



III heritage design

2023



urban
design
awards

UNIVERSITY COMMONS

DESIGN NARRATIVE

At the front door of the University of Alberta's main campus, the Dentistry Pharmacy Building, now known as University Commons, has stood as a cherished historic landmark since 1922. Blending the timeless charm of the original structure with contemporary design elements, this adaptive reuse includes a dynamic seven-storey addition and a vibrant south plaza, establishing a student hub that fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, inclusion, and social interaction.

A balance between historical and contemporary elements characterizes the design approach. The rich heritage of the original 1922 building is thoughtfully preserved by identifying and incorporating character-defining elements. The south entrance, reading room, and lecture theatres underwent substantial rehabilitation, forming the heart of the historic core. With a focus on inclusion and accessibility, the main south entry is thoughtfully modified to create accessible entries that link the original and new buildings. A grand arching pathway emerges as a defining feature, shaping the new south plaza and inviting all to enter.

The east facade is wrapped by a new student porch that extends around the north side of the building, providing additional accessible entries and activating the campus through engaging public space. Hemlock wood clad overhangs create sheltered walkways and entries. The South Academic Link emerges as a vital artery, seamlessly connecting University Commons with the South Academic Building, resolving accessibility and connectivity issues within the campus.

University Commons sets an exemplary standard for sustainable practices. Photovoltaic solar arrays adorning the roof ensure long-term energy savings and a reduced carbon footprint, underscoring the project's commitment to environmental responsibility. The pursuit of LEED Gold certification further reaffirms this dedication to creating a more resilient future.

The transformation of University Commons is a testament to the power of heritage conservation and contemporary design thinking. The seamless integration of old and new spaces fosters interdisciplinary connections and social interactions, embodying the essence of a vertical university and the integration into an existing campus. With a harmonious blend of inclusivity, sustainability, and cultural appreciation, the building stands as a beacon for the successfully adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, embracing the past while confidently stepping into the future.

BIG CITY MOVES NARRATIVE

The University Commons stands as a testament to the potential of adaptive reuse in contemporary cities, reshaping Edmonton's landscape while honouring its heritage. It aligns with the City Plan, providing a resilient, accessible, and welcoming environment. As it supports the University of Alberta's mission and elevates Edmonton's global competitiveness, the University Commons serves as a catalyst for transformative growth, fostering a vibrant and inclusive community hub that celebrates learning, collaboration, and innovation.



TOP

View of the historic 1922 building and south plaza with the new additional peaking over the roof line.

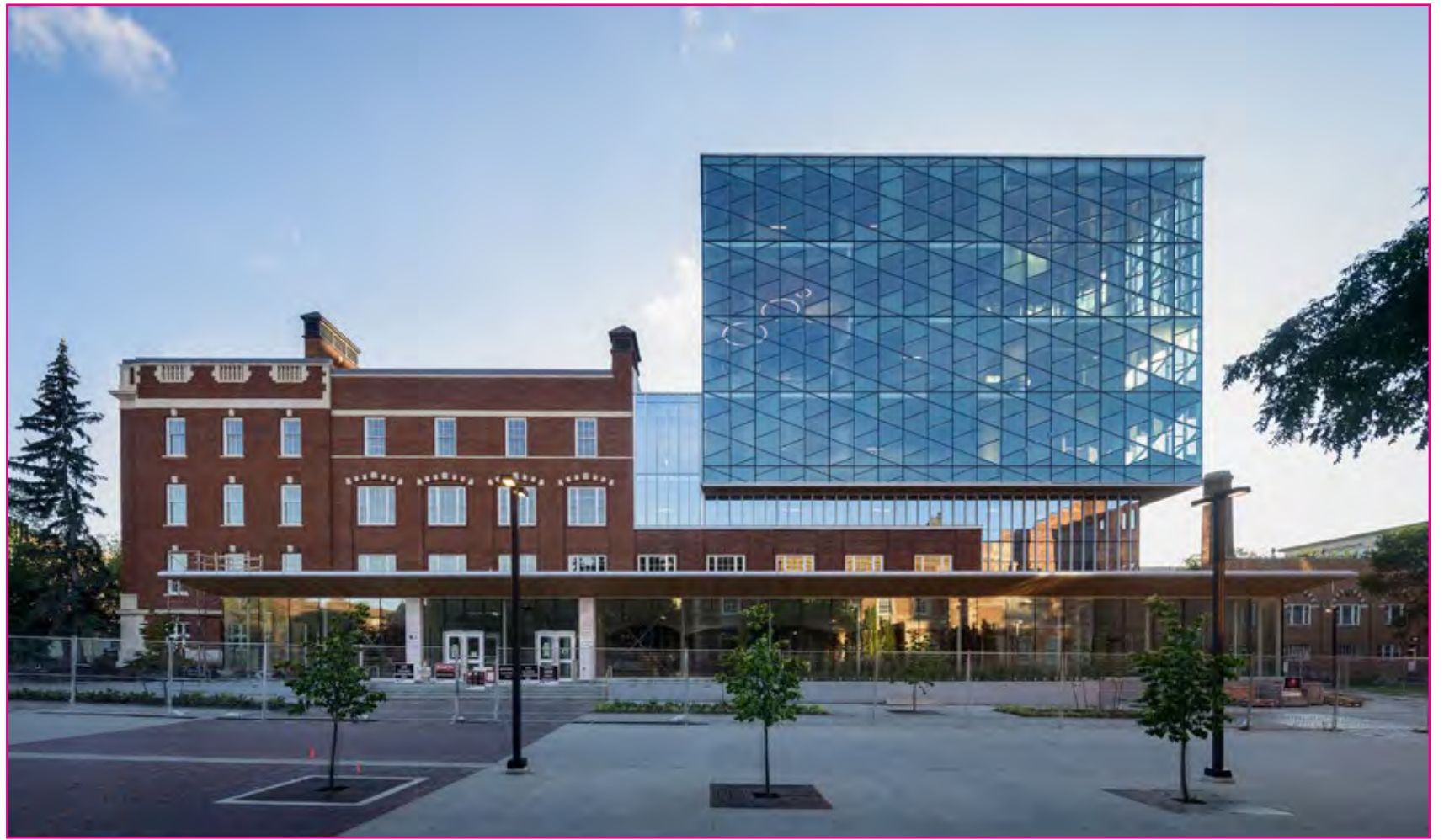
BOTTOM LEFT

Aerial view illustrating the relationship between the old and new buildings.

BOTTOM RIGHT

The student porch wraps the building providing new east and north entrances.





LEFT

View from the 89 Avenue student boulevard.

TOP

View towards the new student porch and accessible east entry.

BOTTOM

Overall site plan illustrating the south plaza and grand arching pathway.



The Buena Vista building (1912) podium

THE MACLAREN

An innovative reimagining of the historic 1912 Buena Vista Building in the Oliver neighbourhood, The MacLaren consists of a 27-storey residential tower atop a commercial podium contained within the façade of the original brick building. The MacLaren preserves the character of this three-storey red brick structure while promoting a modern, urban lifestyle through the state-of-the-art apartments above. A new public pocket plaza is also created within the historic podium, accessible alongside the entrance to the apartments above.

A winner of a 2021 Urban Redevelopment Alberta BILD Award, The MacLaren provides both tenants and passersby the opportunity to experience Edmonton's architectural history. The original Buena Vista building had major code violations and was beyond repair. With little worth preserving on the inside, the design team dismantled the south, north, and west facades of the Buena Vista building for incorporation into the new project: taking apart each brick one at a time so they could be preserved and featured as the refurbished podium wall. This was the best way to preserve the building for future Edmontonians.

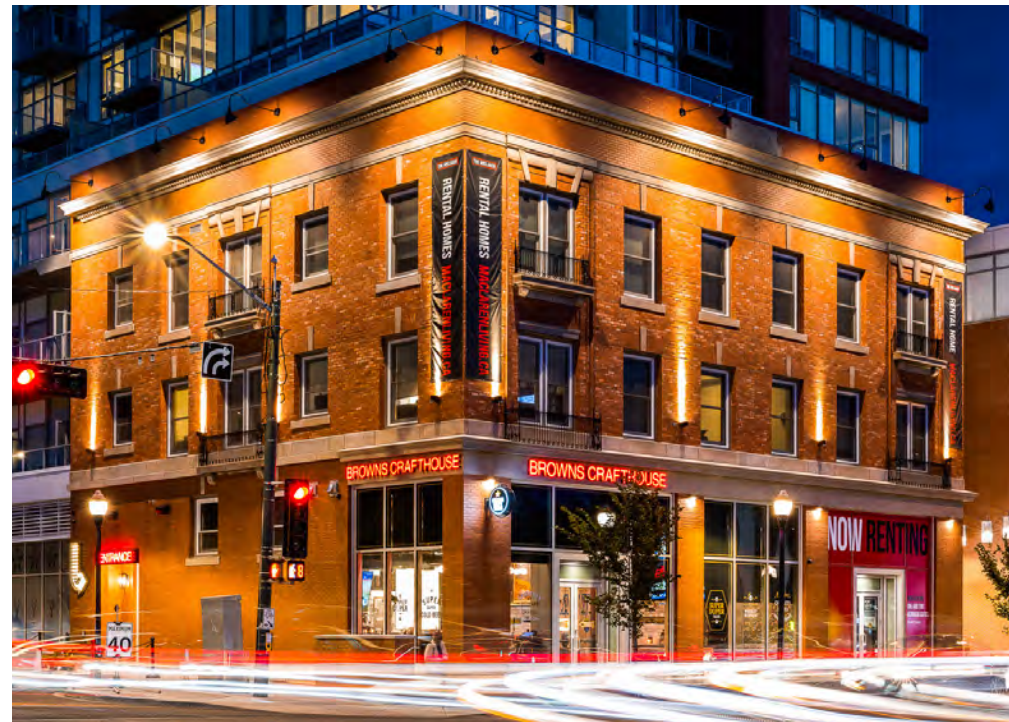
The authentic red brick of the original building is echoed in the community in similarly preserved twentieth century building materials such as in the nearby Edmonton Brewery District. The podium is able to remain contextually consistent with the neighbourhood by leveraging its character as a design starting point. The pedestrian experience was also prioritized in the preservation, providing human-scale interest in the bustling ground level public realm through authentic podium windows and the preserved turn of the century City Grocery and Laura Secord painted signs on the south podium wall. The slim tower design and the setback behind the reconstructed facades reduces the visual impact for pedestrians, promoting a character-forward sidewalk experience. The MacLaren is a stunning example of how good design can come together with preservation to create a charming and walkable community.



MacLaren Residential Tower entrance - modern materials inspired by historical podium next door



Early 20th century "City Grocery" sign



The authentic podium anchors the bustling public realm



The podium and tower and surrounding neighbourhood context

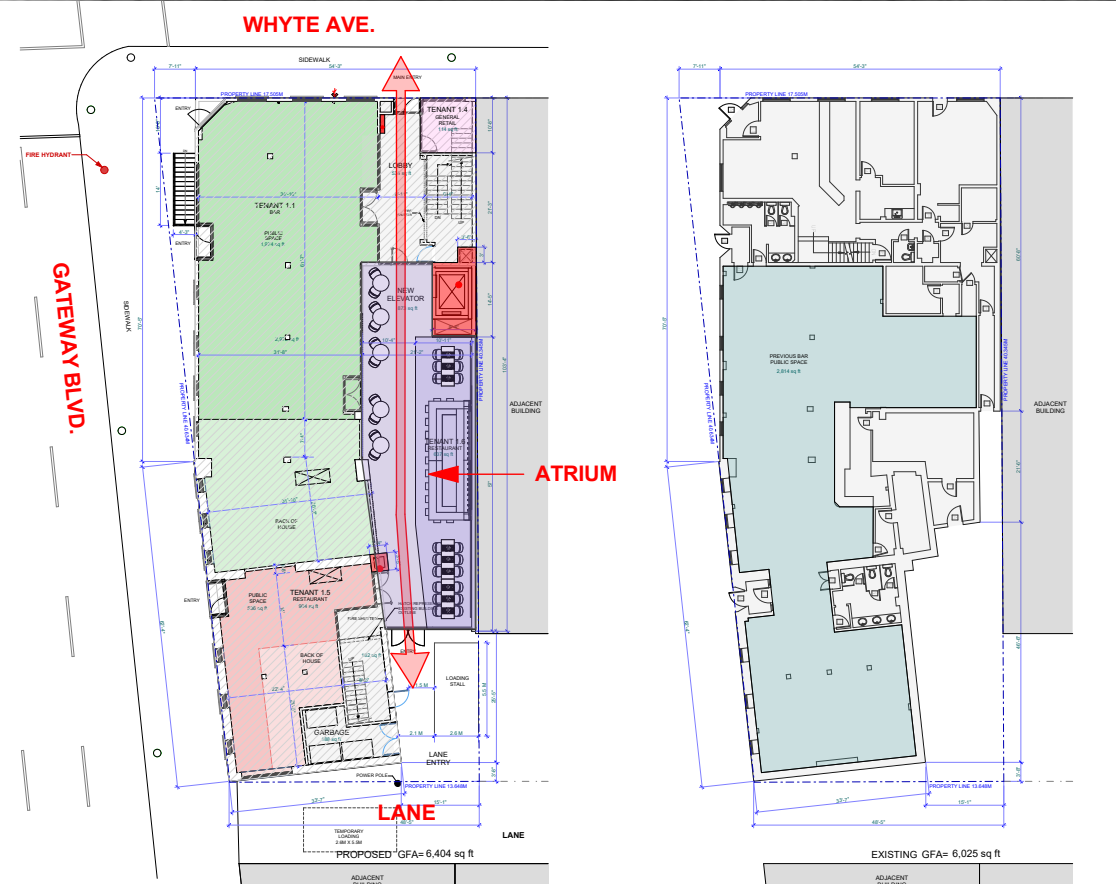
THE STRATHCONA



HISTORIC IMAGE OF HOTEL



VIEW FROM THE CORNER OF WHYTE AVE. & GATEWAY BLVD.



NEW MAIN LEVEL

FORMER MAIN LEVEL

The Strathcona stands as a striking redevelopment of the historic Strathcona Hotel, an architectural gem with a rich past. Originally constructed in 1891 as a 3-storey wood-frame structure, the hotel underwent expansions in 1903 and 1907. Its prominent corner location in Old Strathcona, Edmonton's historic district, adds to its allure. The hotel's historical significance primarily lies in its role as a vital stopover for immigrants arriving after the railway's advent in 1891. Notably, it holds the distinction of being the oldest wood frame commercial structure in the region.

Recognized on the prestigious Alberta Register of Historic Places, the redevelopment approached preservation with care, ensuring the retention of the late Victorian commercial style's defining features. Existing street front building accesses were maintained, and the addition of new openings was avoided to honour its authenticity.

The redevelopment envisioned the entire building transformed into commercial space across all levels. This entailed converting main and basement levels into diverse retail, food, and beverage spaces, while the upper-level residential suites were adapted into flexible commercial areas. Overcoming the challenge of limited exterior entrances, an innovative multi-storey atrium was introduced. This atrium serves as both a visual and physical bridge, connecting various levels and tenant spaces. An interior link connects the main building entrance on Whyte Ave. to the rear alley through the atrium. Notably, feature lighting within the atrium is the creation of a skilled local industrial designer.

The design thoughtfully fosters exterior tenant spaces along Whyte Ave, Gateway Blvd, the adjacent alley, and even an upper-level outdoor patio. These spaces offer occupants a chance to engage with the vibrant ambiance of the Whyte Ave area.

Despite facing setbacks during construction, including a partial fire that damaged a significant portion of the roof, the renovation remained committed to rebuilding these areas according to the original design.

The tenant mix showcases the diversity of businesses, featuring a tavern, barbershop, wine bar, take-out pizzeria, and nut mylk tea shop. The Strathcona is more than a redevelopment; it's a homage to history, an ode to architectural heritage, and a harmonious blend of tradition and contemporary vibrancy.



REFURBISHED SIGNAGE



TENANT SIGNAGE



BUILDING MAIN ENTRANCE



BUILDING AT NIGHT

THE STRATHCONA



VIEW FROM THE CORNER OF WHYTE AVE. & GATEWAY BLVD. AT NIGHT



STREET EDGE ACTIVATION



INTERIOR ATRIUM



CHARACTER TENANT SPACES



LANE ACCESS



FUTURE ROOFTOP PATIO



AERIAL OF REDEVELOPED SITE FACING 124 ST.



BEFORE REDEVELOPMENT



HERITAGE BUILDING PATIO ALONG 124 ST.

The Westmount Substation Redevelopment rejuvenates the historic Street Railway Substation No. 600 on Edmonton's 124 Street, a structure of architectural and historical importance. Erected in 1938, the substation played a pivotal role in the evolution of the Westmount neighbourhood, which flourished alongside the demand for the electric streetcar line connecting it to downtown Edmonton. Substation No. 600 was integral, housing equipment that boosted the efficiency of the street railway by reducing electricity loss.

Following its 1953 retirement, the building lay dormant until its revival in 2019. Recognized on the prestigious Alberta Register of Historic Places, meticulous preservation efforts were undertaken, expanding beyond to a strategic enhancement that balanced program density with historical reverence. A modern 3-story annex at the heritage building's rear boosted functionality while honouring its significance. A sunken front patio not only provided programming potential but also outdoor access to the basement.

A design challenge emerged – maximizing glazing on the southern facade within property line limits. Two innovative solutions emerged: a freestanding fire wall to accommodate more glazing or the audacious choice of purchasing the adjacent southern property. The latter option, chosen, unified properties and allowed a pedway installation, creating a single building per Building Code. This decision magnified presence along 124th street, enhancing pedestrian access and tenant amenities.

This bold choice yielded manifold benefits – enriched streetscape, improved tenant visibility and accessibility, expanded outdoor seating, and spill-out areas. An internal alley linked 124th street to the rear lane, fostering connectivity. An overhead pedway served as a functional connector and elevated platform for upper-level occupants.

The diverse tenant mix, including a micro-brewery, mezcal rock bar, coffee shop, art gallery, salon, interior design business, and more, weaves commerce and culture, enriching resident and visitor experiences. The Westmount Substation Redevelopment harmonizes history with contemporary vitality, symbolizing the neighbourhood's evolution, preserving heritage, and fostering dynamic human interactions. Beyond a physical structure, it encapsulates Edmonton's enduring legacy.



BIKE RACKS AND RETAIL STOREFRONTS

WESTMOUNT SUBSTATION



PEDWAY LOUNGE



NIGHT VIEW ALONG 124 ST.



ALLEY STOREFRONTS W/ PEDWAY ABOVE



BASEMENT PATIO



HISTORIC BUILDING INTERIOR



ALLEY PATIOS

WEST MOUNT SUBSTATION



A laser scan of the exterior was used to verify the extant conditions against the original drawings and develop a Building Information Model that could be used to propose amendments to the storefronts to bring them back to their original design. The existing condition of the building was poor, with layers of renovations altering much of the structure and storefronts, including elements that had been added over time rendering the interiors largely opaque from the street, such as paneling, planters, terraces and an encasing canopy that darkened the interiors. The design restored the original geometry of the storefronts, and stripped away the elements that reduced the connection to the street and the sunlight.

As part of the rehabilitation, historic elements throughout were preserved or maintained in place. Significant structural work goes almost completely unnoticed. Where conservation was not possible, materials were re-purposed, such as the centre-cut Douglas fir from the original roof that needed to be replaced for structural reasons, and now forms a striking backdrop in the front lobby.

The outcome of the project is a successful commercial hub, with active street-oriented commercial uses at grade, adapted upper floors with high-density office and short-term rental suites, and a reactivated rooftop terrace. Restored storefronts re-open the building to the street, providing a high-quality interface with the public and an important cultural asset to the community. We're grateful to have played a part in the process, to see local entrepreneurs thriving in the building, and the greater community re-discovering and engaging with it.

GIBBARD BLOCK REHABILITATION AND ADAPTIVE RE-USE

Built in 1912 as a commercial block with two primary storefronts and nine luxury apartments, the Gibbard Block once boasted the latest in comfort and detail. Despite the toll of age and changing times, the building has maintained its core integrity. This local landmark is both a Municipal and Provincial Historic Resource.

The goal was to retain the original 1912 character and design intent, essentially removing the effects of the last century or so, and integrating changes only when necessary. The team followed the *Standards and Guidelines of Historic Places in Canada* during the rehabilitation.





North Elevation

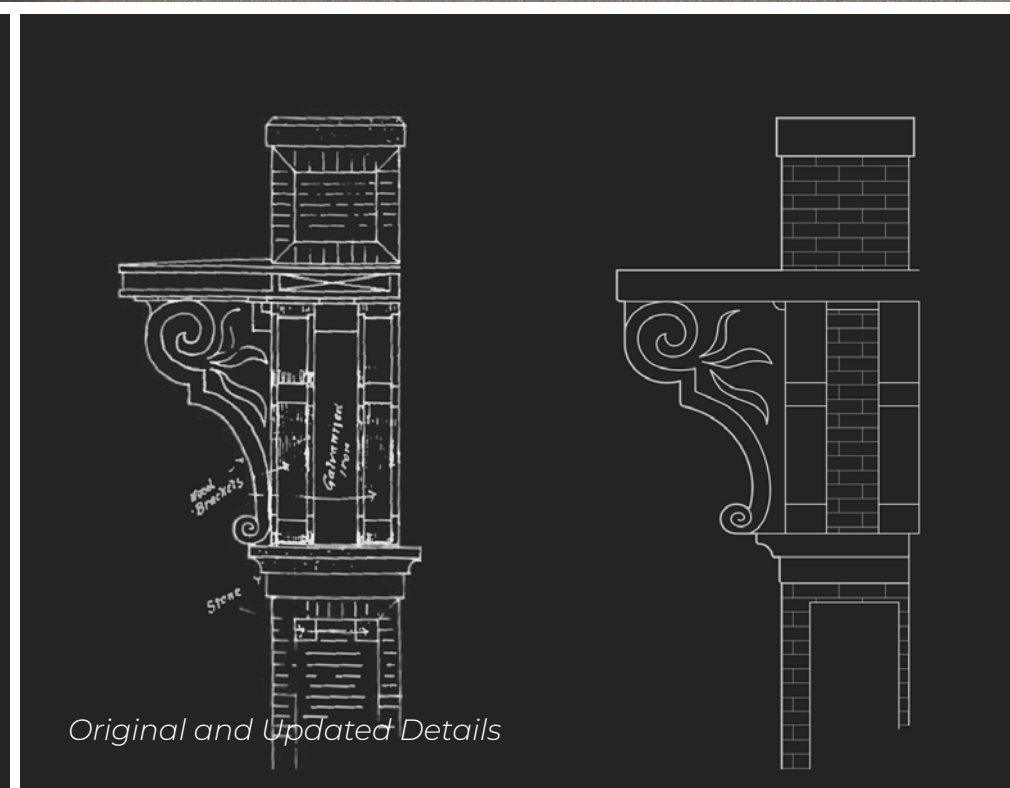
The Gibbard Block is located in the Highlands neighbourhood, and is the crown jewel of a small commercial node supporting the area. Highlands embodies a strong sense of history, with many buildings of heritage significance being celebrated via plaques, books and ongoing events. The restoration and update of this important piece of architecture highlights the history and the culture of the area, and increases its sustainability, flexibility, and adaptability.



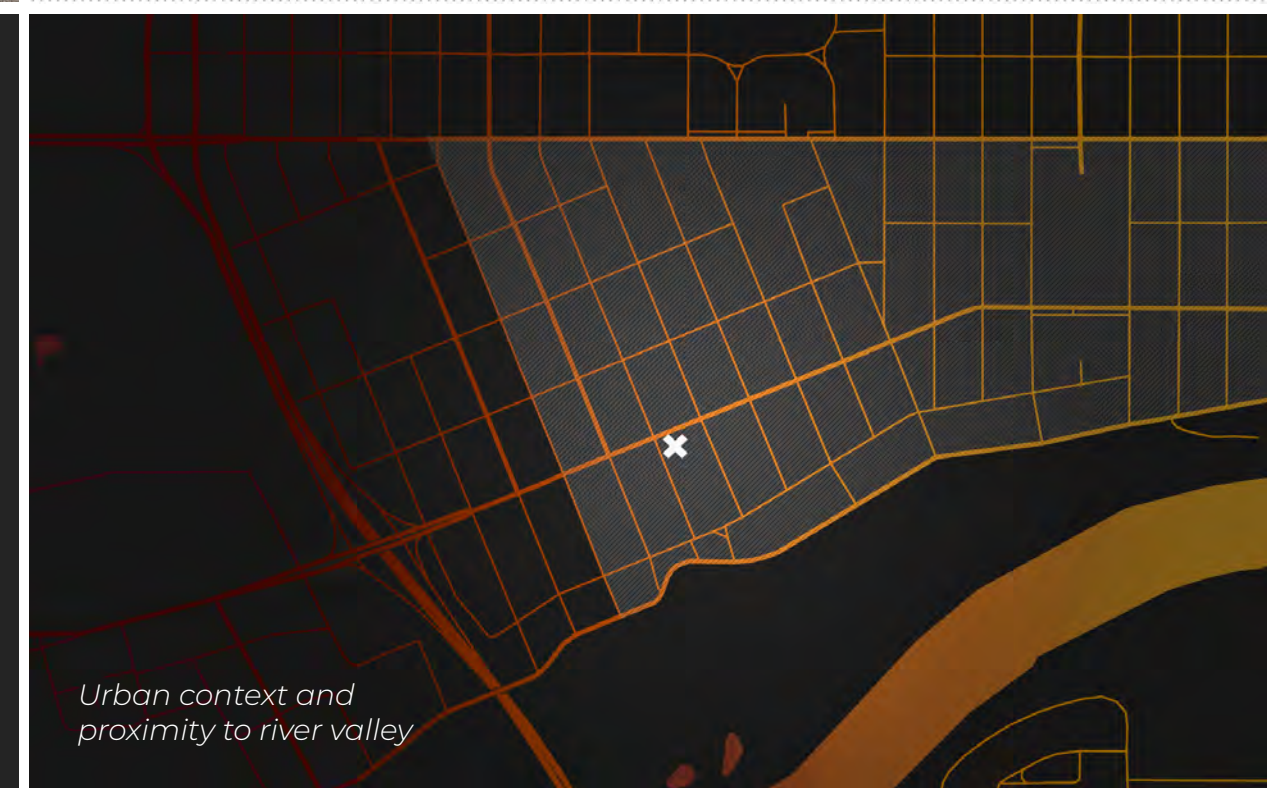
EMBODIED ENERGY COST OF
REPLACEMENT
= ANNUAL GREENHOUSE
GAS EMISSIONS OF 56 CARS



REHABILITATED
• RETENTION OF HISTORIC ASSET
• PROLONGED BUILDING LIFE
• LESS ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT



Original and Updated Details



Urban context and proximity to river valley