telling the story of our research through the public process of the hub

CHARRETTE COMMITTEE
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2004_05 UNIVERSITY OF UTAH HONORS THINK TANK
In a conversation with a Think Tank member at the open house, one city leader made comments to the effect that the people in general are not well enough informed to make decisions in the planning process. His intention was to place the fault on the public, but perhaps it is not the average person who is the cause of the problem. Perhaps more effort should be given to inform the public of future planning decisions and strategies.
what is a charrette?

The term charrette evolved from a pre-1900 exercise at the École des Beaux Arts in France. Architectural students were given a design problem to solve within an allotted time. When that time was up, the students would rush their drawings from the studio to the École in a charrette, the French word for cart. Students often jumped into the cart to finish drawings and respond to comments from critical viewers on the way. The term evolved to refer to the intense design exercise itself.

Modern applications of the process are a bit more confusing. Charrettes come in all shapes and sizes. They are used for local, state, and regional planning processes and can last as long as a week. We adapted the charrette concept into what we thought best fit our constraints—namely time and resources. Our plan included a single public meeting (co-sponsored by Salt Lake City and the Utah Transit Authority) that was focused on presenting information and gathering feedback. Because of the diverse nature of the research that was being conducted, we decided on three methods of presentation—poster boards, interactive exercises, and film.
We made initial contact with Salt Lake City in February 2005. We discovered that there was an on-going planning process that included the Hub area, but that it had come to a halt for various reasons and was just beginning to get started again. It seemed like an ideal opportunity to connect our research to efforts already in process.

We presented a proposal for a jointly-sponsored public open house to Mary Guy-Sell, the city’s Transit Development Manager. The response was very positive. Ms. Guy-Sell explained that an open house had been held in January 2004, and expressed interest in hosting another. We set the date for the first week in April and the location as the newly completed first phase of the Intermodal Hub facility.

We centered the open house around gathering public input. To that end, we created a series of high-quality display boards and a short film presenting the research of the history, housing, and ethnography committees. In addition, the group created several interactive installations, including an open community discussion, general comment forms with suggestion boxes, a series of drawable large scale maps, and a visual preference survey.

The community discussion component of the open house was designed to be similar to a town hall meeting, where people had the opportunity to stand and discuss specific questions they had. The city took charge of ensuring that qualified individuals were present to accurately answer questions. The results of this community discussion were mixed. Although the public came with meaningful questions, and our “experts” had all the answers, few people actually participated. Apparently, too little effort was made at engaging people in dialog.

To elicit written comments, we considered using topic specific comment forms tailored to the subjects of individual displays. We decided, instead, to use a neutral, open-ended form that would allow participants to comment on issues of most concern to them, without being prompted to respond on specific topics. Think Tank members were instructed to ask each visitor to fill out a comment form. We hoped that this would greatly increase the amount of feedback we would receive.
After the open house, we collected the comment boxes and began to look through the feedback forms. Although we had a better than anticipated turnout at the open house, the number of completed forms was below what we had expected.

For the most part, the public seemed most concerned with the plans for extending the TRAX light rail line to the Intermodal Hub. Many seemed to disapprove of the proposal to create two new TRAX stops between the Intermodal Hub and the Delta Center. They seemed to prefer a single stop option. Of particular interest was a full-page typed letter by local business owner Richard Thomas who laid out a logical and well-reasoned argument against the two-stop proposal. According to Thomas, he could, within 9 minutes, walk to four different proposed TRAX stations from the front door of his business. Thomas concluded that it would be faster to walk from the Intermodal Hub to the Delta Center with so many stops slowing down the train.

We also received a number of forms regarding the work done by the Think Tank. The majority of these applauded the involvement of university students in the future of Salt Lake City. Many called for continued public access to the material created by the Think Tank, whether via a website or some form of publication. The research done on the history of the area seemed to be of particular interest. One person noted that the Think Tank had done an “excellent job in highlighting historic events to help educate the public on the importance of this area.” Participants also appreciated our focus on a need for mixed-income housing, some citing the fact that most families were either too poor to afford the luxury condominiums springing up all over the downtown area, or they made too much money to qualify for the subsidized housing that is available. By and large, the comments expressed appreciation for our work and our involvement, and encouraged further participation from the University of Utah.

Perhaps the most pervasive and relevant theme found in the comment forms was a desire to see the area surrounding the Hub become a comfortable walkable neighborhood. Individuals expressed the desire for coffee shops, exercise facilities, small local grocers, and intimate neighborhood bars. Further, those participating wanted green space in the form of trees and grass, and places to sit and enjoy the quiet and peace. Overall, open house participants indicated a desire for an intimate, friendly, and familiar setting for what will become the entryway to Salt Lake City.
mapping
the story

The Idea
Maps are an efficient visual medium to show information about an area’s past and present. For example, the Think Tank’s history committee used historic maps—such as a mid-nineteenth century bird’s-eye-view of Salt Lake City or the later series of Sanborn fire insurance maps—to learn about the past of the Rio Grande District, bring the area’s history to life, and connect historic photographs to the current places they depicted. The ethnographic committee used maps to help those they interviewed recount the stories about the area and their experiences in it.

Maps also offer a unique visual means of figuring out a neighborhood’s potential and deciding its direction. The charrette committee used maps at the community open house to discover the public’s ideas, hopes, and concerns about the Hub district and its future. The open house’s mapping station, “Mapping the Story,” was set up to complement the visual preference survey and comment forms, and to provide participants another opportunity to have their voices heard. Unlike the other forms of feedback gathered at the community forum, these maps allowed respondents to see the current situation in the area and then visually express their ideas and opinions. Participants had to carefully consider what they wanted to see in the area. For example, they had to not only envision a grocery store, but also decide where in the neighborhood it would be, how large it would be, and how it would interact with its surroundings. The hope was that each person in attendance would offer suggestions for the area: what could be improved, what should be built in the future, and what possibilities there are in upcoming changes.

The Process
We printed ten maps that were approximately 36” by 54”. These maps included a light, black-and-white aerial photograph of Blocks 46 and 63 and bordering areas. Orienting points such as streets, the Rio Grande Depot, the Intermodal Hub, and The Gateway were labeled. The maps were made available, along with markers, on two tables at the open house. An instruction board directed participants to use the markers provided to
draw any ideas they had for the area directly on the maps—to illustrate specifically what they wanted in the neighborhood and where they wanted it.

The Results
In reviewing the maps, a few trends become apparent:

- Many Salt Lake City residents want to bring their city, and these blocks in particular, down to a more human scale. Concerns include the size and architecture of buildings and pedestrian-friendly streets and sidewalks. Participants also recommended dividing the ten-acre blocks into smaller parcels using streets, green space, and pedestrian paths. This would result in smaller, more manageable, and more comprehensible spaces in the district. Specific suggestions included adding more shade trees on the plaza at 300 South and 500 West and making 300 South more pedestrian friendly.

- Participants supported locating an aquarium on Block 46 (a possible use for the area that had been the subject of recent media coverage).

- People want neighborhood businesses such as a grocery store and cafés. They also want restaurants already in the area to provide outdoor seating on the sidewalk.

While most comments concerned the quality and texture of the area as a neighborhood, there were some suggestions for things that would draw people from a larger area. Among these were a baseball diamond, a skate park, and an outdoor music venue.

There were even a few unusual and amusing suggestions for the blocks: a goat farm, a lighthouse, “infill sprawl” (a new suburban neighborhood in the heart of one of the blocks), and a statue of Sasquatch. While these suggestions were most likely not serious, they provided a good laugh. Besides, perhaps a lighthouse over 700 miles from the nearest coast could prove to be a big tourist draw. Especially if it has a statue of Sasquatch on top and is filled with goats.

Perhaps the most important result of the mapping exercise was that people responded and drew on the maps, indicating a level of care about the city and this neighborhood. The maps are among the first pages in the story of this area’s future—a future that can be shaped to a large degree by the regular people who will live, work, and just pass through this place every day.
After the open house, the maps were returned to the College of Architecture + Planning at the University of Utah for storage. For the purpose of analysis, each map was assigned a number. The following is a complete list of comments made on the maps.

**Map 1**
- subdivide big blocks
- playground
- Hub Pub—UI&S Co [bar]
- possible 45° parking
- Outdoor Seating in front of buildings
- landscaped medians on 300 South between hub & depot
- grocery store—YES! YES! YES!
- !!!!—closer to Dakota Lofts!
- not a big box
- small business (independent)—I support local businesses

**Map 2**
- shade trees [on plaza at 500 West 300 South]
- bar
- Hub Pub
- New sign: “loitering encouraged”!
- provide more urban design options for the homeless. More transitional housing, that looks more architecturally integrated with new dev.
- small storefronts; windows [at The Gateway and 200 South]
- mixed income housing—ground lev. retail
- make sidewalks wider—bring community out on the street neighborhood grocery

**Maps 3, 4, and 5:** These maps had no comments on them.

**Map 6**
- baseball diamond
- Power Exchange (Scott’s hangout)
- park—green space
- DENSITY DENSITY DENSITY—all of these blocks need to be broken up, too boring! walkable paths & interesting vistas
- AQUARIUM
- Rimini Coffee HQ
- mixed-use residential/commercial café—outdoor seating housing

**Map 7**
- AQUARIUM
- grocery store somewhere in the neighborhood
- outdoor market
- skate park
- residential book store
- record store—café
- interesting street network
- (tall) higher buildings toward center of block
roundabouts/45° parking—sq. footage restrictions
make Target fit into this ☺
PRESERVE VIEWS—lower height on immediate structures; glass [on east side of Intermodal Hub]

Map 8
office space visible to freeway (4th South)
parking [at center of block 46]— [response:] NO WAY!
Hidden/underground only.
VERTICAL MIXED USE/Break up these blocks for PEOPLE
Res/retail
trees [over Utah Ice and Storage Company building; response from another visitor:] leave this beautiful building here. Preserve our history
Res/office/retail
small/grocery store
lighthouse
goat farm
no big box retail anywhere!
need on-street parking and freight loading zone

Map 9
new movement—‘infill sprawl’ ☺ [a new cul-de-sac leading to suburban-style lots and houses

was drawn on the map]
Utah State Records Center?
Make street one-way with wide sidewalks
PIAZZA—wireless internet, obelisk, pet-friendly area
hub pub [written twice]
road [with reference to breaking up the blocks]
install a statue of Sasquatch carrying a 6 pack of beer
Grecian Café
Condos
Amtrak: Let’s hope it is still here

Map 10
How about an outdoor music venue? People get off commuter rail or light rail and walk into a concert…
BRING BACK Little Italy, Syria, Greek Town. Build on our HISTORY. Not just historical markers.
The Hub Pub
Human-size chess board
park/playground
community garden
hidden or underground parking requirements
Grecian Café
Where is the low-income housing??
visual preference survey

Visual preference surveys provide the opportunity for residents, architects, designers, business owners, community leaders, and others to create a collaborative vision for the future. Usually, surveys consist of a series of photographs of different development and land-use patterns, transportation issues, and other elements that might be relevant. Participants are asked to rate each photograph, and then the highest-rated pictures are used as a prototype for future development. Most visual preference surveys are conducted by showing pictures one after the other and asking participants to rate them as they are shown. Designers use the themes, scale, mix of activity, or characteristics of the photographs to guide them in their work.

The Honors Think Tank took the principle of the visual preference survey and adapted the process to meet our specific needs. Instead of showing generic photographs, the Think Tank chose to use design drawings that IBI Group had created for blocks 46 and 63. For block 63, where The Venue nightclub is currently located, IBI provided three options which illustrate various ways to break up the block, make it more pedestrian-friendly, and add green space while preserving most of the existing structures. Four options were provided for block 46, where the historic Utah Ice and Storage building is located. Finally, six street design options were supplied for 300 South between the Rio Grand Depot and the Intermodal Hub. The charrette committee put all the options on poster boards with descriptions (also provided by IBI) about each option. This allowed participants to compare and contrast each idea. Respondents rated each option and completed the survey at their own pace. The purpose was to see which options the public found most favorable.

It should be noted that the survey was not comprehensive and gave respondents only a limited number of options; those with different ideas, however, could draw them on the maps at the “Mapping the Story” station (described above).

There were 83 participants who took the visual preference survey. Participants rated each option on a scale of 1 to 5, with the following scoring system: 1, strongly dislike; 2, somewhat dislike; 3, neutral, 4,
somewhat favor; and 5, strongly favor. Because not all participants evaluated every option, no option was rated 83 times. Option C from block 46 received the most evaluations (80). For whatever reason, the street-infill portion of the survey received the least amount of participation; many participants simply left this section blank. One individual noted that all the options suggested keeping traffic flow to a minimum while perhaps it would be expedient to keep traffic flow to a maximum. Further, in some cases, some options had more than one number circled. In these cases the higher number was used for scoring purposes unless it was evident that the participant had changed their mind from the higher number to the lower one.

The results of the survey are outlined on the following pages. We hope the information will be valuable to the city as it proceeds with the development of the Hub district. It would be interesting and informative to conduct the survey several times with different groups of people. The survey could also be provided online so even more people could participate. Hopefully, property owners, the city, and the people of Salt Lake can come together and see this area develop in a way that would be advantageous to all.

The drawings and associated descriptions on pages 100-105 are provided courtesy of IBI Group.
options

**Option A**
Block is split to exploit, as much as possible, existing openings between buildings and railway right-of-way. Small green space located, as much as possible, in already open space on site. East–west street aligns with entry to Intermodal Center across 600 West. Infill development could be in keeping with style and scale of existing buildings. Opportunities for higher density, mixed use residential exist at 600 West and 300 South, facing Intermodal Center, and mid block along 500 West. Smaller scale residential development could focus along internal streets and green space.

**Option B**
Approximate quarter block subdivision of block with central green space. This allows development immediately south of buildings on 200 South, screening their “service” sides from green space. Development patterns could be similar to Option A.

**Option C**
Block is split in modified “half/third” and “quarter block” configuration, creating a finer “grain” along 300 South. Development patterns could be similar to Option A.
results

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<th>option</th>
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<th>somewhat dislike</th>
<th>neutral</th>
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<th>total votes</th>
<th>average score</th>
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**highest-rated option**

A  
average score: **4.14** out of 5
Option A by far was rated the most in the “strongly favor” category.

**lowest-rated option**

B  
average score: **2.97** out of 5
Option B was rated 20 times as “somewhat dislike,” accounting for about 25% of option B’s total.
block 46
bounded by 300 South, 500 West, 400 South, and 600 West

existing block

options

Option A
Block cell is split in modified ‘nine square’ configuration. Site could develop as medium density office, with an office/mixed use focus along 300 South.

Option B
This option is also based on ‘nine square’ configuration, but introduces a green space. The perimeter of the block might develop as office and mixed-use office/retail, with the interior developing as residential.

Option C
A ‘half/third’ block cut is employed here to further break down the scale of the original and strengthen through-block connections. A large park is the focus of the block. This configuration might be amenable to a greater focus on residential development.

Option D
Block is split in modified “half/third” configuration with small park space. This configuration respects the large property at the east, a potential aquarium site.
### results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>option</th>
<th>1 strongly dislike</th>
<th>2 somewhat dislike</th>
<th>3 neutral</th>
<th>4 somewhat favor</th>
<th>5 strongly favor</th>
<th>total score</th>
<th>total votes</th>
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<td>15</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>72</td>
<td><strong>3.49</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**highest-rated option**

**C**

average score: **3.91** out of 5

Although there wasn’t much difference in the “somewhat favor” category, option C was dominant in the “strongly favor” category.

**lowest-rated option**

**A**

average score: **2.23** out of 5

Option A was not rated once as “strongly favor.” This option elicited strong negative responses.
**street infill development**

300 South between 500 and 600 West

**options**

**Option A**

*Large mid–street zone as developable property*

Multistory mixed use development. Possible below grade parking. Retail, gallery, small office uses at street level. Keep through traffic function. Provide on-street parking. Keep travel lane widths to a minimum.

**Option B**

*Seasonal street fair—farmer’s market or art walk*

Pedestrian-scale street lights with banner arms. Trees in planters with white Tivoli lights. Encourage street vending and busker performances. On-street parking and bike lanes. Keep travel lane widths to a minimum.

**Option C**

*Supplemental mid-street angled parking with safe pedestrian access*

Trees in planters for enhancement and safety. Add decorative bollards along mid-street walkway. A further short term benefit with mid street parking seems to be that of “traffic calming (as elsewhere on 300 South).*
**Option D**
Create large central median for public use
Utilize as linear plaza or park. Add retail kiosks, green space, fountains, etc. Provide on-street parking and bike lanes. Keep travel lane widths to a minimum. Provide “bulb outs” at intersections. Provide structured left turn lanes.

**Option E**
Maximize sidewalk width on one side of street
Utilize enhanced public space or utilize excess as developable space. Provide on-street parking and bike lanes. Keep travel lane widths to a minimum. Provide “bulb outs” at intersection. Provide structured median with trees.

**Option F**
Maximize sidewalk widths on both sides of street
Utilize as enhanced public space or utilize excess as developable space. Provide on-street parking and bike lanes. Keep travel lane widths to a minimum. Provide “bulb outs” at intersections. Provide structured median with trees.
The idea of extending the Farmers’ Market from Pioneer Park to this block was popular.

Option E had an average score just below option C. It is interesting to note that neither C nor E had the highest number of “strongly dislike” ratings. The radical mid-street building in option A got strong positive and negative responses from participants.
Our intention as a committee was to provide an opportunity for all individuals who were interested in, or who would be affected by, the future development of the area surrounding the Intermodal Hub to have their voices heard and their concerns taken into consideration. Being neither developer nor government agency gave us the advantage of remaining neutral to all proposals.

One lesson we learned along the way was that a little advertising can go a long way. A few phone calls, emails, and faxes were the difference between the expected turnout for the community open house—which was 100—and the actual turnout—which was estimated at 300. People are interested in what is happening in their neighborhood. They care about the future of their city.
We must never forget that a city belongs to its residents. Officials are elected, appointments are made, and employees are hired to ensure the will of the people is brought to life. In a conversation with a Think Tank member at the open house, one city leader made comments to the effect that the people in general are not well enough informed to make decisions in the planning process. His intention was to place the fault on the public in general, but perhaps it is not the average person who is the cause of the problem. Perhaps more effort should be given to inform the public of future planning decisions and strategies. Not everyone is an expert city planner or architect, but everyone should have a voice when it comes to deciding the future of what is ultimately theirs—their city.
It is difficult to articulate “the sense of an ending” for this experience. Just as Frank Kermode suggests in his literary analysis, this is an artificial construct, needed more for the comfort and cultural expectations of the reader than in any way a reflection of temporal boundaries. However, we did find ourselves at the end of the academic year, and at the end of our formal gatherings as a group. So this kind of ending applies to our classroom meetings and not to the influences that will resonate in our work and imaginations.

I have never been involved in a class that was as open and potentially creative as this one. I situate this kind of experience within Greg Ulmer’s pedagogy of invention (1994). According to Ulmer, heuristics, or the “logic of invention,” shifts responses to readings from interpretive to inventive. Invention follows as a response to analysis: from hermeneutics to heuristics, using theory not only to interpret an object of study but also to design a poetics.

The levels of dedication, concentration, and responsibility differ from that of a more traditional class. In such a setting, everyone has to take the work seriously. That is not to say it wasn’t fun; and certainly not to ignore the potential to liberate the imagination, but it requires a commitment we seldom see from students in our new business model of education. It differs dramatically from the usual classes in which students are often absent,
indifferent, or even hostile; and in which they “expect to get the grades they have paid for.”
The Think Tank model not only gives students an opportunity to have a more intimate experience as learners, but also provides faculty with a renewed sense of the importance of our own work.

So what kinds of things did we invent in our classes? As you have read, students wrote a series of essays describing their research and findings. Their approaches incorporated interdisciplinary perspectives: they recognized through their work the interrelationships of history, politics, economics, the dynamics of current social processes, and the embodied voices of those who are living around or near The Hub.

According to the students, “Everybody Has a Story,” and it was through this emphasis on constructions of narratives or storytelling that the students found their voices and were able to help others articulate for themselves. So we find a project that links social structures with historical roots. According to William Whyte (1980), “any study of an organization or community must be built on a firm historical base” (p. 161). For example the ethnographic interviews and the politics of housing are embedded to a degree in this sense of history. History is embedded in the attitudes and values that inform the politics of housing and homelessness. Having gained an understanding of the importance of context helped us see how this kind of project could be further developed and enriched; and importantly, gave the class a sense of the complexity of research, field work, and of representing the voices of others.

So if I respond to the work of the students—that is, if I use theory to first analyze the classroom processes in the production of this kind of “pedagogical text,” and I return to Ulmer’s theory, I should invent from this experience a poetics of pedagogy.

What if I travel from the issue of housing to the crisis of homelessness to the idea of home. What if this takes me to intersect with the idea of the exile and the wanderer. I entered the class as an exile, having been absent during the beginning semester, due to an immense tragedy. I wandered through the process, trying to find a place, trying to find
home. My heart is moved by the exiles in Pioneer Park we encountered: interviews with the homeless, the wanderers, who search ceaselessly for a safe place to rest. Exile is written on their bodies, on their faces, in their eyes. I wonder how they became homeless, what in their lives causes them to wander, how we look to them, what questions they would ask us if they had the video camera in their hands.

Their stories are of poverty, sorrow, freedom, and fear. They tell us of corruption in the shelters and of their sense of place in the park. My response to them is emotional, another aspect of Ulmer’s theory, academic research “whose structure would come from an emotion rather than from analysis or in which the emotion associated with analysis” guides the invention (p. 257). Perhaps it was this emotional response that guided the housing group to imagine homes that reflect more social justice and to suggest as part of their project, a way to design inclusive and integrated housing that promotes hope, possibility, and democracy.

The historical essay is responsive to both the successes and failures of the people in Salt Lake City and to the erasure of the cultures that lived in harmony with this dry and dramatic place, and demonstrates, along with all the other groups, a perspective shift from one that is individually centered to one that emphasizes context, continuities, and interactions.

So back to the top of Ensign Peak, back to the vastness of the West, back to the place of Salt Lake City within the natural and historical context of the land, back to take another look. Looking down on the city lends context and complexity to this place. We have been in the city, we have seen the faces of the people who live here and tried to imagine the lives of those who lived before. The view is sweeping, but the city has taken on many other dimensions, defined by the lives and hopes of the people we have met.

So thank you Martha Bradley for the opportunity to be a part of this experience; thank you Ann Darling for holding my place with such care; thank you Keith Bartholomew for being a perfect inspiration, and thank you students for helping me find a sense of place.
References


