Studio 4

Conway, Arkansas

Spring 2007

This studio grew out of a 2002 urban design study we did in our private practice. Unlike many communities we work with, Conway's population is mushrooming. The energetic young people and city fathers we worked with are managing challenges of growth, not decline. They want to make the heart of the city more attractive and introduce similar amenities to the approach off the interstate. The two student and faculty trips to Conway were funded by a generous gift from Champion Enterprises, Inc.

ABOUT 70 PERCENT OF CONWAY'S employed residents work in town, and all three institutions of higher learning—the University of Central Arkansas, Hendrix College, and Central Baptist College—are located in the city and not in the countryside, creating a foundation for community commitment that most places would envy. The city's population is about 55,000, and as the third youngest city in Arkansas it's expected to double in 20 years. Sixteen fourth-year architecture and two fifth-year thesis students from Notre Dame participated in this studio, directed by Sallie Hood and Ron Sakal.

Conway's downtown isn't always well connected to the colleges, and the ubiquitous surface parking lots threaten to cut downtown itself into disconnected fragments. In a vicious circle, abundant parking both encourages driving and discourages walking. Conway has a variety of street widths; in general, the wider ones are difficult for pedestrians to cross, and they tempt traffic to speed, compounding the problem. The history, culture, and architecture that distinguish Conway from other places are at risk of being homogenized in an auto-oriented blender.

But all is not lost. Conway's streets offer room for renovation and traffic calming. The area's indigenous style of unadorned commercial building is both handsome and energy-efficient. Awnings over sidewalks shelter pedestrians; just above them, clerestory windows and attic vents let light into the building and excess heat out. Even the outmoded classic gas stations lend themselves to adaptive reuse as unique, interesting establishments, while surface parking lots can be reclaimed for higher and better uses.

Filling the gaps in Conway's downtown and residential neighborhoods isn't an exercise in nostalgia. It's common sense. More people living within walking distance means more business and (hopefully) healthier customers. The students' proposals were all aimed to trigger a “virtuous circle” of further improvements that would enhance the pedestrian experience of Conway without reducing its accessibility by car. For instance, they proposed widening Harkrider's right of way into a 105-foot-wide boulevard with travel and parking lanes separated by three planted medians. The result would be more pedestrian-friendly while increasing the street's traffic-carrying capacity.

Infill Single-Family Homes

Students proposed building a variety of sizes and styles of houses for existing vacant lots, compatible with existing Conway dwellings. They range from 1,400 square feet with two bedrooms to 1,800 square feet with three (see pp. 75, 85–87).

Infill Modular House
S. Gallagher

Infill Modular House
J. Coyle

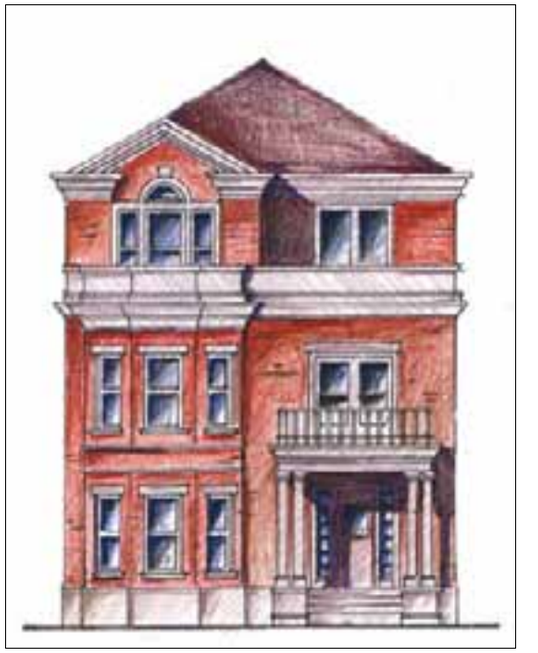
Infill Modular Houses
C. Meyer, M. Ponto

Infill Modular Houses
C. Shannon

Infill Modular Houses
A. Lorenz

Infill Modular Houses
C. Shannon

Covington Square
G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara



Covington Square Modular House
G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara

Downtown Conway's northern edge

Between Front and Spencer, south of Mill, students proposed a three-block, 10.5-acre complex that would include two apartment houses, duplexes, single-family homes, and 7,000 square feet of retail. At the southeast corner of Spencer and Mill they proposed an apartment house with 900-square-foot units; at Spencer and Markham, duplexes averaging 1,200–1,300 square feet each; and on Spencer, single-family housing up to 1,500 square feet. Key to the complex is an interior-block green square and common area enclosed by a larger apartment house and high-end homes (3,400 square feet). Covington Court Apartments would face Front Street, with retail stores on the ground floor, apartments above. The apartments (about 1,550 square feet each) would have their entrances at the other side of the building, where they overlook the common area. This three-story building would define the Front Street streetscape without overwhelming it, creating a more positive environment for walking (see pp. 91–93).

Infill Modular Duplex Apartments
K. Elfring, B. Dolan

Harkrider Boulevard Proposed Section
Studio

Conway Cinema and Lofts
A. Lorenz

Harkrider and Pine Street Neighborhood

Immediately east, between Markham and Harkrider south of Mill, students proposed several buildings graded by the size of their surroundings and the width of the streets they front on. They proposed a duplex along Harrison. Six-flat rowhouses would be built along Markham and around the corner on Garland with accessible green roofs; the ground floor would have the potential for commercial use. On Harkrider itself they designed a nine-story building with 24,000 square feet of commercial space at street level, offices on the second and third floors, and 95 one-to-three-bedroom apartments above, along with built-in parking. In the block north of Willow between Harkrider and Clayton, they proposed a smaller apartment complex with 40 units, office space, and four-flat rowhouses (see pp. 84, 94).

Conway Cinema

At Garland and Markham, students proposed a building containing six theaters, each seating 300 people. The east side of the building would have 5,400 square feet of retail on the ground and ten apartments overlooking a new midblock mews. This sizeable building would take the place of a huge asphalt lot. The strip mall that now fronts the parking lot would remain, becoming part of the confines enclosing a newly pedestrian-friendly environment (see p. 89).

Markham & Van Ronkle Mixed Use

This five-story L-shaped building, proposed for an important corner, would enfold a drive-through bank in a newly urban and pedestrian-friendly setting, making the corner look more like a place than an accident. Above the commercial ground floor it would allow for 26 loft apartments, 8 penthouses, and 5 townhouses. Below, the basement would have parking on two levels.

AME Church

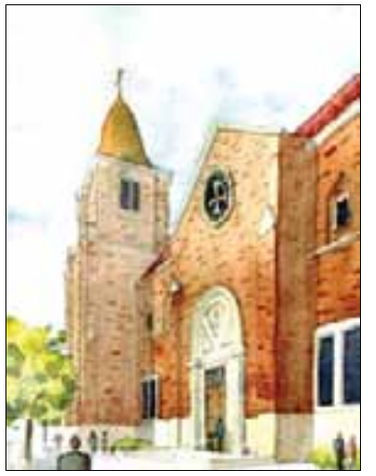
Just off Harkrider on Garland, students proposed a church seating 200. The building would have universal access, and together with the church offices and parsonage would enclose a courtyard (see p. 88).

Toad Suck Square

Moving south of Van Ronkle, students proposed that this annual festival area be made into a stronger center for community life. A new L-shaped mixed-use building would incorporate the First Street Bank Building and restaurant, adapting the local architectural style while accommodating two-level loft apartments on the upper floors (see p. 95).

Parkway and Main Mixed Use

Students proposed replacing a parking lot with two- and three-story brick structures. They would contain commercial and residential space, including 16 loft apartments, and 70 parking spaces (most below ground).



Conway AME Church
C. Colclough

Toad Suck Square Lofts
C. Shannon

Park Main Lofts — Before
D. Turner

Park Main Lofts — After
D. Turner

Existing Retail
A. DeFrees

Conway Infill Development Proposal Plan
Studio

Conway Marketplace

At Main and Front streets, students proposed a dramatic building with a vaulted two-story center, with a second-floor catwalk overlooking the ground-floor open market. The second floor would hold retail shops, with one- and two-bedroom condos on the upper floors.

Mixed-Use Infill on Court Street

Between Main and Oak, students proposed filling a vacant lot with a brick three-story building in the Conway style but taller than its near neighbors, accommodating 7,800 square feet of commercial space with four one-bedroom loft units above.

Conway Grand Hotel
D. Bertao

Conway Grand Hotel

Connected to the conference center next door, the proposed hotel would offer 110 luxury rooms and 40 suites, a high-end restaurant, a 7,800-square-foot banquet hall, and 8,000 square feet for retail, with built-in parking (see p. 90).

Conway Conference Center, Court and Main

This 70,000-square-foot center would include a grand hall seating 900 (divisible into thirds). Above a first floor with lobby, cafés, and shops, the second floor would have ten conference rooms, an auditorium, and a formal hall. The third floor would have offices, the auditorium entrance, a covered garden, and technical facilities (see p. 88).

St. Joseph's Baseball Park Development
D. Yanez

Conway Arts Center Mixed-Use Building
J. Coyle

St. Joseph's Baseball Field, Commercial-Residential Building, and Townhouses

East of Harkrider between 2nd and 4th and Factory streets, students proposed a complete reconfiguration, first moving St. Joseph's elementary school across Harkrider closer to the rest of its campus. The proposal would close 3rd Street, add a new north-south Diamond Way near the east edge of the property, and place 37 modular 3-bedroom townhouses between Diamond and Factory. The remaining 80 percent of the double block would be divided very roughly into a southern half with a baseball field and clubhouse, a northwest quarter with a five-story mixed-use building including a sports bar and 78 one- and two-bedroom apartments over underground parking, and a northeast quarter that would be a public park. An east-west courtyard along the north side of the ball field would give access to all places, and connect Harkrider and Diamond (see p. 87).

Conway Community Arts Center

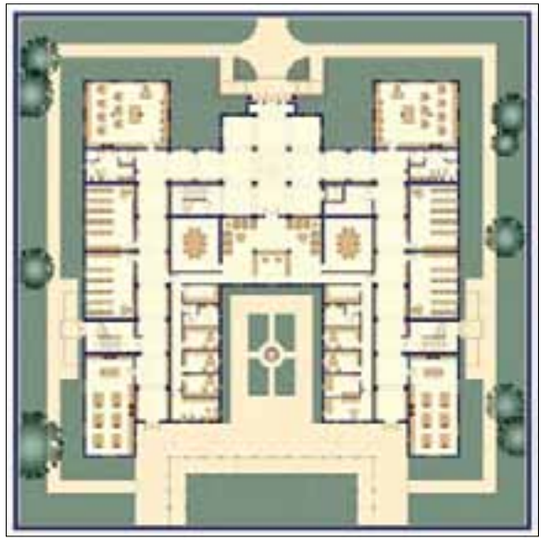
Students proposed a monumental building for the area bounded by Harkrider, Deer, Chestnut, and Elm, intended as "a new symbol for artistic education and growth." It would include the Diamond Theater, Art Museum, and the Bank of the Ozarks. Its third floor would have three artist studios, 31 two-story two-bedroom lofts, two wading pools, and a roof garden—"one central location where one may shop, eat, work, live, and play" (see pp. 88–89).

Conway Community Center
C. Meyer, M. Ponto

Conway Community Center

East and west of the railroad between Deer Street and College Avenue, students proposed a banquet hall, community education offices, classrooms, and recreation facilities (see pp. 89–90).

St. Joseph's High School Elevation
M. Snow



St. Joseph's High School Ground Floor
M. Snow

St. Joseph Parish
Students envisioned a new site plan for these buildings, including a new St. Joseph High School (see p. 94).

Any town would be challenged to remain true to itself while quickly doubling in population. Conway has the assets to do so if it focuses on using pedestrian-oriented infill to attract even more residents into downtown and keep them there evenings and weekends.

Conway Arkansas Studio Participants

Clients

Mayor Tab Townsell
City of Conway

T. J. Johnston
Executive Director,
Conway Downtown Partnership

Brad Lacy
President and CEO,
Conway Area Chamber of Commerce

Father Tom Byrne, Tim Kramer, Bill Hegeman, and Members of St. Joseph Parish

Jamie Gates
Assistant to the Mayor, City of Conway; Vice President of Government Affairs, Conway Development Corporation

Amy Reed
Administrative Assistant,
Conway Development Corporation and Conway Downtown Partnership

Citizens of Conway

Special thanks to our host families in Conway!

4th-year Architecture Students, School of Architecture

Daniel Bertao

Gintautas Civinskas

Claire Colclough

James Coyle

Brian Dolan

Kiley Elfring

Yacintha Fanardy

Stephen Gallagher

Anne Lorenz

Rachael Maricich

Christina Meyer

Caitlin O'Hara

Maureen Ponto

Cailin Shannon

David Turner

Daniel Yanez

5th-year Architecture Thesis Students, School of Architecture

Martin Snow

Kevin Weckman

Notre Dame Faculty:

Sallie Hood
Director of Design, CBC
Associate Professor,
School of Architecture;

Ron Sakal
Executive Director, CBC;
Professional Specialist, School of Architecture

Professional Consultants and Studio Reviewers:

Alan DeFrees
Professional Specialist,
School of Architecture, University of Notre Dame

Kevin Flaherty
Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Genesis Homes, A Division of Champion Enterprises, Inc.

William C. Griffiths
Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer, Champion Enterprises, Inc.

Neil E. Hoyt
B. Arch. and M.ADU, University of Notre Dame School of Architecture; Konstant Architecture Planning, Skokie, Illinois

Steve Kondrchek
Field Operations Manager, Midwest Region, Champion Enterprises, Inc.

Tony McGhee
Vice President Physical Development and Business Attraction, Cornerstone Alliance, Benton Harbor, Michigan

John Torti, FAIA, LEED AP
President, Torti Gallas and Partners

Members of the Champion Enterprises team at the plant in Topeka, Indiana

Members of the School of Architecture Faculty, University of Notre Dame

Client Letters

CONWAY DOWNTOWN PARTNERSHIP / JUNE 8, 2008

Dear Ron and Sallie,

On behalf of the city of Conway, Conway Downtown Partnership and Conway Area Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to express our sincere appreciation for the work performed by your team at the Center for Building Communities. As you know, our city is young and well educated and boasts three institutions of higher learning. We have a healthy and diverse economy that retains nearly 70 percent of our working citizens. Conway is also one of the fastest growing cities in the state. Over the past decade, our population has more than doubled. Today, we are quickly approaching a population of 60,000. The growth we have experienced has brought about many positive changes but has also left us with many challenges. ¶ Roughly seven years ago, we began tackling some of these challenges by focusing our energy and resources on rebuilding our downtown. While we have made huge steps in this effort, we still have work to do. Our urban core is still scattered with suburban styled developments, under utilized on-grade parking, and other various ailments associated with typical sprawl development. ¶ The CBC's knowledge, along with its all-star lineup of students from the Notre Dame School of Architecture, has helped us combat many of the issues plaguing our downtown. The unique approach the CBC took in dealing with this in Conway was second to none. You worked one-on-one with property owners, local elected officials, and other

key stakeholders involved in redeveloping Conway's central business district. In the end, your team crafted a plan of attack that was realistic, attractive, and affordable. ¶ We are more than satisfied with the results of your efforts to help our city. We are excited to say that several components laid out in your plan for Conway are being implemented. We look forward to working with you again in the near future.

Sincerely,

TAB TOWNSELL
Mayor
City of Conway

T.J. JOHNSTON
Executive Director
Conway Downtown Partnership

BRAD LACY
President and CEO
Conway Area Chamber of Commerce

Student Reflections

Perhaps we should have known it wasn't going to be a normal semester as soon as we walked into that first class and found sacks of Clementine oranges on the table, discovering that our professors' opening tirade was not to be on the propriety of classical design, but the dangerous state of citrus affairs in Florida. (We were confused, too.) Or we should have figured it out when we toured our first modular construction factory, and saw the unlikely potential power of housing design that could be sliced into pieces and shipped onto trailers, challenging us to question whether efficiency, affordability, and beauty really need be mutually exclusive. Maybe the best warning came simply when sixteen college students plus two thesis students were shipped south for nearly a week to experience their first dry county—and enjoyed it.

...Okay, we're being mildly dramatic. We knew exactly what lay in store for us the moment we signed up for Sallie and Ron's studio section. We may not have known the content of our future architectural lessons, but we fully comprehended that they would be unconventional and thought-provoking, and hopefully even a bit inspiring—and all with a healthy hint of "wacky." (Don't forget the Clementines.)

The studio hardly disappointed. Instead of learning from photographs and theories, we jumped right in and found the fantastic vernacular traditions of Main Street America for ourselves. We just as quickly appreciated the astonishing decay of that architectural heritage which gave richness to our country's regional identities. Instead of prioritizing time for individual desk critiques, we focused our education in a community. Taken in warmly by the city on our two visits, we worked with and for Conway's people. Our interaction with families, parishes, students, officials, and dedicated citizens contributed a vital reality to our studies that had never been communicated by lectures and readings. We saw that these people were the true foundation-stone of our architecture, and this community was the most important block in our urban plan.

We now find ourselves at the exciting and scary beginning of our professional lives; but we have all taken personal lessons from our CBC studio, and can only wait to see how they continue to encourage and challenge our future work. But a big thanks to Sallie and Ron in the meantime, for making us all a little more unconventional, thought-provoking, inspiring—and even wacky.

Conway, Arkansas

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A *Conway Infill Redevelopment Plan*, Studio; **B** *Harkrider Boulevard Proposed Section*, Studio; **C–D** *Conway, Arkansas*, A. DeFrees; **E** *Infill Loft Building*, S. Fallagher; **F** *Conway, Arkansas Existing Retail*, A. DeFrees; **G** *Park Main Lofts—Existing Condition*, D. Turner; **H** *Park Main Lofts*, D. Turner

Infill Modular Houses


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A–B *Infill Modular House*, J. Coyle; **C–E** *Conway Pine Street Neighborhood Houses*, Unknown; **F** *Infill Modular House*, C. Meyer, M. Ponto; **G** *Infill Modular House*, S. Gallagher; **H** *Infill Modular Duplex House*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; **I–J** *Infill Modular House*, C. Meyer, M. Ponto

Infill Modular Houses


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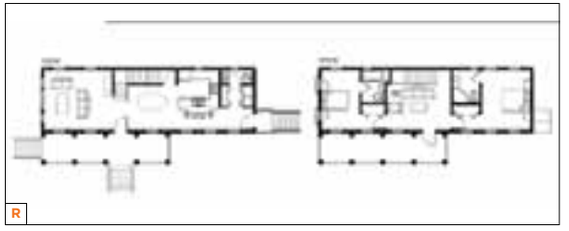
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St. Joseph's Baseball Park Development


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K *Infill Modular House*, C. Meyer, M. Ponto;
L *Infill Modular House*, J. Coyle;
M *Infill Modular House*, C. Shannon;
N *Infill Modular House*, C. Meyer, M. Ponto;
O *Infill Modular Duplex House*, C. Shannon;
P *Infill Modular House*, Y. Fanardy;
Q *Infill Modular House*, C. Colclough;
R *Infill Modular House*, D. Turner;
S *Infill Modular Duplex House*,
G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara;
T *Infill Modular House*, D. Turner;
U *Infill Modular House*, C. Shannon;
V *Infill Modular House*, A. Lorenz;
W *Infill Modular House*, C. Shannon, A. Lorenz;
X–Y *Infill Modular House*, R. Maricich


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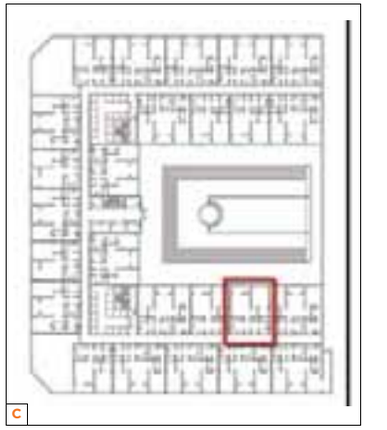
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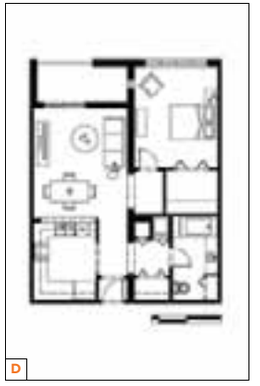
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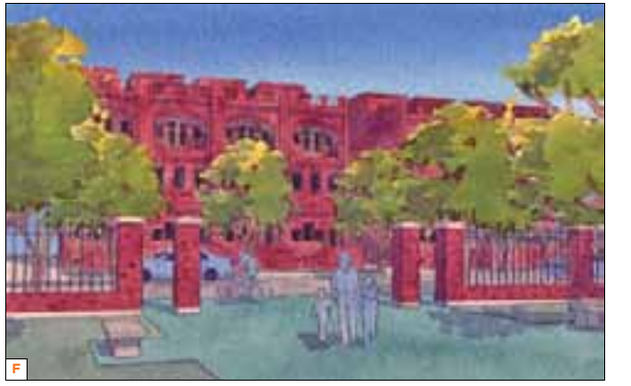
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A–B *St. Joseph's Baseball Park Development*, D. Yanez;
C–D *St. Joseph's Baseball Park Development—Townhouse Plans*, D. Yanez;
E–G *St. Joseph's Baseball Park Developments*, D. Yanez;
H *St. Joseph's Baseball Park Development—Townhouse Plans*, D. Yanez


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Conway AME Church


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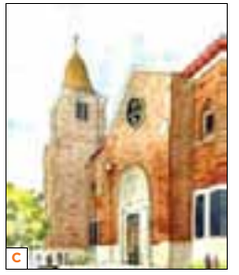
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A–E *Conway AME Church Proposal*, C. Cloclough

Conway Conference Center


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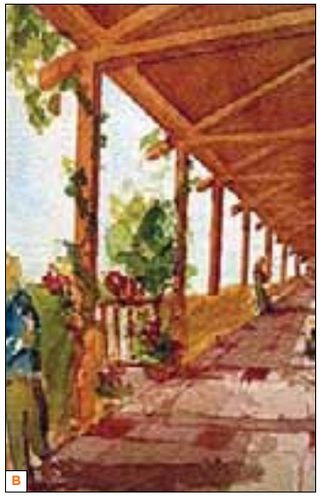
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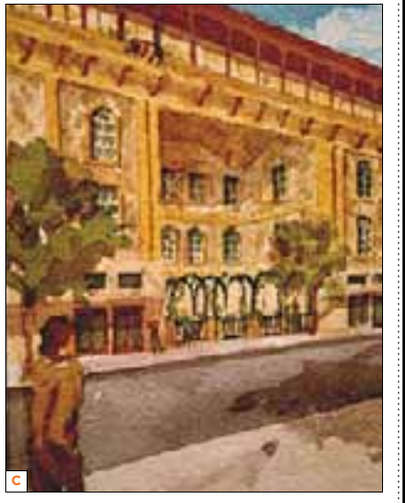
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A–C *Conway Conference Center*, R. Maricich

Conway Community Arts Center


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A–E *Conway Community Arts Center*, J. Coyle

Conway Garland Cinema and Lofts

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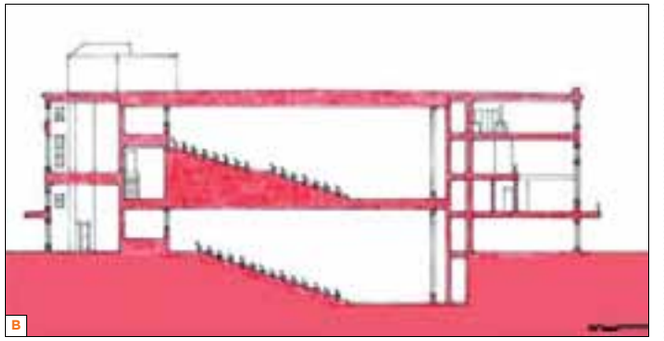

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A–C *Conway Garland Cinema and Lofts*, A. Lorenz

Conway Community Center

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A *Conway Community Center*, C. Meyer, M. Ponto

Conway Community Center


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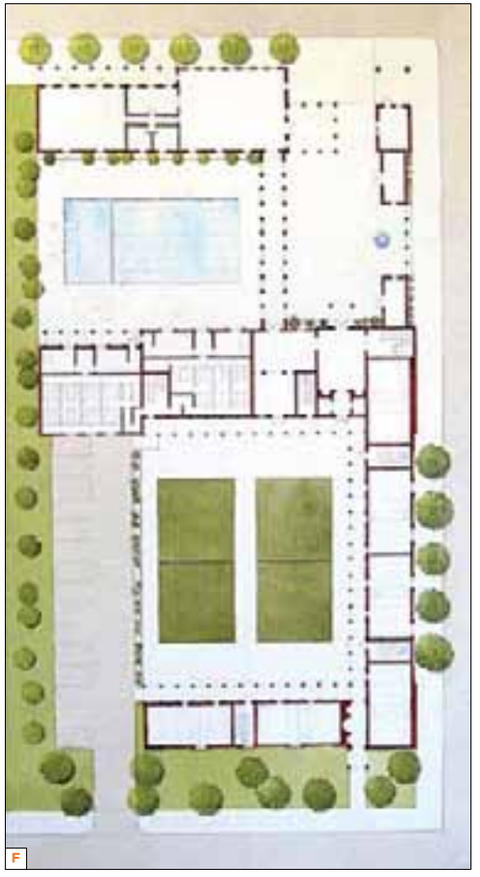
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B–E *Existing Conditions*, C. Meyer, M. Ponto;
F–I *Conway Community Center*, C. Meyer, M. Ponto

Conway Grand Hotel


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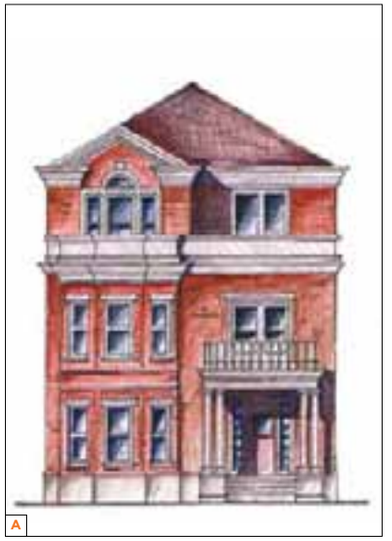
A–C *Conway Grand Hotel*, D. Bertao

Housing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A *Covington Square Modular House*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; **B–C** *Covington Square Houses*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; **D** *Site Plan*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; **E–H** *Front Street Apartments*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara


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I *Manley Apartments*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; J *View of Infill Houses*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; K *Infill Modular Duplex Houses*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; L *Covington Square*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; M *Manley Apartments*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; N *Infill Modular Homes*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; O *Technical Wall Sections*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara

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P–R *Front Street Apartments*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; **S** *Housing Master Plan*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara; **T–U** *Manley Apartments*, G. Civinskas, C. O'Hara

Harkrider Mixed-Use Building

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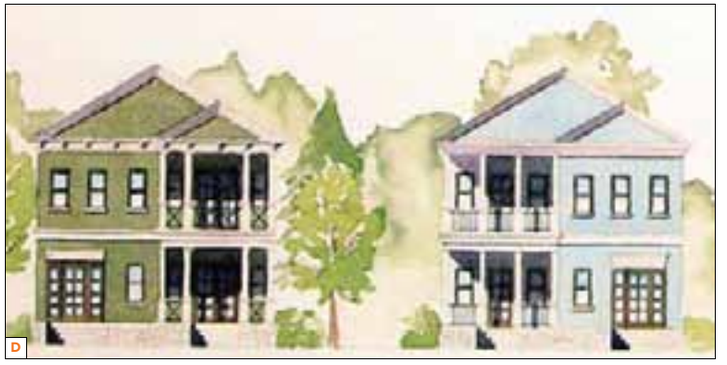

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A–B *Harkrider Mixed-Use Building*, B. Dolan, K. Elfring; **C–D** *Infill Modular Duplex Apartments*, B. Dolan, K. Elfring

Mixed-Use Infill Building

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A–B *Mixed-Use Infill Building*, Y. Fanardy

St. Joseph's High School

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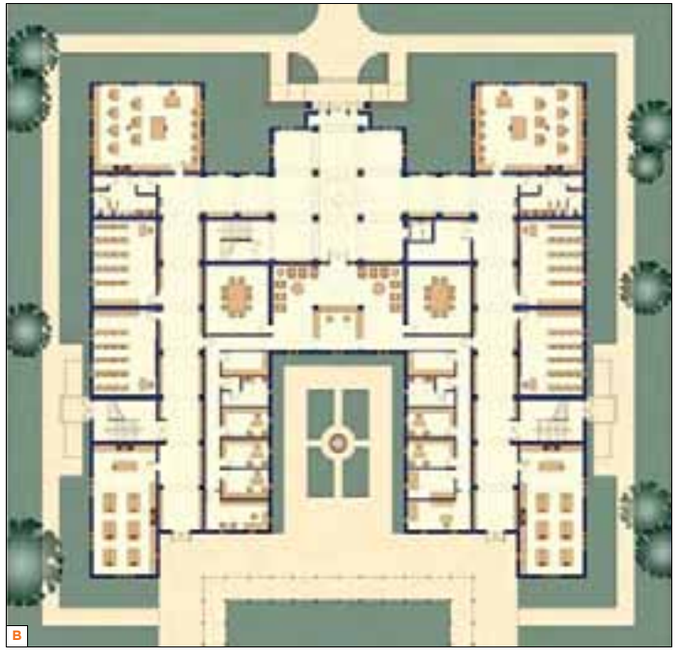

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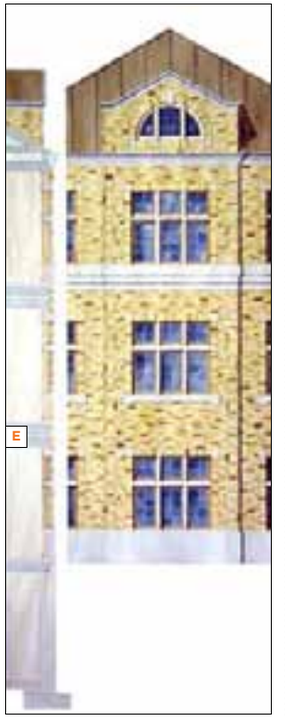
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A *St. Joseph's High School Elevation*, M. Snow; B *St. Joseph's High School Ground Floor*, M. Snow; C–E *St. Joseph's High School Proposal*, M. Snow; F–K *St. Joseph's High School Existing Conditions*, M. Snow

Toad Suck Square Lofts


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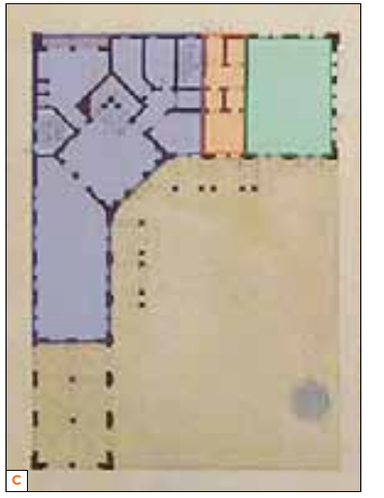
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A–D *Toad Suck Square Lofts* , C. Shannon