Synopsis  I How do we redevelop the city for the next generation? Vibrant public spaces, efficient buildings, alternative transportation, and mixed-use neighborhoods. The Urban Design, Community Redevelopment studio explored how to leverage the arena investment, create value for downtown, and transform the entertainment district.

Solutions envision great places to live, play, and work for all ages. Residential choices provide opportunities for people to live west of the river and activate the neighborhood 24/7. Entertainment venues, cafes, and restaurants attract residents, employees, and visitors. Offices allow residents to walk to work, as well as bring people to the area. Great public spaces create memorable images, engage people, embrace our culture, and develop the iconic downtown Milwaukee deserves. The future is about more than sports, it is about utilizing a mix of uses, architecture, and landscape to transform an area with blank walls and parking lots, into a vibrant, walkable district.

Carolyn Esswein, AICP, CNU-A

Site and Context  I The proposed arena district redevelopment fits within twelve blocks of Westown in Milwaukee and expands in some student proposals to surrounding blocks. The site is defined as Juneau Avenue to the north, Kilbourn Avenue to the south, Milwaukee River on the east, and 6th Street on the west.

There is easy access from both I-43 and I-794 and pedestrian access from the east side of the river via all of the east/west running roads: Juneau Avenue, Highland Avenue, State Street, and Kilbourn Avenue.

The BMO Harris Bradley Center currently occupies two city blocks, between 4th and 6th Streets and Juneau and Highland Avenues. The Arena is slated to be
demolished following the completion of a new arena one block north of the current location.

Four of the twelve blocks include housing, with the majority of current uses being entertainment venues, restaurants, and support uses. The site is diverse in the population served, as it holds both the BMO Harris Arena and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Panther Arena. Additionally, it services the Milwaukee Area Technical College with a large parking garage and is home to one of Milwaukee’s historical treasures, Turner Hall. Various restaurants and retail outlets line the historical and small-scale Old World 3rd Street. The scale and style of Old World 3rd Street contrasts new additions to the site, such as the sleek Moderne which towers over the site with more than thirty floors. The diversity of building types and businesses, and the unique programming that comes with an arena, were key factors for design consideration. The Milwaukee River provides an environmental amenity and is an extension of Pere Marquette Park, but is not easily visible from at ground level from other properties.

Program

The program was flexible, with priorities being well-designed public spaces, mixed-use developments, residential units, a walkable neighborhood, and response to the proposed arena design as shown in preliminary renderings by Populous. The goal was to propose a vibrant district where people will want to live, work, and socialize, and serve as a destination within downtown Milwaukee. Programming also extended into the streets, as designs were required to integrate and highlight the inclusion of the new Milwaukee streetcar, which is projected to run north/south along 4th Street, affecting future access to the site. The streetcar moved into its final design phase in spring 2015 and is expected to be under construction by spring 2016.

Process

Students approached the redevelopment design in two phases. The first phase was at the master-plan level where emphasis was placed on massing, building footprint, and general programming for the full twelve block area. Students were encouraged to integrate design ideas and influences from Mary Miss, a New York-based artist who specializes in using cities as living laboratories and encourages small and large scale sustainable interventions to be incorporated in city design and education. Miss sat in on early design critiques to give preliminary advice. Following a larger review with professional architects, planners, and city staff planners, students moved into the second phase which focused on refining the master plan and designing a public space within their schemes.

The design process was iterative, with reviews held approximately every two weeks. Precedent studies and pertinent design information was gathered and presented by urban planning graduate student, Julee Mitchell. Students were encouraged to use Mitchell’s research as well as their own explorations and include them as part of their presentations. Examples of building typologies, responsible water harvesting systems, and public art installations were commonly chosen.

The midterm presentations were held at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning building atrium on Tuesday, April 7, 2015. Final presentations were held in the atrium of the BMO Harris Bradley Center on Tuesday, May 12, 2015. Twelve students presented their projects to members of the city and other critics. Following the primary presentations, all fifteen students displayed their work during an Open House for local developers, property owners, design professionals, and stakeholders. Eight of the student proposals were exhibited at Gallery Night and Day, July 24-25, 2015 as part of a three-month exhibit at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee SARUP Mobile Design Box at the North End.