

Team Qualifications

Our team consists of four members with diverse backgrounds: Jennifer Wong, Alexander Morley, Malia Kalahale, and Paul Sorenson. All four members have lived in St. Louis, Missouri for over two years, and have received or are currently pursuing graduate degrees in architecture, social work, and urban design from Washington University in St. Louis. Our team members have developed strong bonds and relationships within the university community as well as the larger St. Louis community.

Jennifer Wong, MArch + MUD Candidate, 2013 LEED Green Associate. Jennifer earned her Bachelors of Fine Arts from Bard College in 2008. She has extensive experience with installation work. In 2009, Jennifer lived in Berlin as an Artist in Residence with the Takt Residency program. Using common materials in a sculptural manner, she held two solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group installations. Jennifer is very active in the Washington University community. She participated in the 2011 installation of the *PLASTI(k)* pavilion located in the Botanical Heights neighborhood of St. Louis, and she won a spot in the 2011 Sukkah City STL Competition in collaboration with team member Alexander Morley. Jennifer is committed to the study of sustainable urbanism and site-specific installations.

Alexander Morley, MArch Candidate, 2013, LEED Green Associate. Alexander graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Lehigh University in 2008, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture and a minor in History. As an undergraduate, Alexander spent nine months in Copenhagen in 2006 to study urbanism in Denmark under associates of Gehl Architects. After graduation, Alexander remained at Lehigh University for a fifth year as a Presidential Scholar to design and build a house for Habitat for Humanity on a narrow infill lot in Bethlehem, PA. During this time he also interned for Arup in New York City to help initiate a feasibility study for an urban regeneration project in Hunt's Point, Brooklyn. While at Washington University, Alexander teamed with Jennifer Wong in 2011 for their winning entry in the Sukkah City STL competition. He has participated in several courses that focus on community development in St. Louis and planning policy.

Malia Kalahale, MArch Candidate, 2013. Malia earned her Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Portland State University in 2007. Before attending Washington University, she participated in a 10-week community development and design/build studio in New Orleans, organized and taught by Bryan Bell and Design Corps in 2009. Working with the Hollygrove neighborhood, Malia helped design and construct a site-specific bus shelter to strengthen the community's connection to the city. Her interest in urban revitalization prompted her to attend graduate school in St. Louis. During the summer of 2011, she participated in CityStudioSTL, a design/build workshop in Hyde Park, organized and taught by Theaster Gates Jr. The multi-disciplinary course worked with Gates' ReBuild Foundation and the Hyde Park community to rehabilitate a neighborhood building into an arts center that provides after-school and summer programs for elementary students. After the studio, Malia continued to volunteer with the ReBuild Foundation for the next seven months.

Paul Sorenson, MSW, 2012. Paul specializes in social entrepreneurship and economic development. He has been heavily involved in St. Louis community development during his time as a student and is now employed at Grace Hill Settlement House, where he started as a practicum student in January 2011. His current position encompasses planning and implementing volunteer management, civic engagement and partnerships in target St. Louis neighborhoods, specifically Old North and College Hill. Paul has been actively involved in numerous programs, studies, and assessments of St. Louis communities, focusing his energy on place-based community development. In collaboration with Aldermen and community leaders, Paul has worked to improve educational advancement, economic & neighborhood development. He plans to continue this work throughout his career.

The Neighborhood

The community in the Old North St. Louis neighborhood has established a vested interest in its own revitalization. This area benefits from a strong history created by residents, employees, and business owners who have taken the neighborhood into their hearts and call it home. The nearly 200-year old village has a wealth of historic brick buildings and several family-owned anchor businesses that have helped to establish a strong identity. Frequent organized and spontaneous neighborhood events have developed enduring community relationships. A well-run community website maintained by the ONSL Restoration Group helps keep the residents and public-at-large informed and involved with the evolving neighborhood.

Although the neighborhood has seen significant investment and renovation since the 2006 redevelopment effort, there remains a discernible amount of unoccupied buildings, vacant lots, and a need for more neighborhood amenities. While anchor businesses such as Crown Candy are popular magnets for people outside of Old North, many visitors do not further engage the adjacent businesses along the 14th street corridor or the neighborhood beyond this district. There is a lack of outdoor gathering areas with ample protection from the extreme seasonal weather of St Louis.

Program Concept:

Our overarching concept is to strengthen the core of Old North to better serve the local businesses and residents. While we believe in the need to draw new people into the neighborhood, we maintain that the first step in community development is to energize the community and its assets. Once established, we want to broadcast these strengths to the adjacent neighborhoods and the regional St. Louis area.

We propose to develop a flexible space to serve as a catalyst for community events. In a neighborhood with limited means, versatility is key. We want to strengthen the existing activity at both a neighborhood and citywide scale. A flexible event space would serve as a venue to host and supplement new and existing events in the community, serving Old North residents, while drawing in people from outside the neighborhood. When the site is not aiding active events in the community, it becomes a passive gathering space for the public. By allowing the community to use the space spontaneously, we hope to spark a sense ownership over the lot. The duality of formal and informal use of the site will allow Old North residents to curate activity themselves, and we hope this will facilitate the delicate process of building community participation.

To assist in cultivating a sense of ownership, we wish to include multi-functional tools and instruments in the design that encourage use at both active and inactive times. With an affordable and flexible tool like chalk, for example, an inactive site transforms into a community bulletin board or information hub to inform both residents and passerby of current events and news. Engaging further with the neighboring business owners and residents of Old North will be crucial in developing a responsible participatory design process to decide what is right for the site.

In addition to cultivating a participatory design process, we will address the broad issues of environmental and social sustainability at every stage of the undertaking. This will include, but will not be limited to, passive climatic strategies of wind, light, and shading, the use of recycled and reused materials from local sources, and the engagement of the community with education and awareness of these concepts. These are all low cost, high impact approaches that are easily implemented when planned for at the inception of the project.

Site Selection:

We would most like to address the infill condition on Lot #3. We believe that the best way to strengthen the core of Old North is to build immediately off the areas that have the strongest existing infrastructure and densest amount of communal amenities. We began investigating the sites with frontage on 14th Street, the most established corridor in the neighborhood and the main artery of the redevelopment effort. We were more attracted to infill lots, as they maximize our potential to partner with adjacent tenants, owners, and create a more active and safe public space. The proximity will help better facilitate our program concept to strengthen neighboring commercial activities, while providing them with a platform to draw in new customers.

We also feel that the unique constraints of infill conditions allow opportunities for more place-based and exciting designs than an open lot. Because of this, our ideal site is Lot #3; the adjacent tenants include Headhunters Barber & Beauty, an established long-term anchor business, and Rambles Gift Gallery & Boutique, whose owner has expressed interest in hosting events in the adjacent lot. The gravel covered site is sometimes used as a parking area, which can easily be relocated to the ample parking available along the corridor and does not have the same easement restrictions for occupation as Lot #2, which is our second choice. Regardless, we feel strongly in choosing an infill site, as it will be a visible, safe space for residents to interact with each other, and allow for partnerships along the entire 14th Street corridor. With continued efforts to engage Old North and involve the community with their input and ideas, the site will serve as a magnet for people who are visiting other businesses in the area, and as a visible catalyst for neighborhood events.