



The McMorran Wildflower Corridor

Project Proposal for implementation Summer 2021 - 2023

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Question:

In what ways can a community building happen during a time of disconnection, anxiety, and increasing polarity? In what ways can an environmental project have multidisciplinary benefits to a city? In what ways can we reimagine sustainability in American cities that is engaging and inclusive?

Why now?

This project is developing in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, ongoing Police Violence in BIPOC communities, ongoing efforts to respond to climate change as well as ongoing decolonization efforts in landscape design practices.

Spring 2021

Background

Port Huron is a city of 30,000 situated at the head of the largest freshwater delta in the United States; where the St. Clair river meets Lake Huron. The Black River, quite literally, divides the historic downtown in half, depositing into the St. Clair river. With the Black River, and a canal a few miles North, Port Huron is in fact an island.

This city maintains a strong connection to water - referred to as the "Blue Water Area," popular for visitors to visit various parks, beaches, and trails along the water. It is famous for the annual sailboat race to Chicago that attracts thousands, and several festivals and activities around water such as the Sturgeon Festival.

The downtown area has made an economic comeback in recent years, and has seen the arrival of new businesses and major renovations. One notable ongoing

renovation this past year is the courtyard and ice rink development outside of McMorran Auditorium - a major landmark within the city for notable events.

The McMorran Wildflower corridor is a joint economic and environmental conservation project that seeks to use wildflowers to connect major institutions downtown, and highlight proximity to the rivers on the east and west of the city. It is an effort to transform the aesthetics of city boulevards from sodgrass/ornamental plants, into a highly functioning ecosystem of native plants that can educationally, socially, and economically. This will locate Port Huron as a city making **leading and necessary changes to conserve the water that is integral to the city's identity.**

This project follows the success of the Blue Water River walk,

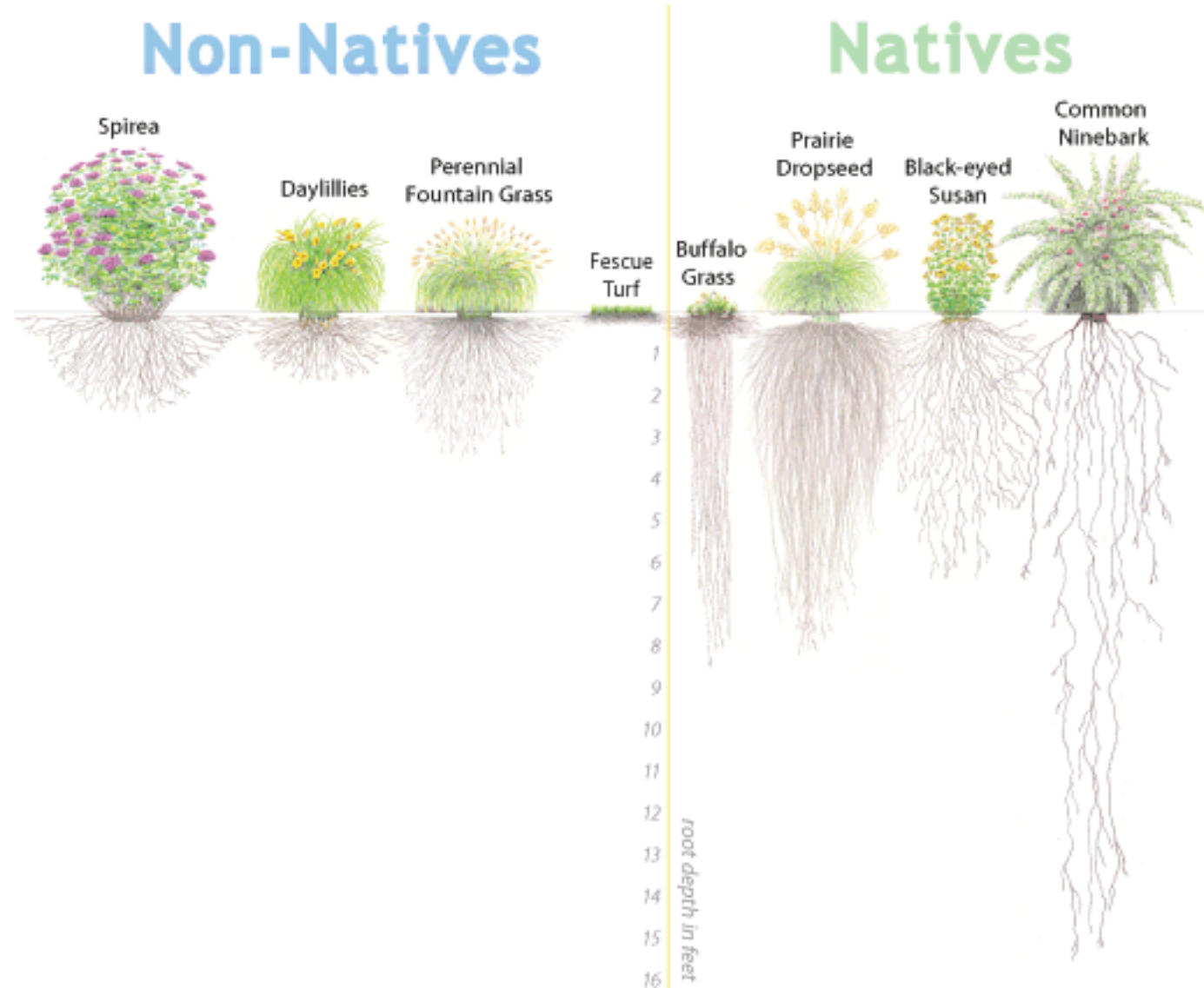


built in 2011, south of McMorran. It also draws from the wildflower rain gardens installed in the formerly grass boulevards within the St. Clair County Community College parking lot. This project draws on these guiding case studies to evaluate possible plans of direction and development.

Stage 1 Identifying Spaces

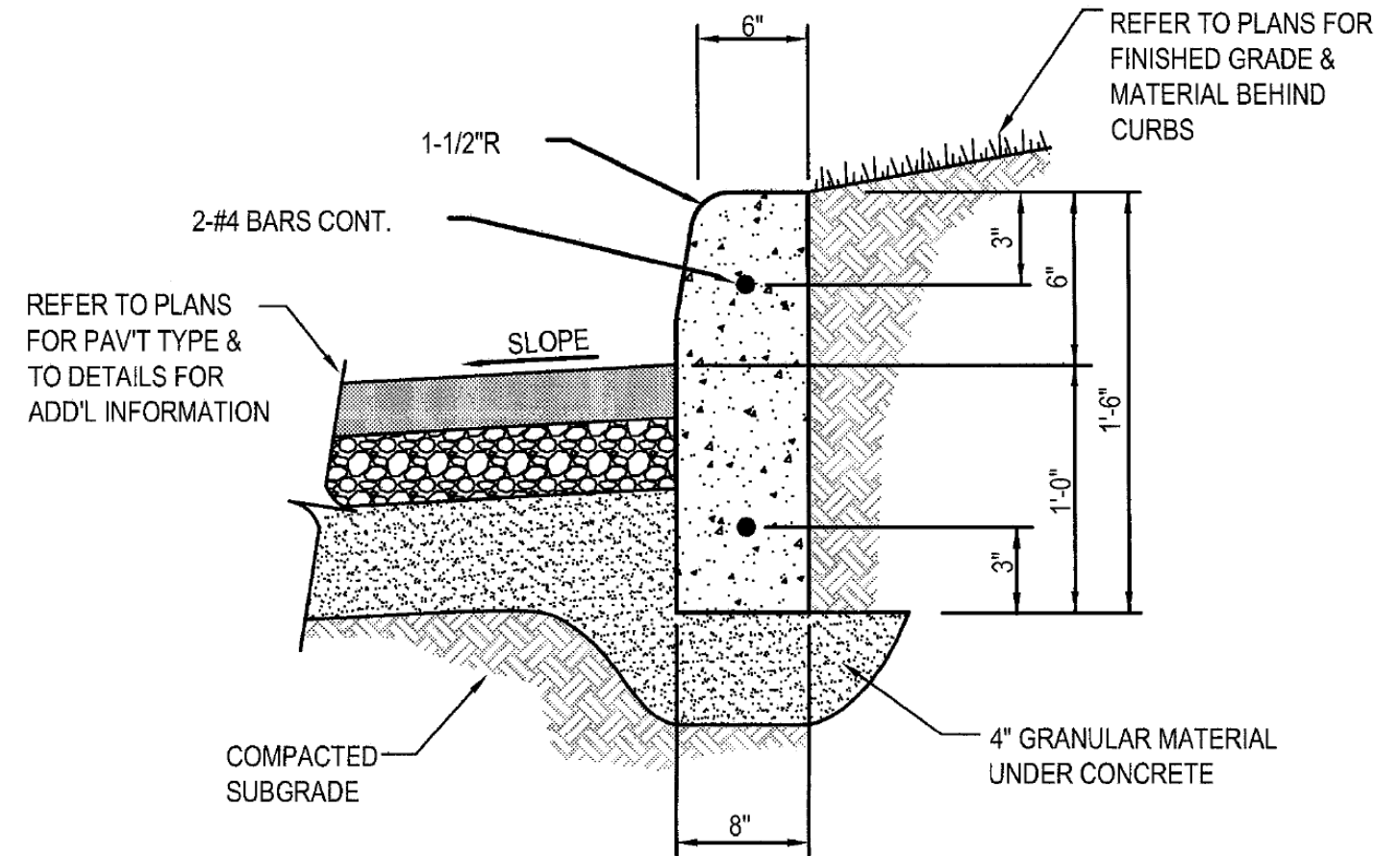
This project hopes to utilize these boulevards - spaces that are city owned and resident managed - into a city wildflower engagement space for environmental and social improvement.

Why Wildflowers?



See “Fescue Turf” in the center. This is a nonnative plant referred to as “sod” grown in lawns all over the United States. Native plants, per the diagram, have root systems designed to absorb and trap significant amounts of water runoff. They are a much more suitable food source for wildlife and local pollinators.

Case Study: <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2020/10/13/detroits-new-medians-keep-sewage-out-basements-flood-prevention/5974076002/>



Sodgrass is often equated to concrete. This is an engineering template from the city of Port Huron. Wildflowers are capable of catching and maintaining water so it doesn't hit the storm water system and overwhelm it. It removes toxins and pollutants too.

What does this look like?



Here are several examples of sod boulevards replaced with native plants.



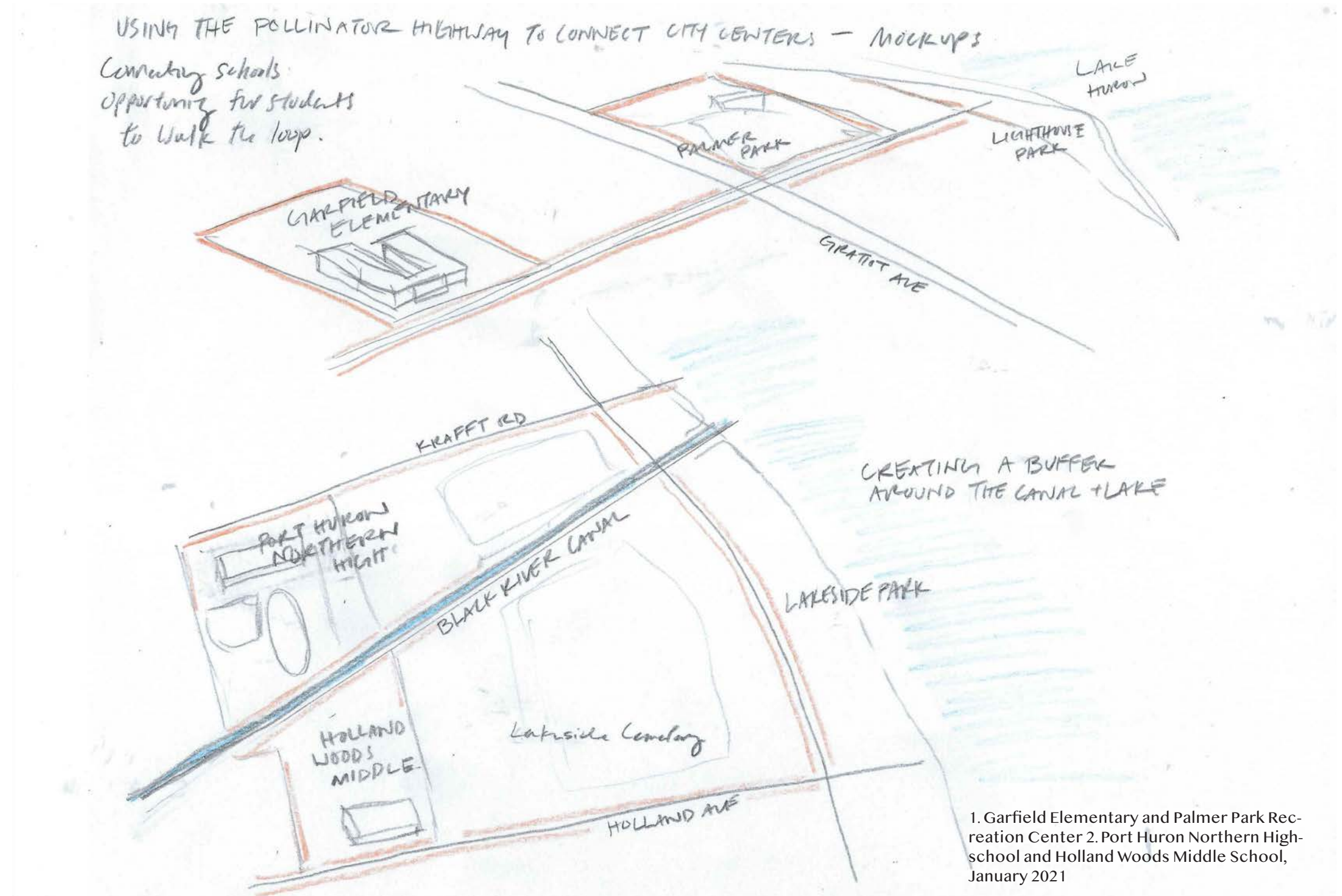
© az plant lady

Process & Development

Wildflowers to connect spaces

Given the conservation educational opportunity present, consideration was made for how these boulevard wildflowers could connect community institutions as urban wildflower trails. Designs started by connecting a few schools and community centers in the Port Huron area (see right).

These trails are intentionally designed in neighborhoods where children might not have access to “wild” spaces. Native grasses in a neighborhood would be an opportunity for kids to explore and engage with these plants on the way to a playground, school, etc. This would expose kids to new varieties of plants and pollinators to develop a sense of comfort around “wild” spaces that aren’t heavily managed like sod or lawns around them.

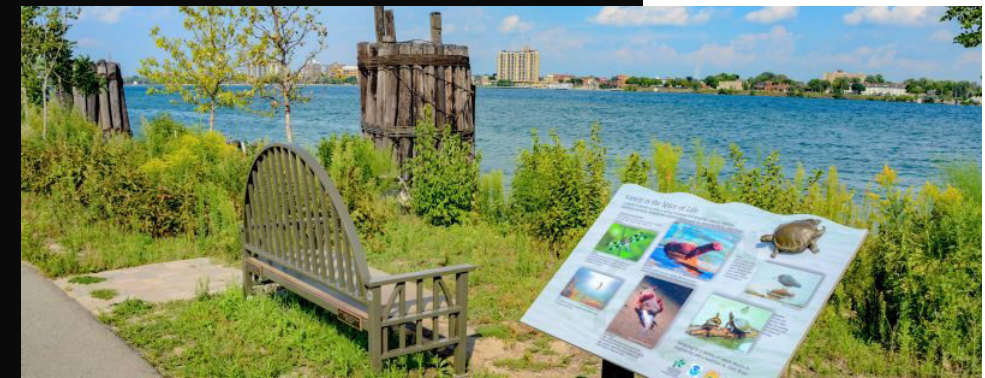


Case Study: The Blue Water River Walk

Just South of McMorran Ave, this trail serves as a model ecologically, socially, and economically -



The Blue Water River Walk is shoreline trail bordered by Native plants. It has been ecologically successful, and hugely successful within the community - consistently ranked as one of the “top things to do” in Port Huron. This trail is maintained by local groups and volunteers, and serves as a model for what a ecologically successful trail can be.



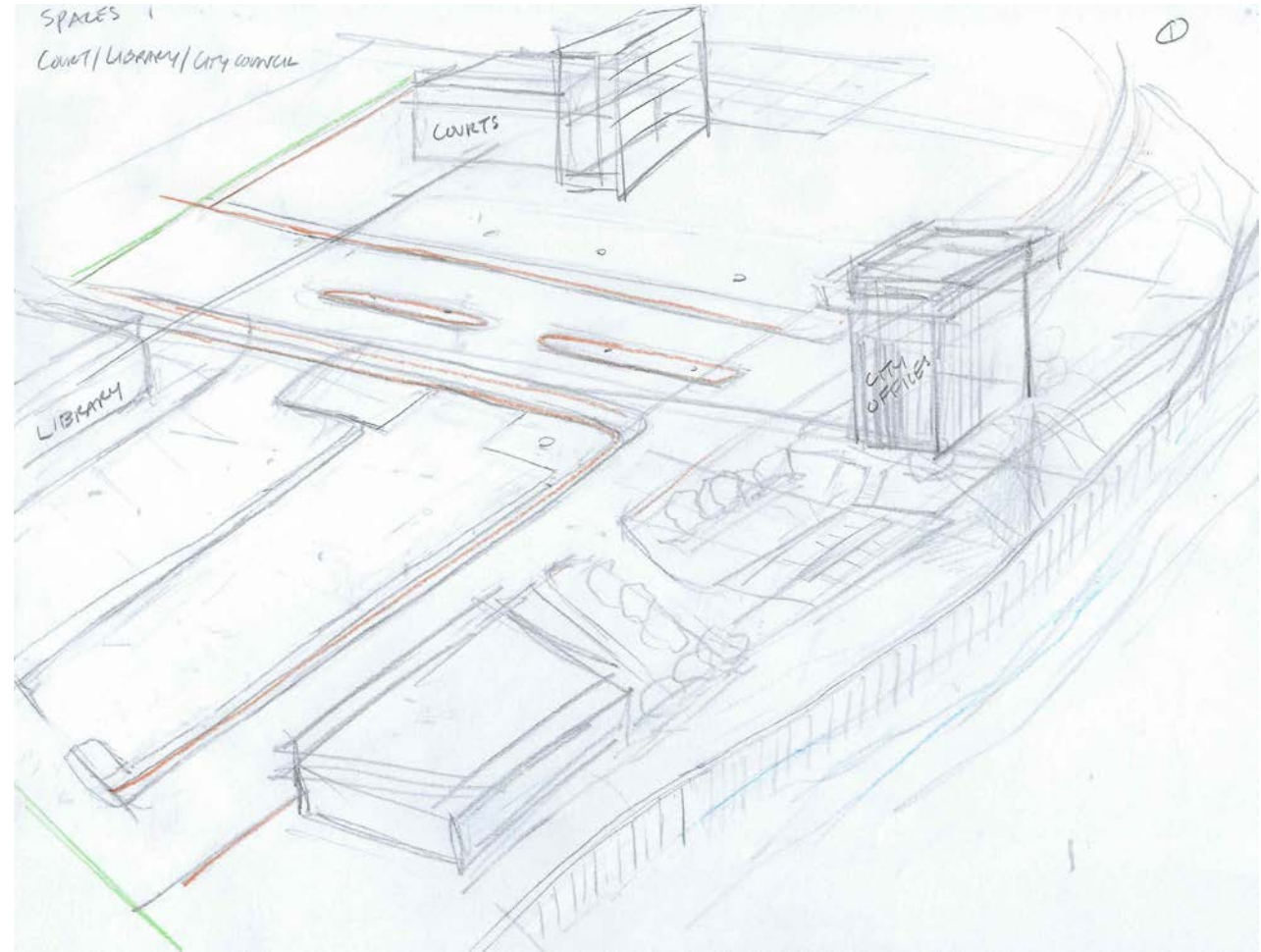
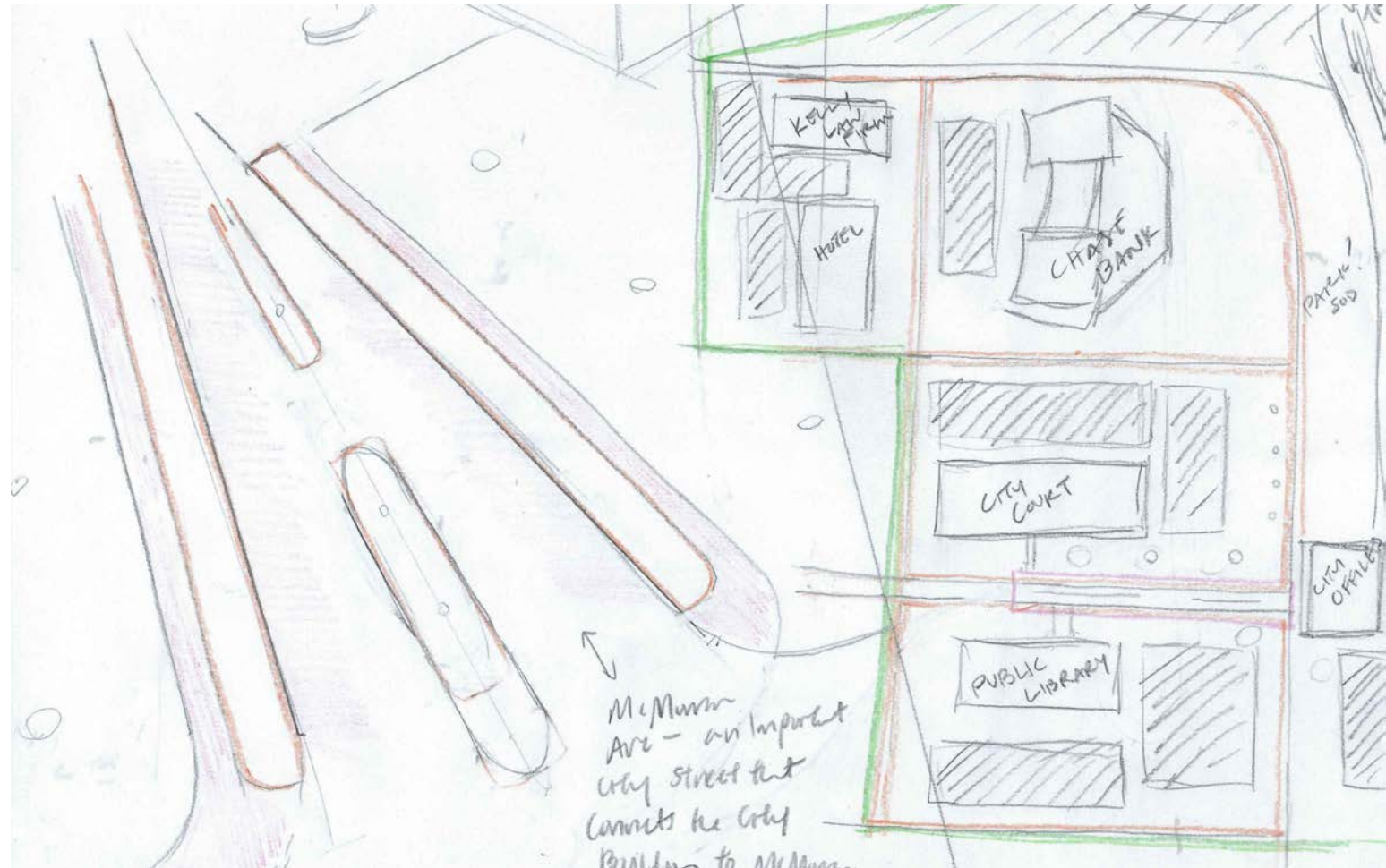
Proximity to the water is a big factor in the success of this trail. Similarly, the McMorran corridor seeks bring people **into** the downtown area from the water, and **out to the water** from the downtown in a connecting loop.

This trail incorporates a educational component to maximize engagement, and is something the McMorran Corridor could implement as well with local histories within the urban space.

Process & Development

Application to a non-residential city space

Transitioning from sod grass to wildflowers is directly infringing upon a western cultural norm -



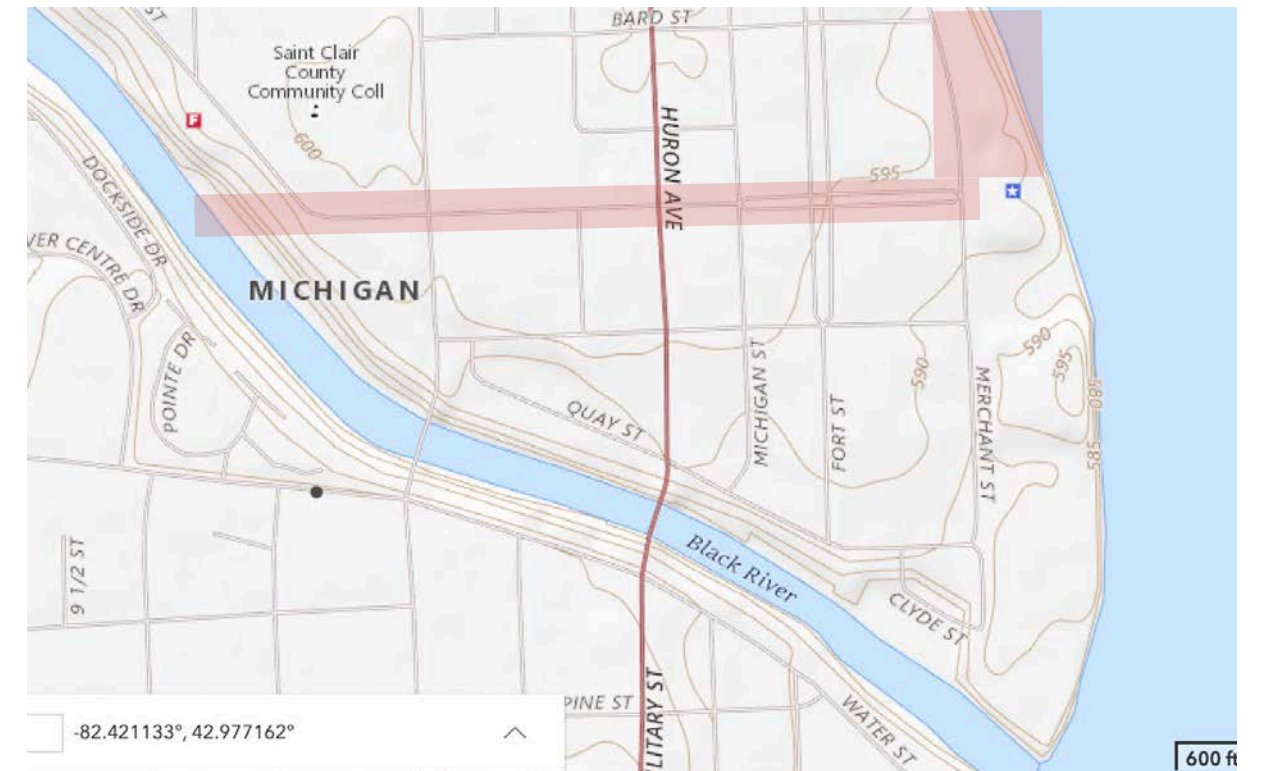
It is likely that proposing this project in neighborhoods will be met with skepticism. People do not know how to manage a “maintenance free” wildflower garden. (They do know how to use a lawn mower!) City code still identifies most native plants as “weeds.” Grass is historically prominent in western aesthetics of beauty and control.

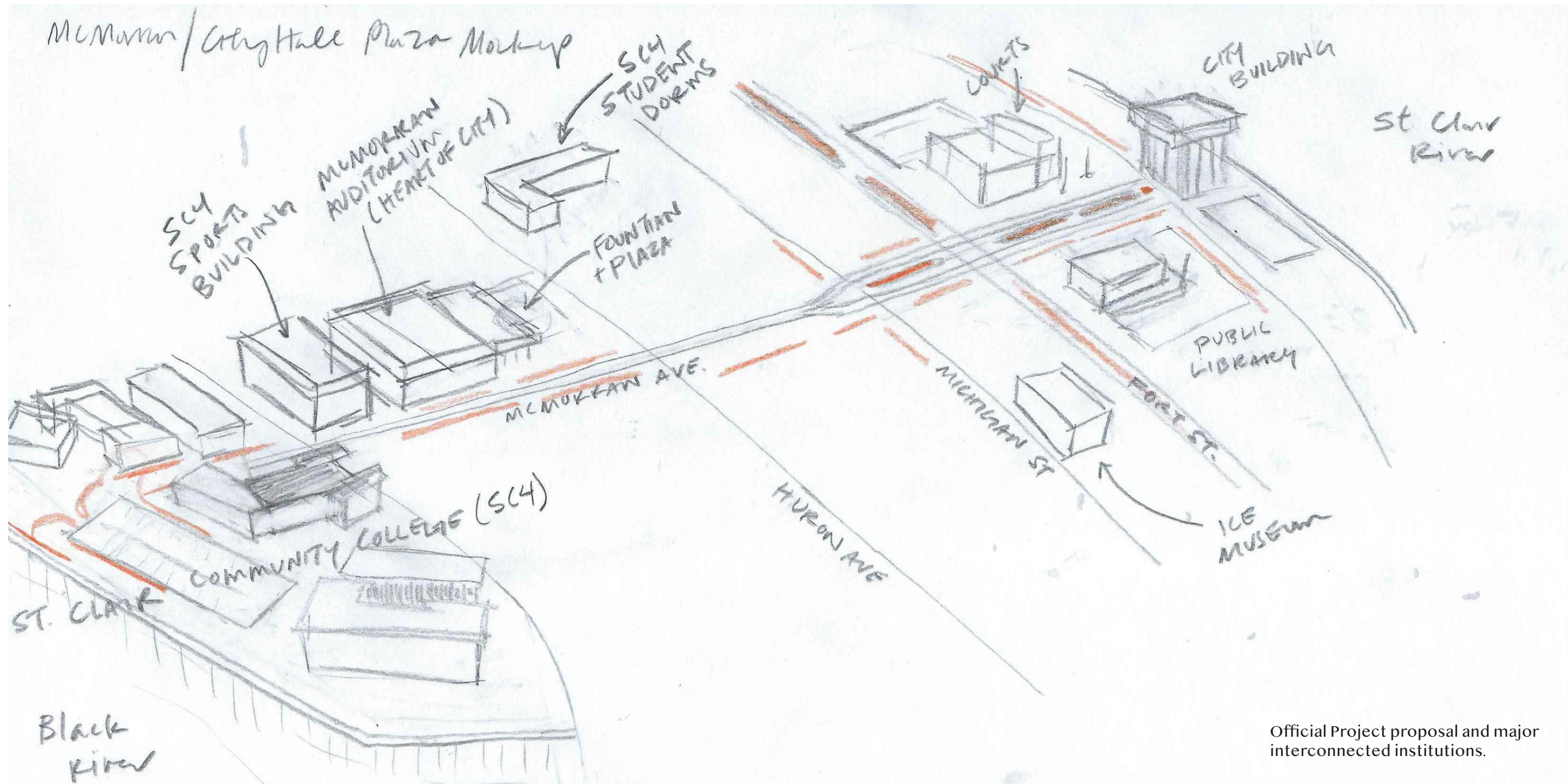
In a shift of direction, these designs bring the wildflower trails to the Port Huron business district around the City Office building. The hope is that residents will see professional spaces embracing wildflower boulevards, and implement them in their own neighborhoods.



Initially proposed wildflower trails within the Port Huron Business District on the east side of McMorran Ave along the St Clair river.

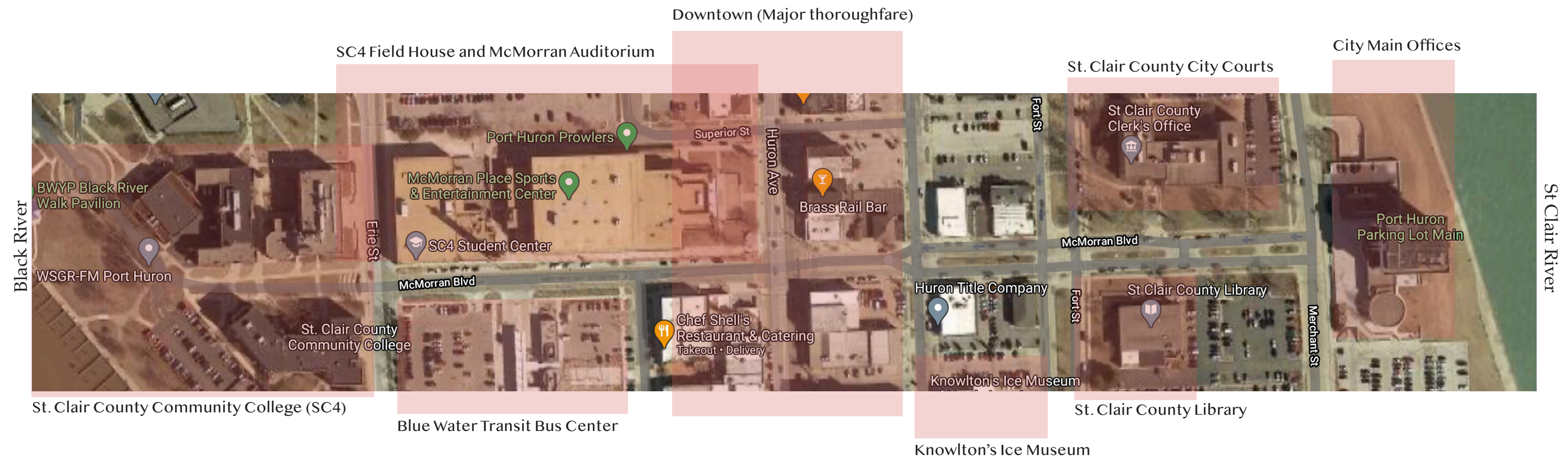
Why restrict a trail to the business district? In an attempt to make this trail as inclusive and engaging as possible, a new design will span the length of McMorran Ave, from river to river, and become the McMorran Wildflower Corridor -





Official Project proposal and major interconnected institutions.

Connected Spaces and Institutions

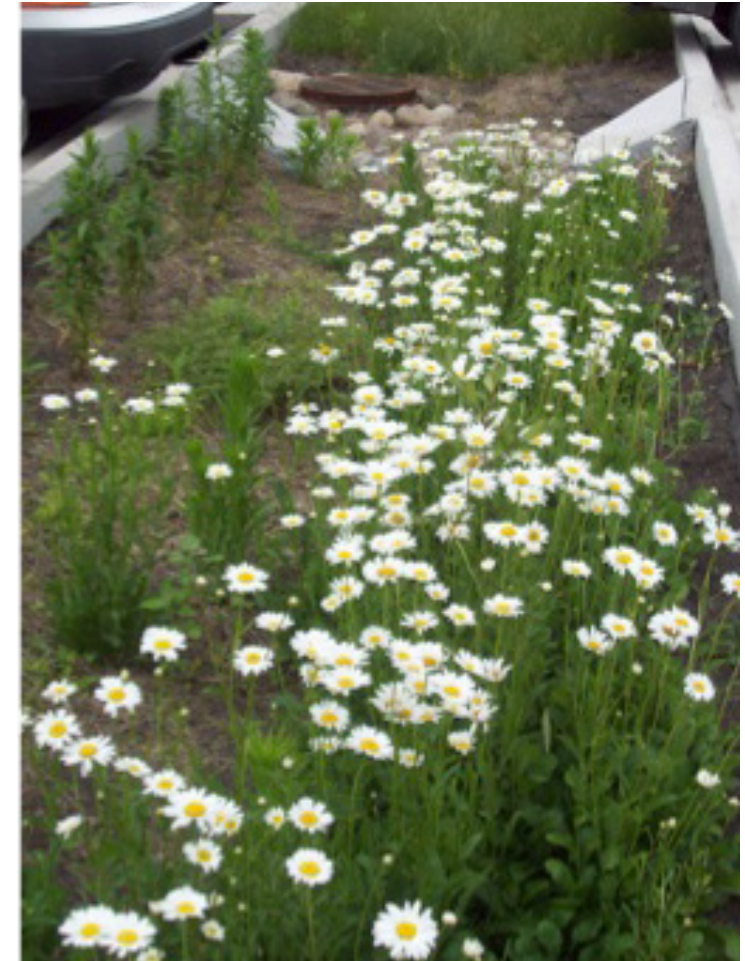
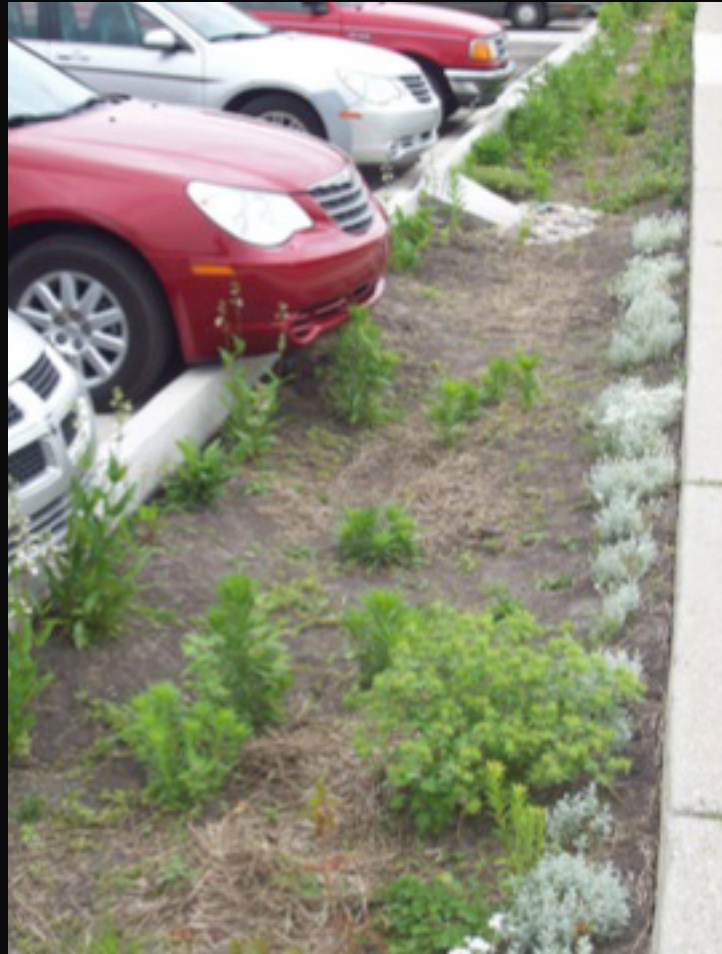


10 major points of interest outlined above. (Note that the scope is not limited to 10 - there are many other places to mention nearby, such as the SC4 student dorms, the Council on Aging, etc. This diagram is 10 generalized points of interest)

Case Study: The St. Clair Community College Rain Gardens

A challenging reality check for community aesthetics and maintenance

These bioswales were implemented by the same group who runs the Blue Water River Walk - and “many lessons have been learned since then.” This site is located in Port Huron just off of the Black River along Erie and North of McMorran.

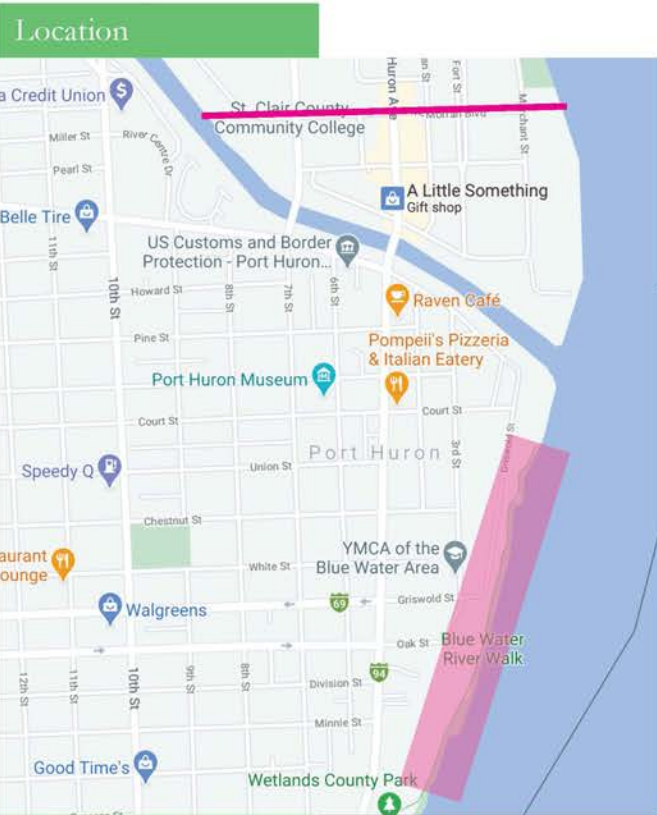


The SC4 parking lot added rain garden bioswales to the medians in-between the parking regions in 2010. Although ecologically functional, the aesthetics were low, and SC4 received complaints about the appearance. This project shows the importance of a maintenance plan, and making sure an aesthetic standard is maintained.

McMorran Wildflower Corridor

user breakdown and analysis

The wildflower corridor provides families with a new downtown activity inbetween other about town activites. It puts into perspective Port Huron’s very close relationship to water, and highlights it’s many historical institutions. This project unfolds during the covid-19 crisis, in which sense of place, and sense of community has become an utmost priority in people’s lives.



This map shows the proposed project in relationship to the already existing Wildflower trail in South Port Huron.

What makes the McMorran Corridor different?

Activating Space and Connecting Institutions

1. Black River Waterfront
2. SC4 Campus + Field House
3. McMorran Auditorium
4. Council on Aging
5. Huron Ave/SC4 dorms
6. Gina’s Gallery
7. Knowlton’s Ice Muesum
8. St. Clair Public Library
9. St. Clair County Courts
10. Port Huron City Building
11. St Clair River Front

Partnership Events and Community Notables:

- Port Huron River Walk (Vantage Point) past downtown area
- SC4 parking lot Rain Gardens
- Rockin on the River
- Feaste of the St Clair
- Family boat week
- Art Hop - Spring and Fall
- St. Clair County Community Foundation
- PHASD Schools
- Bluewater Rotary Day parade

- Blue water 5K
- PII Escape Room

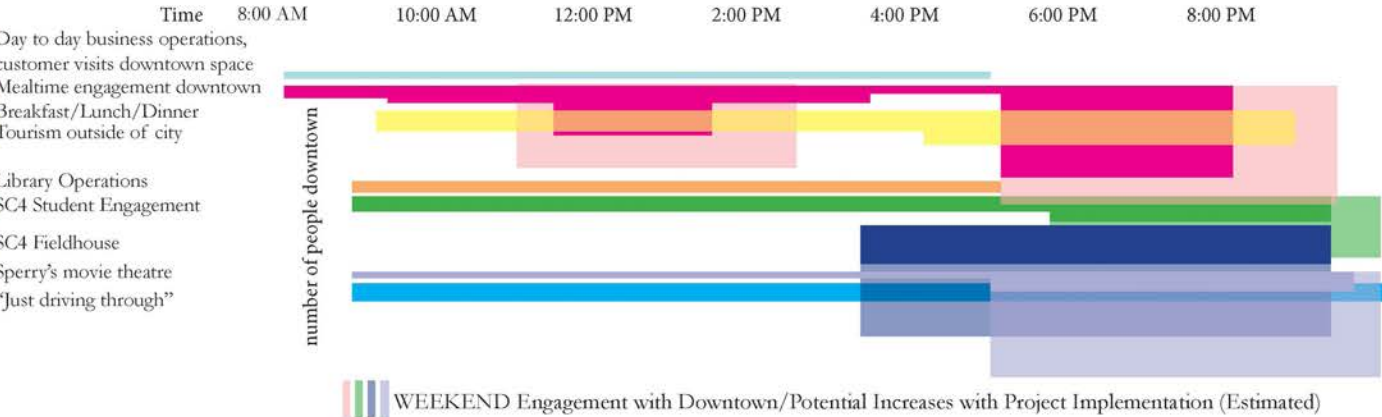
Role of Port Huron:

- Review and revision of city codes
- Maintenance + review of procedures
- Support of a larger push to incentivise homeowners to participate in wildflower planting in the future. A national leader in community environmental change.



See “Activating Space and Connecting Institutions” for reference

Weekday Engagement with Downtown/Potential Increases with Project Implementation (Estimated)



Community Engagement vs City Maintenance in a Year

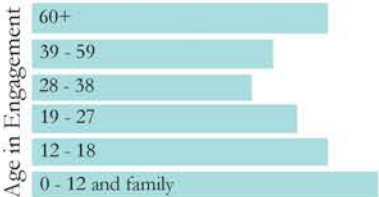


KEY STAKEHOLDERS:

- City of Port Huron
- Friends of the St Clair River
- Port Huron Local Businesses
- SC4
- St Clair Library
- Residents

Major Goals:

- EcoTourism
- Downtown community engagement
- Environmental education
- Historical education
- Building a stronger ecological relationship to the rivers.



Example user diagram with daily and monthly potential engagement.

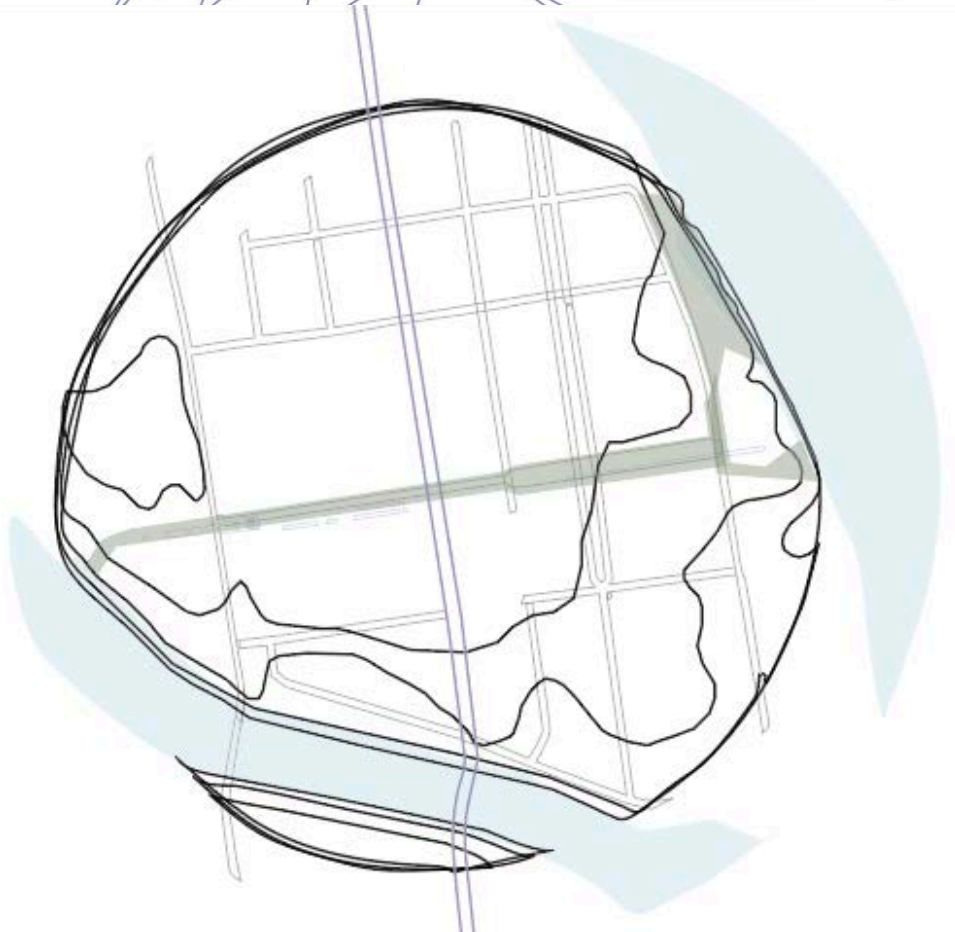
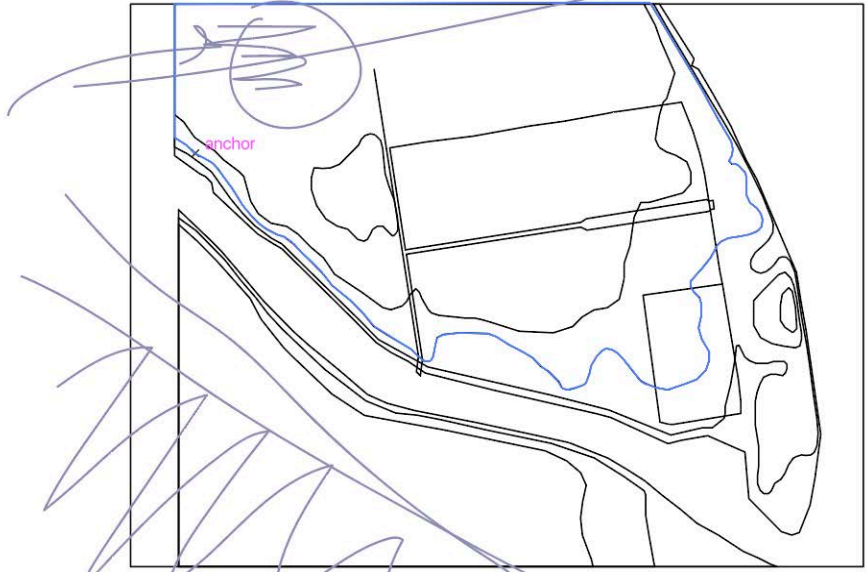
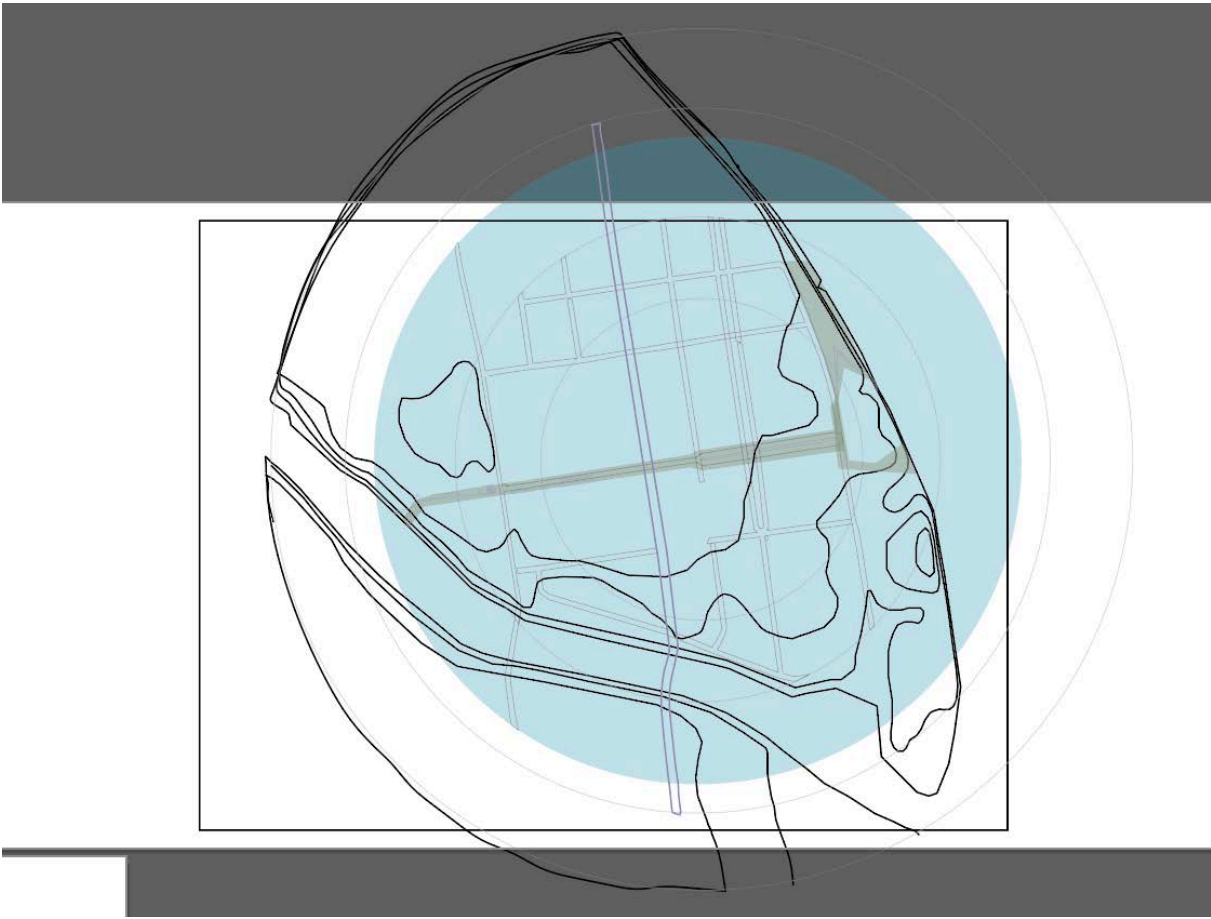


Started by hand with cardboard and string. Focused mainly on the Primary peninsula that makes up Port Huron.

Constructing a 3D Model



Moved to illustrator, and experimented with ways to define the water, and how much land to include.





Testing the cut

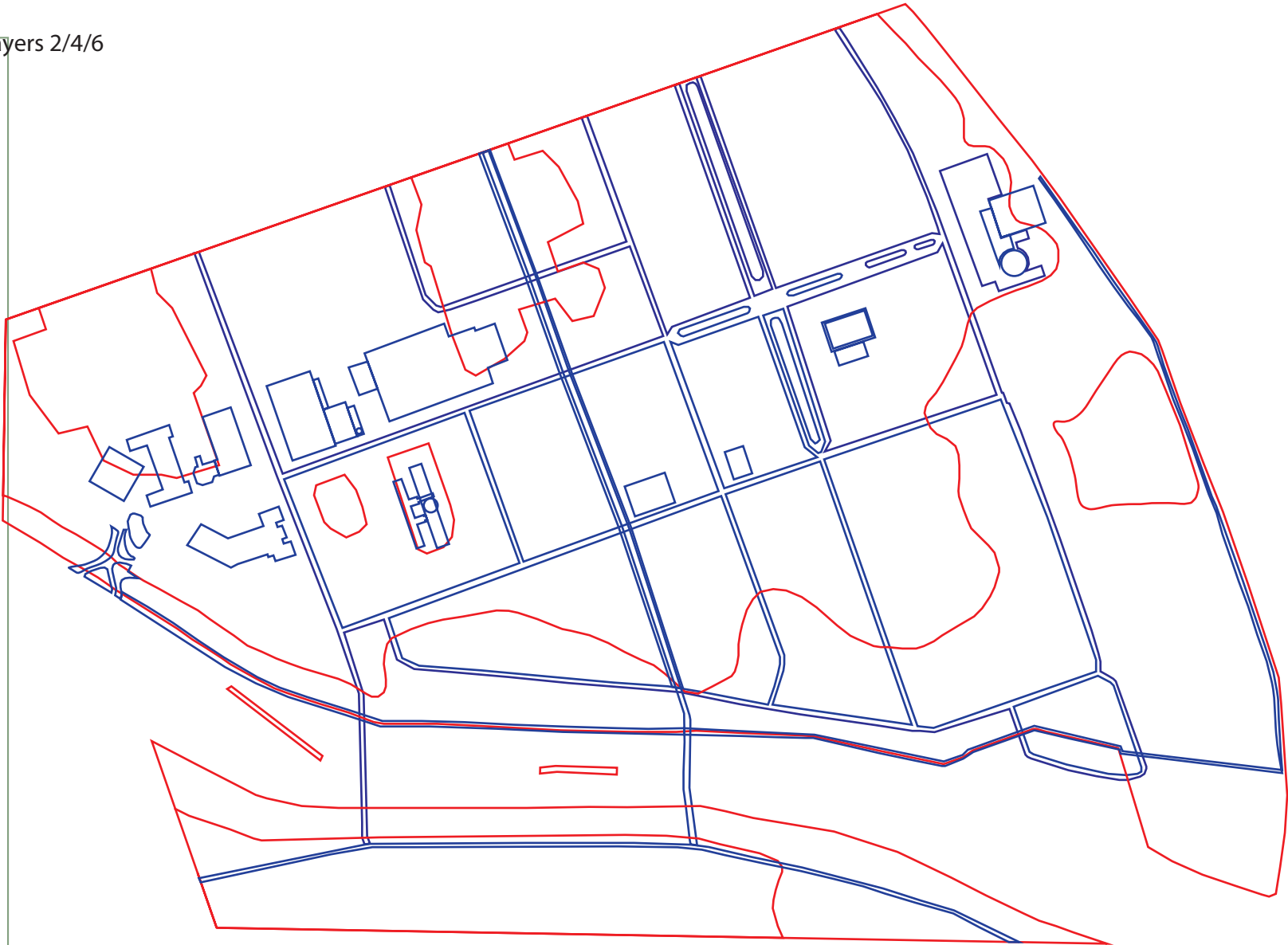


Phased out the circle for water - The circle was an attempt to center the corridor visually, but it wasn't working to define the water on the outsides of the landscape within the rivers.

cut layers 1, 3, 5



Layers 2/4/6



Official Final wood cut plans, April 2021

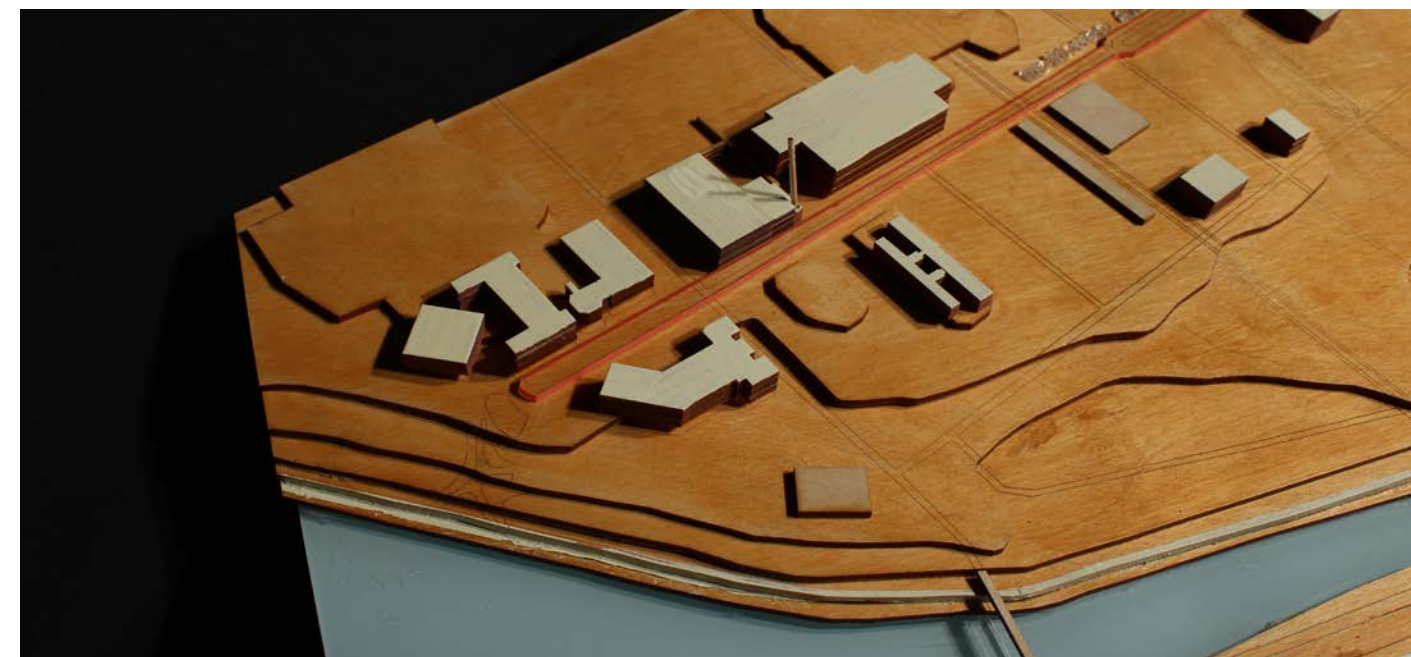


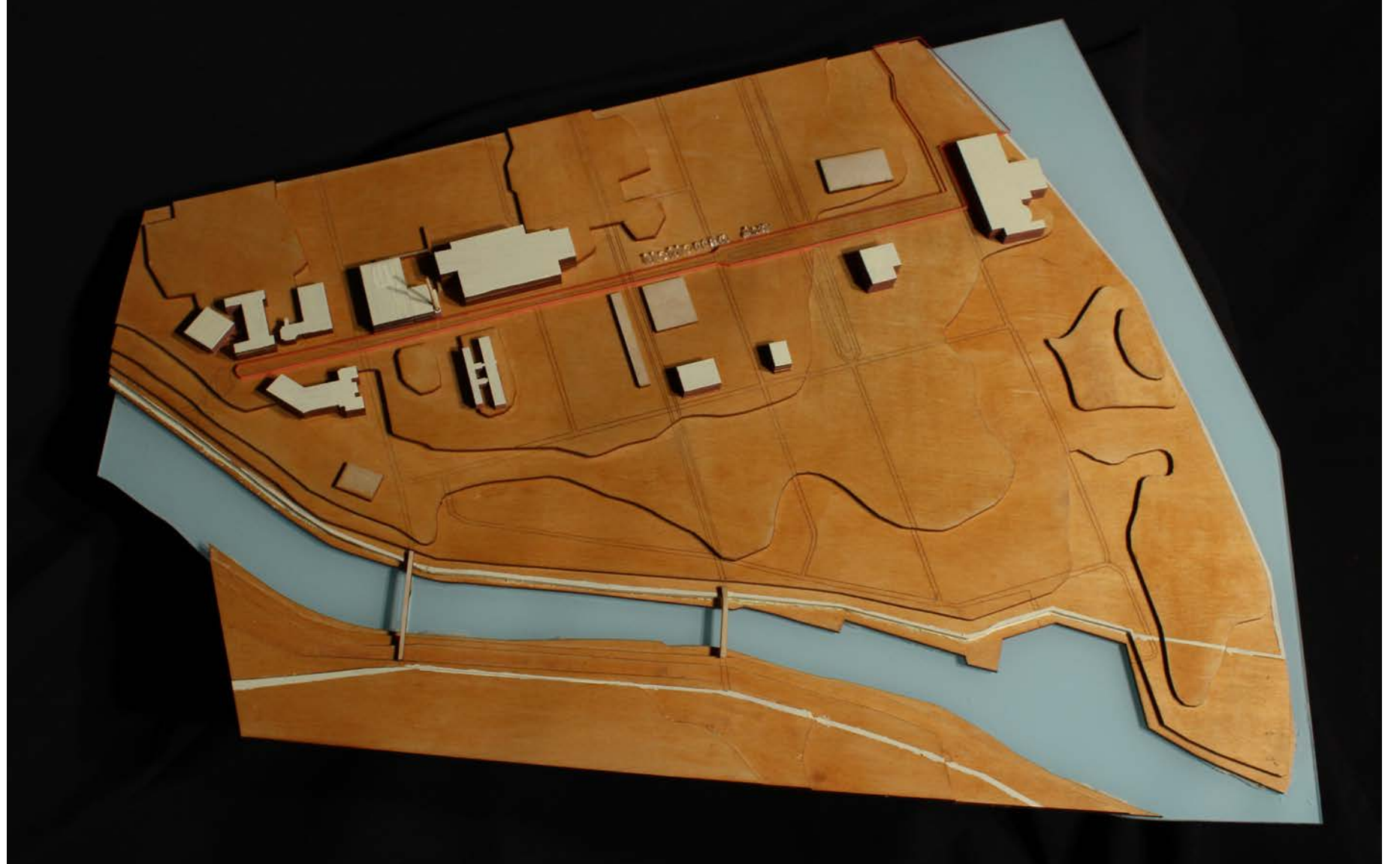
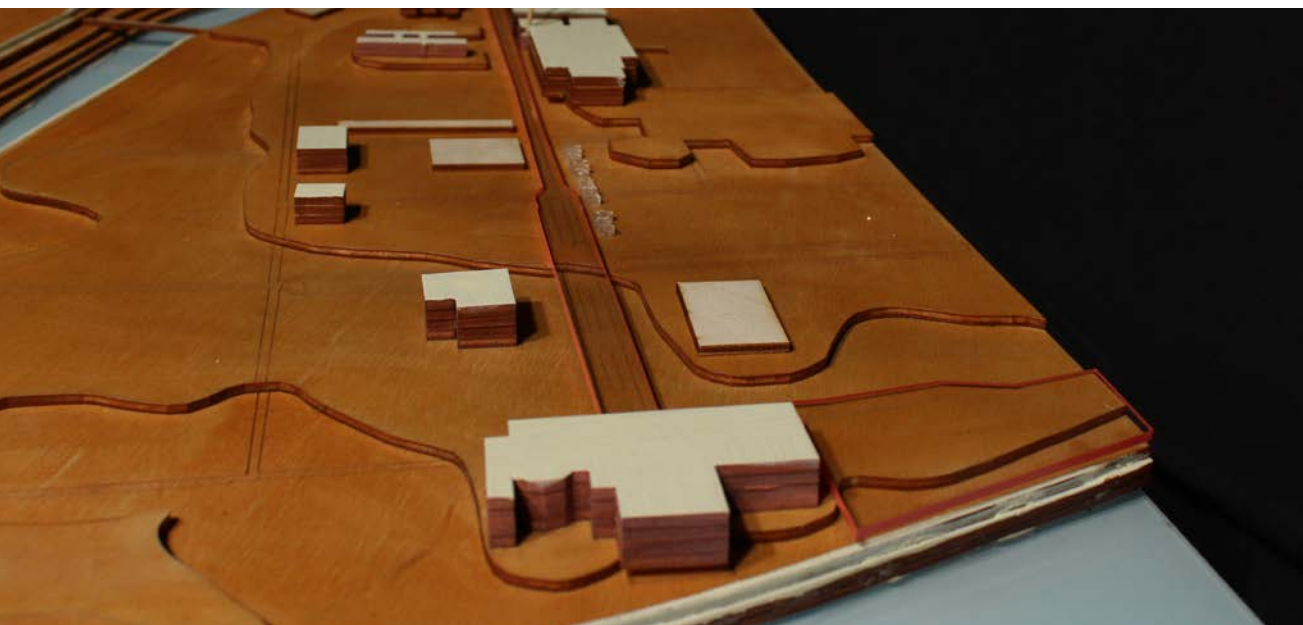
First time setting up the wood cut (above) and one thin coat of stain + red orange buildings (left)



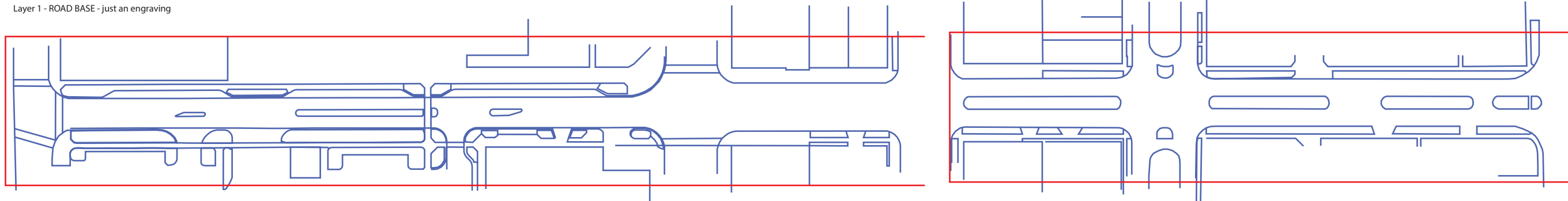
The white line is the preexisting trails along the rivers. The pink line is the proposed corridor, and the white buildings are the major connected institutions.

Final Model 1:1500

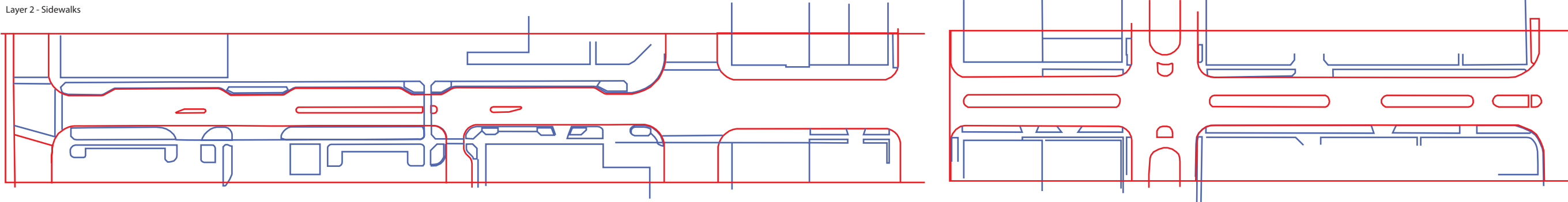




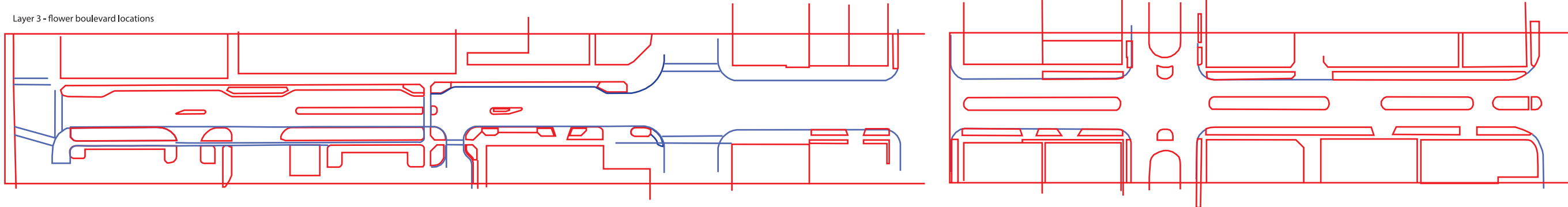
Layer 1 - ROAD BASE - just an engraving

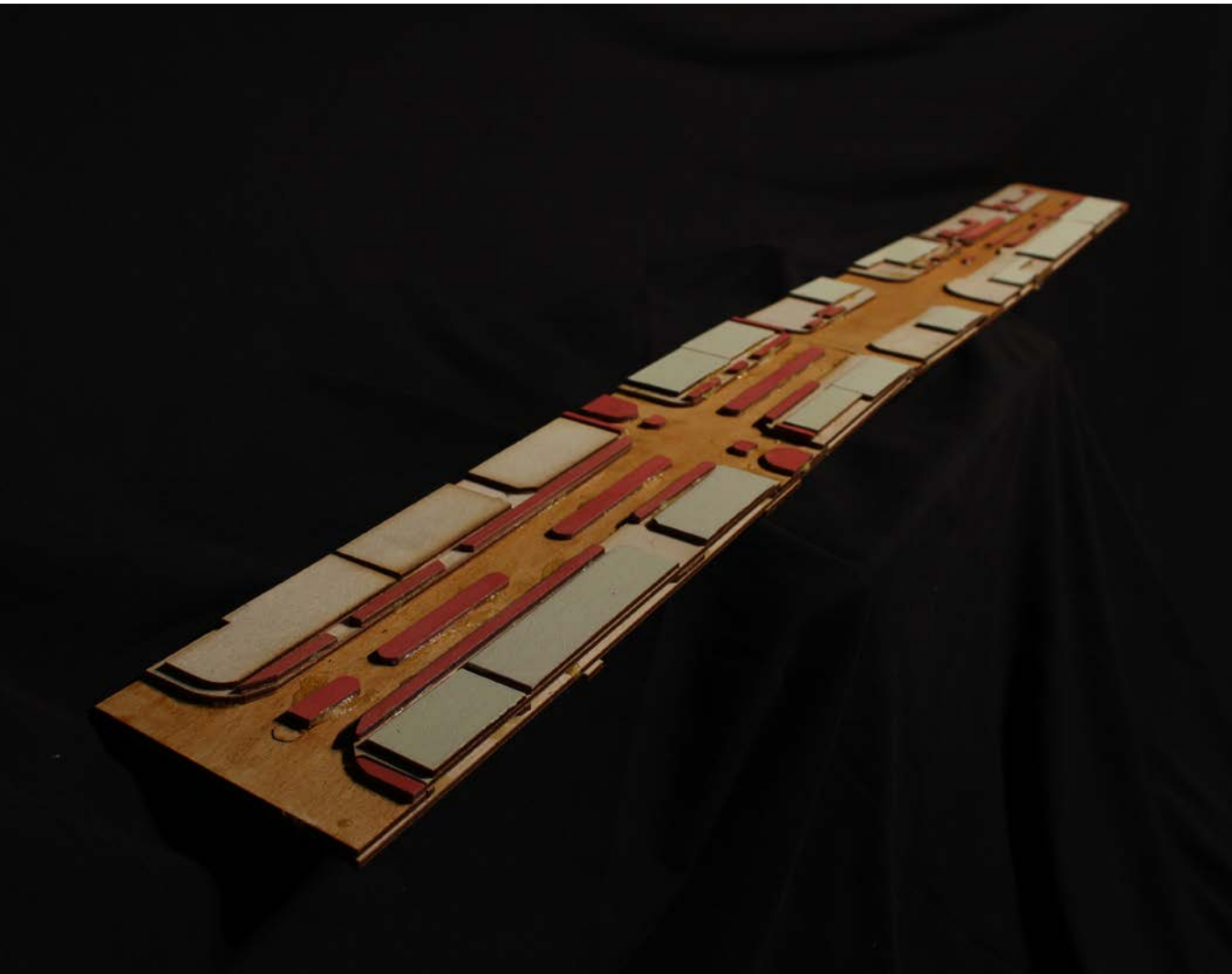
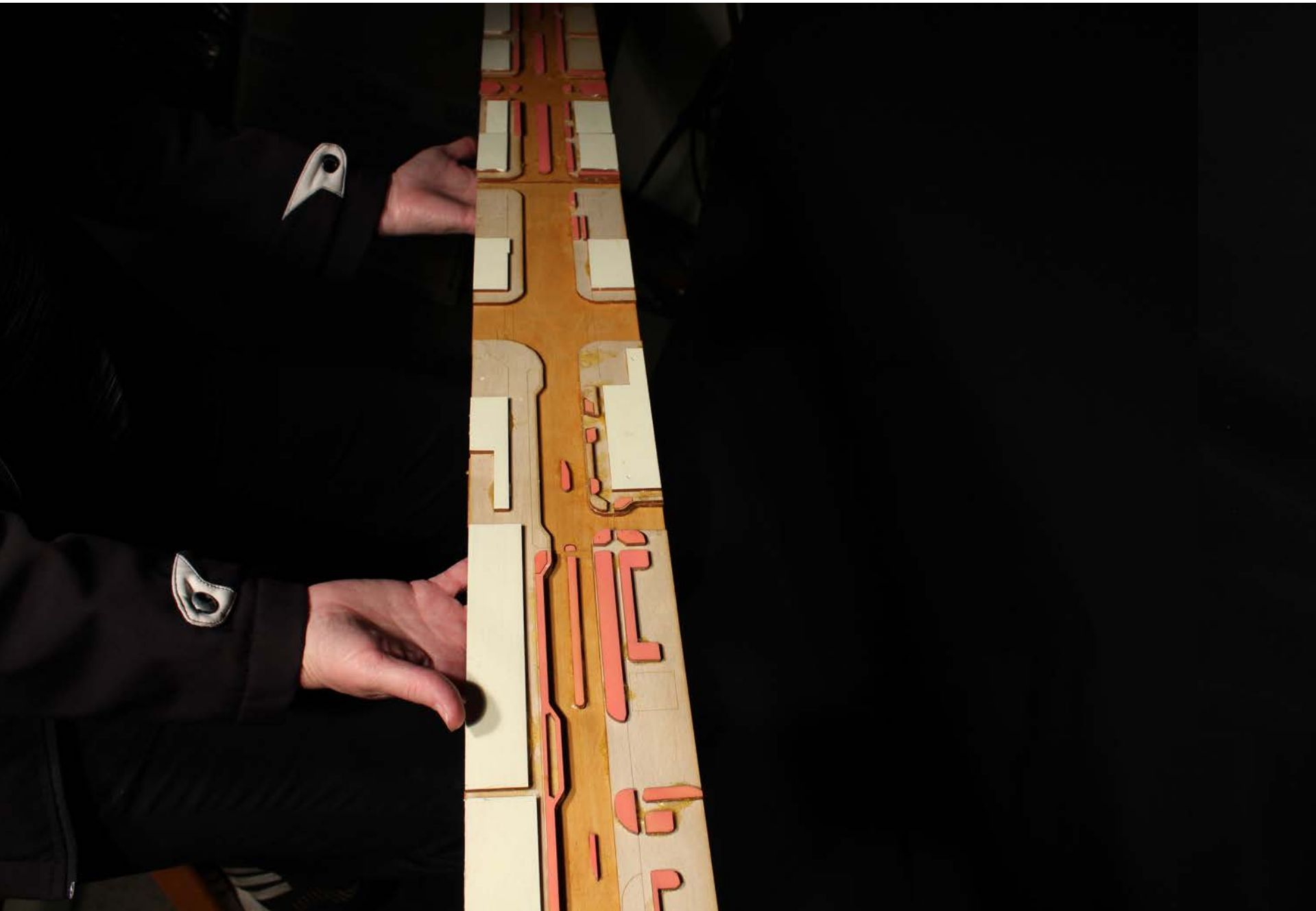


Layer 2 - Sidewalks



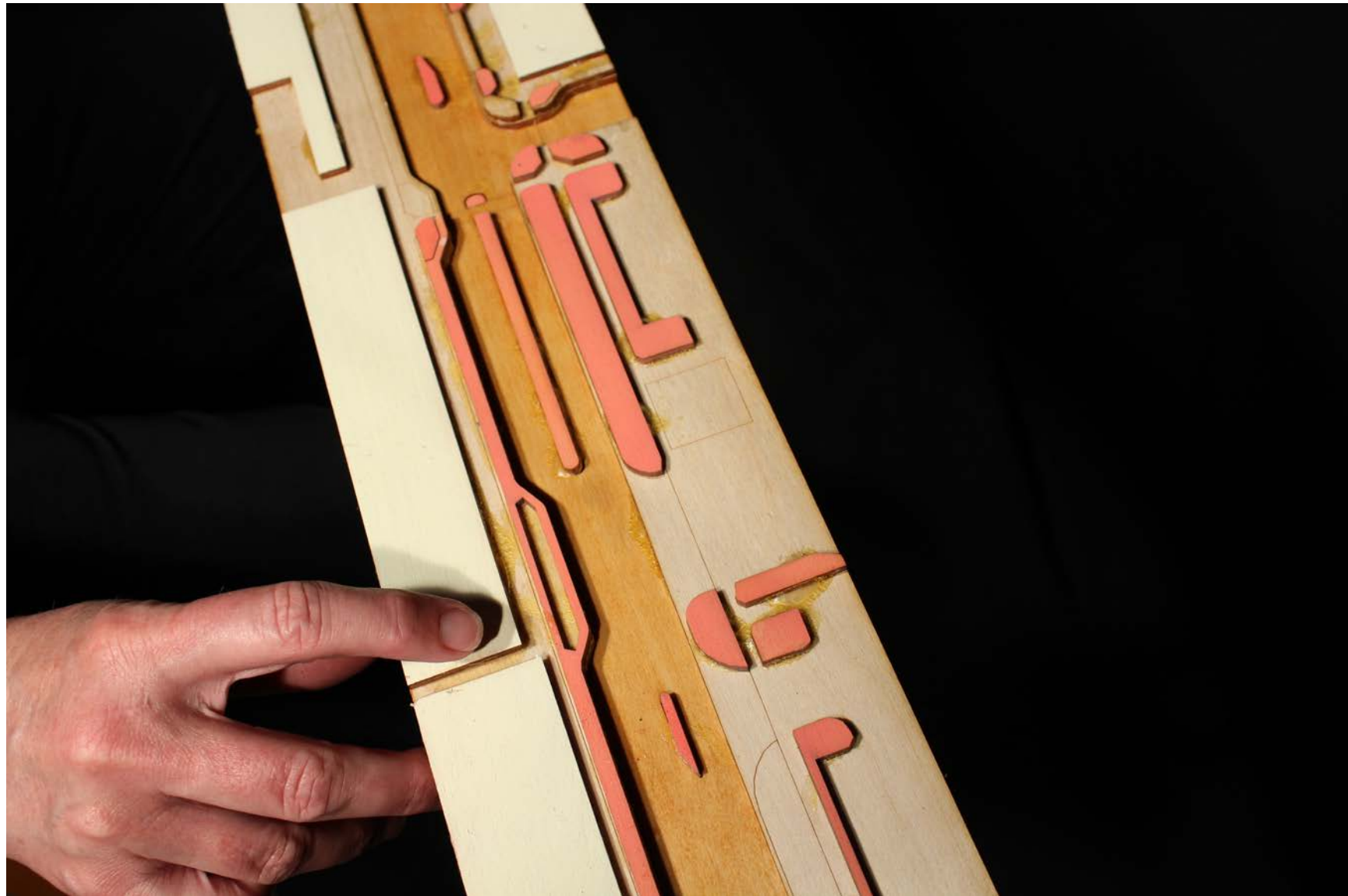
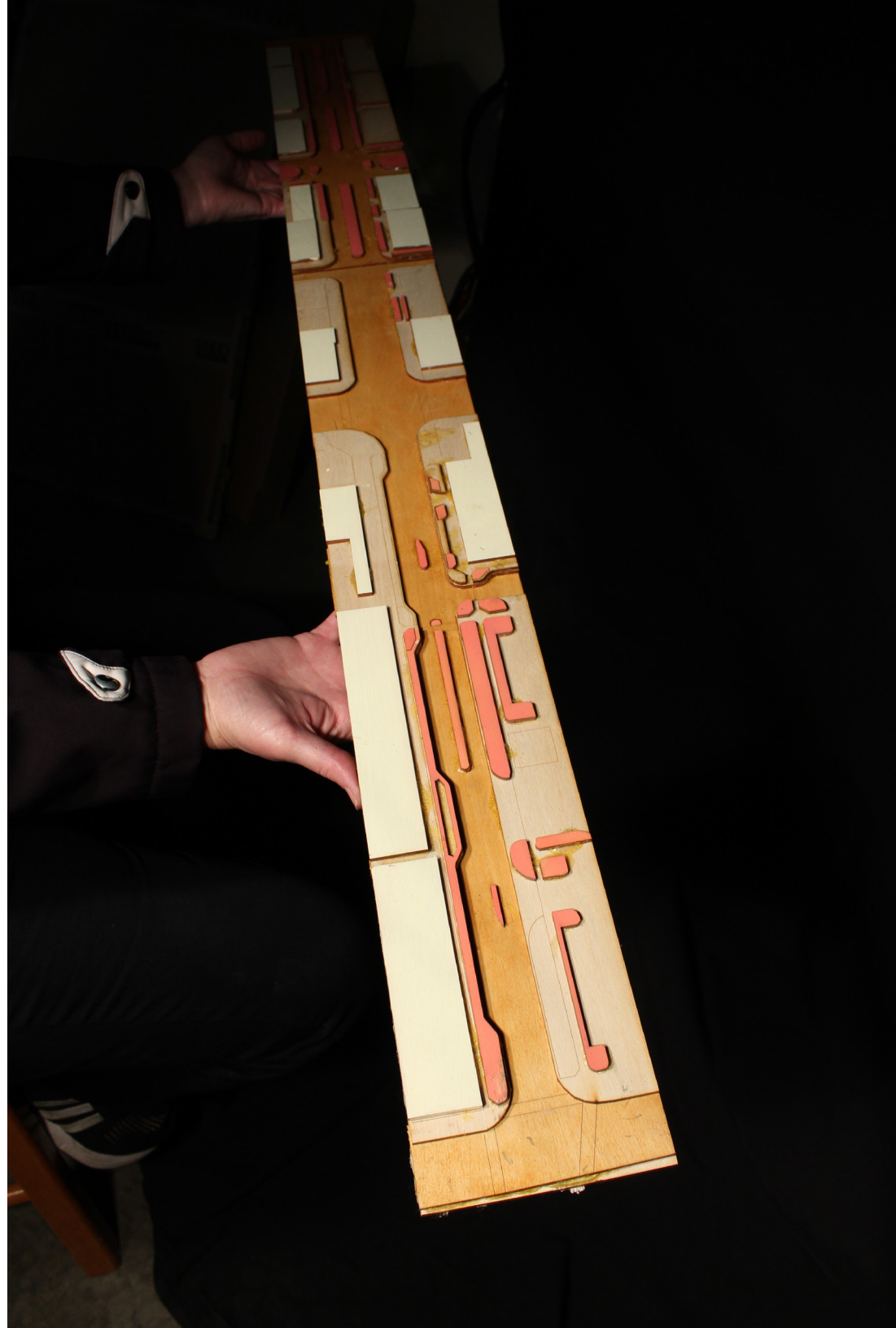
Layer 3 - flower boulevard locations



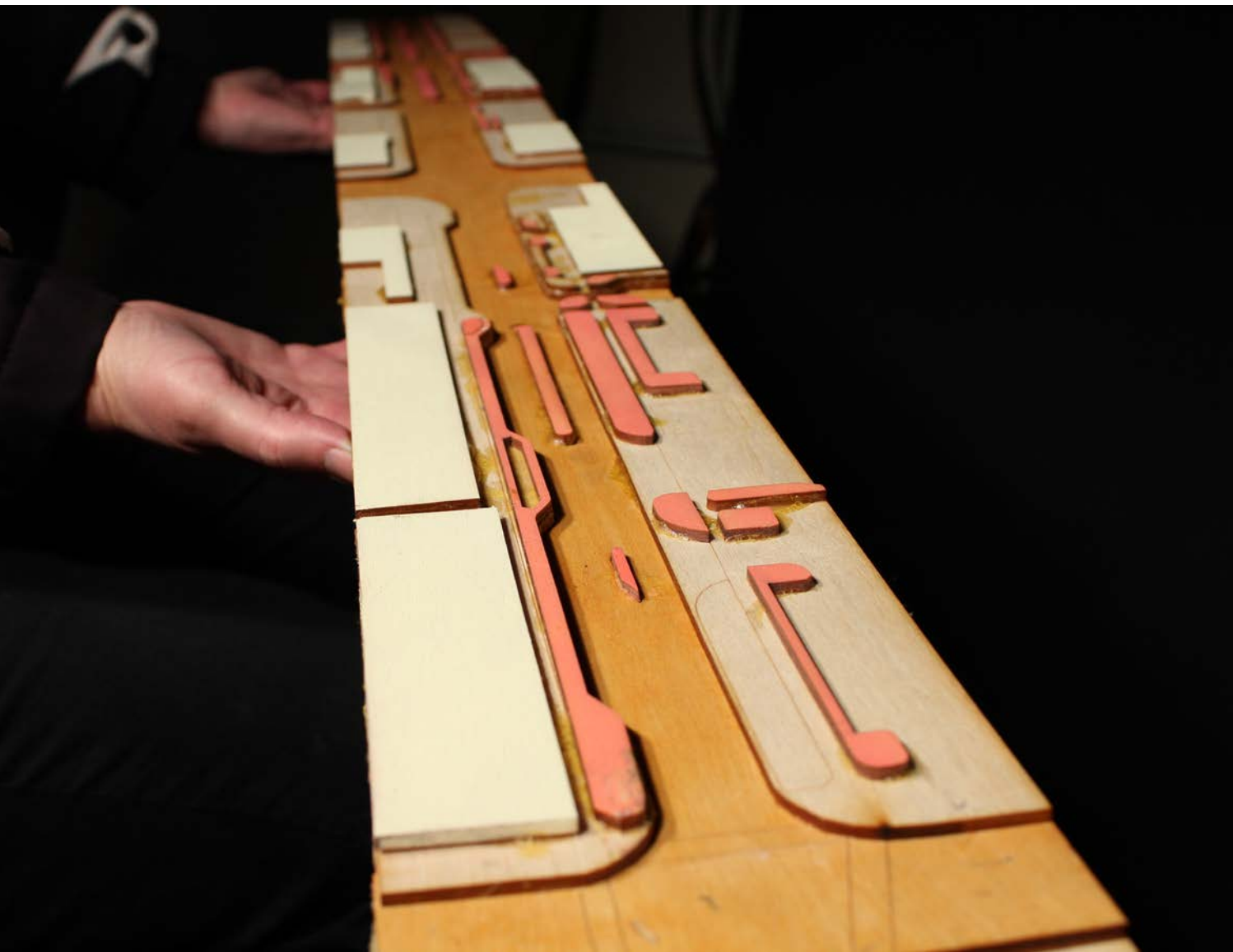


This is the entire street of McMorran, that a person can “hold in their hands.” Each of the pink shapes outlined are the boulevards that would be planted with wildflowers.

Model of McMorran Ave 1:400



“Where is McMorran?”
Treating this as an ongoing project, I hope to make a version that is labelled, and has the buildings more to scale - here they are represented by the white shapes.



Both final works together in perspective.

Feedback and Concluding Thoughts

There are still major concerns about how the public might respond to the flowers within the city, and what the maintenance will look like shifting away from a standard sodgrass framework.

The opportunity to transform these boulevard spaces is incredibly beneficial to local ecology and human communities! Inserting “wild” spaces into our built environments is necessary for climate change resiliency and defending the freshwater resources so close.

Thank you for reviewing this. (Buy wildflowers for your own lawn here: <https://www.americanmeadows.com/wildflower-seeds>)

