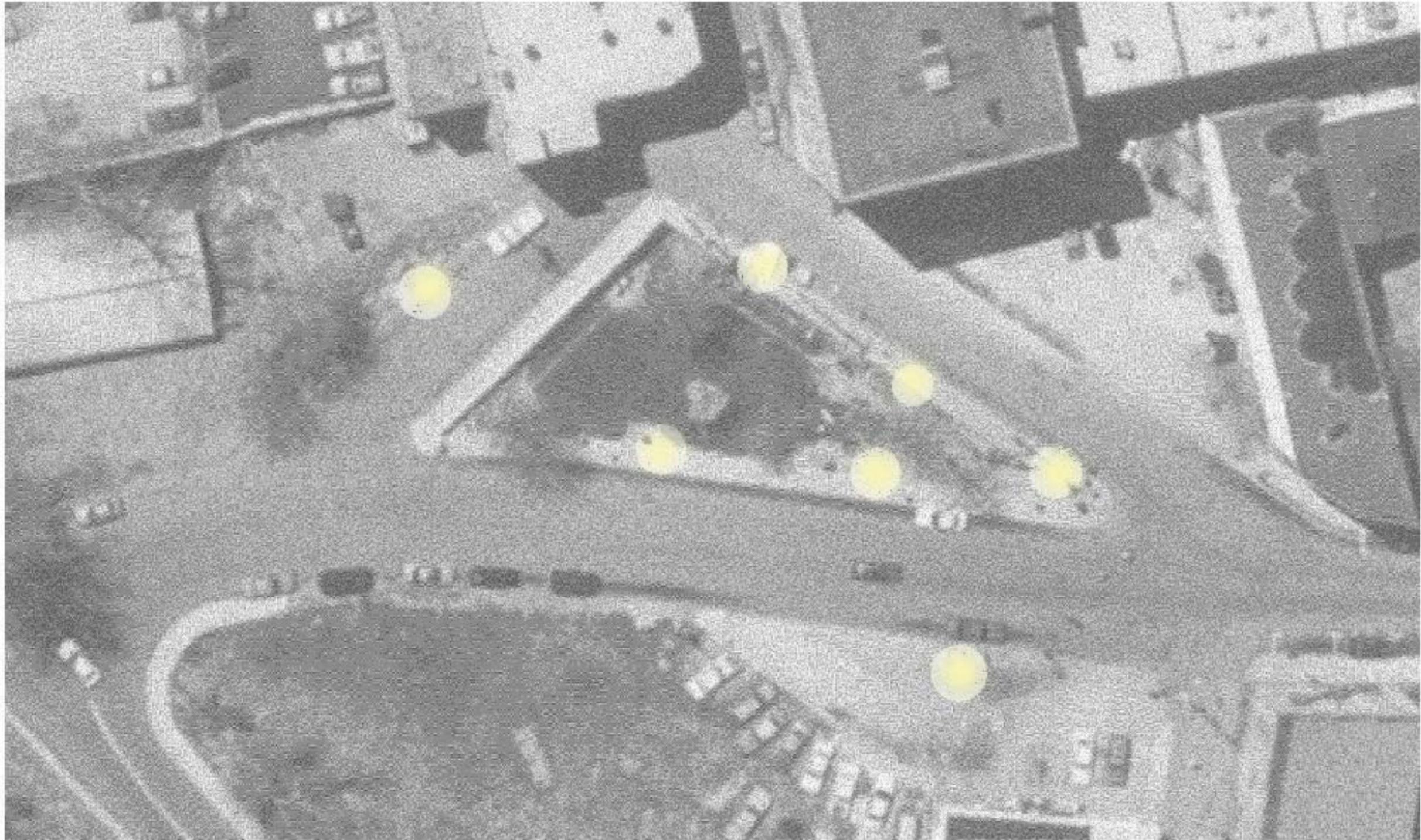
(Note: 1995 Arial obtained from Asheville City Planning Office)

Scale : nts

South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina

Figure 7.12 • Light Sources

Wilson Alley

Sycamore Street

Spruce Street

South Market Street

junk cars

convenience store

Scale : 1" = 20'-0"

Dangerous/Hidden Area

Pedestrian Flow

Unsightly objects

Pedestrian/Vehicle Conflict

Hangout Spots

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ♦ Asheville ♦ North Carolina

Figure 7.13 ♦ Behavioral Analysis
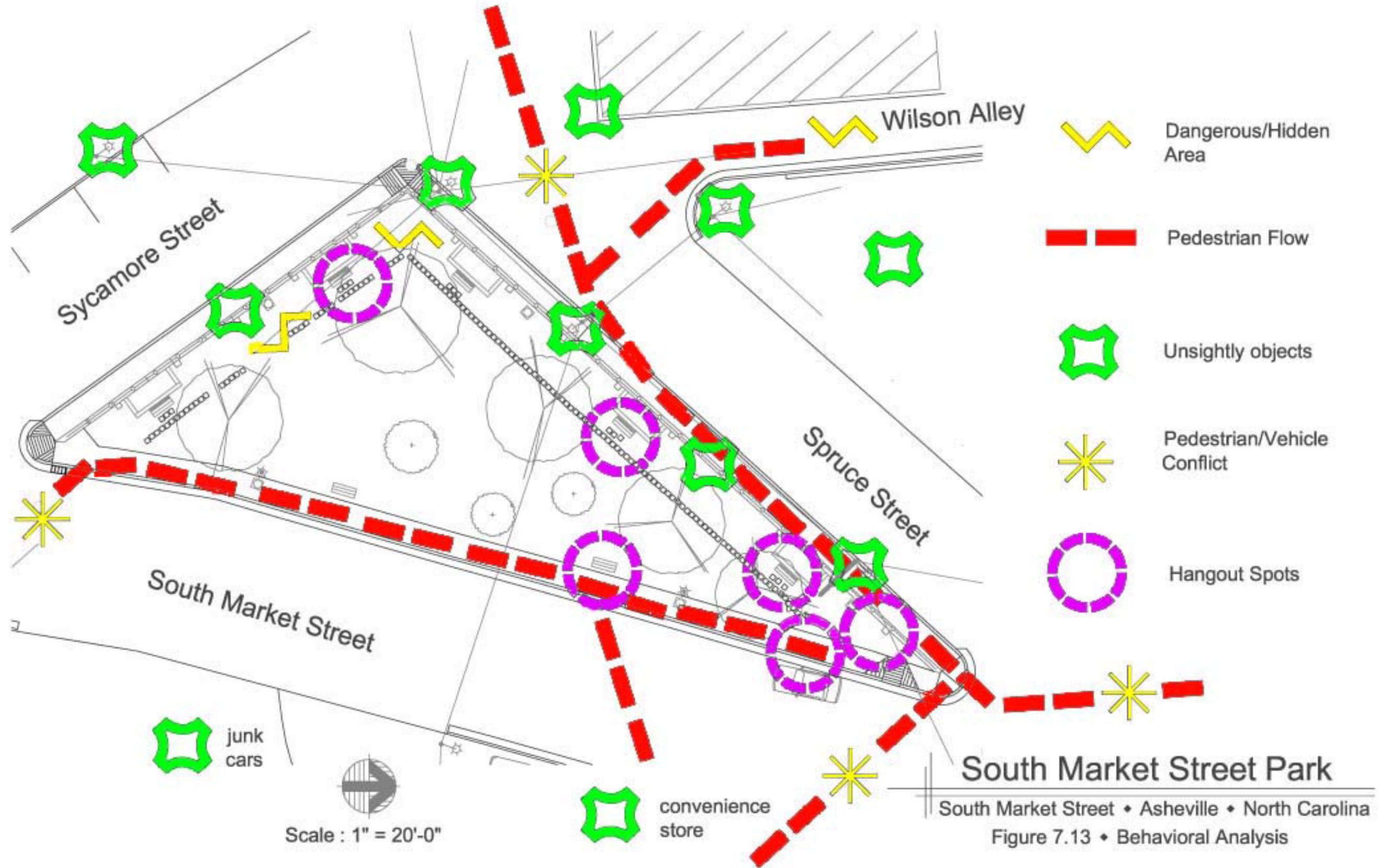
<u>The Proposed Design</u>

The proposed redesign of South Market Street Park is a model space for cultural expression. The design reflects the rich culture of Asheville's African-Americans and immerses the user in a sea of extensive history of "The Block". The outcome of such a design can build community pride, develop a sense of awareness for the identity of African-American influences on Asheville and eradicate the blight which is currently dominating the park and neighborhood.

The design, in general, is a radical transformation of the existing conditions. Figure 7.14 shows a plan view of the proposed redesign. Instead of creating a lackluster space to fit between a forbidding and unpleasant retaining wall, the design creates life, cultural awareness and community development. The design opens up the park, offering a safe and relaxing environment for its users. The hardscape elements enable the user to discover the meaning of the design and depict the essence of a quality cultural neighborhood and its citizens. This also generates a new scene in neighborhood that attracts positive use while discouraging illicit activity.

South Market Street Park currently sits in a shady, hidden and cold corner of "The Block". The new design setting changes this radically by eliminating the retaining wall and filling in the space to recall the slope that once naturally occurred. This is illustrated in section drawings found in Figures 7.15, 7.16, and 7.17. The top of the retaining wall is removed and the fill grade comes flush to the curb. A smaller retaining wall holds enough of the slope to create a plaza space filled with historical and cultural symbolism. The new slope permits easier access through the site. The hill and alignment space draw the visitor's eyes away from the surrounding deteriorated brick buildings and toward the
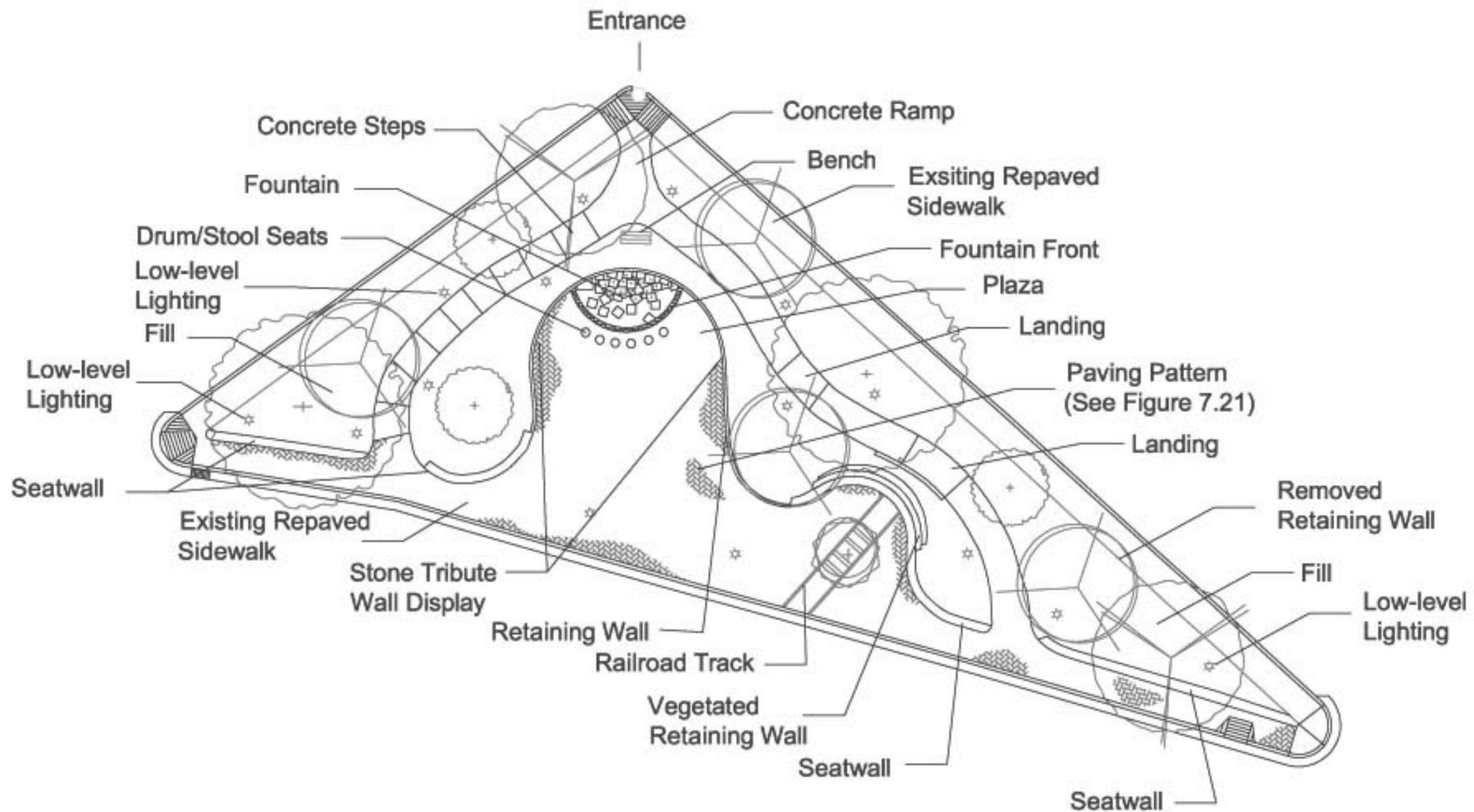
Entrance

Concrete Steps

Concrete Ramp

Fountain

Bench

Exsiting Repaved
Sidewalk

Drum/Stool Seats

Low-level
Lighting

Fountain Front

Plaza

Fill

Landing

Low-level
Lighting

Paving Pattern
(See Figure 7.21)

Landing

Seatwall

Removed
Retaining Wall

Existing Repaved
Sidewalk

Fill

Stone Tribute
Wall Display

Low-level
Lighting

Retaining Wall

Railroad Track

Vegetated
Retaining Wall

Seatwall

Seatwall

Scale: 1" = 20' - 00"

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ♦ Asheville ♦ North Carolina
Figure 7.14 ♦ Proposed Plan
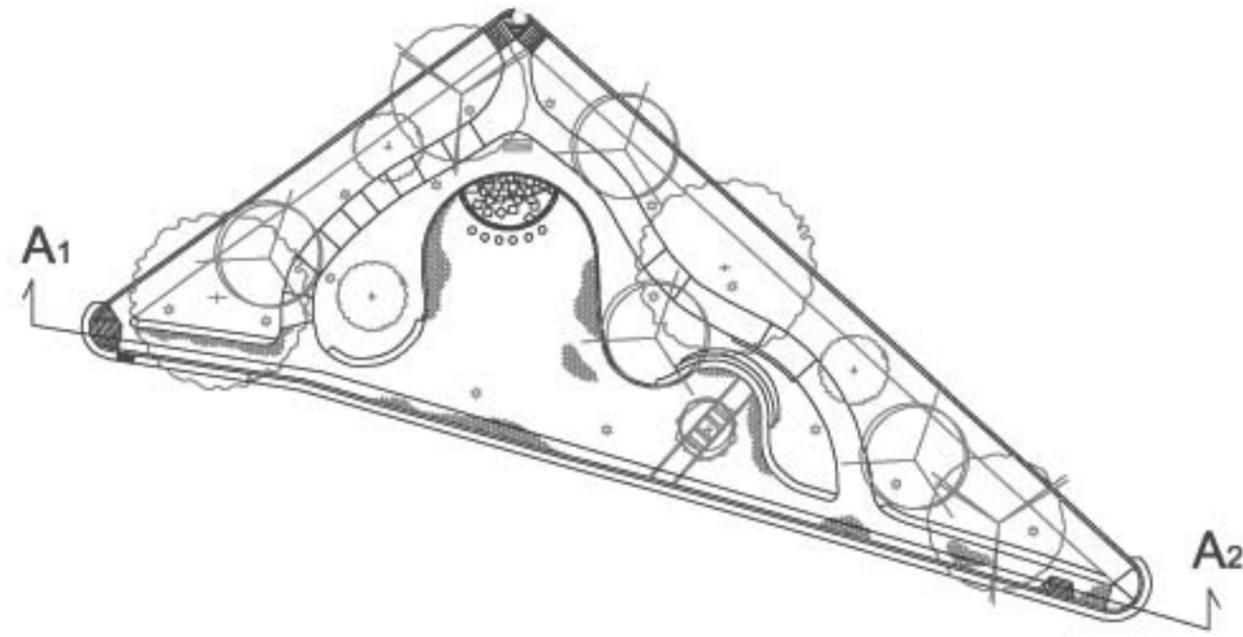
Scale: 1" = 10' - 00"

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ◆ Asheville ◆ North Carolina

Figure 7.15 ◆ Section A1 - A2
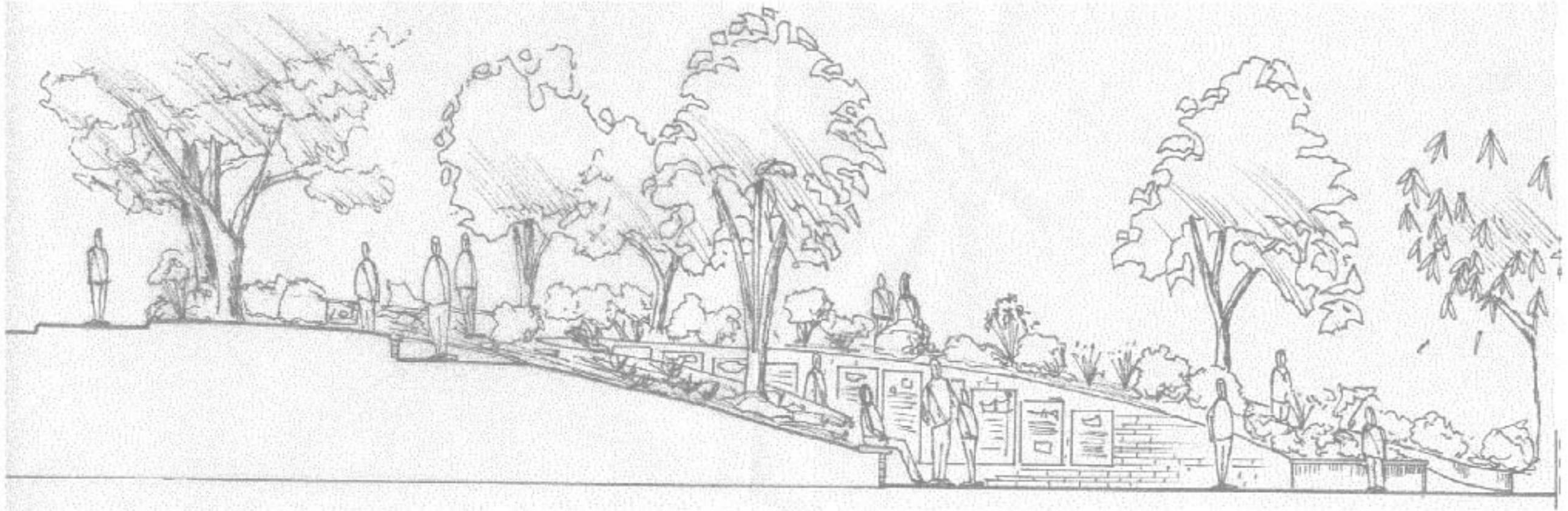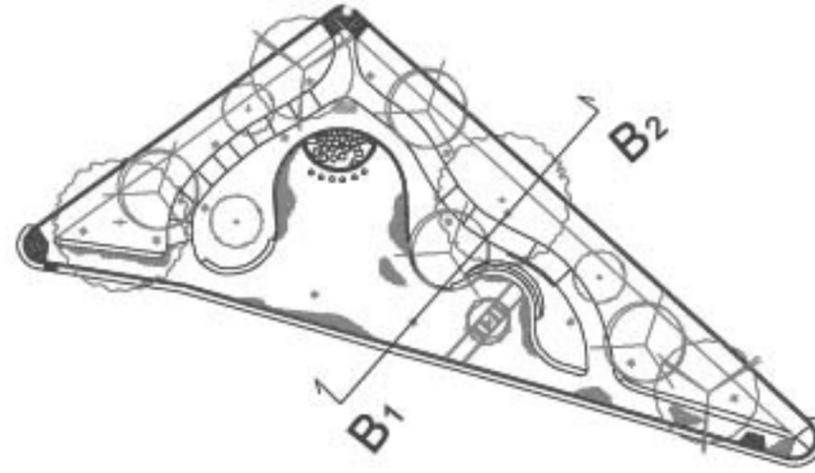
Scale: 1" = 5' - 00"

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ♦ Asheville ♦ North Carolina

Figure 7.16 ♦ Section B1 - B2
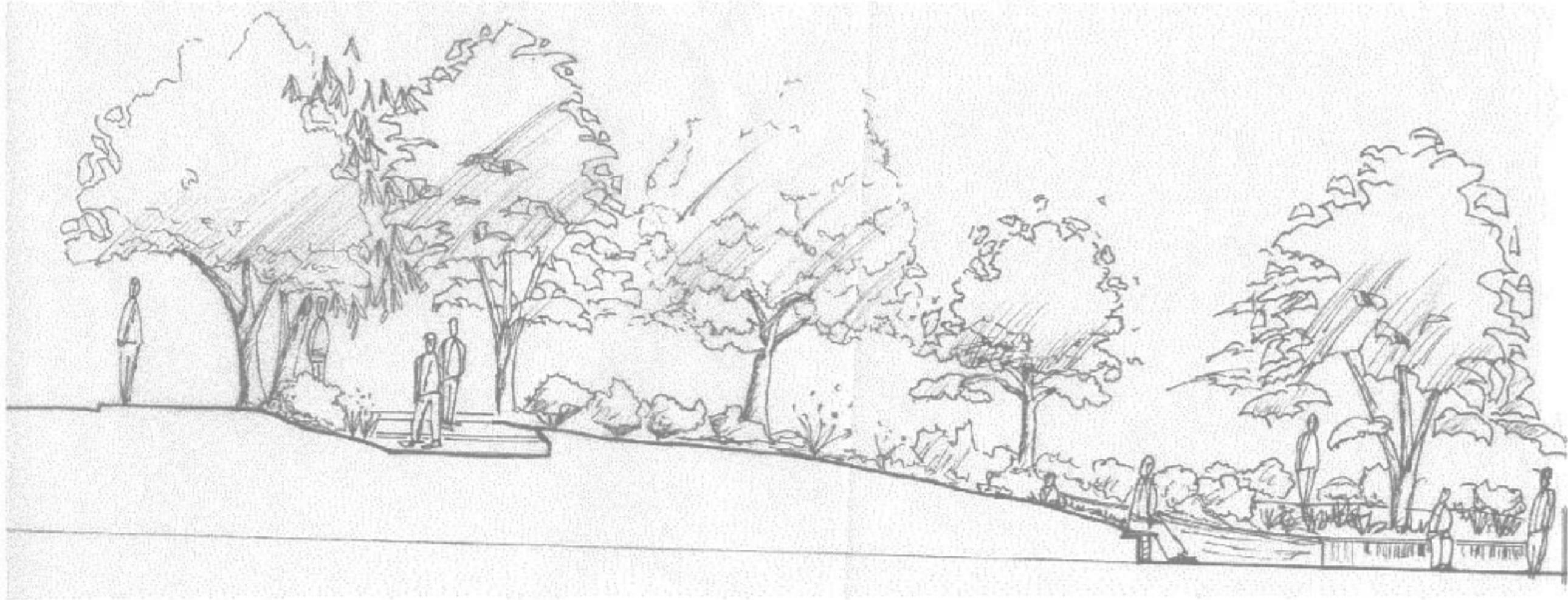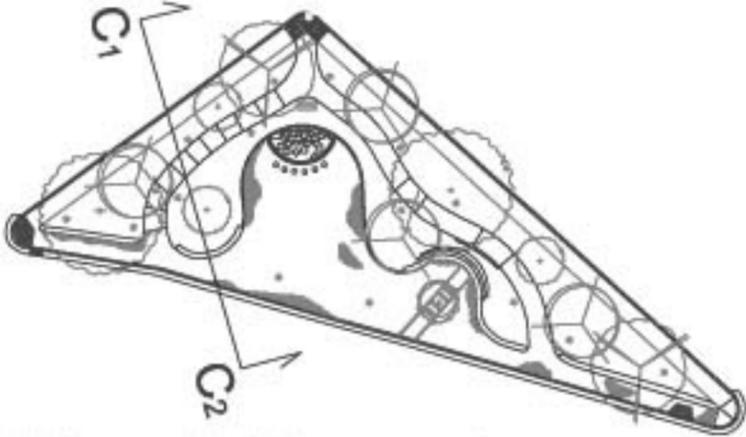
C₁

C₂

Scale: 1" = 5' - 00"

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ◆ Asheville ◆ North Carolina
Figure 7.17 ◆ Section C1 - C2

important features of the design. It also brings pedestrians out of the street area and promotes a greater connection with the site's elements. When there is a connection, the visitor's eyes are drawn into the space providing a greater sense of safety. The design necessitates the removal of the current less than healthy Dogwood and Red Maple trees and provides more growing space for shrubs and more appropriate tree species.

The new path system has three access points. These points entice the user to walk through the site instead of walking along the street and steep, surrounding sidewalks (Figure 7.14). Shallow steps gently climb up the southern half of the site. A long serpentine ramp, with generous landing spaces for observing the plaza bellow, glides up the northern section. The ramp has a more accessible slope than the sidewalks on either side of the site, and brings pedestrian flow away from the street. Where the two paths meet, at the top of the hill, a small landing has a bench and space for observing the plaza below.

The steps and ramp provide views of the circular plaza below. Figures 7.18, 7.19, 7.20 depict perspective views from the proposed pathways. The multiple viewpoints achieved in the design create a sense of discovery as well as safety. The plaza is an open-air community space that will generate a positive social atmosphere. Unlike the existing park's conditions, the proposed plaza guides the visitor to an inviting space without being forced. The space is adorned with hardscape elements that reflect the cultural and ethnic history of Asheville's African-Americans and the unique neighborhood where they once lived. The proposed space is to be used for personal exploration, festivals, gathering spots, community events and small concerts. The area can easily hold approximately 250 people comfortably for a small community outdoor event. The path system and grassy
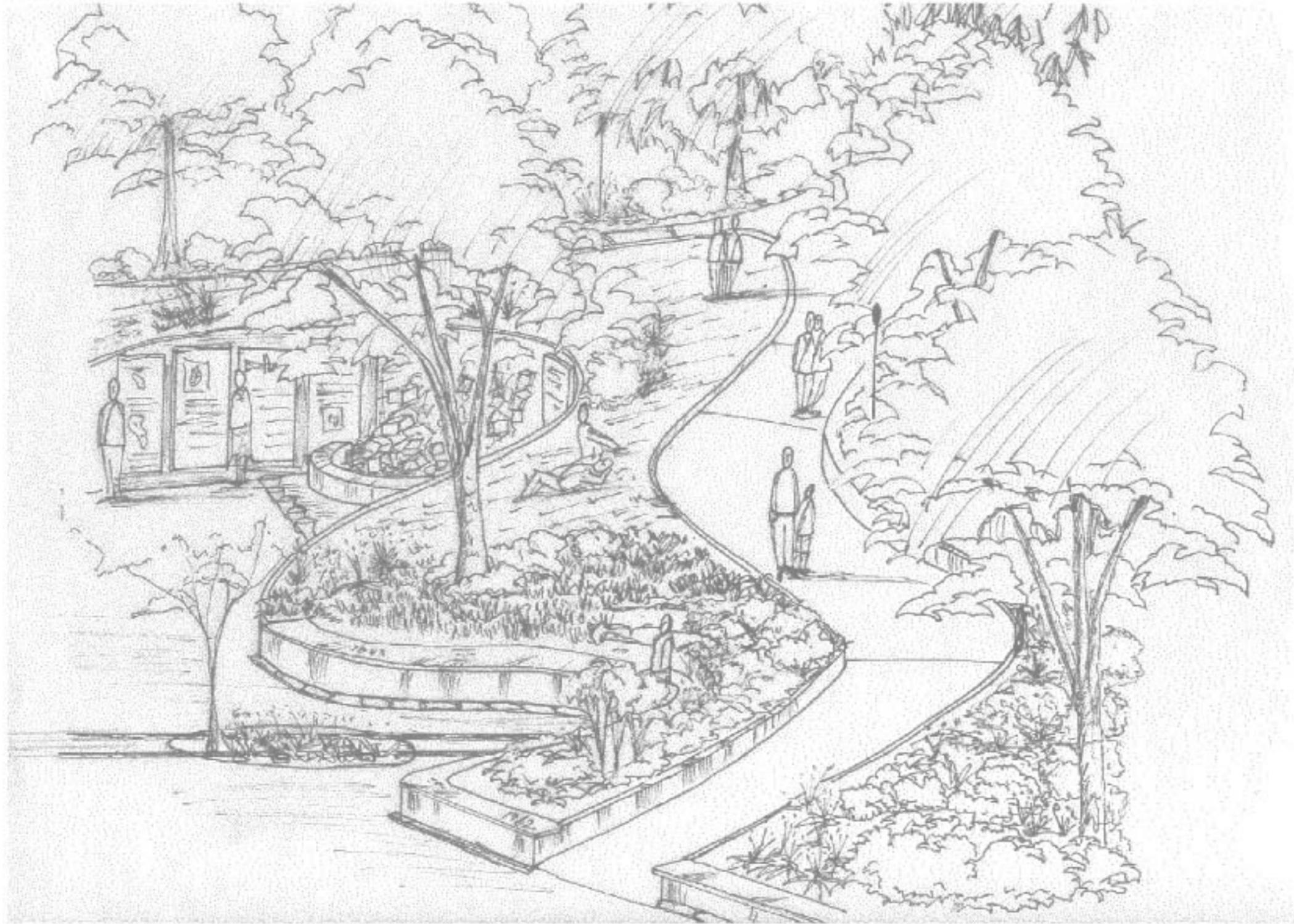
South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina

Figure 7.18 • Perspective Looking South
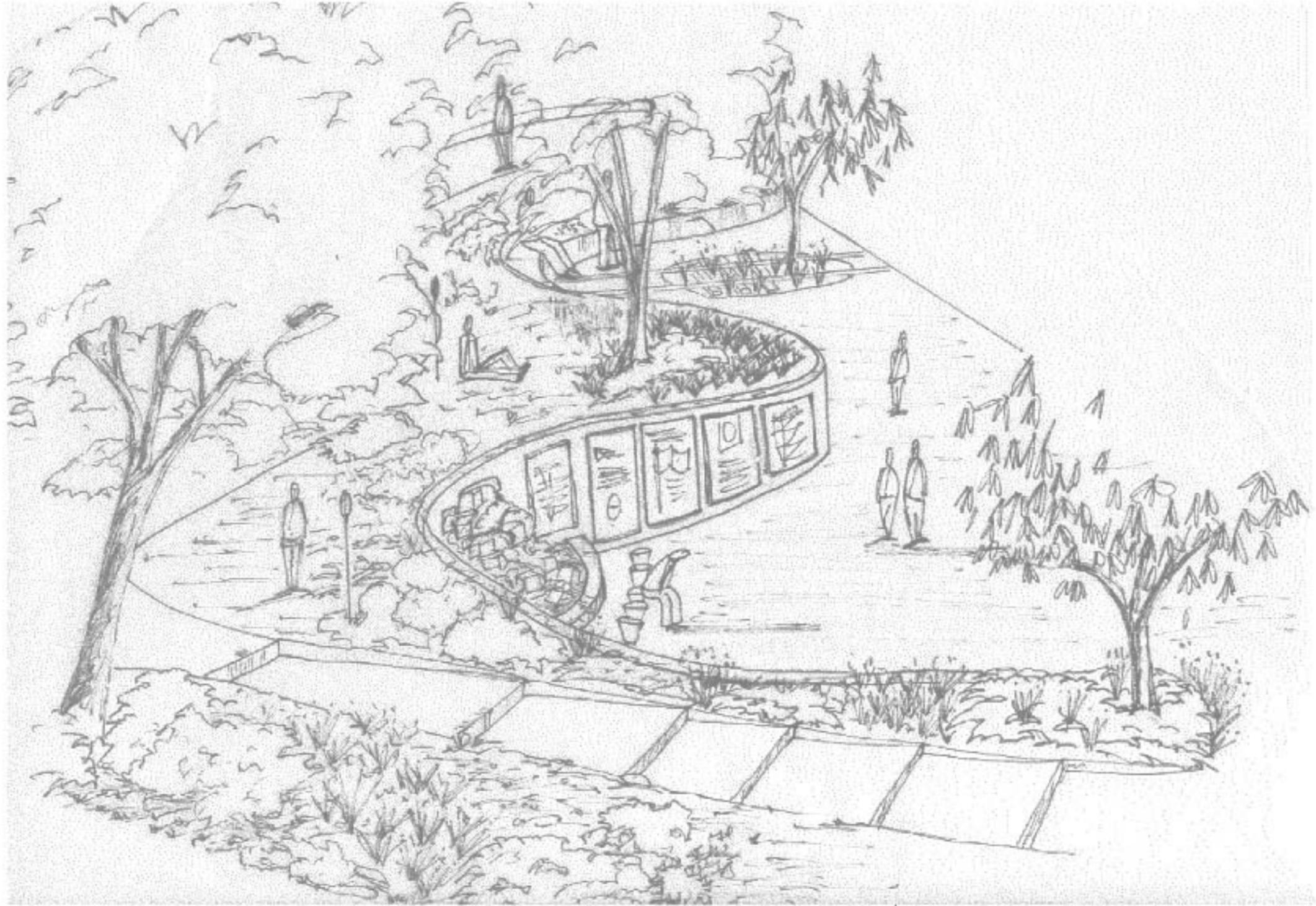
South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina
Figure 7.19 • Perspective Looking North
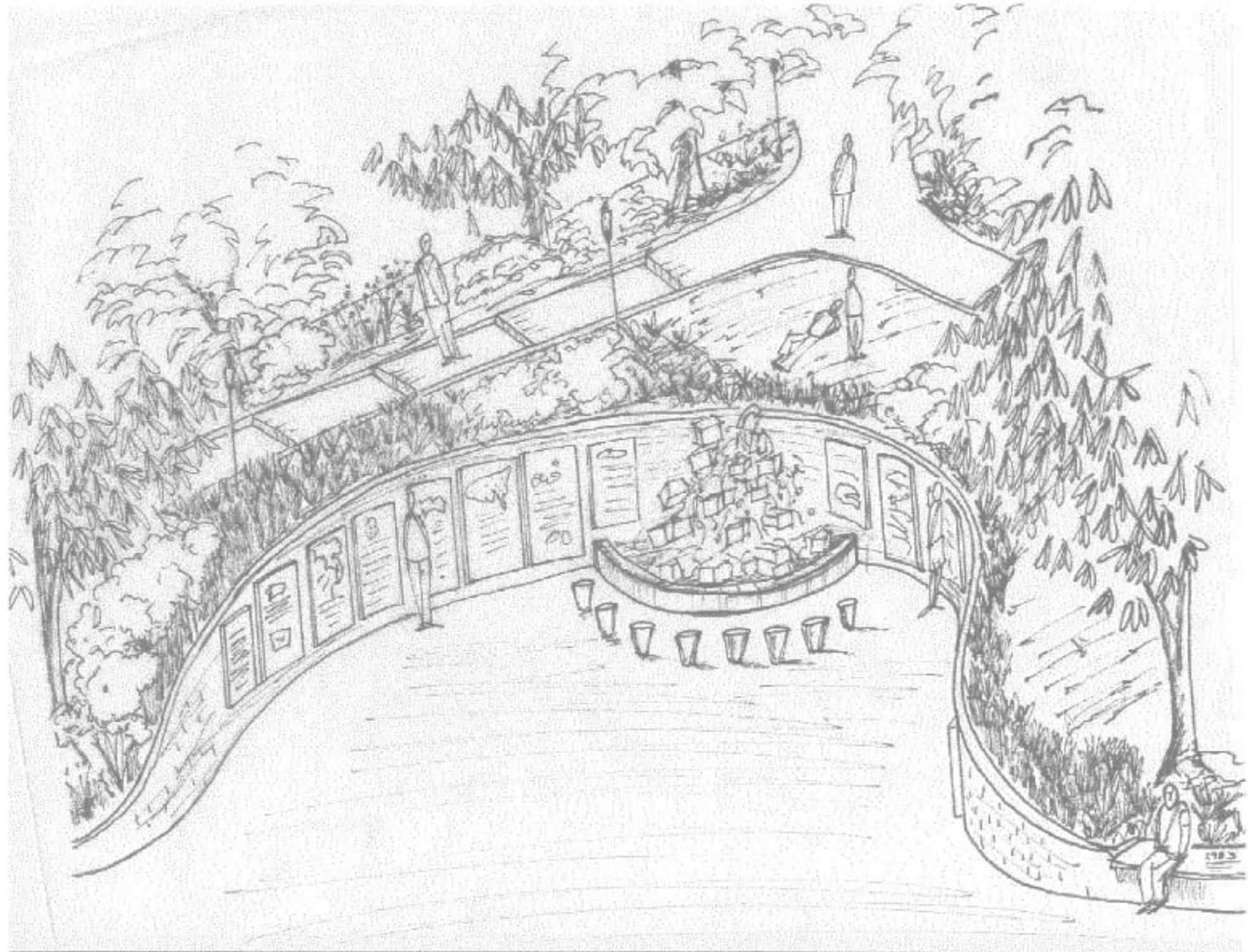
South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina
Figure 7.20 • Perspective Looking West

slopes also provide spaces for overflow seating and standing. The open areas are comfortable and impromptu seating can take place along the vegetated areas overlooking the plaza space.

The plaza floor mimics a unique symbol of various ancestral patterns found on indigenous African art and/or presents a connection of African-Americans to the mountainous region of Asheville. The entire park and sidewalks is herring bone paved with pavers and, when observed from the above pathways, the design pattern is discerned. The paving symbolizes the connection of African-Americans to their ancestral roots around the world and their rich legacy as pioneers and entrepreneurs in Western North Carolina. The actual design of the paving pattern can be a community-based decision and will also run along the sidewalk of South Market Street. An example of this can be found in Figure 7.21.
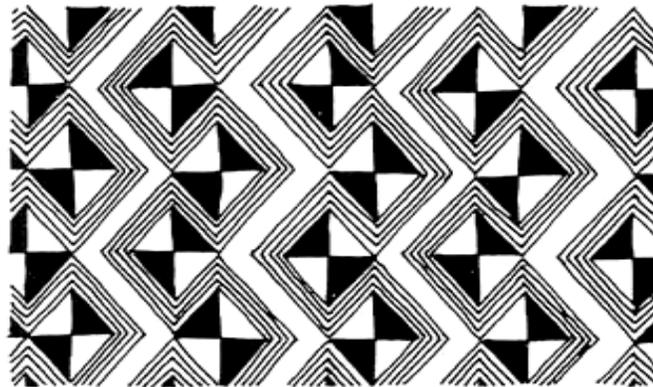
Figure 7.21 - Traditional African pattern: cloth pattern, lower Congo (Williams 64).

The northern section of the plaza floor has another design element that is a tribute to the first major contribution of the African-American to Western North Carolina and the development of Asheville. This portion of the park has a section of old railroad track

laid in the ground to commemorate the role African-Americans played in clearing the Buncombe Toll Road followed by the construction of a significant portion of the Southern Railroad. The track comes out of the seat-wall and extends into the sidewalk, cutting through a circular planting bed. The track symbolizes the growth of Asheville following the completion of the railroad. A small flowering tree, Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), grasses and small flowering annuals, are planted in the center of the tracks to symbolize the over-growth on the old tracks and the growth that has taken place in Asheville as a result of the railroads construction. This portion of the plaza has a comfortable semi-circular seat-wall surrounding the track display. The slope is held back behind the seat-wall by a granite retaining wall. This wall is only about two feet tall and will be softened by planting vines and small shrubs that drape over the top edge. Figure 7.19 depicts the scene.

The major visual attraction of the South Market Street Park is a fountain in the main plaza (Figure 7.22). The fountain is also the most significant design element that tells the history of "The Block". Mentioned earlier in the preceding chapters, the YMI, in the past, served as a cultural facility and was a way of life for Asheville's African-American community. It was a place where most African-American families would go after church and kids would go there after school to get a soda from the large brass soda fountain (Barbara Williams, personal communication, 2/17/01). It was the main hub of "The Block," where Asheville's African-Americans would go to be seen and maintain their rich community pride. The plaza's fountain is a tribute to the ability of the soda
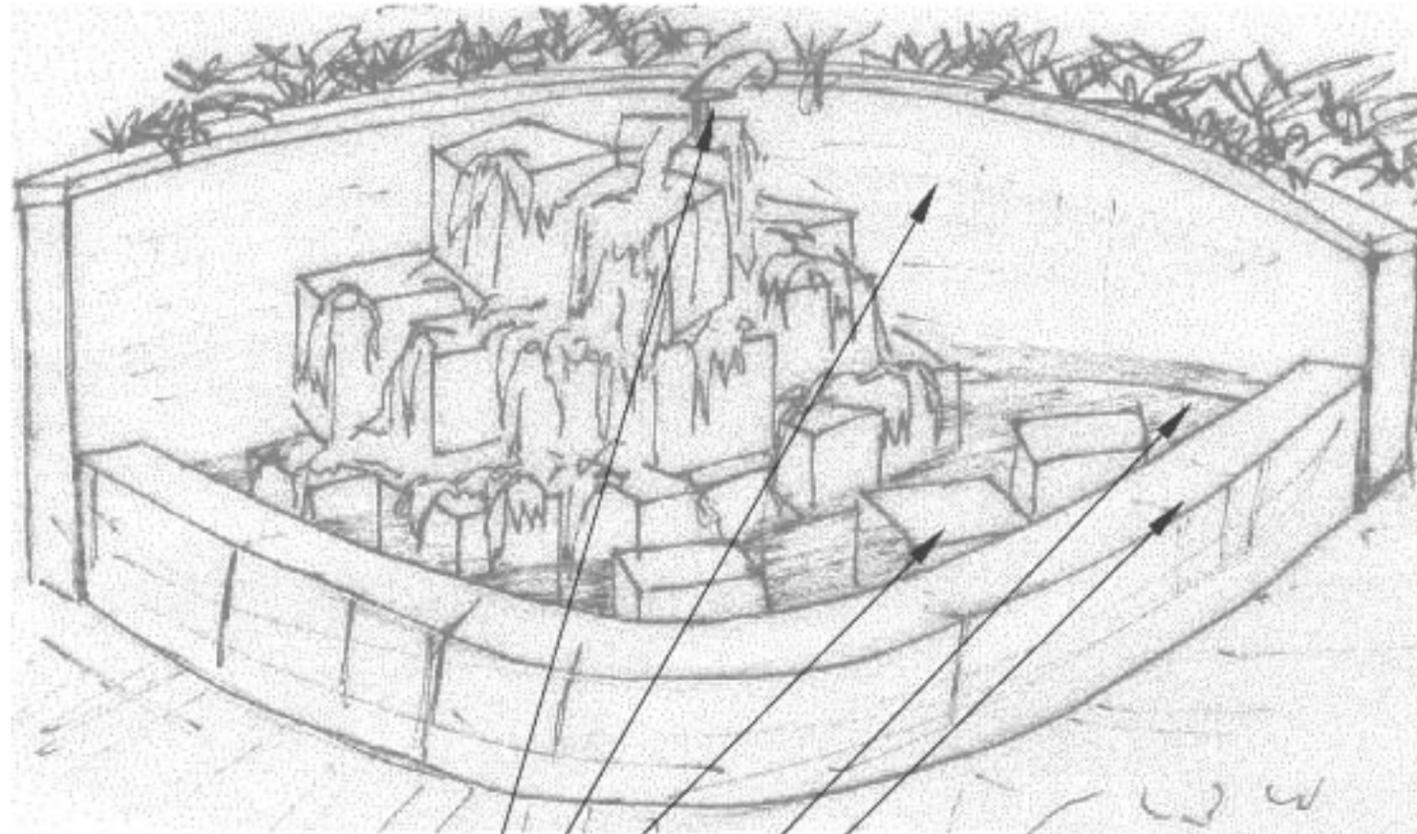
Section of Fountain

Fountain Spigot

Brick/ Tribute Wall

Steel Blocks

Granite-lined Pool

"Countertop"
Seatwall
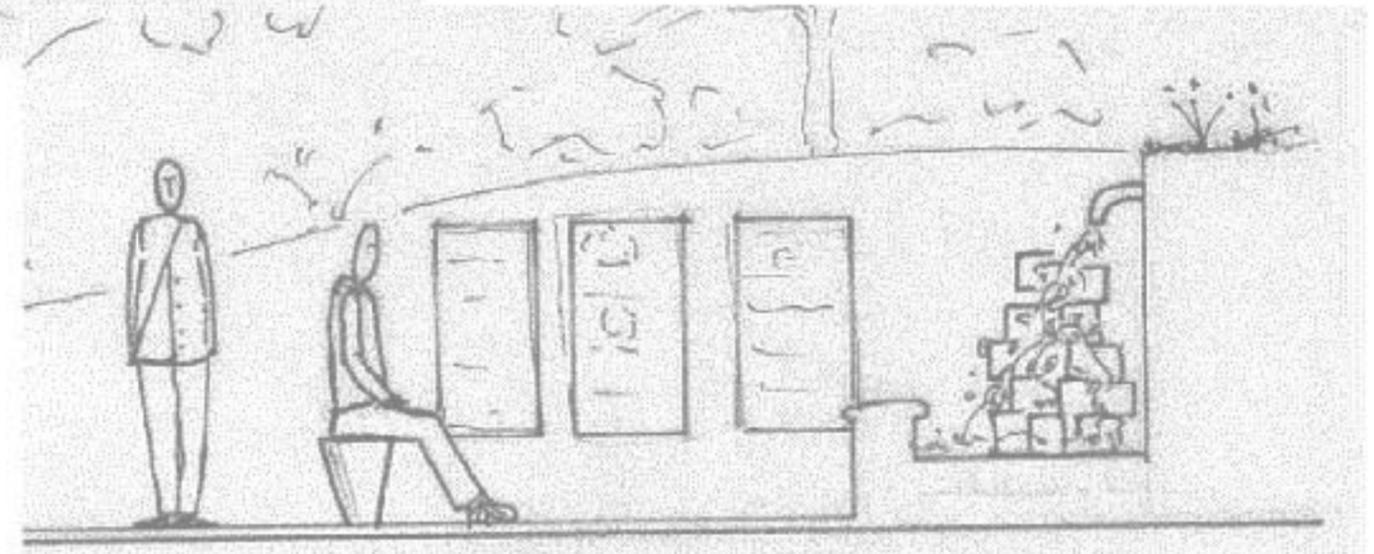
South Market Street Park

South Market Street • Asheville • North Carolina
Figure 7.22 • Fountain

fountain at the YMI Drug Store to bring a culturally rich community together. The fountain is symbol of the important contributions of African-Americans on the history of "The Block".

The fountain is made of a series of stacked steel blocks that water bubbles over. The blocks come out of the retaining wall of the plaza and are configured to look as if each block is supported by another one. The block configuration is a symbol of the support that Asheville's African-Americans historically gave each other. It is also a symbol of those African-Americans who helped make "The Block" what it used to be. They are made out of steel to pay homage to the Asheville Foundry, which provided jobs for the neighborhood. Various boxes will be allowed to rust, while others will be stainless steel and remain shiny. The rust is a connection to the recent blighted history of "The Block" and the stainless steel alludes to the purity of a cultural neighborhood and its traditions. Water comes out of a brass looking pipe at the top of the blocks to mimic the actual fountain tap. The bubbling water is representative of the soda fountain being the center of neighborhood and holding "The Block" together. The fountain meets the plaza at an elevated seatwall. This wall has a marble coping on it to symbolize the counter at the YMI Drug Store where the sodas were made.

A series of cone-shaped stools wrap around the fountain. They are made of black limestone and are shaped to indicate the stools that once sat around the YMI soda fountain (Figure 7.18 and 7.22). They also are shaped as drums and commemorate the popular Goombay Festival, which is held on "The Block" each year. The stools provide sitting space and become optimal points to view the remaining design elements.

The YMI was the center of the neighborhood and is the central force of the fountain's symbols. The history that was generated at the YMI and the history preserved at the current YMI Cultural Center are important factors for the development of "The Block". The history that surrounds the African-American neighborhood is implemented into a tribute wall panel. Figures 7.18, 7.19, and 7.20 give a perspective of what the wall will look like. The paneling serves multiple purposes, by doubling as a retaining wall that supports the slope around the plaza, while also being a display wall. The wall is made of limestone and has the names of historical and important Asheville African-Americans sandblasted into it. The names on the wall indicate the important African-Americans who have contributed to the rich legacy of "The Block" and the history of African-Americans in Western North Carolina as a whole (See Appendix C for a list of important and historical names that could be implemented into the wall). Each name is inscribed into the wall with a description of his or her contributions (e.g. – Isaac Dickson, "educator and father of black development", or Gilbert Sligh, "first African-American on the Asheville Police Force", etc.).

The wall also has sections of engravings that are physical symbols of Asheville's African-American history (e.g. – a trumpet shape to symbolize the jazz history and the incredible musicians who played on "The Block"). A series of bas-relief sculptures are integrated into the wall to give an abstract representation of what the neighborhood used to be like. A relief, like the one located adjacent to the YMI on the wall of the parking garage, is also used. The wall also has embossed graphics and historical photos to give reference to the important events of "The Block". Sections of the wall are left blank in order to allow for future events and important future members of the community to be

recognized. This also enables the space to provide for the future and connect to all ages of society.

The new design for the South Market Street Park allows for ample sitting space. A seat-wall extends along the South Market Street sidewalk and winds its way through the plaza space. It is not just a simple place to sit, but also serves as another informative culturally sensitive design element. The seat-wall is capped with a gently sloping smooth-surfaced limestone block that has significant African-American dates and events sandblasted in it. Figure 7.19 and 7.23 depict a perspective and detail of the proposed seat-wall. The rock is used as a symbol to commemorate the efforts of many African-Americans who moved large amounts of rocks during the construction of Asheville's large structures like the Grove Park Inn or Biltmore House. The wall is supported by a running bond of brick, which is a symbol of the quality contributions of African-American masons. The seat-wall extends along the sidewalk and is a timeline of the African-American influence on Western North Carolina. Users have the opportunity to learn when the first African-Americans came to the area, who were important trendsetters and who has contributed to the enrichment of the black culture in Asheville. It also describes important dates in the advancement of Civil Rights in Asheville.

The seat-wall timeline does not extend continually along the sidewalk. This allows for future significant events to be recorded in the space. The seat-wall allows places for people to sit and experience the park. It also provides a sense of discovery and attraction. If someone is sitting over an important date it will either prompt those intrigued to talk with another person or return to the space at a later time to discover the

Brick Cap

Brick Face

Concrete Block

EngravedLimestone
Wall Panel

Anchor

#4 Rebar

Wall Ties

4-6" Drain

Granite Paving Strip

Brick Pavers

Mortar Joint

4"

Concrete Footing

#4 Rebar

12"
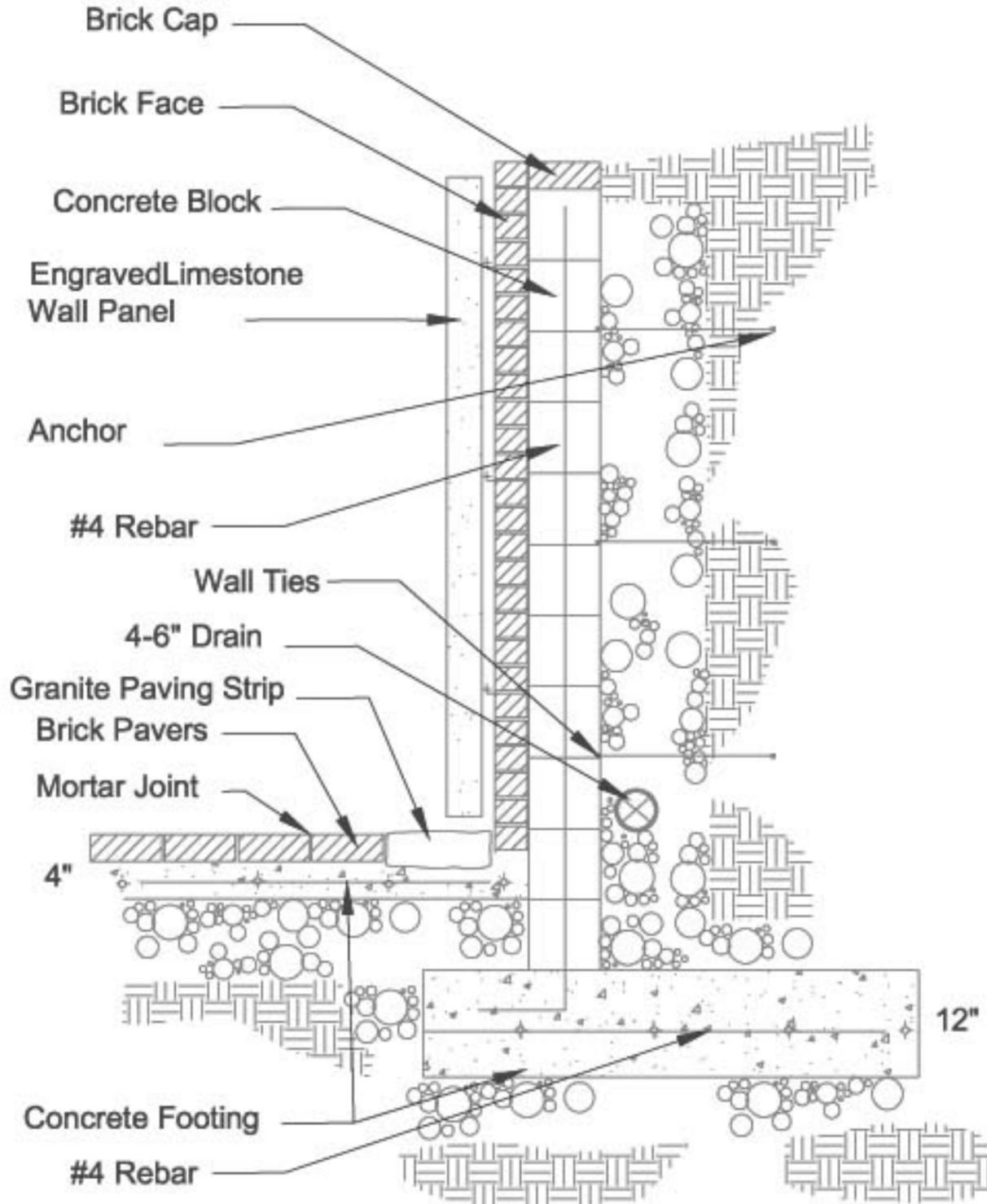
Tribute Wall Detail

Scale: NTS

Precast
Limestone Seat
Cap

Brick Face

Wall Ties

#4 Rebar

Brick Paving

Granite
Paving Strip

Concrete Footing

4-6" Drain

Seat-Wall Detail

Scale: NTS

Precast Concrete
Retaining Wall Forms

Vegetated Section
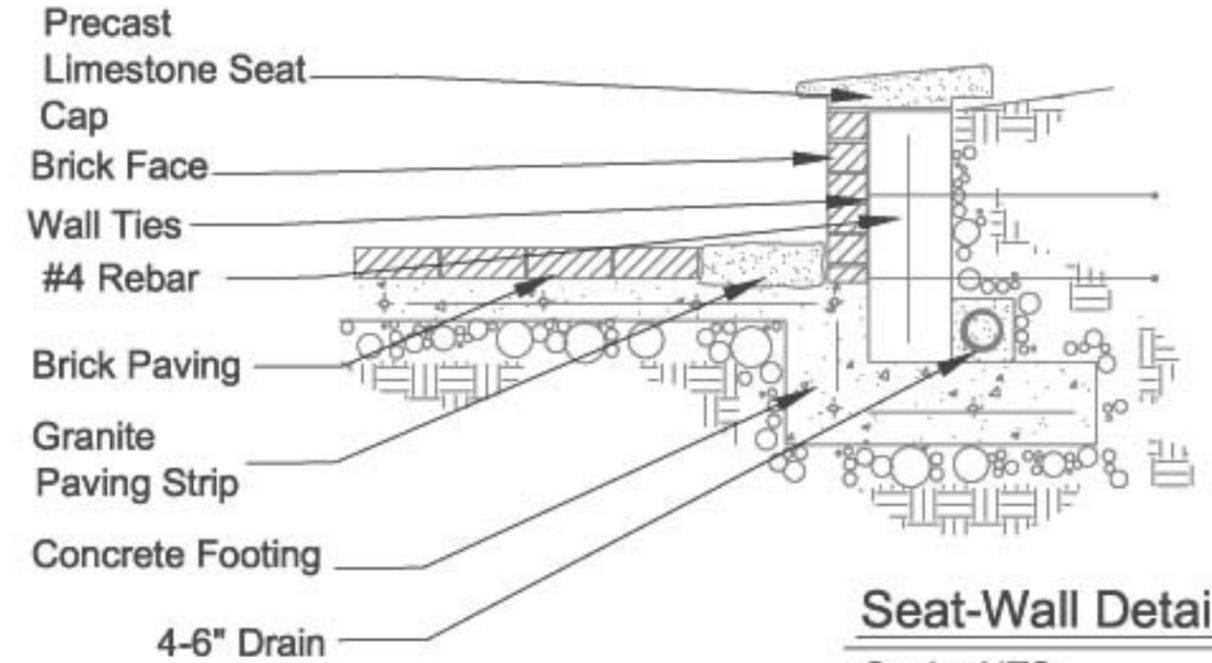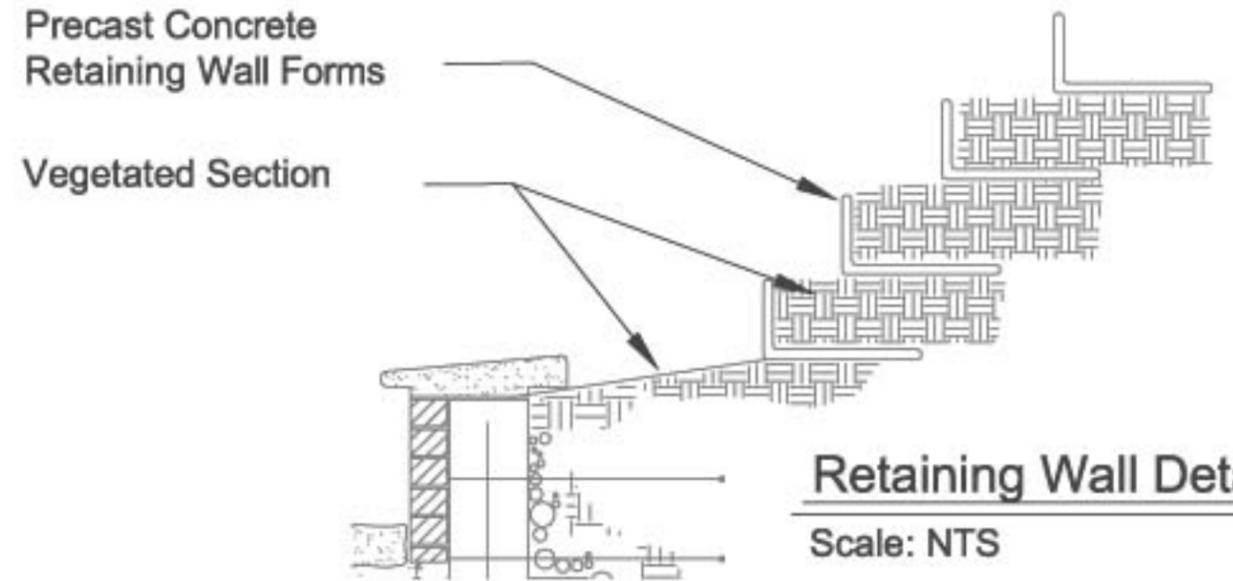
Retaining Wall Detail

Scale: NTS

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ◆ Asheville ◆ North Carolina

Figure 7.23 ◆ Details

hidden date. The seat-wall is located along the sidewalk, so when pedestrians observe the

dates in the stone they will be drawn into the space to admire the site's whole story. The

vegetation for the South Market Street Park design hides the ominous brick buildings

from the user and creates a pleasant and lush environment in the heart of a previously

blighted downtown neighborhood (Figure 7.24). A number of natural and exotic plant

species are used which can tolerate the site's conditions. The vegetation also contributes

to the atmosphere in the space. The hill is planted with a series of River Birch (*Betula*

nigra), Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), Maple species (*Acer spp.*), White Oak (*Quercus*

alba). River Birch is a hardy tree with pleasant fall color, and its bark is an attractive

feature. They grow tall and provide soft shade when grouped together. The Maples and

Oaks will also generate ample shade and screening. The fall color is often strong and,

without leaves, the tree still provides ample shade. The Dogwood has a soft texture and

blooms in the spring. The small trees are native to the mountain region and provide a

natural connection to the space. The edges of the park are heavily planted with a shrub

border. The major species include Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), Rhododendron,

Fothergilla (*Fothergilla major*), Clethra (*Clethra alnifolia*), Red Chokeberry (*Aronia*

albutifolia) and Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*). Ornamental native grasses

and small flowering plants are placed below the shrubs and in the remaining open areas.

The vegetation of the site is native and will not require lots of effort in maintenance. The

flowing paths are planted with typical vegetation that would be typical of the mountain

regions and adaptive to urban settings.

　　　The redesign of the park also improves the utilities (Figure 7.15). Numerous

attractive light poles and uplit trees are provided throughout the site and promote a safe

Oakleaf Hydrangea - *Hydrangea quercifolia (8)*

Clethra - *Clethra alnifolia (18)*

Rhododendron - *Rhododendron spp. (20)*

Itea - *Itea virginica (41)*

Red Chokeberry - *Aronia albutifolia (10)*

Fothergilla - *Fothergilla major (16)*

Red Maple
Acer rubrum

Kousa Dogwood
Cornus kousa

River Birch
Betula nigra

White Oak
Quercus alba

Kousa Dogwood
Cornus kousa

White Oak
Quercus alba

Kousa Dogwood
Cornus kousa

Red Maple
Acer rubrum

Redbud
Cercis canadensis

River Birch (3)
Betula nigra

Planting Beds

A   Seasonal Color Bed

B   Grass Bed

C   Native Wildflower Bed

Scale: 1" = 20' - 00"

South Market Street Park

South Market Street ◆ Asheville ◆ North Carolina
Figure 7.24 ◆ Proposed Planting Plan

and attractive setting at night. Benches are located along the hill for resting-places. The slope and added fill of the design enable proper drainage. The drainage is also aided by a series of drains that connect to the existing storm drains.

Design Significance

The proposed cultural design ameliorates the park's blight and combines the criteria that are suggested for a successful culturally sensitive design. The new South Market Street Park is a place for people, families, and all members of Asheville to congregate. The elements in the details of the design engage the user, while the numerous symbols promote a sense of discovery and excitement. The planted slope, flowing path system and fountain beget a scene of African-Americans coming together around the soda fountain. The lack of hiding spaces makes for a safe space. The new South Market Street Park will exude culture and connects the user to the rich history of the African-American neighborhood. Finally, the space solves the issue of people circulating in the street and provides a specific place for people to interact without damaging the vegetation.

Limitations

It is important to note that the design will not be as successful as it potentially could be without the continued redevelopment of the deteriorated neighborhood. The Eagle/Market Street Development Corporation has purchased numerous structures in "The Block" and will soon begin to turn them into mix-use (commercial and residential) units (Personal interview, 2/5/01). The redesign will be successful, only if the neighborhood can turn itself around and regenerate the prideful atmosphere that once existed.

The design will immediately generate awareness to the park space, but without positive neighborhood advancement it will continue to be a space where inviting events occur. Before outsiders experience the space, they need to know that the rumors and history of the blighted park have been erased.

The proposed changes in South Market Street Park and in "The Block" will bring awareness and development to the neighborhood. New development is needed in the neighborhood in order to get rid of the blighted conditions, but it is important to also understand that such drastic and immediate changes can actually disrupt the possibilities of drawing in a culturally sensitive clientele. A revitalized neighborhood, such as "The Block" might gain cultural awareness through the redesign of the South Market Street Park, but may not attract various African-American members of Asheville into the space. When urban environments consisting of strong cultural histories are renovated they often attract a different social class who feels it trendy to live in such a diverse neighborhood.

Asheville is growing at such a fast rate and like many cities there is an increasing need to provide housing in the urban areas. The renovation of "The Block" would attract those people who can afford to live downtown (probably not African-American) and commercial businesses that are not typical of the historic neighborhood. The proposed redevelopment of "The Block" needs to make sure that incubator businesses are placed into the vacant structures and mix-income level housing is incorporated. This will at least provide some measure in maintaining portions of the neighborhood's existing cultural fabric.

It is the intention that South Market Street Park will be visited by not only African-American members of the community, but by all members. It also should not be

assumed that the space should remain a predominately African-American space. The attraction of a more diverse set of individuals to the park will spread the significance of the space throughout all social and cultural communities in Asheville.

A final limitation is the feasibility of the reconstruction of the South Market Street Park and "The Block" being accomplished. It will take public and private funds to develop this new design. These funds will be non-existent until contributors are assured that the city and African-American neighborhood alike are trying to address the problems of the blighted neighborhood and there is potential for the site to contribute to the ongoing diverse growth and reputation of the Asheville community.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The installation of a culturally sensitive design project will express the significant contributions of a culturally rich neighborhood to the entire community. It will generate knowledge, pride and respect for a particular, important cultural history. The proposed redesign of the South Market Street Park fosters a sense of respectful awareness of the many ethnic, cultural, historical and social contributions of African-Americans to Asheville and Western North Carolina.

As cities grow and become melting pots of cultures, there is also a growing need to hold onto our cultural heritage before it is lost. Society has the ability to determine the significance of any culture, and if a particular culture does not have a strong focus, it will become gentrified. This gentrification in the urban environment compounds the loss of cultural tradition and an individual's ability to recognize his or her cultural and ethnic past.

The installation of a positive cultural-based landscape design is an important source of personal and community identity. The design has the potential of becoming a place where people have a strong social, physical and emotional connection to a particular cultural community's roots. However, the successes of this landscape is going to be jeopardized unless the entire community embraces the positive changes to the space and uses the cultural history as a positive force to change blighted conditions.

Edward Relph points that:

> Landscape is not merely an aesthetic background to life, rather it is the setting that both expresses and conditions cultural attitudes and activities, and significant modifications to landscapes are not possible without major changes in social attitudes (Relph 122).

The legitimacy of any cultural design is based on its ability to effectively generate a sense of attraction and make people aware of a cultural group's history with relation to the entire community. "Knowing places through sociality in a community, places are records and expressions of the cultural values and experiences of those who create and live in them" (Relph 61). A culturally sensitive redesign should be implemented in any cultural neighborhood that is struggling to find a link with its cultural history and current patterns of existence. A design project of this magnitude will create community respect and dynamically symbolize the historical and social qualities of a cultural community. The outcome of the design will generate positive user actions and will become a driving force for the stable future development of a cultural neighborhood.

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http://gocalifornia.about.com/travel/gocalifornia/bl_ctownphoto_gate.htm

www.wrtdesign.com/transit

Project for Public Spaces, Inc. , www.pps.org

www.epa.gov/ceisweb1/ceishome/atlas/northcaroline.html

www.mapquest.com

Site Photos

View of South Market Street Park from Across the Sycamore Street

View of South Market Street Park from behind Eagle/Market Street Development
Corporation

View of Jone's Convenience Store and a vacant Asheville Foundry structure

View into the park from the adjacent parking lot

View North of the neighboring parking lot

View East looking approaching the park from Sycamore Street, notice the lack of
sidewalks and the darkness

View looking West up Sycamore Street from the top of the retaining wall

APPENDIX B

Oral Questionnaire

1. What do you like about this park?

2. What do you not like?

3. Do you use this park alot?

4. What suggestions do you have about improving the site?

5. What do you think the community's overall feeling is of this space?

6. Do you know any history regarding this neighborhood and space?

7. If you could see one thing in this space, what would you put in this place?

8. What do you think would change the community's view towards this space?

APPENDIX C

Important and Influential African-Americans from Asheville*

Albert E. Manley – He was an educator and leader for African-American education throughout the country. He was the principal of Stephens-Lee High School in Asheville and then became president of Morehouse College in Atlanta (Ready 56).

B.J. Jackson - He was the first African-American in Asheville to establish a business. He sold and grew vegetable produces ("Blacks" D1).

Connie Simons – She was the first African-American female to work for the Buncombe County Sheriffs Dept.

Daisy Glenn – She devoted her time to African-American literacy programs in Asheville (Ready 59).

Dr. Charles A. Edington – He was a community leader and pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church. He was known by some as the "Pastor of Eagle St." (Ready 56).

Dr. Howard K Harrison – He was one of Asheville's oldest doctors when he was practicing and a leader of the African-American community.

E.W. Pearson –He was a founder of African-American fraternal organizations across North Carolina and promoted agricultural fairs (Ready 58).

Edward Stephens – He was a native from the West Indies, and strongly educated. He came to Asheville, on behalf of George Vanderbilt, and recognized the need for public facilities for the city's growing African-American population. He was the first conspirator of the Young Men's Institute (YMI). Stephens – Lee High School was named in part after him (Ready 54).

Eugene Smith – He was an editor and publisher of *The Southern News* from 1938 – 1966. It was Western North Carolina's only black newspaper (Ready 58).

Gilbert Sligh – He was Asheville's first African-American policeman.

Helen Eddington – She is a community volunteer and educator. She taught history and has written a few books on Asheville's African-American visionaries.

Henry Robinson – He is a reporter with the *Asheville Citizen-Times* and devotes much of his time to writing about Asheville's African-Americans (Ready 58).

Herb Watts – He is a retired police Sgt. from the Asheville Police Dept. after 25 years of service. He is a popular community volunteer and liaison and grew up on 'The Block".

Isaac Dickson - He was son of a slave mother and Dutch father, the first African-American member of the Asheville School Board and organized the first schools for African-Americans in Western North Carolina, on being Catholic Hill School (Ready 53).

James V. Miller – He was one of Asheville's best builder and contractor. A few of his projects included the St. Matthias Episcopal Church, Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Asheville Police and Fire Station ("A History" D1).

Lucy S. Herring – One of Asheville's most beloved women, she promoted the advancement of elementary education for all children. She was a community leader and so influential that in1965 Mountain Street School was named after her, Lucy Herring School (Ready 57).

Newton Shepherd – He was Asheville's first African-American to hold public office. He served as an alderman ("Blacks" D1).

Oralene Simmons – She is a devoted leader to all of Asheville. She worked for years with the Asheville-Parks and Recreation and now is the director of the YMI Cultural Center. She was also the granddaughter of a slave and the first African-American female to attend college in Western North Carolina. She attended Mars Hill College ("A History" D4).

Phinton Harris –He was a veteran of the Spanish-American War and longtime proprietor of the YMI.

Reverend Hopkins – He promoted equality in the church. In 1868, he became angered the discriminatory practice of having church services outside and founded the AME Hopkins Chapel (Ready 56).

Robert Rumley – He founded the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church and was an eloquent and vital speaker for African-Americans (Ready 56).

Rueben Daily – He was Asheville's first African-American City Council member (Ready 58).

William Rolland – He was a promoter of African-American Civil Rights in Asheville. He greatly contributed to the integration of lunch counters and the inspirer of removing "colored" sings (Ready 558).

* This is a short list of possible individuals whose names and contributions to "The Block", African-Americans and Asheville alike, could be displayed in the new design.