

E. LIBERTY COMMONS

Design process and proposal

ZOE PINFOLD | 2007



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WORLD CARFREE NETWORK 2ND ANNUAL DESIGN COMPETITION

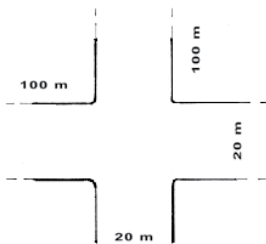
THE PROMPT: The world Carfree Network

Convert an existing or imaginary street of vaguely 20m x 100m into a carfree space from a previously car oriented space. This space should encourage human interaction, sense of community and livability and address alternative forms of transportation. The design should be realizable. Design changes may be made to surrounding buildings but the judging process will not focus on these changes.

DUE DATE

November 15th, 2007

INTERSECTION FORMAT



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THE LOCATION: East Liberty

My original thought was to design a car free space for Portland, OR. Since I know it well and thought this kind of proposal would be well received.

As the research process started, however, I realized how much neighborhoods in Pittsburgh could benefit from some urban renewal. I chose the East Liberty neighborhood because it was accessible and I was mildly familiar with the area. East Liberty has a history of urban design failure,

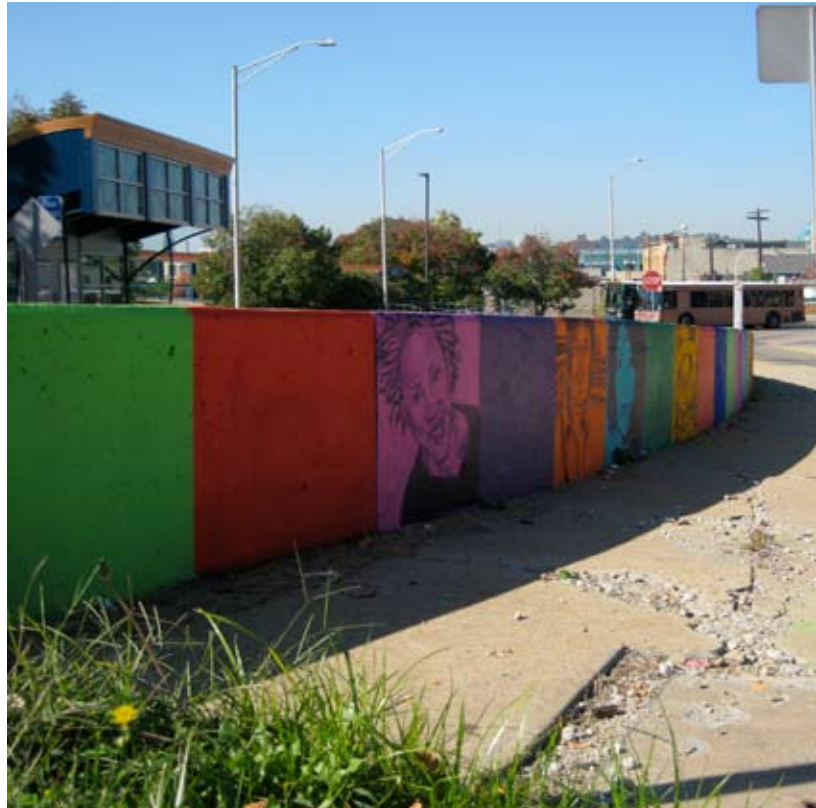
NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

1816: Pittsburgh-Greensburg turnpike built through East Liberty making area a center for trading and ensured future growth.

1868: A thriving commercial center attracted wealthy Pittsburghers to settle in surrounding Shadyside, Point Breeze, Bloomfield and Friendship.

1960s: Attempts to stop business moving to the suburbs led to the URA redesign of East Liberty street plan. These plans rerouted Busiest section of Pitt-Greensburg turnpike (Penn Ave) rerouted into one-way circuit around main business district (Penn Circle). The project also leveled 254 acres and over 1 million square feet of retail space while building 3 large housing complexes along Penn Circle to accommodate displaced residents.

1979: just 98 business remain in East Liberty; less than 20% of the number in 1959 just before the restructuring efforts.



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THE LOCATION: East Liberty

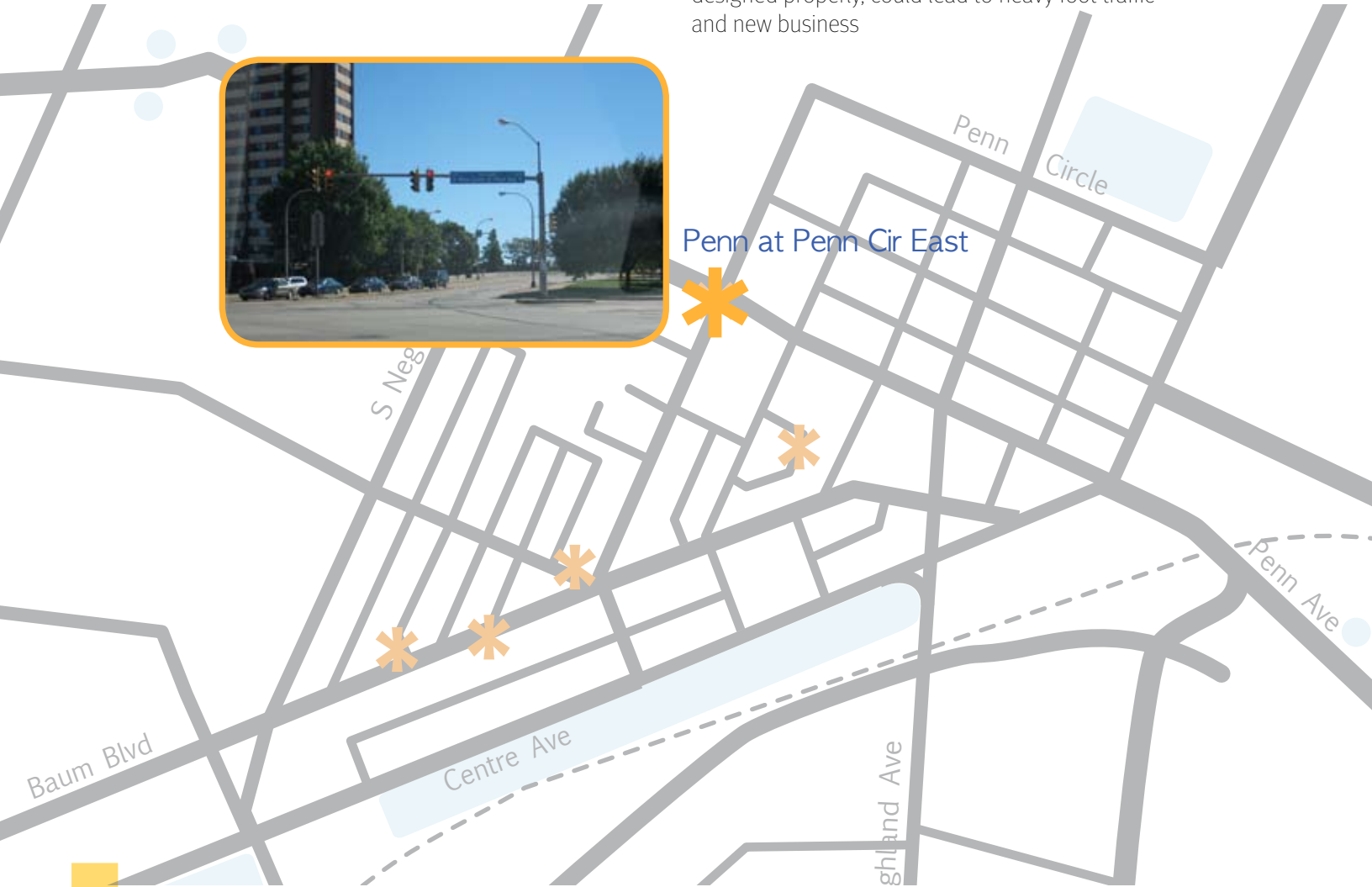
In the last decade, East Liberty has seen the much promising renovation including the opening of a Whole Foods, Home Depot and Borders as well as several independent art studios and galleries to the West along Penn Ave (shown in blue).



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THE LOCATION: East Liberty

The intersection of Penn Ave and Penn Cir. East is surrounded by areas of new development but the location itself is still aesthetically very run-down. The site is also a busy thoroughfare that, if designed properly, could lead to heavy foot traffic and new business



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DEFINING THE ISSUES: **COMMUNITY BUILDING**

East Liberty residents have a strong pride in their neighborhood, but much less sense of community and few places to demonstrate that pride. I want to provide a place that is open to every member of the community, a place where East Liberty can demonstrate and share their neighborhood, heritage and community with each other and visitors.

SAFETY

The intersection of Penn Ave and Penn Circle East has become a known location for drug deals and violence. Even residents often avoid traveling through the intersection. I want to give back the feeling of safety that has been taken away from the area. E. Liberty will always be well lit and open to the public.

ENTRANCE TO EAST LIBERTY

The E. Liberty commons location lies on the border of East Liberty and Shadyside near Friendship, Squirrel Hill and Point Breeze. I want the Commons to act as a Entrance to the neighborhood, a welcoming point where visitors can learn about the area.

GREEN SPACE

East Liberty is a particularly urban area with little green space. E. Liberty Commons would be a green haven from the traffic noise of the large intersection.

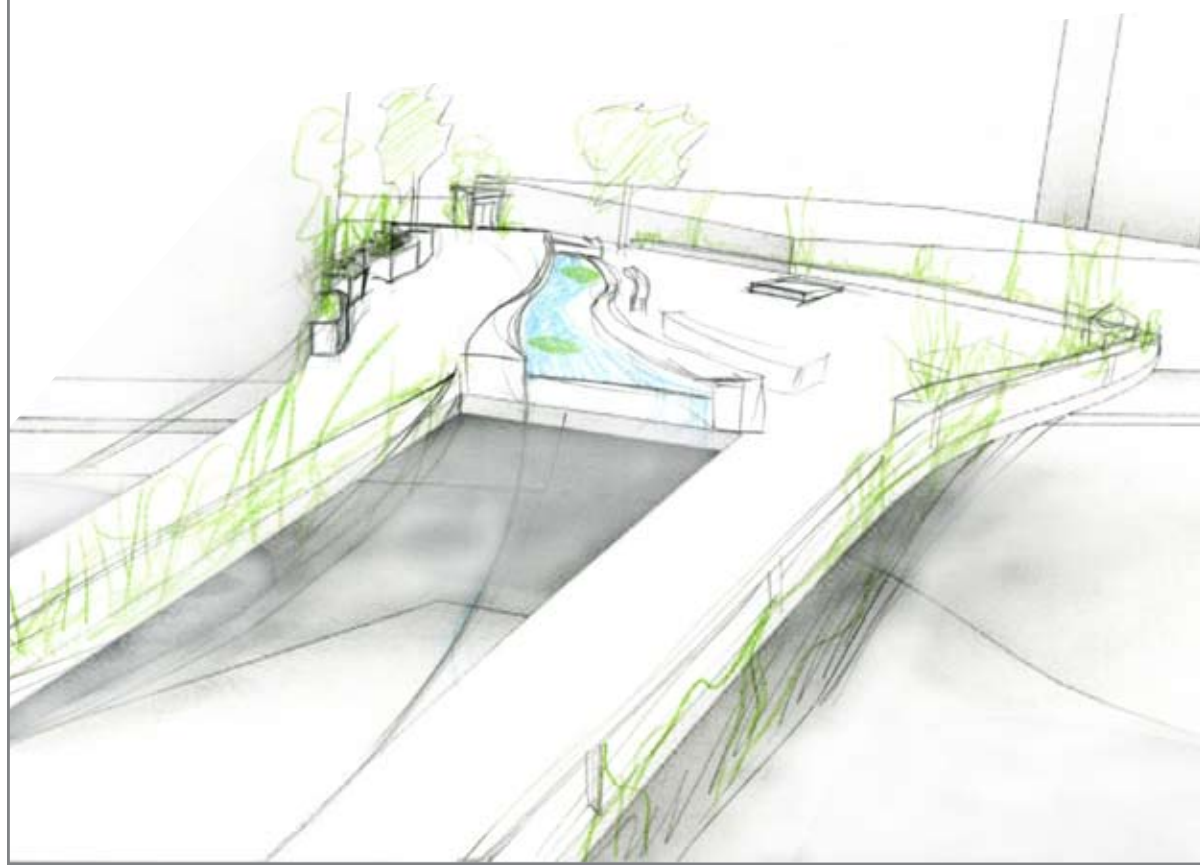
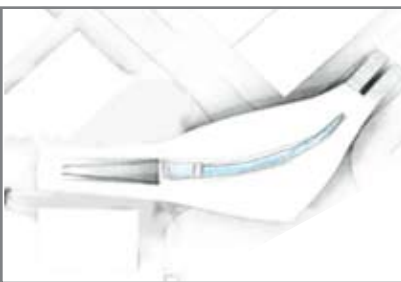
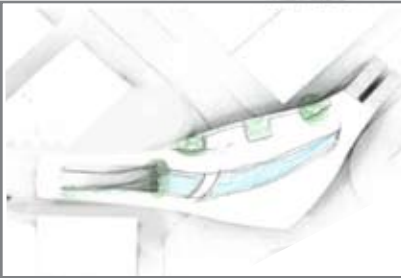
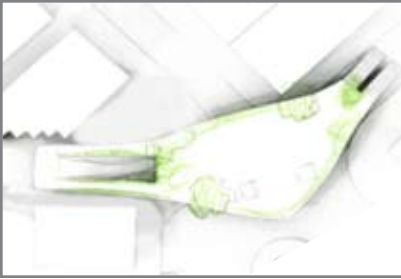


PROCESS: Inspiration

I began my design process by collecting images of public spaces that I felt to be most successful. Images ranged from spaces as un-designed as cobbled streets such as Via Dante in Milan (bottom right) to the modern, highly sculptural works of Frank Gehry (top right) and the

Millennium foot bridge in London (top left) to urban parks like Jamison Park, an interactive children's fountain in the center of Portland OR. With these I pulled the elements I thought could be applied to Pittsburgh and East Liberty and began my initial sketches.

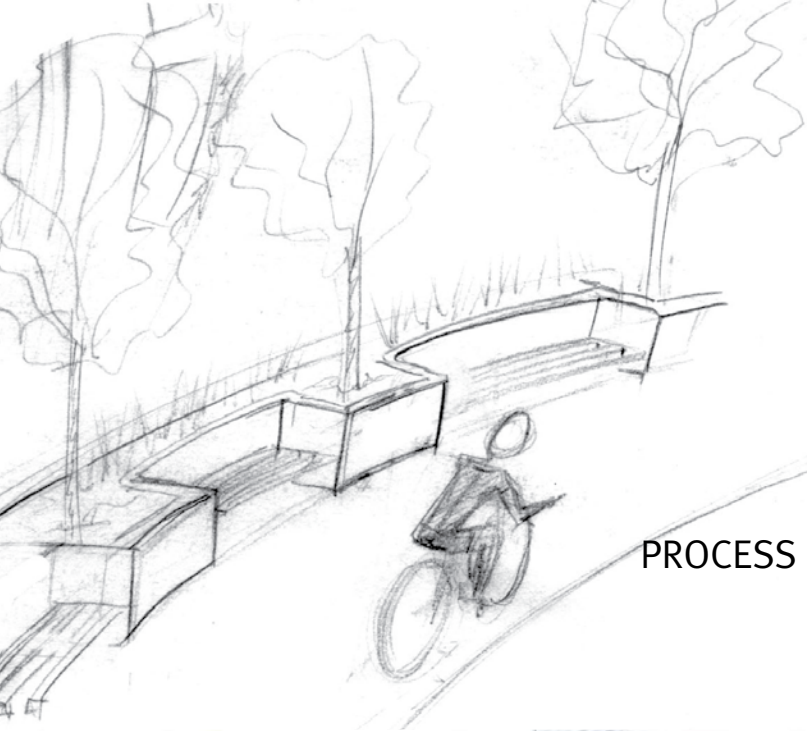




PROCESS : Initial Sketches

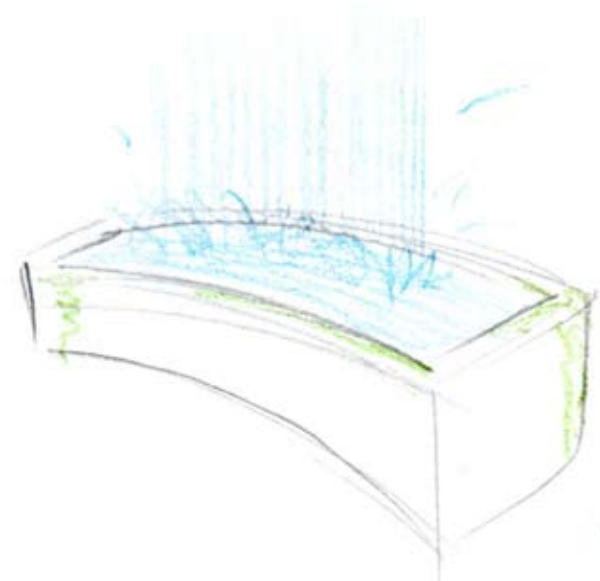
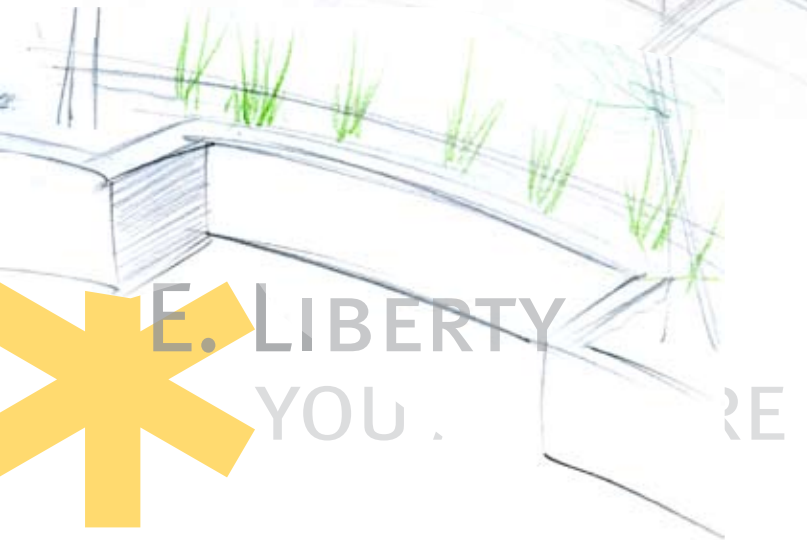
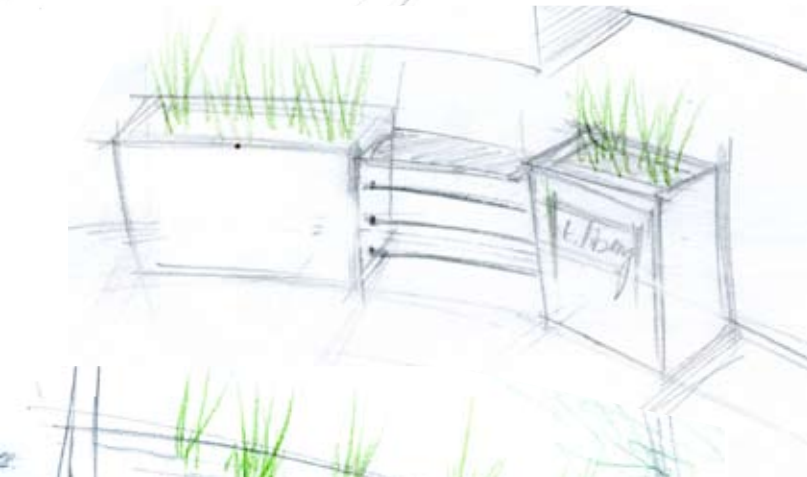
I wanted E. Liberty Commons to feel as if it were overflowing with greenery, with vines crawling over the edge of the park and down the walls to hide the concrete structure and sculptural grasses lining the walkways. Trees were used to help block traffic noise and provide shade across much of the exposed site.





PROCESS : Initial Sketches

To encourage a sense of individual involvement and responsibility for the space, I tried to create multi-function spaces that could be enjoyed or utilized by many different members of the community. For example, the multi use alcoves that line the North West side of the park double as small performance spaces or selling stations for independent vendors. Large planters throughout the grassy area of the park are large enough to sit or lay out a small picnic while being in excellent view of the main stage.



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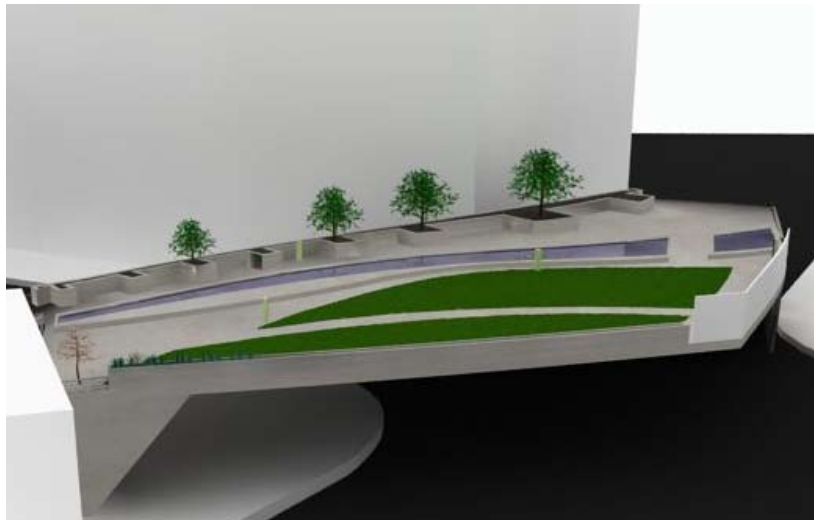
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THE CONCEPT: Progress critique

Once initial sketches were conceived, I began modeling the entire intersection using CAD software. Midway through the design process, I asked peers for critiques of my concept so far. The session brought up several issues I had not considered including flow of people and safety. Throughout the design, I tried to avoid dark or dead-end spaces that could encourage dangerous or illicit behavior. My initial entryway design had to give way to a brighter, more open format.



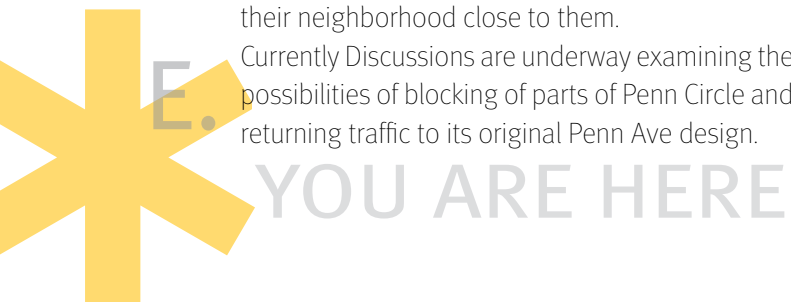
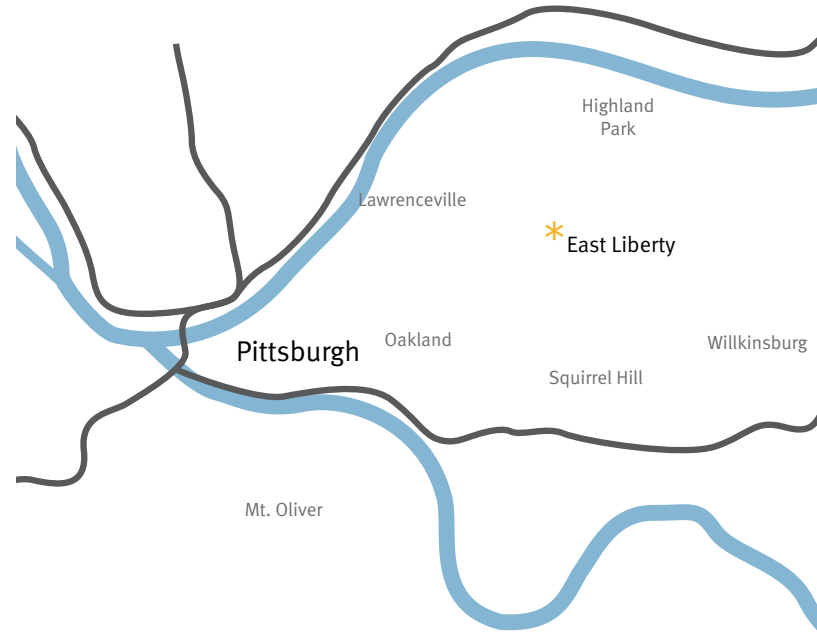
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THE SITE: East Liberty, PA

The town of East Liberty sits just east of downtown Pittsburgh in Western Pennsylvania. The town, like the city, has a rich, if dirty history in the steel industry, which made and lost many fortunes during the 19th and early 20th century. East Liberty's more recent history talks of dirt, crime and poverty. Forty years ago, a booming East Liberty economy made some poor civil engineering decisions, cornering itself between three enormous housing projects and rerouting Penn Ave. traffic, its main thoroughfare, around a series of one way streets that became Penn Circle. The loss of this major conduit road caused more than 90% of East Liberty businesses to go under.

Over the last four decades, East Liberty has fallen into disrepair. Violence and crime rates are high, causing much would-be traffic to circumnavigate around dodgy areas. East Liberty residents are largely African American families. Like all Pittsburgh natives they are proud of their heritage, loyal almost to a fault, and hold the misfortunes of their neighborhood close to them.

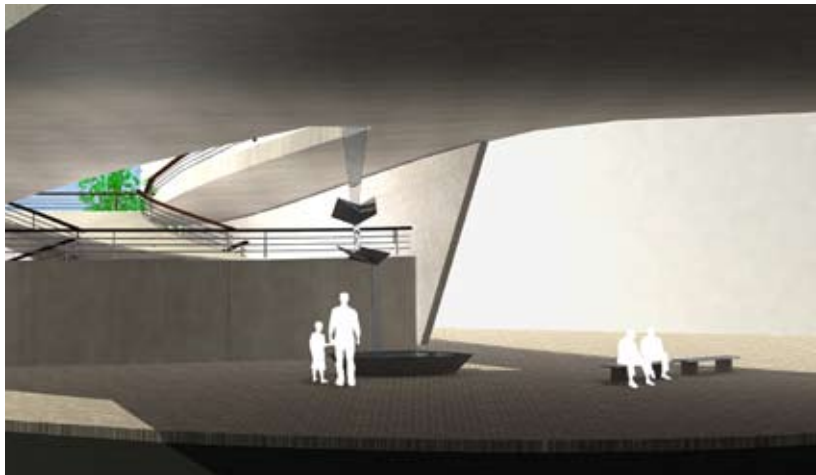
Currently Discussions are underway examining the possibilities of blocking of parts of Penn Circle and returning traffic to its original Penn Ave design.



THE PROPOSAL: E. LIBERTY COMMONS

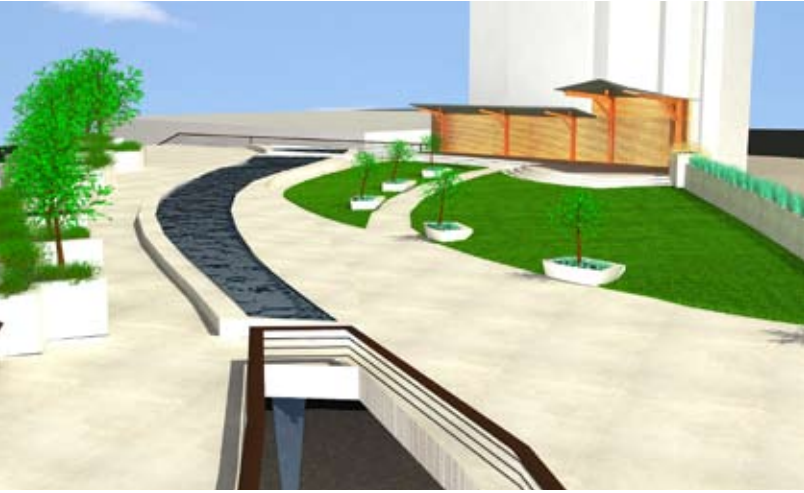
E. Liberty Commons would close one block of Penn Circle East on either side of Penn Ave. from car traffic and bridge the gap across Penn Ave. with a sculptural elevated park. E. Liberty Commons provides a much needed space for members of the community to express their individual voice. It offers a stage for local theatre groups, bands or speakers. It provides a gathering place that the community can use and enjoy.

The park as a whole has been designed with exhibition and community in mind. Inlets along the main walkway are large enough for street artists and musicians to perform. Areas under and around the park are perfect for market vendors who have long been in competition with store owners in the area over sidewalk use.



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THE PROPOSAL: E. LIBERTY COMMONS



A Shallow stream runs the length of the park giving children a place to play on a hot day and adults a calming place to sit and relax.

E. Liberty Commons is a refuge from the traffic below, from the chaos of everyday life, perhaps even a momentary refuge from a difficult home life.

East Liberty is largely made up of families. Many children attend after school programs at East Liberty Presbyterian Church in the center of town. E. Liberty Commons offers a place where these after school groups could bring kids to play, learn or perform. A display case built into the portico wall makes room for kids' artwork so that every member of East Liberty can put their positive mark in the life of the Commons.



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THE IMPACT: Revitalization

Slowly East Liberty is changing as artsy Pittsburgh types along Penn Ave renovate old buildings into trendy art galleries and lofts. Home Depot and Whole Foods have moved into the area, increasing retail traffic and a sense of upward mobility but there is still a long way to go. E. Liberty Commons is an attempt to decrease and hopefully eliminate neighborhood violence and vandalism. By giving back the feeling of safety that has been taken from the site and getting community members involved in the life and future of the park, this project could do an incredible amount to brighten the future of East Liberty.

