

Detroit:

Cass Corridor Housing Prototypes

2000-2001 ACSA Faculty Design Award

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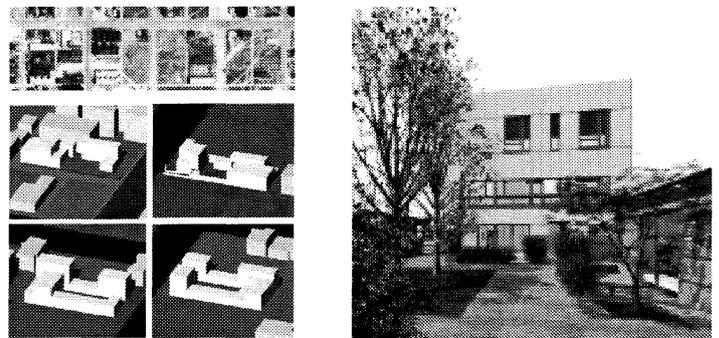
PROJECT

This is a proposal for multi-family housing prototypes for the city of Detroit and for its Cass Corridor neighborhood. The work suggests four prototypes or two pairs, i.e. two prototypes of eight units and two of ten. One of these eight unit buildings is developed in depth here.

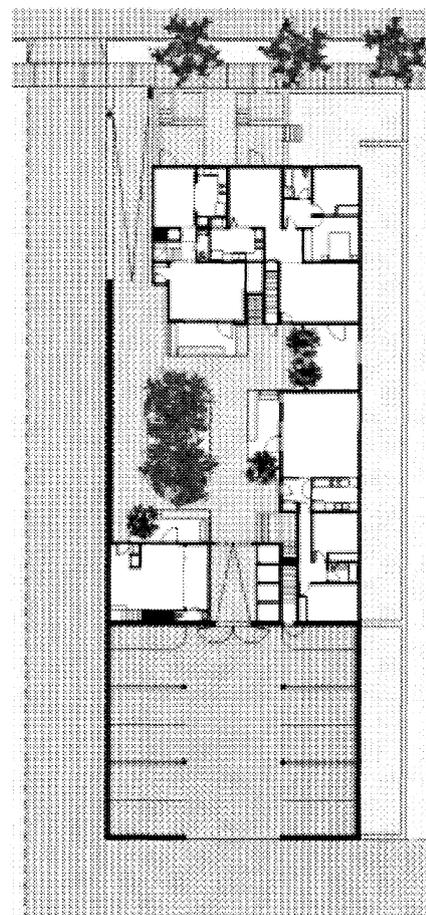
ISSUES

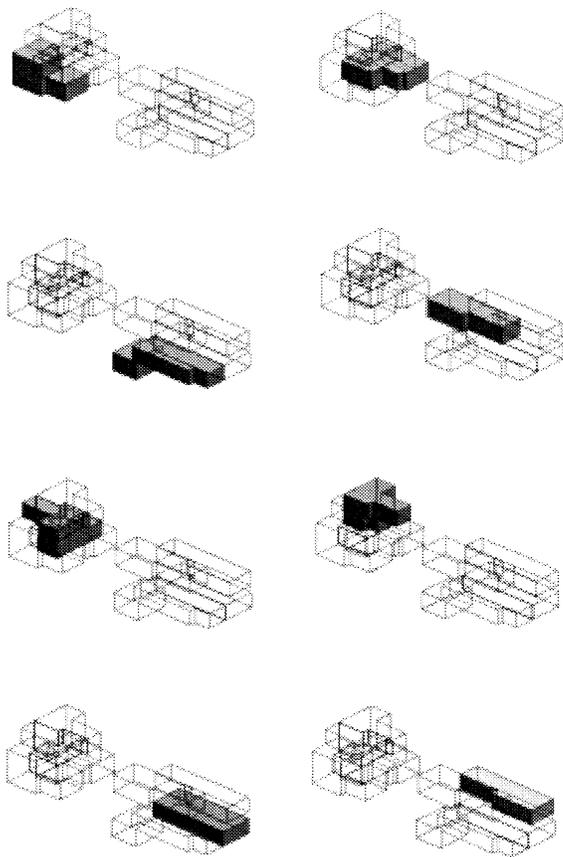
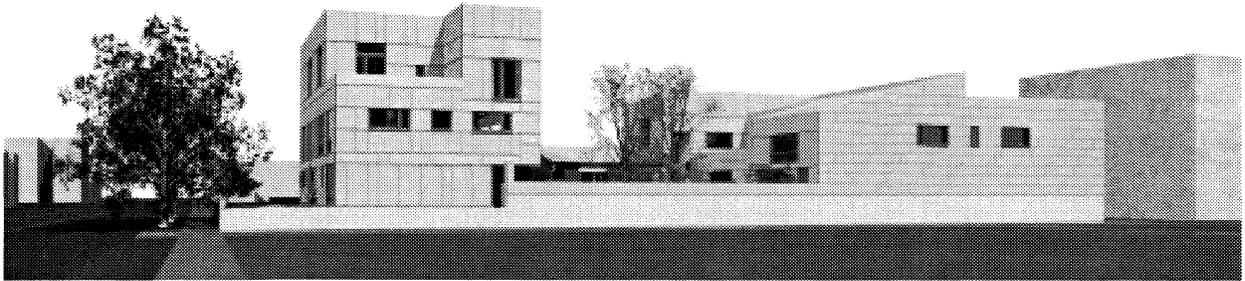
At stake is the suburbanization of Detroit and similar American cities. This proposal's goal is to redirect these suburbanizing efforts of housing development in Detroit. However, though the sense that suburban form's intrusion into the city has deleterious effects on the qualities of the city that make urban life desirable—notably proximity and variety—many of the ambitions and accommodations that suburbia satisfy are accepted here as relevant (and presently unavoidable) protagonists for an urban synthesis.

In Detroit the vast amounts of vacant and abandoned lots have made it possible for large consolidations of land. In residential development this has meant the appearance of large PUD-like subdivisions, consolidating many blocks at a time in order to create suburban styled subdivisions. These developments erase the former map of the city and replace the city's fine-grained street pattern with a balkanized configuration of discrete developments. A profound, if less easily grasped, consequence of such 'de-mappings' is the erasure of the physical vessel of memory that finds itself in the durability of urban pattern. More immediately apparent is the dissolution of the compact between public and private space within the city. Single-family houses are withdrawn from the street into bermed landscape settings. Excessively large minimum lot sizes and single family house zoning contribute to undesirably low building densities substituting present suburban-based standards for city metrics that once accommodated even the single family houses on narrow urban lots. The re-emergence of seemingly 'urban' housing types in the form of lofts and townhouses brings with it its own anti-urban tendencies. These new townhouses follow the infamous example of lining streets with garage frontage while in the case of lofts surface parking is placed on lots equal in size to the residential building proper and immediately adjacent to first floor unit



Four Prototypes





exposures. In neither case do these housing types make use of the available network of alleys as a cue to parking solutions. In both cases the accommodation of the car leads to the disruption of urban continuity and the spatial/social exchange between public and private realms.

The development of consolidated subdivisions within the city also favors large-scale capital ventures, neglecting the prospect for economic developments rooted in community-based settings. Non-profit neighborhood and small private developers working within economically 'marginal' neighborhoods need to accommodate themselves to more incrementally acquired properties that will inevitably follow, in some fashion, existing parcel patterns. In such circumstances the advantage to maintaining continuity with the historical pattern of the city is built into the limitations of these developers' financial capacities, however finding ways to accommodate the very issues addressed in the suburban styled development nevertheless remains.

RESPONSE

The tactics adopted to deal with the above issues involve the reconfiguration of lot sizes, reconsideration of unit configuration and arrangement, patterns of unit aggregation, open space or landscape patterns, private-public sequences and thresholds, constructional economy versus unit variety and solar ecology.

Unit Distributions

