

**Architecture as Reparation: Re-establishing a Sense of  
Belonging for the Black Community in Halifax**

by

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at

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kmaq'i,  
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.  
We are all Treaty people.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on a historic African Nova Scotian community that currently faces erasure due to gentrification along Gottingen Street in Halifax's North End. Black communities in Nova Scotia, from early migration to the present day, faced various forms of racism and marginalization. This has led to a decreased sense of belonging and life advancement opportunities. This thesis explores how reparations can be achieved through the architectural design of a community centre for the Black community. This community centre will increase sense of belonging through local history, cultural symbolism and social activities that are rooted in the neighbourhood. Not only will the community centre increase belonging in the present, but also provide opportunities to succeed in the future. This entire thesis is inspired by an altered version of the Sankofa symbol on the African Nova Scotian flag. It is a symbol that emphasizes learning from the past to create a better future.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first like to thank my partner and family for believing in me and supporting me throughout life and school. I would also like to thank my thesis supervisor Steve Parcell and advisor Ifeyinwa Mbakogu for their invaluable feedback. Talking with members of the community, including Rodney, Dennis, Sylvia and folks at the local YMCA, was also a great experience. Thank you, and I appreciate you all.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## What are Reparations?

Reparation is defined as the act of making amends or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury (Merriam-Webster 2023). Before we can determine how reparations can be embodied within an architectural intervention, we must understand the concept of reparations. In 1989, the late U.S. Representative John Conyers of Michigan drafted bill H.R. 40 to study the effects of slavery. It recognized the benefits slavery conferred on white American society and the harms it has caused on subsequent generations of Black people. This led to an extended dialogue on reparations on college campuses, editorial pages of newspapers and even political campaigns (Brophy 2006, 3). Those who support reparations focus on the trauma that was caused by slavery and the Jim Crow laws that followed the abolishment of slavery in the United States (Brophy 2006, xi). These laws legalized racial segregation and were meant to marginalize Black people (History 2018). It led to voting suppression due to racist intimidation, limited education and poor employment opportunities (Brophy 2006, xi). If these laws were broken, the consequences were arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence and even death. After World War II, there was an increase in civil rights activities in the African American community. This ushered in the civil rights movement and led to Jim Crow laws being abolished (History 2018). Despite this advancement, slavery and Jim Crow laws have caused generational harm for Black people. Those who support current reparations often mention that racist policies and harm from that period continue to limit opportunities for Black people today. One of those limits is redlining, a systemic denial of services,

including mortgages, insurance, and loans in certain areas, based on race and/or ethnicity. It has also prevented certain neighbourhoods from having grocery stores and health care services (Cornell Law 2022).

## **Types of Reparation**

There are two types of reparations: material and symbolic. Material reparations can be cash payments or service provisions for health, education and housing. Symbolic reparations can include official apologies, changing the names of public spaces, days of commemoration and the creation of museums (Greiff 2006, 5). Reparation programs often dwell on past harms and focus on correcting them, while other programs are more concerned with forward-thinking applications such as funding for schools to benefit an entire community in the future (Brophy 2006, 7). The reparation process should not stop at addressing historical harms of the past. It should also foster a more equitable future for dispossessed groups and individuals (Xiong 2021, 39). In this thesis, symbolic reparations will be in the form of architectural design. Material reparations will occur through the funding of the building and programs within the building that generate wealth for the Black community. These reparations will be rooted in the community's past and present to develop a future that increases belonging. To achieve this, one must study and understand Black history within Nova Scotia. This is key to identifying reasons for a lack of belonging and how they can be addressed through design.

## **Chapter 2: Black Heritage**

### **Black Heritage in Nova Scotia**

African Nova Scotians are an integral part of Nova Scotian and Canadian history. Nova Scotia is seen as the birthplace of Black Culture and heritage in Canada. As of today, Nova Scotia has the largest indigenous Black community in Canada. There are currently 52 historic African Nova Scotian communities, including Shelburne, East Preston, Annapolis Royal, Cherry Brook, Halifax, Sydney, Springhill, North Preston and Beechville (The Black Cultural Centre 2021c). However, for over 400 years they have struggled to deal with various forms of racism and to achieve an adequate sense of belonging in society (Saney 1998, 79). Marginalization, broken promises and community erasure are some tactics that have been used to oppress African Nova Scotians and their history. A contemporary example is evident along Gottingen Street in Halifax's North End. Gentrification is a major force that has led to the decline and erasure of the historic African Nova Scotian community in the area. This thesis focuses on how architecture can be a form of reparation and increase a sense of belonging in a disappearing historic community.

### **Early Arrival**

Between 1750 and 1777, British colonial settlement took root in Halifax. During this time there was also an active commerce of buying and selling enslaved Black people between Boston, Halifax, New York, and other New England settlements. In 1752, enslaved Africans were also traded from the Caribbean to Halifax (Cooper 2023).





Historic Black migration routes to various places in Nova Scotia, Canada  
(data from The Black Cultural Centre 2021c)

## **Black Loyalists**

In 1783, Black Loyalists were the largest group of people of African descent to enter Nova Scotia. In the United States' War for Independence Black people from the American colonies sided with the British because they were promised freedom, land, provisions, and other benefits (The Black Cultural Centre 2021a). However, after arriving in Nova Scotia, they were met with many obstacles. This included broken promises and brutal racism by the white population, which provided few rights and opportunities. Some Black people even experienced conditions close to enslavement or were kidnapped and sold back into slavery in the Caribbean and American South (Cooper 2023).



Black loyalist family (The Black Cultural Centre 2021a)

## **Jamaican Maroons**

Another significant migration was the Jamaican Maroons between 1796 and 1800. Jamaica was a society colonized by Great Britain. The Maroons fought for independence;

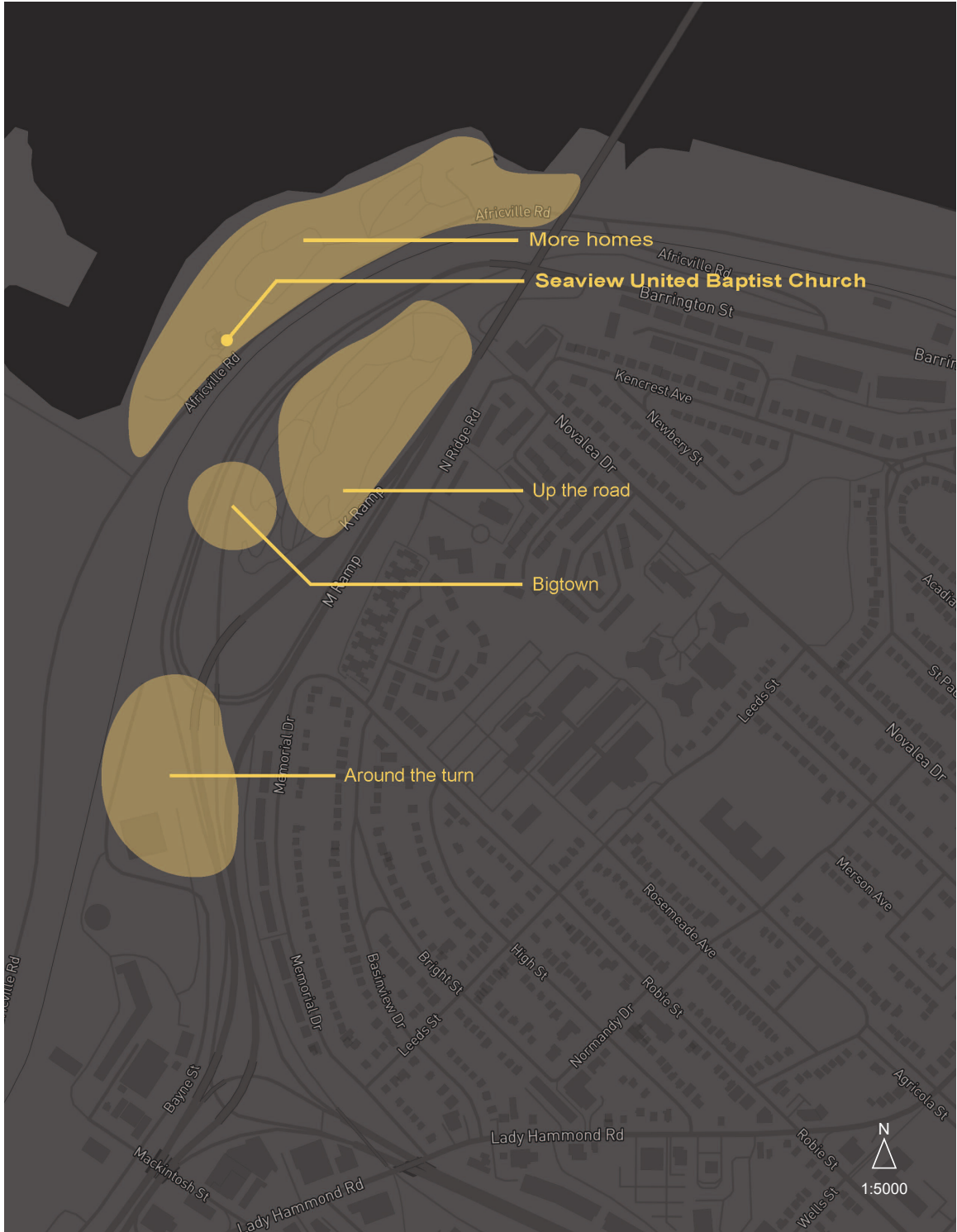
however, they were eventually sent to Nova Scotia after a few conflicts with the British. After arrival, they became part of a colonial labour force that worked on projects such as the modifications to the Halifax Citadel (The Black Cultural Centre 2021b). Due to poor working conditions and pressure from the colonial government and church to abandon their own culture, some Maroons grew frustrated and left Nova Scotia (Cooper 2023). For those who stayed in the province, various Black settlements were established with hope of a better life and a greater sense of belonging. However, they continued to face racist treatment and other forms of oppression.

### **Africville**

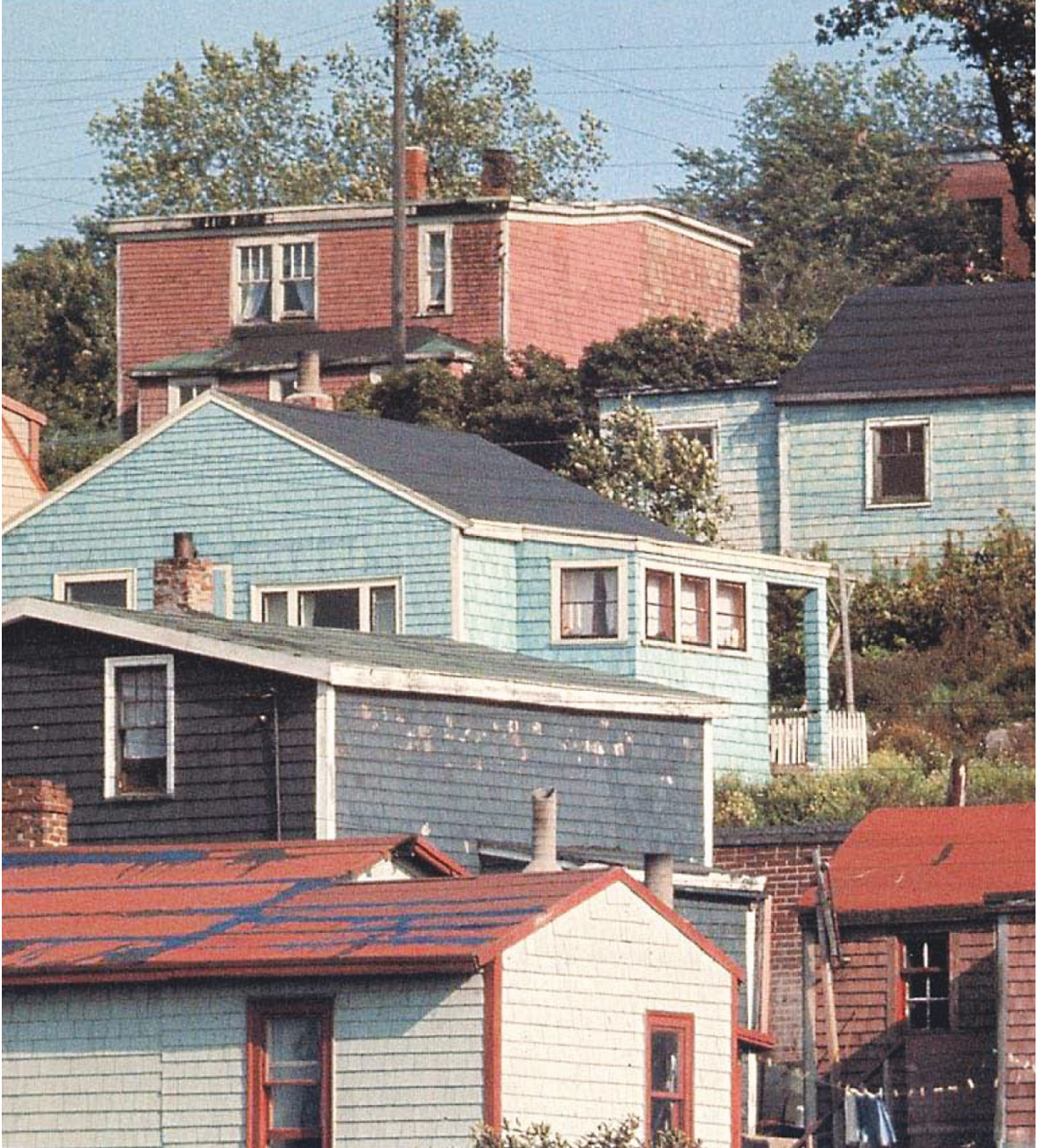
Established in the 1840s, Africville was a small Black community on the north edge of the Halifax Peninsula, overlooking the Bedford Basin (Loo 2010, 23). Many who lived outside the community labelled Africville a slum, populated by squatters. However, in contrast to outside perceptions, its 400 residents paid taxes and took pride in their community. They had meaningful jobs, maintained their gardens, raised their kids and were proud of their homes. Many people who lived in Africville described it as a community with brightly painted houses, where neighbours would support each other (Africville Museum 2022). The community also built and operated its own school, established a post office, and had Seaview United Baptist Church as its spiritual and social centre.

### **Environmental Racism**

However, Africville was treated poorly by the city, and became victim to discriminatory urban development policies. Although residents paid taxes, Africville was denied



Places that existed in Africville according to former Africville residents Brenda and Linda (data collected by Mahon 2020)



Africville homes (Africville Museum n.d.)

basic services granted to those outside the community. This included running water, sewage treatment and disposal, paved roads, police, ambulance, and fire truck services. Instead, a polluting railroad was run through the community in 1854. This was followed by undesirable facilities placed near Africville: a prison, a slaughterhouse and an infectious disease hospital. In 1955, a dump was even placed dangerously close to homes and the Seaview United Baptist Church. This contributed to the steady decline of Africville and its designation as a slum by those outside the community (Africville Museum 2022).



An Africville well in the 1960s with a sign reading, "Please boil this water before drinking and cooking" (Brooks 1965)

## **Destruction of Africville**

Between 1964 and 1970, all Africville homes were destroyed, along with the Seaview United Baptist Church, which was bulldozed in the middle of the night. Residents were forced to relocate, and Africville was ultimately erased (Africville Museum 2022). Canadian jazz musician Joe Sealy, whose father was born in Africville, gave an important perspective. He said, "What was lost was invisible to those 'well-meaning' bureaucrats, because they never lived in Africville. They

never chased baseballs across the field on cool summer evenings, or scrambled for blueberries in the scrub on the hill, as the children did. They never heard the piano music from the parlours, or the voices raised in praise from the church. They never knew what it was like to be six years old, living in Africville and knowing you're safe because you're home" (Loo 2010, 24).



Denise Allen rallying for Africville reparations outside Halifax City Hall (Hoffman 2020)

## Africville Reparation?

After forced re-location, many Africville residents struggled to live in unfamiliar places where they were stigmatized and marginalized. Job security was an issue, and the privacy, freedom, and community Africville provided was sorely missed (Loo 2010, 24). In 2010, the Africville Genealogy Society entered a long conversation with the City of Halifax to receive monetary reparations for what happened to Africville. It resulted in a public apology, 2.5 acres of land, and money to construct a replica of the Seaview United Baptist Church, which is now the Africville Museum (Africville Museum 2022). Unfortunately, the museum is isolated from the rest of Halifax by a series of roads and railway lines.

This limits the opportunity for people to experience the historical exhibits and see information that is not available elsewhere. It also diminishes the sacredness of the place and continues marginalization.



## Chapter 3: Gottingen History

### Sense of Community

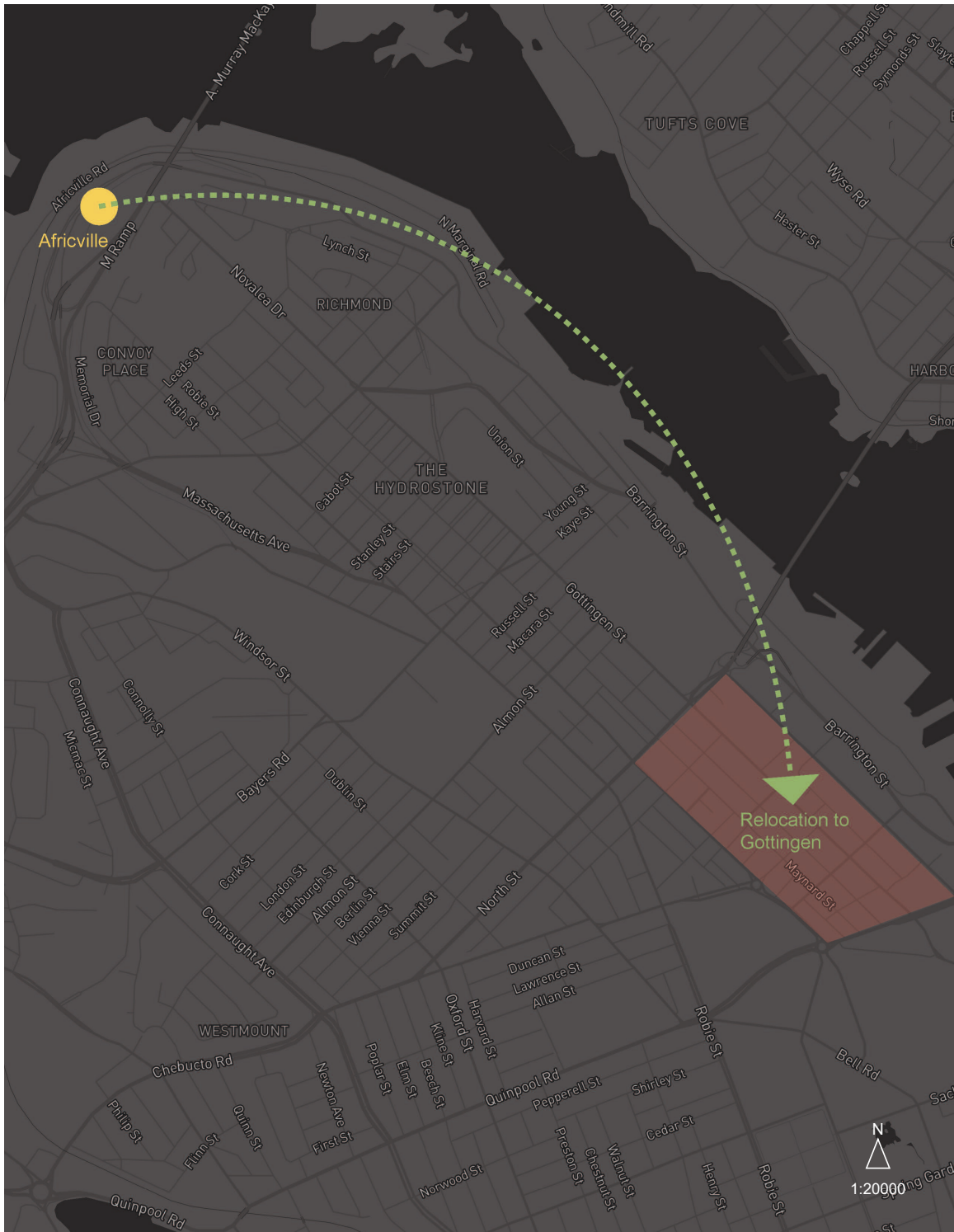
The Gottingen Street area in Halifax's North End was one of the places where former residents of Africville were relocated (Poitras 2018). It is bounded by Cogswell Street, Agricola Street, North Street and Brunswick Street. This location was already a special place for Black people in Nova Scotia and Canada. Life within the community was described as densely populated and tight knit. Primarily along Creighton Street, three-story houses had a family on each floor, and residents would often lean out of their windows and talk with neighbours (Akintokun 2020).

### Black Businesses

The local streets included several Black businesses and important gathering spots, such as Viola Hairdressing and Jack Barbershop on Gottingen Street (Pachai 2007, 190). Jack Desmond was the first licensed Black barber in Nova Scotia and husband of Viola Desmond.



Viola Desmond in her beauty salon (Bingham 2013)



Africville relocation of some residents in Halifax, Nova Scotia (base map from Mapbox n.d.)

Viola Desmond lived on Maynard Street within the community, and was an impressive businesswoman and civil rights activist. She built a career as a beautician while making her own hair care products and cosmetics (Bingham 2013). She also mentored other young Black women in Nova Scotia through her Viola Desmond School of Beauty Culture. She became known for her strong stand against racism, after refusing to leave a whites-only section at a theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia (Akintokun 2020). Today, Desmond is featured on the Canadian ten-dollar bill, and is regarded as a Canadian icon. Other businesses included a food store on Creighton Street run by Sarah Brown, who drew customers from all over with her delicious home-made taffy apples. More food stores were run by Dorthea Jones on Creighton Street and Mary Alberta Gray on Cornwallis Street. Other Black businesses in the area included a shoe repair shop run by Alexander Thomas on Creighton Street (Pachai 2007, 191).

### **Community Gathering**

On the corner of Creighton and Gerrish was Gerrish Street Hall. This is where community kids would go to matinees and where residents would go to socialize and dance. Another gathering spot was the Arrows Club on Creighton Street, owned by Billy Downey. Famous singers such as Tina Turner and Teddy Pendergrass even visited the Arrows Club (Black Nova Scotia News 2010). New Horizons Baptist Church (formerly Cornwallis Street Baptist Church), founded by Reverend Richard Preston in 1832, was also an important place in the community. It served as an outlet for youth and a place for the community to come together. Portia White, who sang in and directed the church choir, became the first Black Canadian singer to win international acclaim, and

was one of the best classical singers of the 20th century (Akintokun 2020). Down the street from New Horizons Baptist Church, at the corner of Falkland and Gottingen, was the Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church. This church was home to important members and speakers. One of these members was Henry Sylvester Williams, who was the first Black student to attend Dalhousie University's law school. He also established the first Pan-African Congress in London. Marcus Garvey, a global Black leader, also spoke at the church (Taplin 2023).



Creighton Street in the 1940s or 1950s (The Old North End 2014)

## **Excellence in Sports**

The community also had prominent athletes such as George Dixon, Wayne Smith, David Downey and Delmore “Buddy” Daye. George Dixon was the first Black world champion in boxing history (Zarum 2020). Wayne Smith was the first Black player to make the Canadian Football League without playing high school or university football (Akintokun 2020).

Delmore “Buddy” Daye was a champion boxer and leader of various community organizations (Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute 2022). A competitive Black hockey league also existed between 1895 and 1920, with teams from Yarmouth, Halifax, Dartmouth, Amherst, Truro and Sydney. The Africville Sea Sides, Amherst Royals, Truro Victorias and Halifax Eureka regularly drew more than 500 spectators to watch high-calibre hockey (Colaiacono 2014).



A Nova Scotia Black hockey team (Blackpast 1910)

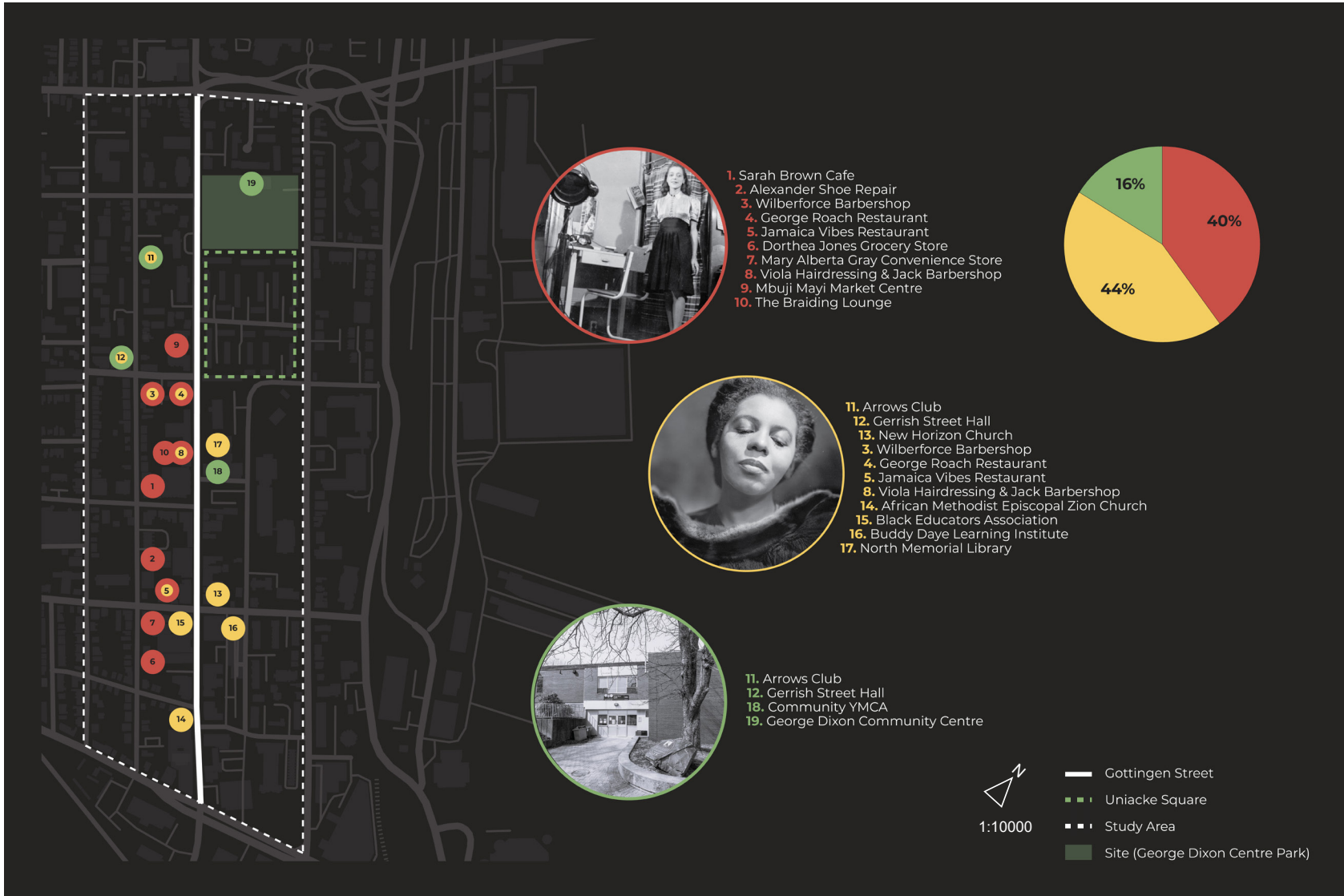
## **Intolerance**

Despite the existence of important community places and people, the community still struggled to gain a sense of belonging. They were still treated as second class citizens. There were certain places they knew not to go. African Nova Scotians would be turned away from certain dance halls, despite being well dressed and behaved, and were told, “You have dance halls of your own.” Members of the community who attended plays were not allowed to occupy seats on the

main floor because they were Black. Furthermore, education for Black people was limited. It was hard to find a job and become a member of a union, as it would be seen as taking jobs away from white folks (Akintokun 2020). African Nova Scotians continued to experience a lack of belonging due to marginalization and other forms of racism.

### **Gottingen Decline**

Similar to Africville, the historic Black community along Gottingen Street experienced a rapid decline in the late 1960s and 1970s due to discrimination and a large-scale urban renewal campaign. Until the mid-1960s, Gottingen Street had been a successful inner-city entertainment and commercial district, but declined due to suburbanization and inner city disinvestment. A continuing effort to modernize the Halifax peninsula led to slum clearance in the area based on perceived physical appearance and social behaviour. Furthermore, large-scale development projects such as Scotia Square and Cogswell Interchange contributed to the decline of small businesses along Gottingen Street. The population decreased and economic disinvestment continued for several decades (Roth 2013, 12). The area lost over sixty-five percent of its residential population by 1996. By 2000, Gottingen Street had 100 fewer retail and commercial uses than it did at its peak in 1960 (Roth 2013, 13).



If historic Black spaces were maintained and combined with present day Black spaces within the community (base map from Mapbox n.d.)



Loss of historic Black spaces and what is remaining in the present day community (base map from Mapbox n.d.)



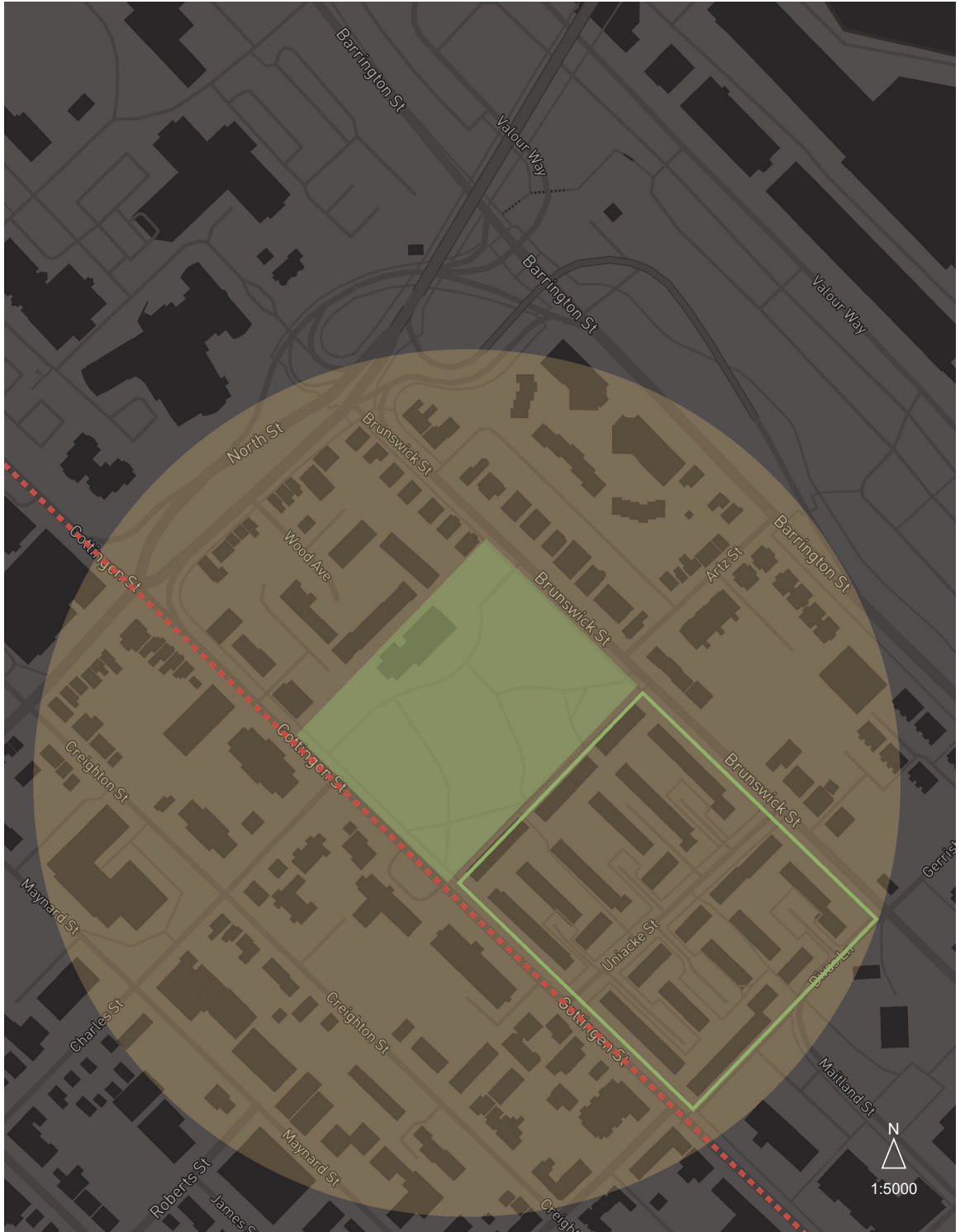
## **Chapter 4: Gottingen Today**

### **Gentrification**

Today, Gottingen Street is undergoing gentrification, with wealthier people moving into the neighbourhood. Some see gentrification as neighbourhood revitalization, but it is important to ask who benefits from this revitalization. For the Black population, gentrification has erased Black businesses and historic places, without reviving them in new developments. Occasional community events, such as Taking BLK Gottingen, feature Black businesses but are only temporary. The daily reality is that residents of this Black community do not see themselves represented in the new boutiques and other businesses in the area. There are also not many public spaces where Black people can have large gatherings, express joy, and develop culture all year round. Historic commemoration is also lacking in this neighbourhood with such a rich history. Community institutions like Hope Blooms, Halifax North Memorial Public Library, Community YMCA, Buddy Daye Learning Institute and Black Educators Society do work to increase Black inclusion in the area, but the community is still feeling the negative impacts of racism and the loss of earlier businesses and gathering spots. Overall, this historic Black community is being marginalized and erased.

### **George Dixon Centre Park**

George Dixon Centre Park is the site of the proposed community centre. The park is bordered by houses on the north and Brunswick Street to the east. It is also bordered by Uniacke Square to the south, which is an historic African Nova Scotian public housing block. Additionally, Gottingen



- George Dixon Centre Park
- Uniacke Square
- Surrounding Residential Area
- Gottingen Street

George Dixon Centre Park and its surroundings (base map from Mapbox n.d.)

Street to the west is a major road in the city. The park is a recreational hub in the community, with a community garden, three outdoor basketball courts, a splash pad and an accessible playground. Bus stops near the Gottingen side of the park provide connections to various parts of the city. Additionally, commuters often walk through the park between Brunswick and Gottingen. Building on the north side of the park can take advantage of the commuter path and the park's frontage on Gottingen Street, without impeding on the existing park amenities. A south-facing building can also take advantage of natural light.

### **George Dixon Community Centre**

For this thesis, the existing George Dixon Community Centre will be replaced by the new community centre on the north side of the park. It would provide more opportunities for the community to replace the existing building compared to a renovation. A major limitation for the existing building is its small size. For example, popular programs like the pottery studio can only accommodate a small group of people and storage. This limits community participation and art that can be created in this space. The building's distance from Gottingen Street is also less than ideal. It is not visible from the street and people have to walk through the park to reach it. Additionally, the south facing facade is mostly constructed of brick with few openings for natural light. Inside, the building feels like a labyrinth and is quite dark and closed off from the community. Wheelchair accessibility between floors can also be improved.

### ***Replacement***

An important question would be, why not renovate the building instead of replacing it? With a renovation, the ability to address important issues with the building is restricted to the small building footprint. It would also be difficult to add new programs within it. Fortunately, there is space on three sides for a larger building. This increases the ability to expand existing programs, add new programs and include more architectural features that will help maximize the building's community impact. Despite this, another question would be, why not renovate the other existing places in the community instead? Those buildings would benefit from a renovation but they would still be limited to small lot sizes and dense urban fabric surrounding them. Renovation would also not fix the fragmented placement of these spaces. Community members have expressed that one place to incorporate a more diverse set of activities is needed. The new building will be a central hub for various programs and easier to access.

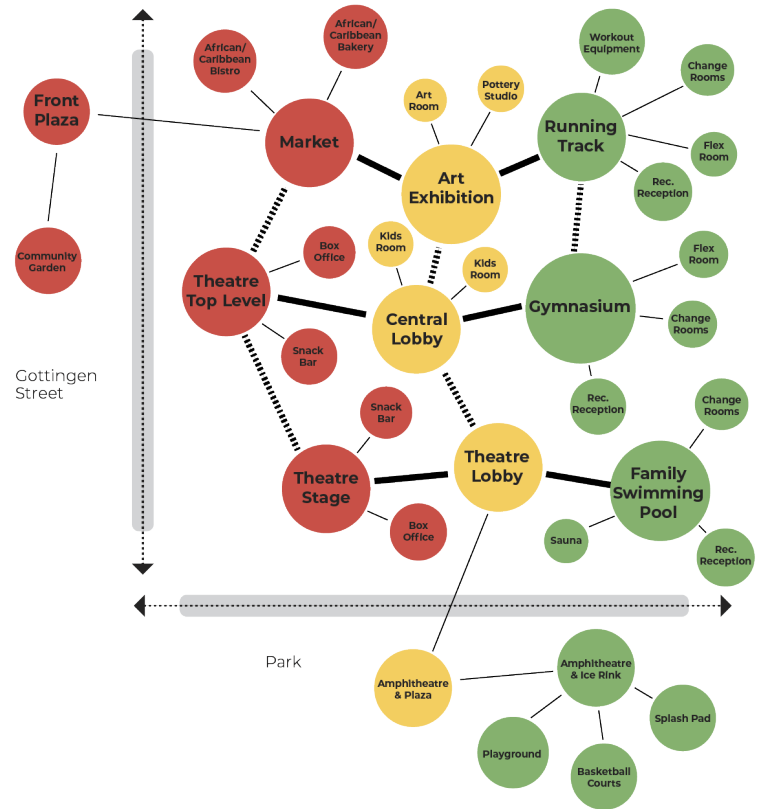
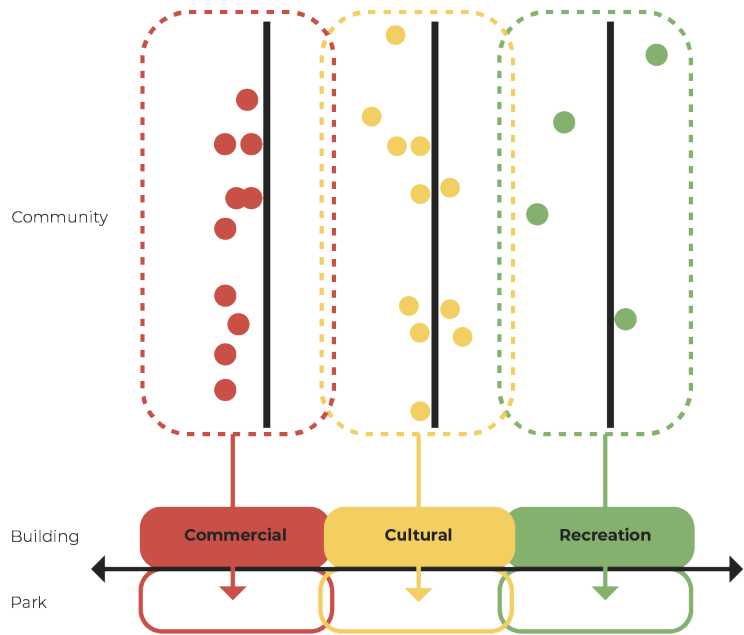
### ***Alternative to Gentrification***

There was careful consideration to ensure the building did not follow the destructive pattern of gentrification, which mostly ignores the community history and needs. In addition to transferring the existing programs, the new building is informed by listening to community members, and implementing the local Black history into the building. Residents will see themselves represented and celebrated more effectively. Therefore, residents will feel empowered to manage and use the building as a permanent beacon of opportunity to grow and succeed. After speaking with members of the Black community, it became clear that this

would be a welcomed addition to the existing community network and culture. They have expressed dealing with racism, poor history commemoration, witnessing important places disappear and new developments that do not reflect them. The new building will foster an increased sense of belonging that has been degraded throughout history. However, to help maximize the building's presence, it was also important to study design precedents from abroad.



Visual analysis of George Dixon Community Centre program connections, site and building (base map from Mapbox n.d.)



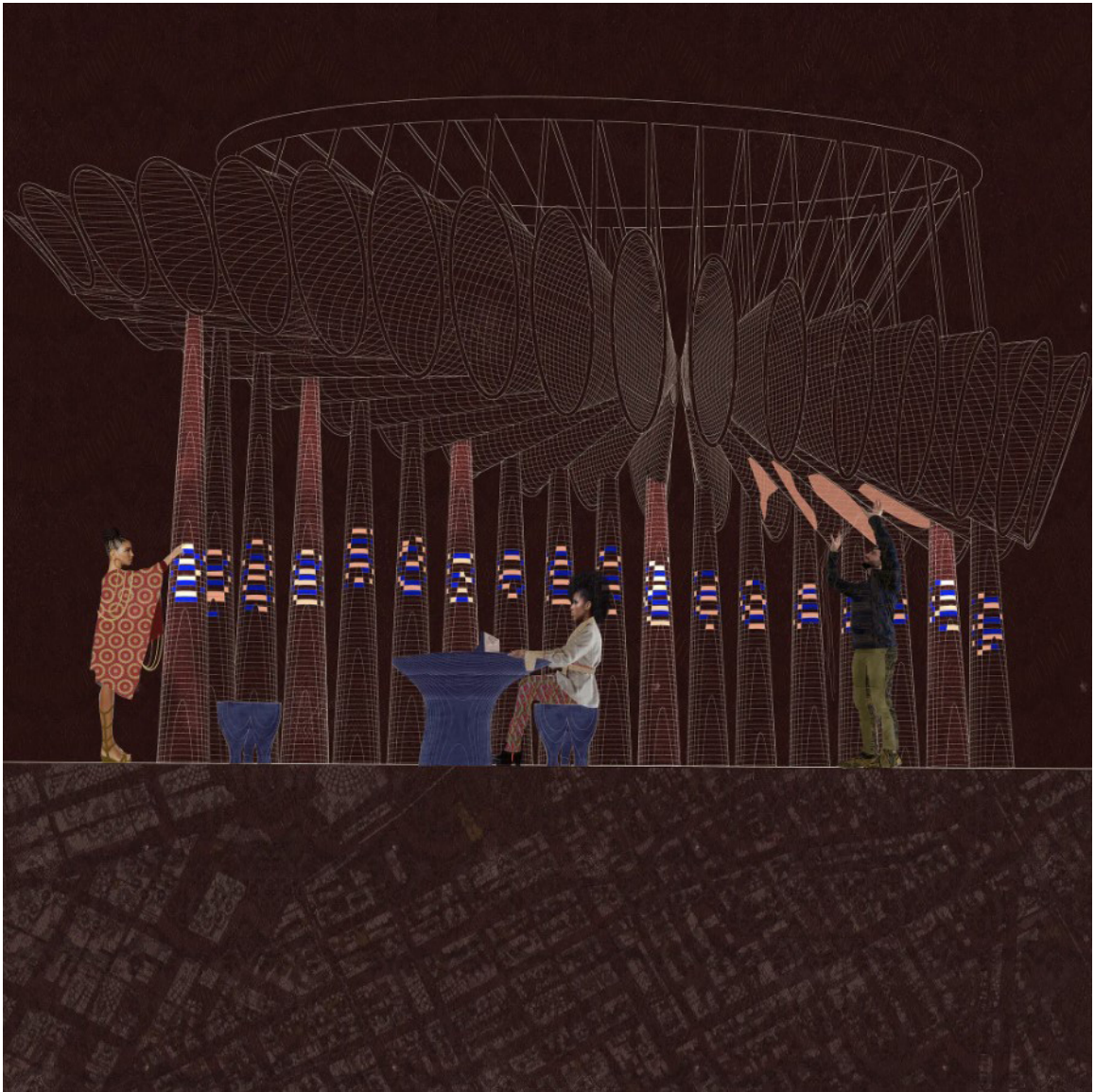
Diagrams of program ideas for proposed community centre

## Chapter 5: Design Precedents

### Architecture and Blackness

To inform a community centre that resonates with the Black community, it was important to become aware of related projects. I found the Museum of Modern Art's "Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America" exhibition quite inspiring. It featured 11 works by architects, designers, and artists who explore how histories can be made visible and equity can be built (Hernandez 2021). One of the architects who contributed to the exhibition is Felecia Davis. Her work focuses on architecture, textiles, and their connection to art, science, engineering and design (Felecia Davis Studio n.d.). In the MoMA exhibition, Davis uses textiles and technology to envision Black futurity through histories of resistance and mutual aid. Her installation featured textiles that can communicate information by "sensing and responding to bodies or to the environment." This included a "touch-activated quilt with attached speakers." Photos taken in the 1950s and 1960s in the Hill District, an African American neighbourhood in Pittsburgh, were displayed on the quilt. She plans to take the quilt to the Hill District so users can add panels to the quilt and add their own stories (Hernandez 2021). Crafting can foster community relationships, skill development and communicate history.





Fabricating Networks in the Hill District, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Felecia Davis Studio 2020)

## Adinkra Symbols

Adinkra symbols are used by the Ashanti people of Ghana. They are typically drawn in ink and have been used for generations. Each symbol has a meaning and is used on fabrics, buildings, pottery and crafts (Ayeeko 2022). These symbols can be applied to a lattice or other forms of architectural design.



Adinkra symbols (Africa Social Work Network n.d.)

## Serpentine Pavilion

An additional precedent was Francis Kéré's Serpentine Pavilion in London, which was inspired by a great tree in Kéré's hometown of Gando in Burkina Faso. Members of his community would meet around this tree and reflect on the day. The design expresses both a sense of community and connection to nature. In the Serpentine Pavilion, this is

accomplished architecturally by a large central opening in the canopy that allows for a connection with the sky. When it rains, the water funnels down and is featured symbolically as a resource for human survival and prosperity, much like the great tree. Another intriguing feature of the pavilion is its illumination at night, through wall perforations. Kéré describes the pavilion as a beacon of light and a symbol of storytelling and togetherness (Kéré Architecture n.d.). A central element that is culturally significant can encourage community pride and belonging.



Diébédo Francis Kéré, Serpentine Pavilion, London, United Kingdom, completed in 2017 (Kéré Architecture 2017)

### **African Nova Scotian Flag**

The new community centre's name is derived from the sankofa symbol on the African Nova Scotian flag. Sankofa is an African word from the Akan tribe in Ghana. It is an Adinkra symbol for wisdom: learning from the past to build for the future (Ayeeko 2022). In relation to the sankofa symbol,

the community centre is informed by the history of the local Black community. However, it also has new programs to enhance life advancement opportunities for the future. All the programs are organized into three major areas. This was inspired by the three parts on the African Nova Scotian flag. The three main areas of the building include spaces for various Black businesses (commercial), cultural activities (cultural) and recreational spaces (recreation). In the middle of the building there is also a circular cutout like the flag, with the African Nova Scotian symbol on the first floor.



African Nova Scotian flag (Wilson n.d.)

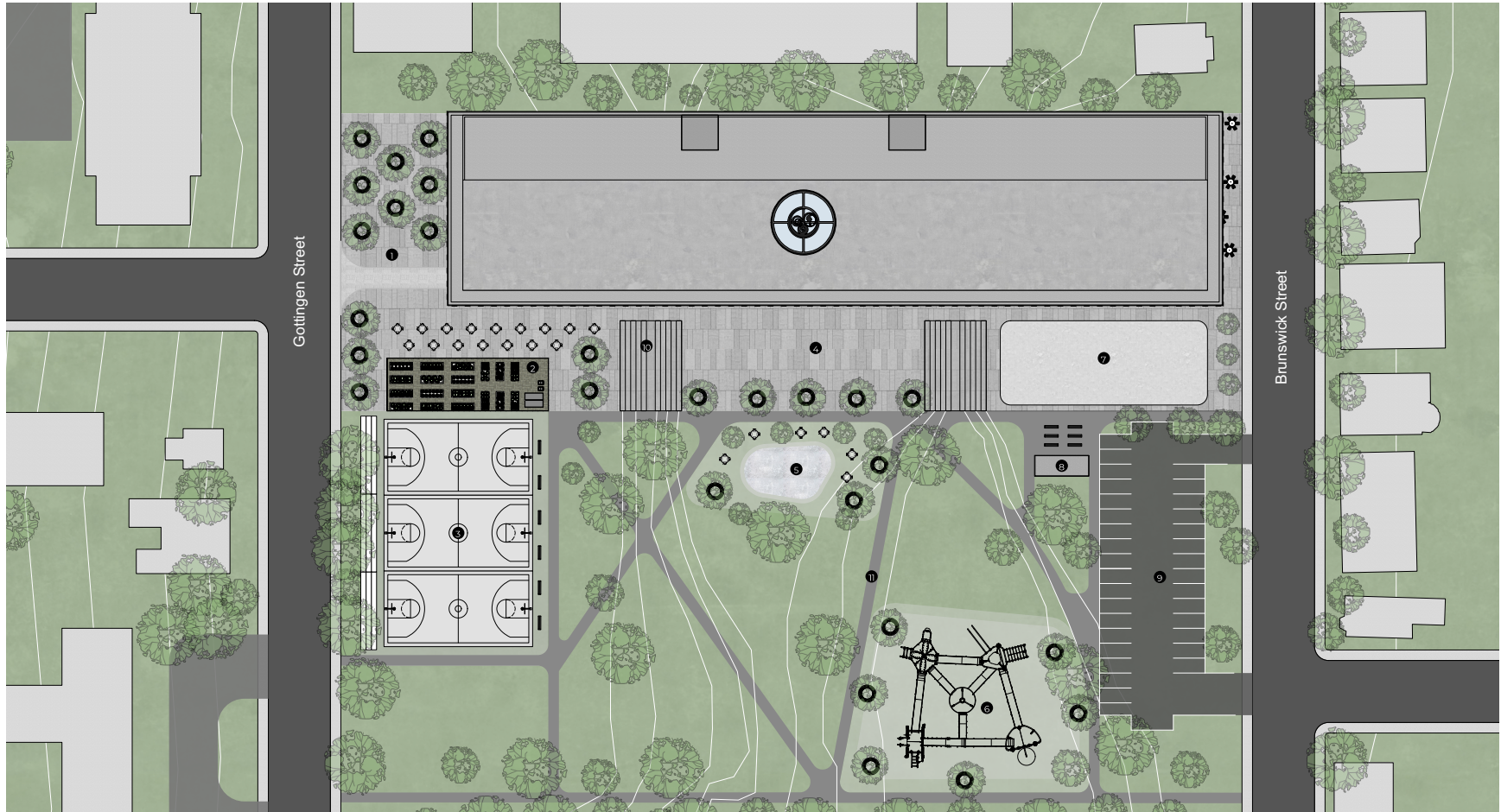
## Chapter 6: Design Proposal

### Placement on the Site

The new Sankofa Community Centre replaces the George Dixon Community Centre at its original location. It is also longer to interact with Gottingen and Brunswick Street. Being closer to Gottingen Street reveals more of the building to the community and welcomes visitors with a plaza. On the Brunswick side, there is quicker access to the recreation part of the building from the parking lot and street. Sankofa Community Centre does not erase the existing outdoor programs. Instead, the new building fits with the existing paths and other recreational areas in the park. These design decisions increase the building's impact in the community.

### Building Organization

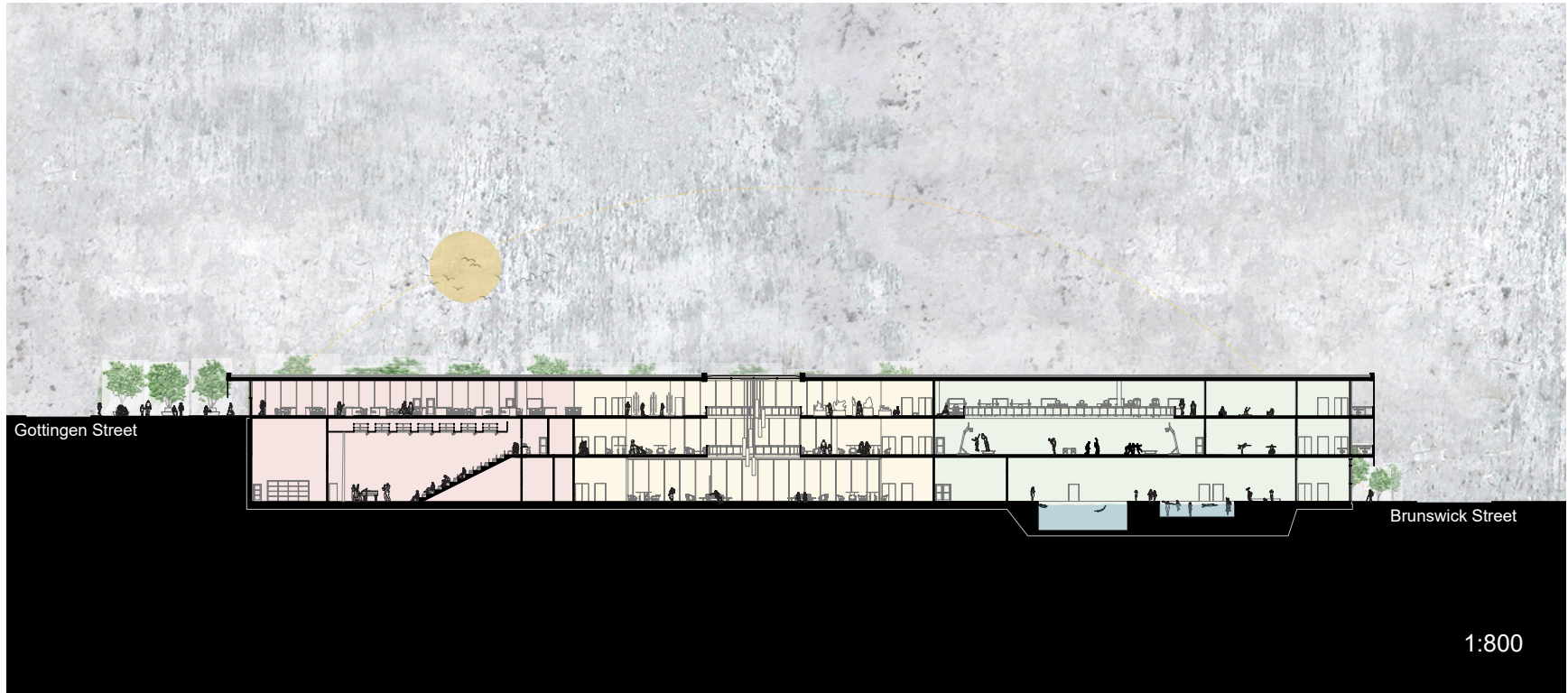
The Sankofa Community Centre's rectangular shape is influenced by an important path through the park between Gottingen and Brunswick Street. The building is also organized along an indoor public path that follows the park's slope down to Brunswick. This resulted in a three-level building, with the main entrance on the third floor, on bustling Gottingen Street. Large public programs are situated along the parallel paths inside and outside the building. The north side of the building contains mostly private and smaller programs that support the public spaces on the south side. As visitors travel between Gottingen and Brunswick, they experience the three major parts of the building: commercial, cultural and recreational.



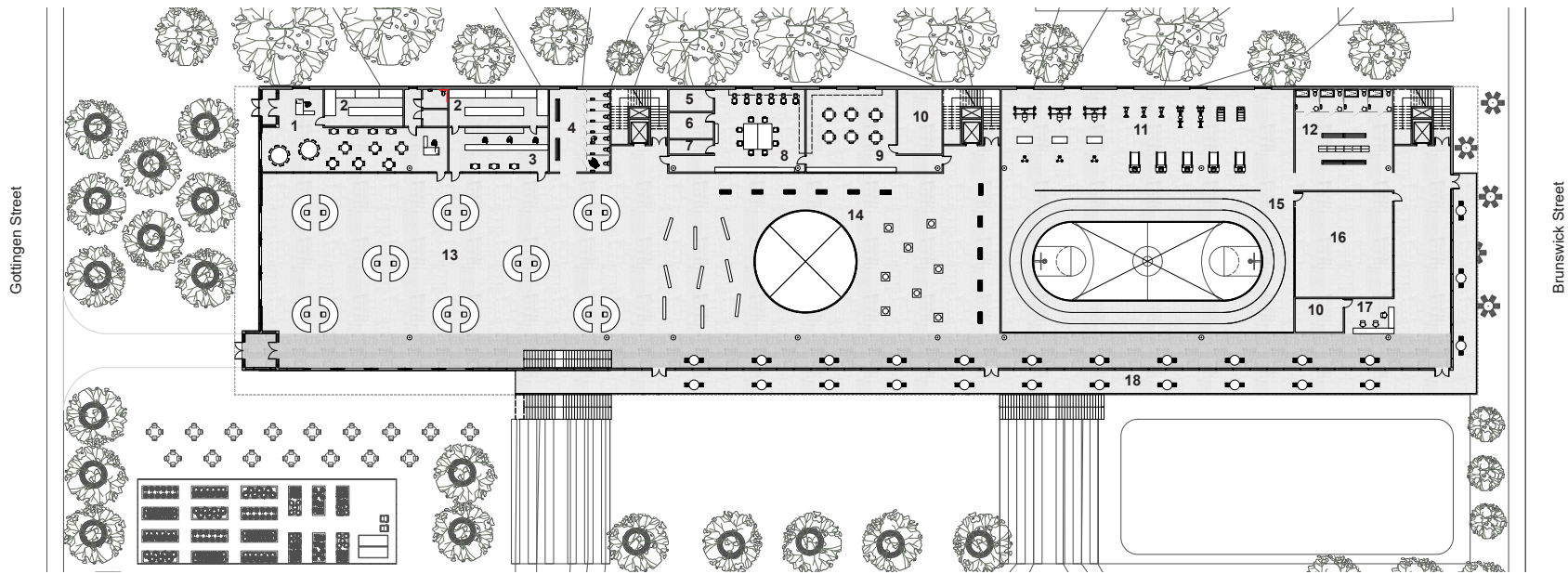
- |                      |                                  |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Front Plaza       | 6. Playground                    |
| 2. Community Garden  | 7. Ice Rink/ Pavement Activities |
| 3. Basketball Courts | 8. Equipment Rental Building     |
| 4. Park Plaza        | 9. Parking                       |
| 5. Splash Pad        | 10. Seating                      |
|                      | 11. Pedestrian Path              |

  
 1:1500

Sankofa Community Centre in George Dixon Centre Park (base map from Mapbox n.d.)



Longitudinal section of Sankofa Community Centre. Commercial (left), cultural (middle) and recreational (right)



Gottingen Street

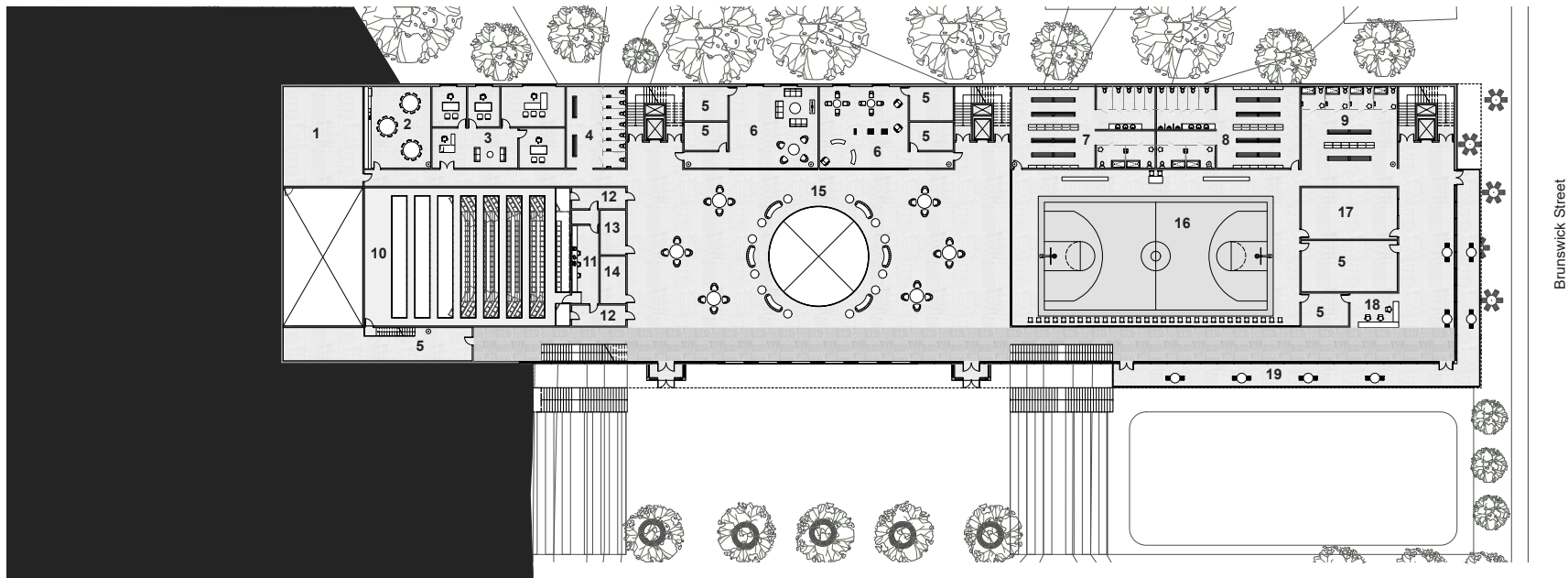
Brunswick Street

- 1. Restaurant
- 2. Kitchen
- 3. Bakery
- 4. Universal Washroom
- 5. Kiln Room
- 6. Drying Room
- 7. Glaze Room
- 8. Multi-media Art Studio
- 9. Kiln Room
- 10. Storage
- 11. Workout Area
- 12. Universal Changeroom
- 13. Market
- 14. Art Exhibition
- 15. Running Track
- 16. Flex Room
- 17. Sports Reception
- 18. Lattice Walk



Third floor of Sankofa Community Centre



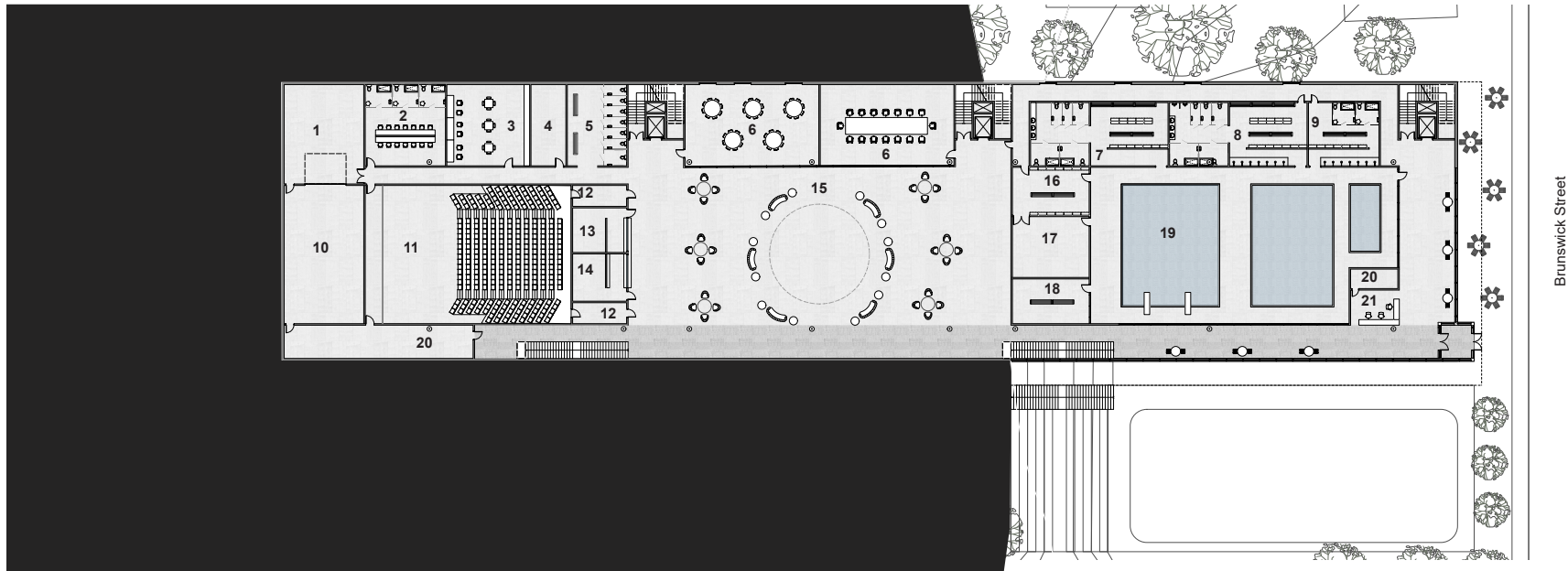


- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Storage              | 10. Technical Grid        |
| 2. Staff Room           | 11. Tech Booth            |
| 3. Admin. Offices       | 12. Light Lock            |
| 4. Universal Washroom   | 13. Box Office/Coat Check |
| 5. Storage              | 14. Café                  |
| 6. Kids Room            | 15. Lobby                 |
| 7. Men Changeroom       | 16. Gymnasium             |
| 8. Women Changeroom     | 17. Flex Room             |
| 9. Universal Changeroom | 18. Sports Reception      |
|                         | 19. Lattice Walk          |



1:1000

Second floor of Sankofa Community Centre



- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Theatre Workshop     | 11. Stage                 |
| 2. Dressing Room        | 12. Light Lock            |
| 3. Costume Room         | 13. Box Office/Coat Check |
| 4. Utility Room         | 14. Café                  |
| 5. Universal Washroom   | 15. Lobby                 |
| 6. Meeting Room         | 16. Lifeguard             |
| 7. Men Changeroom       | 17. Pool Utility          |
| 8. Women Changeroom     | 18. Sauna                 |
| 9. Universal Changeroom | 19. Pool                  |
| 10. Backstage           | 20. Storage               |
|                         | 21. Recreation Reception  |



First floor of Sankofa Community Centre

## **Commercial**

### ***Front Plaza***

As one walks along Gottingen Street and approaches the building, they are greeted by a plaza with tall trees that provide shade. The front plaza has a diverse selection of seating that encourages gathering and talking with community neighbours. The plaza also has tables where one can eat food from Black-owned food vendors parked on the street or in the plaza. This space embodies the spirit of the earlier Gerrish Street Hall and Arrows Club. It is also important to note that Gottingen Street is mostly a traffic corridor. However, there has been a recent effort to make it more of a gathering place. For example, more benches have recently been added along the street. This front plaza expands upon current efforts to make the community more human scale.

### ***Market***

Beyond the plaza, wide sliding doors show the front entrance of the Sankofa Community Centre. Inside is an indoor market in a large space. The first section of the building emphasizes Black businesses. It features murals and descriptions of businesses that once existed in the community. The market provides a central and more permanent place for small businesses to promote and sell their products and services. The market can extend out into the front plaza and the park. The front part of the building also includes an African/Caribbean restaurant and bakery. The market brings back the joy and great service Black businesses provided to the community. This perimeter of the space is mostly surrounded by large exterior glass curtain



Front plaza



Market

walls as well. This allows for more visibility and connection to the surrounding community.

## **Cultural**

### ***Art Exhibition***

Beyond the market is the middle section of the building, which features a large, flexible art exhibition space where the Black community can come together to express themselves through art. Black artists can display their work and gain more exposure. A central feature of this space is a circular skylight that allows natural light to pierce all three floors of the building. As one looks down through the cutout, a large African Nova Scotian logo greets them from the first floor. There are various ways to display art work around this circular opening. Near the market side, there are moveable vertical panels, and on the opposite end there are moveable plinths. This part of the art exhibition also features a permanent commemorative mural of places and people that are important to the community.

### ***Pottery Studio***

Alongside the art exhibition is a pottery studio beyond a glass curtain wall. The pottery studio is a program that was carried over from the George Dixon Community Centre. The new pottery studio features a larger central table where artists have more space to work with clay. There is also more storage and pottery wheels compared to the existing pottery studio. A significant feature of this space is the ability to display finished work on shelves in the studio facing toward the art exhibition. The shelves give artists the ability to display their pottery and add another form of art



Gallery in Art Exhibition space featuring art by African Nova Scotian artist, Boma The Artist



Sculpture area featuring a mural commemorating prominent Black Nova Scotians. This includes James R. Johnston, Viola Desmond, Wayne Smith, George Dixon, Delmore Buddy Daye, Wayne Adams, Portia White, Maxine Tynes and Daurene E. Lewis.





Pottery studio

to the exhibition. On the walls, there are images of African pottery to inspire a connection to cultural roots through craft.

### ***Mixed-media Art Studio***

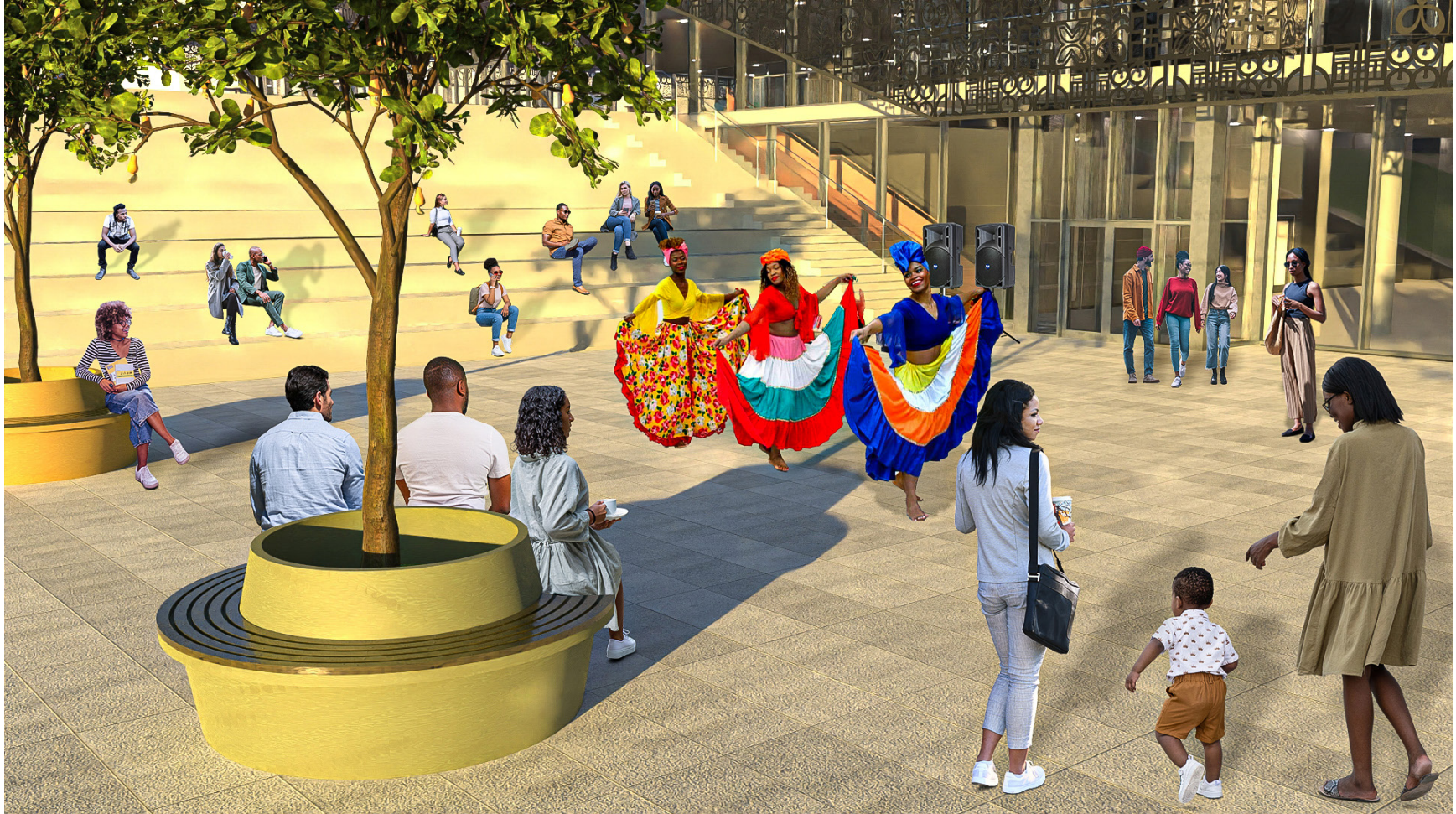
The mixed-media art studio is a place where painting classes that were held in the previous community centre can take place. Before, classes were held in a room that was not meant for painting. This made it awkward to paint, forced participants to bring their own art supplies and provided no space to store their art. This new room provides a dedicated space and storage for painting, and other forms of art. Artists can also put their work on display on shelves facing the art exhibition.

### ***Theatre***

On the lower level, at the west end of the building, is a theatre that can seat 295 spectators and is accessible to differently abled people. Since this theatre is rigid in seating placement and larger in capacity, it is not like the black box theatre that already exists in the community. It provides the community with a larger venue option for movie screenings, lectures, singing/dance performances, and town hall meetings. This venue is inspired by Portia White and pays tribute to her musical contributions to the community.

### ***Performance Plaza***

The performance plaza is located in the park outside the theatre lobby. When the weather is nice, one can open sliding doors that lead out into the plaza. Here cultural performances and festivals can take place. On one side there is amphitheatre seating for spectators. This space



Performance plaza

creates more areas where Black joy can exist and thrive in the open while also entertaining the surrounding community.

### ***Gathering Spaces***

There are youth gathering rooms in the building for multiple ages. These rooms will be used by kids from the local elementary school and surrounding apartments. It also connects with the outdoor playground and park, which kids frequent in the summer months. One youth room is for teenagers to play board games, video games and lounge with friends. The other youth room is for younger kids to gather and play with adult supervision. Both of these rooms feature a large curtain wall to increase safety and visibility for parents. They are also on the same level as the gymnasium, which can be an important place for more activities. These areas create a fun, productive and safe outlet for the community youth all year-round. Especially in the winter months, the community youth lack these types of spaces to gather. It also benefits parents in the area who have concerns for their children getting into trouble. Safety concerns exist about kids wandering near an abandoned school in the community. A boardroom is another important gathering space in this part of the building. This program is transferred from the previous community centre. The new boardroom is larger to accommodate more people, and is a central location where community charity organizations can plan their events.

## **Recreation**

### ***Track and Exercise Equipment***

The eastern part of the building includes three floors of recreational facilities. On the top level is a running track, a space with exercise equipment and flex rooms for other activities. Here community members have access to a large facility where they can follow in the foot-steps of successful athletes like George Dixon and Delmore Buddy Daye as they learn to box and participate in other physical training. This area will also include panels with descriptions of athletes from the surrounding community.

### ***Multi-sport Gymnasium***

The level below features an upgraded gymnasium compared to the one from the previous community centre. The gymnasium can still host matinees, recreational sports and kids' camp activities. However, it now features a large glass curtain wall. This makes it more visible from inside and outside the building, creating a stronger visual connection with the community. There is also sufficient space for spectator seating for various sporting events. For example, there is a competitive basketball league in the community that can take advantage of this. On the far wall, community members can also take pride in a large mural that honours important Black Nova Scotian basketball athletes.

### ***Family Pool***

The lowest level features a family pool, which members of the recreation community suggested would be a welcomed addition. The nearest family pool is about two kilometers away, which is not ideal for kids who want to go swimming, especially in the winter. Similar to the gymnasium, the pool



Gymnasium featuring a mural of prominent Black Nova Scotian basketball athletes Lindell Wigginton and Justine Colley-Leger



Ice rink area featuring a commemorative mural depicting members of a Black hockey league that existed in Nova Scotia

is bordered by two large glass curtain walls and split into adult, kids and toddler sections. It also features gendered and universal change rooms.

### ***Ice Rink/Pavement Sports***

In the summertime, the new pavement area outside the recreational section of the building provides a safer and larger designated space for various pavement activities such as rollerblading. In the winter months, the paved area turns into an ice rink for recreational skating. This rink provides a place to develop a life skill and stay active in the winter. The nearest place for recreational skating is in the Halifax Common. However, some residents worry about their kids going there, since it is a facility outside the community, used by the entire city. Since the local ice rink is in a familiar environment, parents can feel better about their kids being safe. It also becomes easier to stay active in an area lacking facilities for outdoor winter activities. A defining feature of this space is a mural displaying Black hockey players from a significant Black hockey league that once existed in the community and province. Therefore, community members not only have a place to stay active in the winter, but also have a special connection to the place.

### **Indoor/Outdoor Path**

The building takes advantage of an exterior path that runs through the park. This commuter path connects Gottingen and Brunswick Street. Plazas with amphitheatres that follow the slope of the land and the pavement/ice rink are situated along this path as well. Inside, the building has an interior path parallel to the exterior one. This path acts as an indoor extension of Gottingen Street, as it connects all three sections of the building on every level.





Indoor path heading towards Brunswick Street on level 3. Visitors can travel between Gottingen and Brunswick Street using stairs on each level



Indoor path on level 3 with view of lattice walk outside



Sankofa Community Centre from Brunswick Street, looking up towards Gottingen Street

## **Lattice**

Parallel to the interior path is the lattice walk, which is an outdoor balcony on two levels above the park. It enables people on those floors to lounge and socialize outside. This area and most of the facade facing the park are shaded by a metal lattice. This lattice features a pattern of Adinkra symbols which have meanings that relate to the identity of the community. Additionally, one can even open accordion doors built into the lattice. This allows the user to have an unobstructed view of activities in the park and community.

## **Funding and Staff**

### ***Funding***

The Sankofa Community Centre will depend on financial support from various stakeholders. This includes donors, sponsors and partners invested in material reparations and the rejuvenation and success of the Black community. This money will be used to construct the building, pay employees a fair wage, ensure high quality building maintenance and purchase equipment.

### ***Administration***

The administration is comprised of a board of directors and managers. All employment opportunities provided by the administration prioritize members of the Black community. It is essentially an opportunity where talented Black people are appreciated, and able to make a good living while helping their community. Many in the area have faced racism and other discriminatory treatment which has impacted their employment. This also provides more Black representation in an area where it is mostly ignored by gentrification.

### ***Board of Directors***

The board of directors works with financial partners, has final say on money allocation, approves requests from organizations to use the building's facilities, implements building protocols and finalizes hirings. However, one must earn the respect of the Black community to become a board member. The community votes them in, and can vote them out at any time. These checks and balances prevent an abuse of power, and establish leadership that the community trusts and believes in. This also increases a sense of belonging when community members have a strong voice that results in real community change.

### ***Management***

The community centre has three managers, for the commercial, cultural and recreation sections of the building. The commercial manager is in charge of the restaurant, bakery and vendor space availability in the market. The cultural manager works with arts organizations to schedule festivals, art exhibitions, performances and art rooms. The recreational manager is in charge of scheduling recreation activities and working with sports groups. All managers report equipment failure to the board. They also make sure staff have the necessary equipment to do their jobs.

### ***Daily Operation Staff***

Staff in the commercial section support visiting business vendors. They can help set up booths and answer questions. Other commercial staff operate the restaurant and bakery. In the cultural area, staff teach classes in the pottery studio and mixed-media art studio. They also operate the theatre and help set up cultural events. Recreation staff includes

gym trainers, sports coaches, recreation receptionists and life guards to ensure athletic programs run properly. Lastly, the building maintenance staff plays a crucial role in making sure spaces and equipment remain ready to use.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The Sankofa Community Centre shows that architecture as a form of symbolic and material reparation can resist the harmful impacts of gentrification along Gottingen Street. However, the building's reparative impact relies on its connection to the community. I believe community designers must humble themselves and practice empathy when consulting with community members. It was invaluable to sit and truly listen to community members talk about their experiences. Afterwards, it enabled further connections pertaining to the rich Black history and other useful facts about the area, some of which I never would have learned through other means. Listening to them helped me uncover the severe lack of belonging the community has unfairly endured. That is how I identified the main issue of this thesis. Learning about Black history in the community also helped me address the lack of belonging. The Black historic places and people are significant on the local and national level. It ultimately helped me design a building that identified with the community and would increase its sense of belonging. Overall, gentrification in the community is a form of racism that must be replaced with more inclusive ways of community development. This thesis shows that Black history must not be ignored. It should be celebrated and used as a guide to increase a sense of belonging. One community centre would not solve everything. However, when designing for marginalized communities, it is important to understand and include the community's history through their experiences. That will help build a more inclusive society.

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