Central Coburg Public Realm Measurement Framework

RMIT UNIVERSITY

PlaceLab
Architecture & Urban Design

Community Engagement Measurement Framework for Central Coburg Public Realm

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Executive Summary

This document summarises a body of research and community engagement undertaken in 2023–2024 through a collaboration between RMIT PlaceLab, Merri-bek City Council, and the RMIT School of Architecture & Urban Design.

Led by Jan van Schaik, Lauren Garner, and Kiri Delly (RMIT University), with Merri-bek City Council representatives Joanna Bush, Meg Thompson, and Sunny Haynes, the project explored three key questions:

- What does good public design look like in Coburg, particularly at street level?
- How can its quality be measured, both qualitatively and quantitatively?
- Can the public be empowered to make informed urban design decisions?

The work builds on Merri-bek City Council's ambition to create clear, measurable benchmarks for good design—tools to guide decision-making as Coburg continues to evolve. Initially conceived as an analytical study framed by mapping and measuring themes, the research developed into a public-facing initiative.

Central to this was a community workshop designed to bring council, community, and university knowledge into dialogue, while testing methods for meaningful public engagement.

This report documents the process, focusing particularly on the workshop and its value as both a design and research tool. It considers the workshop's potential to inform a wide range of audiences—community members, council staff, students, and researchers—and describes how its findings were translated into design principles.

The workshop centred on an interactive tool that opened the urban design decision-making process to the public. It comprised two types of physical model components: a series of building frontages with distinct public realm interfaces, and a set of objects typically found in the public realm. The precedents informing these types are outlined in Appendix I.

Participants—Master of Architecture students and Coburg community members—were divided into three groups, each with a pegboard base and a collection of loose components. Guided by the students' knowledge of the urban and architectural qualities of the pieces, community members arranged the components to create their ideal streetscape.

By leading the design process, participants gained insight into the compromises needed to achieve desired outcomes and developed a sense of ownership over the results. A review of this process is included in Appendix II.

The outcomes of the workshop form the basis of the subsequent engagement report and, together with the appendices, inform the report's concluding chapter.

Contents

1.0 Workshop Methodology

1.0 Workshop Methodology

APPROACH

An embedded engagement process formed the foundation of this research, inviting community input into the shaping of the public realm. Departing from conventional consultation methods, the approach used physical modeling, combining architectural elements with urban components, as a tool for collaborative “city-making” and deeper dialogue between residents, students, and council.

During the Activity Day, participants (including students from RMIT’s Master of Architecture program and local community members) worked in mixed groups alongside representatives from RMIT PlaceLab and Merri-bek City Council. Together, they were invited to collectively re-imagine and design sections of the Coburg public realm.

1. Public Realm Interfaces

A catalogue of **45 Public Realm Interfaces** was developed by the research team to explore different architectural interfaces with the street. Two thirds of these buildings were local to Merri-bek, while the remaining third were drawn from interstate and international examples.

The final **15 buildings** selected for the workshop demonstrate a spectrum of public-facing architecture, ranging from robust and repetitive to delicate and expressive. Typologies varied from large setbacks with space for seating to flush façades with porous materials and thresholds.

Alongside the physical modelling component, three large tables

2. Table of ideas

were set up as collaborative brainstorming stations. Each table was filled with butcher’s paper, post-it notes, images of the 15 selected precedent buildings, and a set of 15 question prompts.

These prompts were designed to spark discussion, encourage reflection on spatial qualities, and support the development of a shared design strategy within each group. Participants were invited to draw, annotate, and map ideas collectively, building a layer of dialogue that complemented the spatial testing happening through the models.

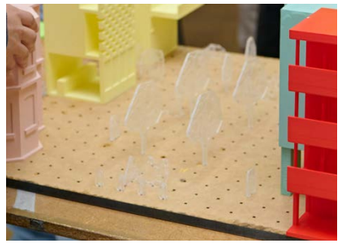
Students undertook a process of analysing and documenting each selected building to extract

3. Architectural Components

its inherent spatial ingredients: such as scale, rhythm, and key gestures toward the public realm. These were then abstracted into simplified architectural diagrams, highlighting the most legible public-facing elements. To enhance communication with a non-architect audience, key features (such as under crofts, awnings, and entries) were deliberately exaggerated or clarified to increase legibility and spatial understanding.

4. Public R ealm Components

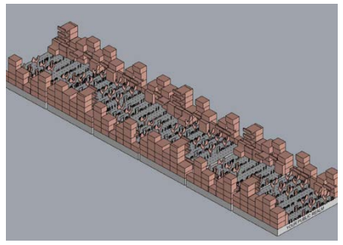
Parallel to the architectural studies, students documented the “life between buildings”—the social and infrastructural layer of the public realm. Measured drawings were created of people, vehicles, transport infrastructure, lighting, recreation spaces, and public seating elements found throughout Merri-bek. This process resulted in **30 sectional street assets**, which became the movable components used in the workshop. Each asset was designed to be easily placed or removed from the model base, allowing flexible experimentation. When combined with the building façades, these elements gave participants the ability to reconstruct their own version of the street, their ideal public realm.



5. The Model Base

Each group was given a **60cm x 60cm modular base**, selected for its manageability and capacity to represent a meaningful urban section. When combined, the six models formed a continuous street section approximately **80 metres in length**, representing a typical urban block in Coburg. The models were designed as sectional slices to be read horizontally rather than in plan - emphasising spatial sequencing, height, and interface over footprint alone.

At the end of the session, the models were intended to be brought together to form a



6. A Collective Street

continuous sectional narrative reflecting the community’s collective vision. While this final assembly was not fully realised, the format was designed to reveal emergent urban values at the scale of the street - ranging from accessibility and ecological sensitivity to vibrancy, legibility, and care - expressed through architectural and urban form, and the arrangement of everyday public elements such as seating, lighting, planting, and thresholds.

1.0 Workshop Methodology

OUTCOMES

The workshop used a model-based design game to test, provoke, and capture local ideas about the future of Coburg's public realm. The modular street model, along with a catalogue of façades and public realm components, acted as a shared design tool, allowing participants to physically edit, rearrange, and narrate their version of the street.

This interactive process generated four interesting outcomes:

1. **Collective feedback across multiple voices**
The model created a shared space for dialogue, bringing together local residents, students, and stakeholders to express concerns, identify gaps, and surface unspoken priorities.
Target audiences are embedded directly in the design process.

2. **Generation of design ideas through play**
Participants used drawing, sketching, sticky notes, and physical model components, buildings, thresholds, street elements, as tools for testing and proposing alternatives.
Imagination is activated through tangible design moves.

3. **Testing of community priorities in real time**
As components were moved, added, or removed, participants voted, commented, and reflected, revealing preferences for accessibility, green infrastructure, safety, flexibility, and social connection.
Design became a live method for decision-making.

4. **Fostering collaboration through co-authorship**
The model-game created a space for negotiation between neighbours, council, and students. Collective authorship emerged not through consensus, but through layered, visible contributions.
Trust is built through shared spatial thinking.

The process foregrounded local perspectives, allowing everyday users of Coburg's streets to physically model, discuss, and record their preferences, frustrations, and aspirations for public space. The modular nature of the models encouraged negotiation, improvisation, and collective authorship - qualities often absent from conventional planning frameworks.

This engagement model sits within a broader research project exploring participatory urban design, tactical planning, and the integration of both qualitative and quantitative design inputs.

While primarily informing student propositions and learnings, the process offers an alternative format for engagement that may support future collaboration between community, academia, and local government.

1.0 Workshop Methodology

GOOD DESIGN PROMPTS

In addition to the models, a series of written prompts were placed on the tables to guide specific conversations, either alongside, or in advance of, testing ideas on the model and engaging in discussion within each of the groups.

Think about your favourite public spaces, and how they create comfort for you. How important is infrastructure like seating and bike parking?

Do you prefer to be in the shade or in the sun? Is this space wide open, or more private and cozier?

Imagine walking into these buildings from the street. Do you prefer more open, expansive entrances to buildings, or more neatly defined entry points across services? Should both be included, and if so, then where?

If you were standing in front of them, which of these buildings feel most welcoming to you? What about them invites you in?

Is your ideal street a place to gather, or is it simply a space to walk? How do these urban components (and their position) create your ideal street?

Think about the types of people you interact with in Coburg, and the diversity of your community. How can this space be welcoming and providing to them?

Should some areas have more shade, and others more exposure, or should it be uniform?
How do you usually get around Coburg? What can the design of this street do to support, or even change/improve that?

What are the elements of Coburg's character that you love most? How can they be reflected along this street?

How do you exercise a connection to the wider community of Coburg? What about a public space could support that, and feel more like it belongs to the community?

How important is local art and culture to your ideal public space? Should this space include public artworks, or would you prefer the space used for other things?
Do you prefer the feel of denser, more active streets, or more sparse, relaxed streets?

2.0 Workshop Outcomes

2.0 Workshop Outcomes

DOCUMENTATION

WORKSHOP RECORD

This section presents a curated photo narrative of the Community Workshop Day, illustrating how local residents of different age groups engaged with the physical models and responded to the spatial concepts on display. By systematically organising and categorising these images, the chapter not only documents the range of public interactions but also uncovers subtle behavioural patterns and preferences that emerged throughout the session. These visual records, accompanied by concise annotations and analytical observations, aim to inform future design considerations and community engagement strategies, ensuring that the community's perspectives are meaningfully integrated into the ongoing planning process for Coburg.

Attendants:

RMIT PlaceLab & RMIT Architecture staff:

Kiri Delly, Jan van Schaik, Lauren Garner

Coburg Community:

Elias, Andrea, Rory, Anton, Khali

RMIT Master of Architecture students:

Jiaqi Sun, Dexter Percival-Cobb, Pham Khanh Linh Tran, Hong Quang Lam, Archie Conway, Suraj Pandu Suvarna, Xingyu Hao, Matthew Donoghue, Ruitian Li, Xiangning Zhu, Zhi Jie Chia, Josh Stenberg

Supported by Merri-bek City Council

Physical Model Precedent List

1. Lacaton and Vassal - Saint Nazaire
2. EAT Architects - Coventry Apartment
3. Lyons - Springvale Community Hub
4. Searle x Waldron - The University of Melbourne EOT Facilities
5. Kennedy Nolan x Openwork - Balam Balam Place
6. Architectus - Kangan Institute
7. Steven Holl Architects - Simmons Hall
8. John Wardle Architects - Holme Apartments
9. Wills Alsop - Peckham Library
10. Nightingale - The Village
11. Clare Cousins - Mid Rise Apartment Building
12. Heritage Building - Typical - Coburg (Sydney Rd)
13 Shopfront Building - Typical - Coburg (Sydney Rd)
14. Shopfront Building w/ Apartments Above - Typical - Coburg
15. Heritage Townhouse Buidling - Typical - Coburg

Public Realm Element List

- Car
- Public Art
- Pedestrian Crossing
- Bike
- Bike Parking
- Tree (small)
- Tree (large)
- Bench seating with table
- Seating plus landscaping
- Buskers
- Shade Canopy / Shelter
- Kiosk
- Kids slide
- Parklet
- Water fountain
- Bin
- Shopping trolley
- People
- Playground
- Street light
- Street flags
- Lighting umbrella
- Recycle station
- Salvo bin
- Bike station
- Bollard
- Teaching areas
- Animals
- EV chargers

9:30am to 10:15am
Team Arrivals. Bump in/ Set up site


Brainstorming Table Set Up


Brainstorming Table Set Up

Model Set Up


Perspex Set Up


Student Setting Up Together

10:15am to 10:30am
Community Member Arrivals

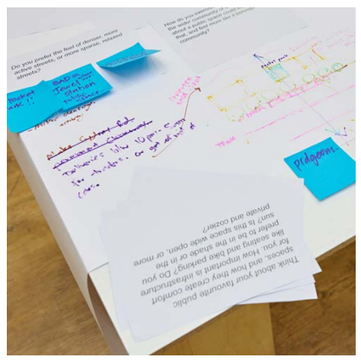
10:30am to 11:00am
Welcomes/ Intros/ Project Overview/ Place community members and teams into 3 groups


Event Introduction (RMIT)


Event Introduction (council)


Forming groups

11:00am to 11:45am
Teams work on their models



Feedback from the community

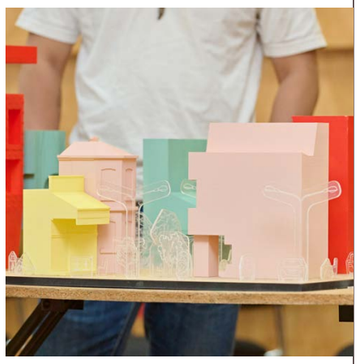

Architecture reference selection


Interaction with community

Group discussion


Interaction with community

Final Outcome



Final Outcome

Final Outcome

11:45am to 12:15pm
Outputs Discussion. Wrap Up

Andrea's Summarise

Anton's Summarise

Rory's Summarise

Khali's Summarise

Elias's Summarise

Dexter's Summarise

Jan's Summarise

12:15pm to 12:30pm
Lunch and Networking. Community Member Departures

12:30pm to 1:00pm
Bump Out. Team Departures

2.0 Workshop Outcomes

OUTCOMES

Comparison

Group 1

(22)

Built to Open Space Ratio = 0.35 : 1

No.of Trees = 12 nos.

Site Activities :

- Busking
- Cafe outdoor
- Alleyway Charging Points
- Parallel Vehicle access road
- Cycle tracks
- Tram Stops
- Intermediate Vehicle Crossing

Group 2

Built to Open Space Ratio = 0.55 : 1

No.of Trees = 7 nos.

Site Activities :

- Busking
- Cafe outdoor
- Parallel Vehicle access road
- Cycle tracks
- Under Canopy Plaza

Group 3

(23)

Built to Open Space Ratio = 0.39 : 1

No.of Trees = 6 nos.

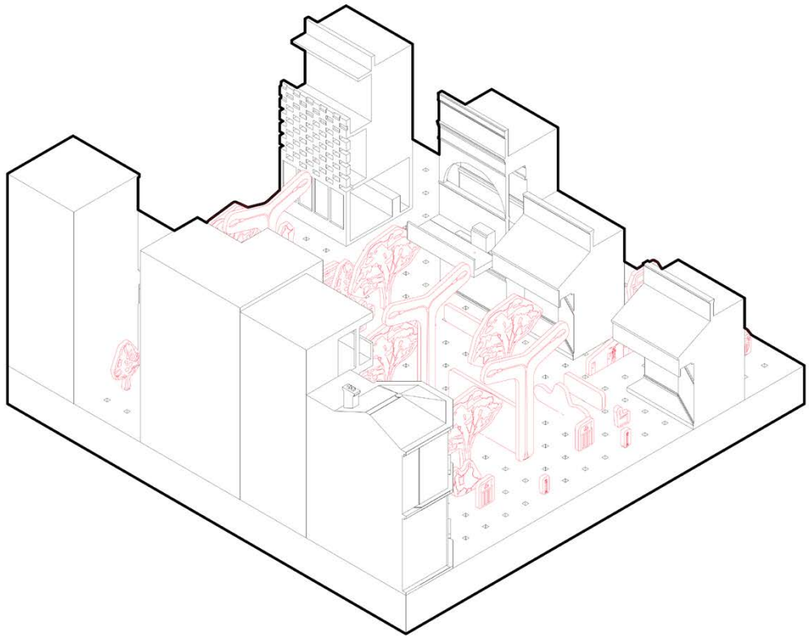
Site Activities :

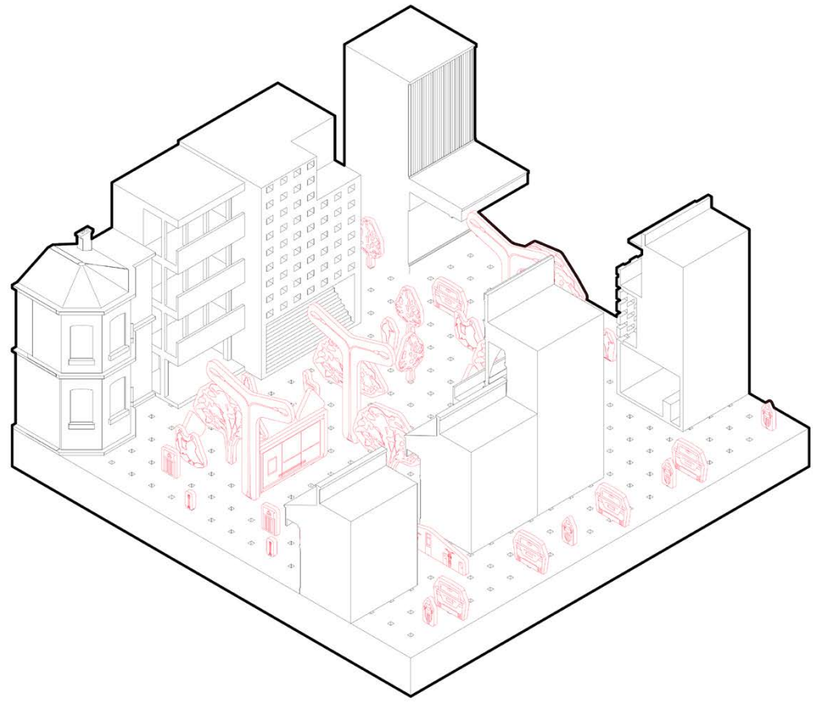
- Busking
- Cafe outdoor
- Alleyway Charging Points
- Parallel Vehicle access road
- Cycle tracks
- Tram Stops
- Intermediate Vehicle Crossing

2.0 Workshop Outcomes

GROUP 1

Model after the Workshop





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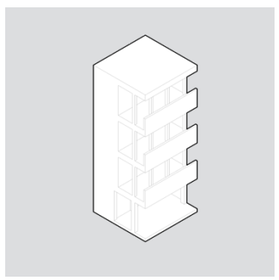

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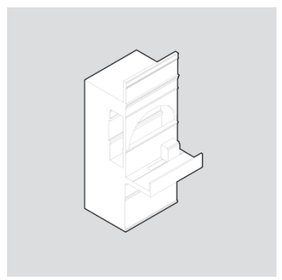

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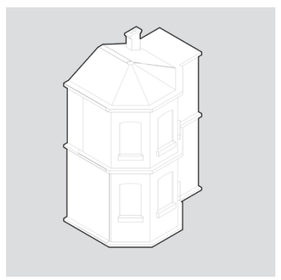

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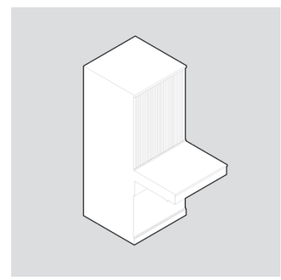
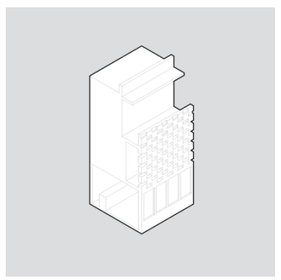


The Coburg Conversation

Measurement Framework

Office



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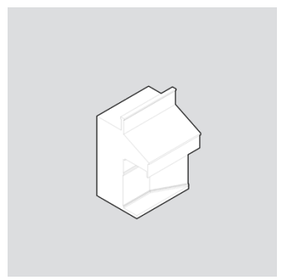

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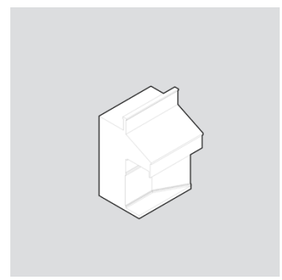

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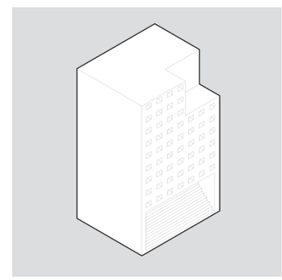


Coburg Central

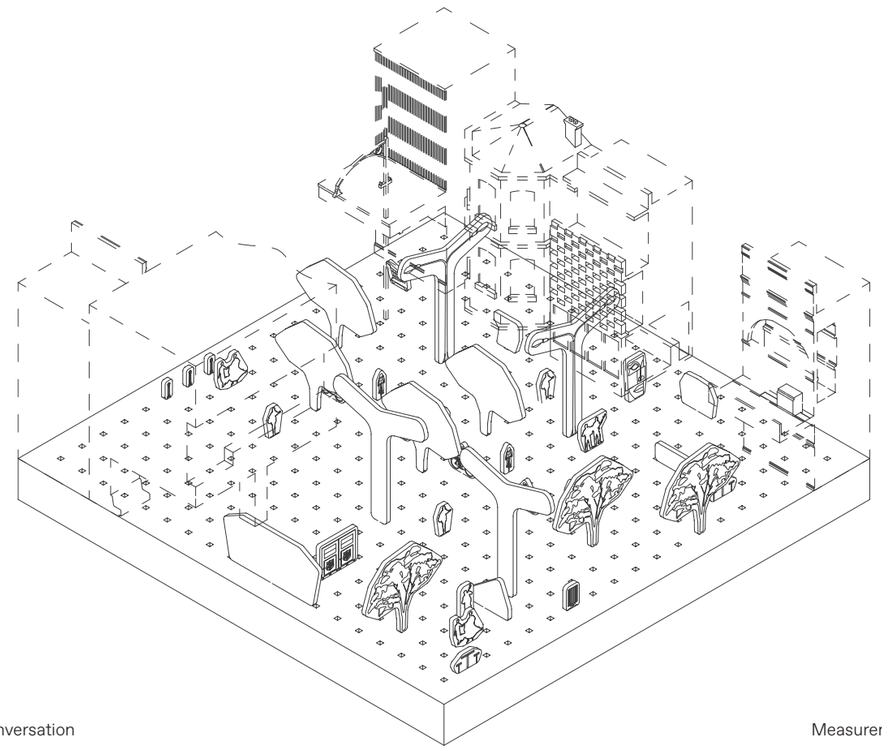
RMIT Architecture & Urban Design

Group 1

Public Realm Elements

Element	priority 1	priority 2	priority 3	priority 4	priority 5	overall used	total points
Cars						2	2
Public Art						1	1
Pedestrian Crossing						0	0
Bike	5					9	14
Bike Parking						0	0
Trees (small)				2		0	2
Trees (large)		4				7	11
Bench seating with table						2	2
Seating plus landscaping						0	0
Buskers						6	6
Shade Canopy / Shelter						0	0
kiosk						1	1
kids slide						1	1
Parklet						0	0
water fountain						0	0
bin						2	2
shopping trolley						1	1
people						3	3
Playground						2	2
street light			3			4	7
street flags						0	0
lighting unbrella						0	0
recycle station						0	0
salvo bin						1	1
bike station						0	0
bollard					1	3	4
teaching areas						1	1
animals						0	0
ev chargers						0	0

Model



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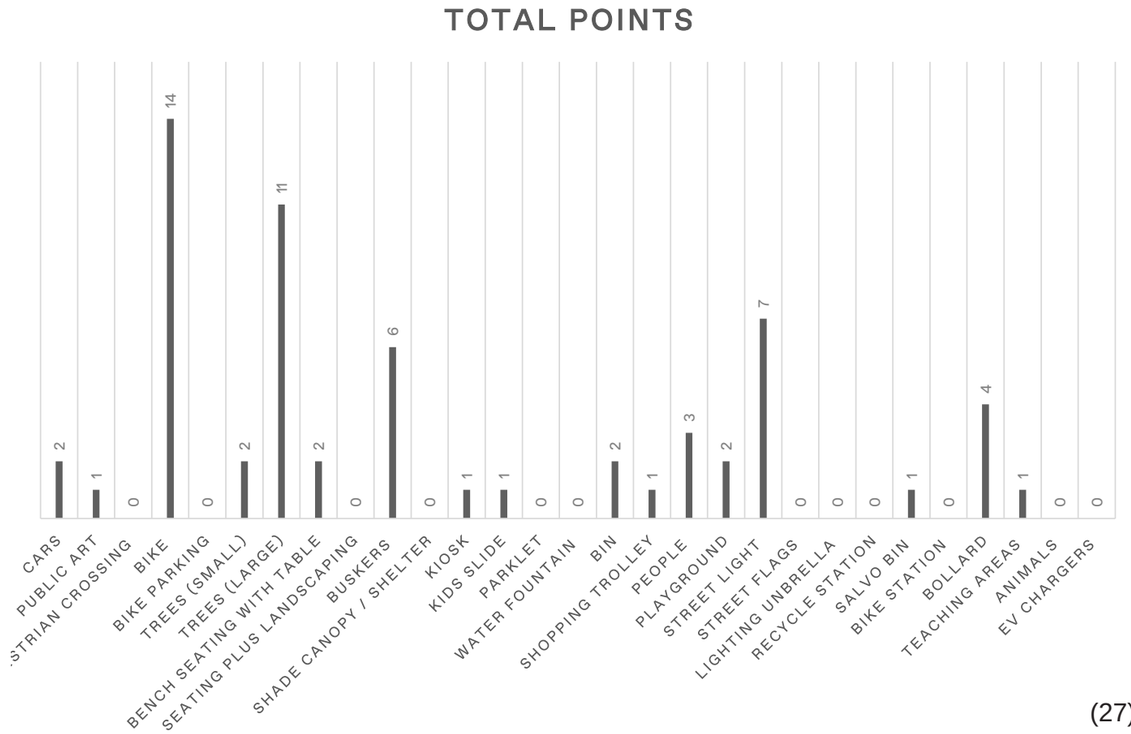


Analysis

Group 1's proposal marked a clear departure from Coburg's conventional urban layout, expressing a strong preference for a more pedestrian- and ecology-oriented future.

Unlike other groups, they deliberately deprioritised cars - only including two, both placed on side streets. Their priorities centred on sustainability and amenity:

Top-ranked elements: bicycles (1st), large trees (2nd), and small trees (4th)
Most frequently selected: bicycles (9), large trees (7)

The scoring matrix reflected this emphasis:
Highest values were assigned to bikes, followed by large trees and street lights, indicating priorities around active transport, environmental comfort, and safety.

Buskers and bollards also ranked highly, pointing to a desire for cultural activation and soft spatial control.

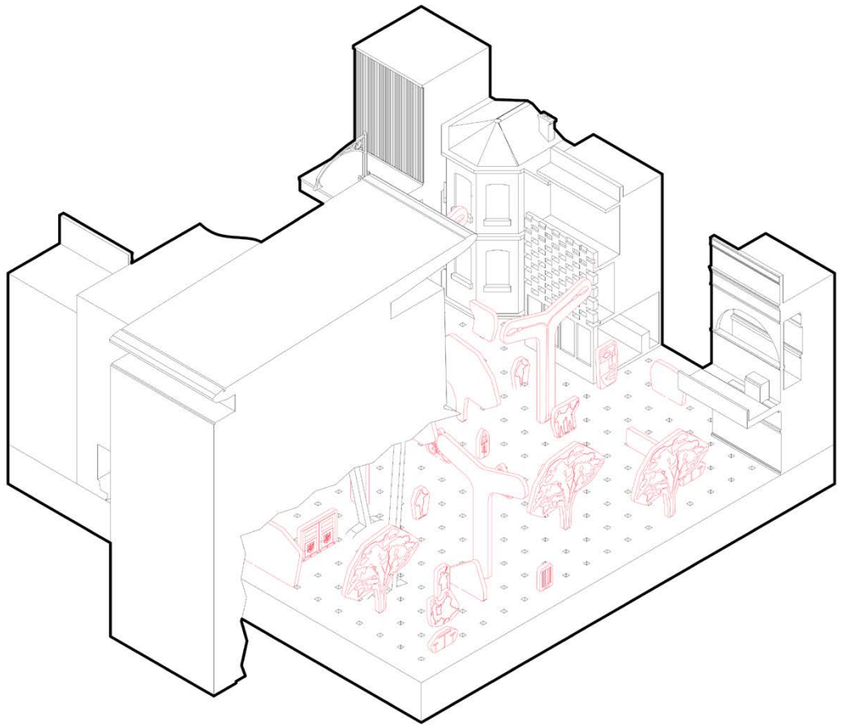
Overall, Group 1 envisioned an urban form defined by reduced vehicular presence, enhanced public life, and strong environmental character.

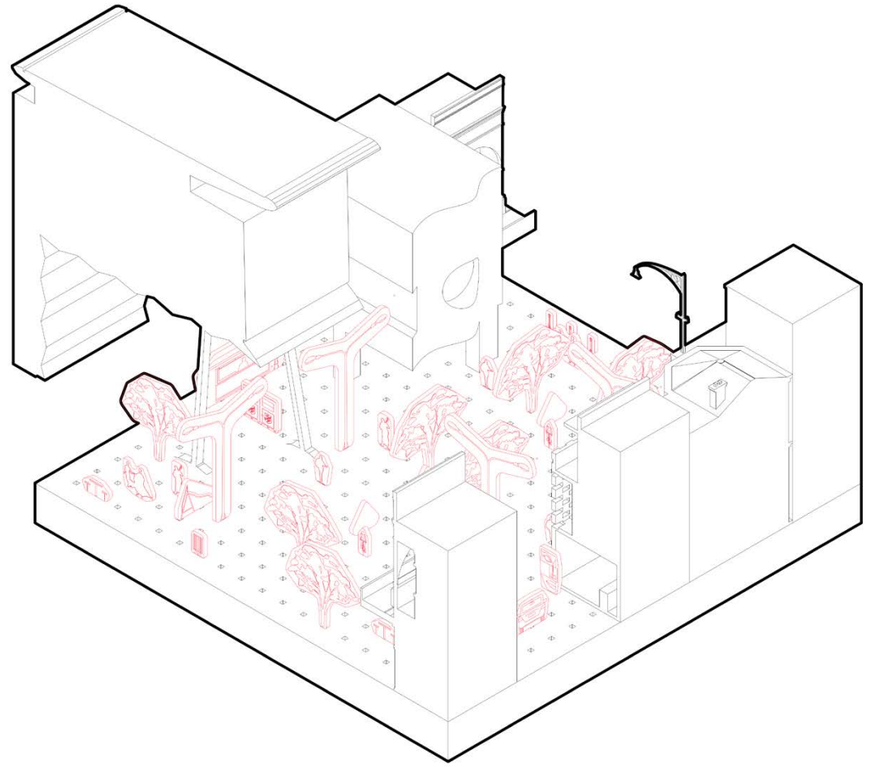
OUTCOME SUMMARY:
Prioritising Ecology, Pedestrians, and Public Life

2.0 Workshop Outcomes

GROUP 2

Model after the Workshop





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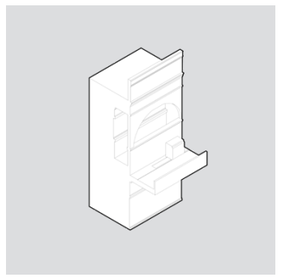

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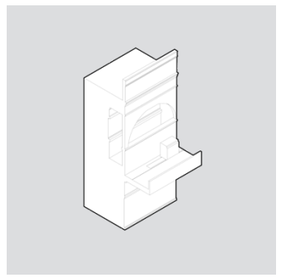
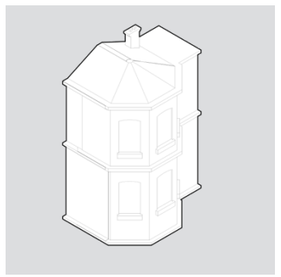


Educational



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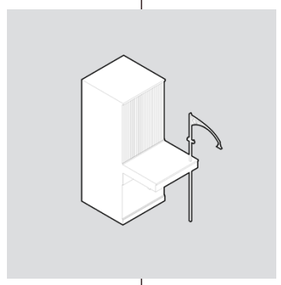
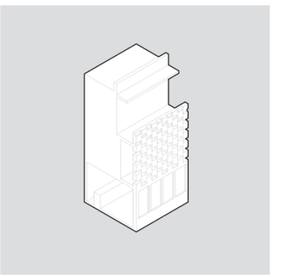


Office



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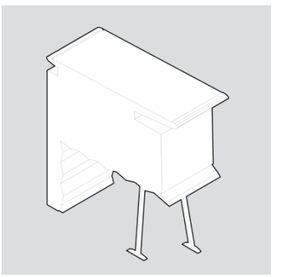

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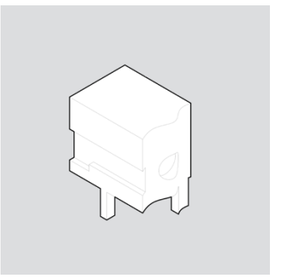
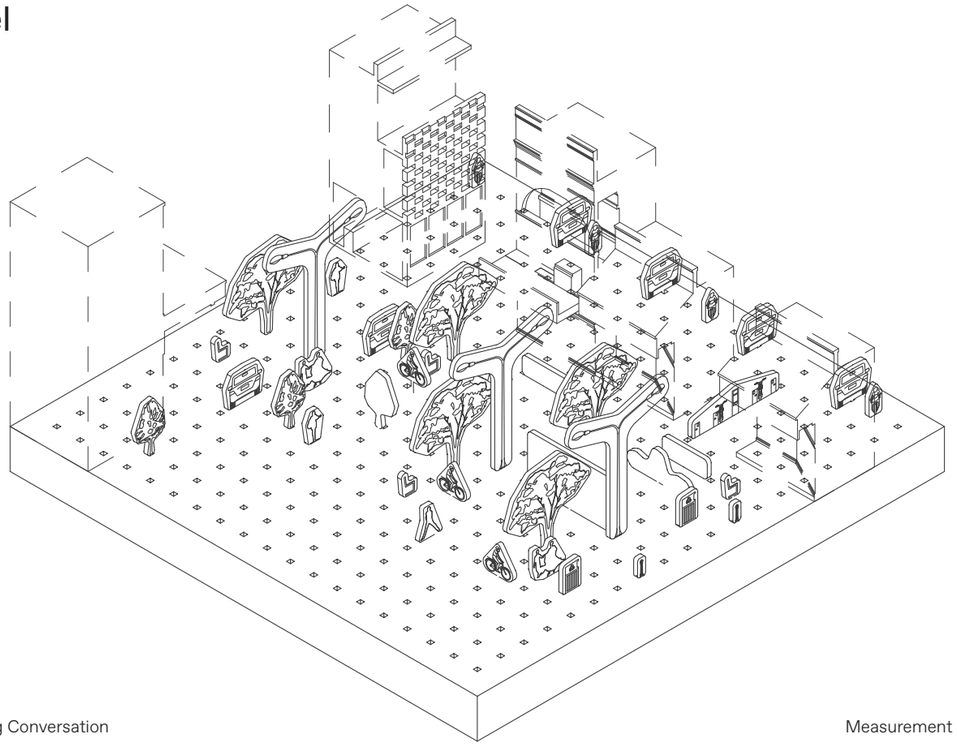


Group 2

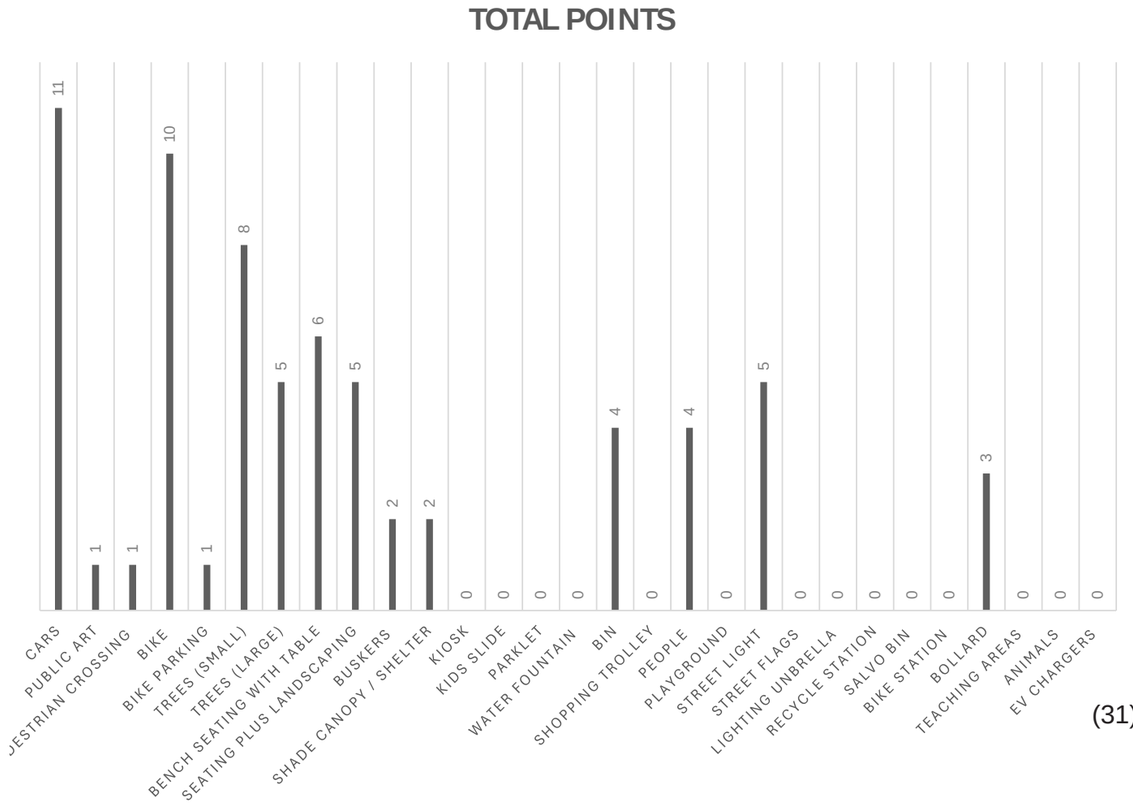
Public Realm Elements

Element	priority 1	priority 2	priority 3	priority 4	priority 5	overall used	total points
Cars	5					6	11
Public Art						1	1
Pedestrian Crossing						1	1
Bike			3			7	10
Bike Parking						1	1
Trees (small)		4				4	8
Trees (large)						5	5
Bench seating with table						6	6
Seating plus landscaping					1	4	5
Buskers						2	2
Shade Canopy / Shelter						2	2
kiosk						0	0
kids slide						0	0
Parklet						0	0
water fountain						0	0
bin						4	4
shopping trolley						0	0
people						4	4
Playground						0	0
street light				2		3	5
street flags						0	0
lighting unbrella						0	0
recycle station						0	0
salvo bin						0	0
bike station						0	0
bollard						3	3
teaching areas						0	0
animals						0	0
ev chargers						0	0

Model



Graph



Analysis

Group 2 showed strong alignment with Coburg's existing urban fabric, prioritising car mobility in both layout and spatial organisation.

Cars were ranked first in their priority list and featured heavily in the model (five total), directly influencing the placement of buildings and street conditions.

Bicycles were present in reasonable numbers, but selected later - indicating a secondary role in the group's mobility strategy.

The scoring matrix highlighted the group's top-valued elements:

Cars, followed by bikes, large trees, and bench seating with tables

Suggests an emphasis on movement and accessibility, balanced with attention to comfort and public amenity

Despite the car-centric approach, the group also displayed a pragmatic and culturally responsive vision:

Their top five included street lights, public art, and buskers, reflecting a concern for safety, atmosphere, and activation of public space

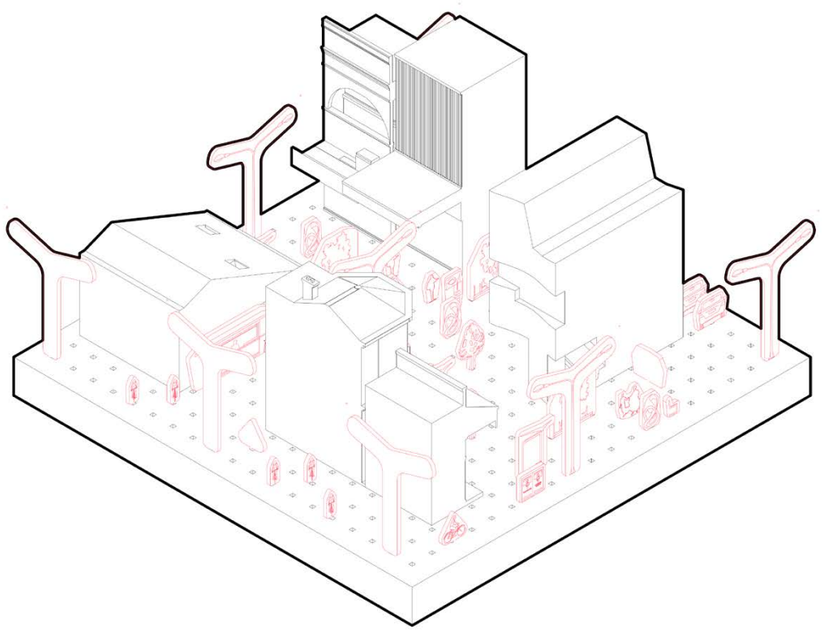
Overall, Group 2's proposal presents a functional and socially conscious urban strategy, combining mobility infrastructure with elements that support comfort, visibility, and cultural vibrancy.

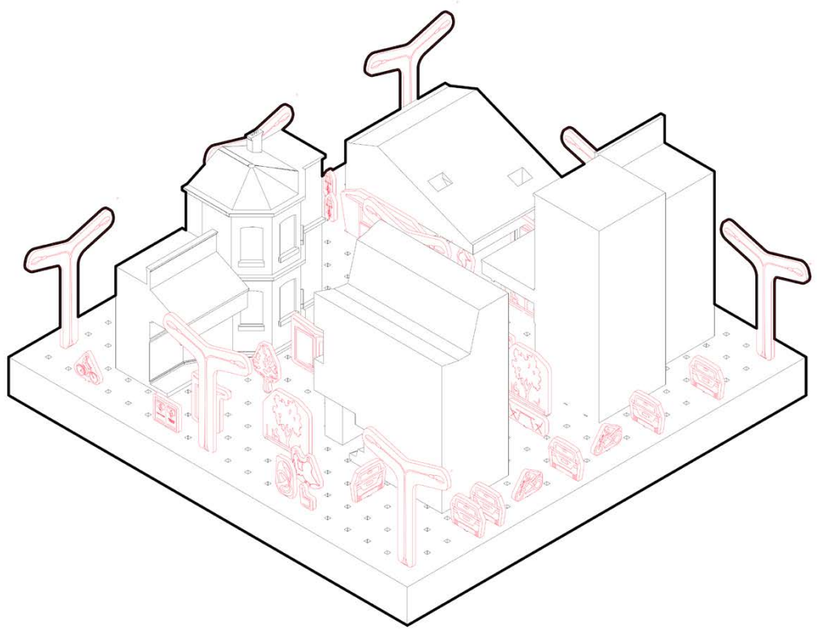
OUTCOME SUMMARY:
Pragmatic, Car-Oriented, Activation Focus

2.0 Workshop Outcomes

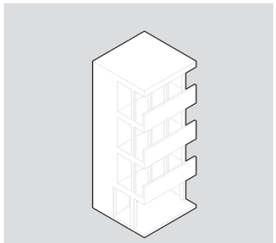
GROUP 3

Model after the Workshop

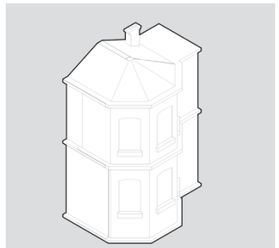




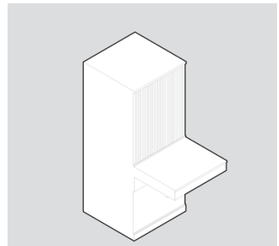
Eatery



Educational



Entertainment



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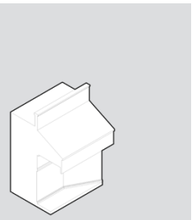

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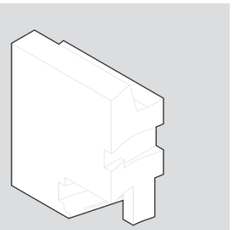
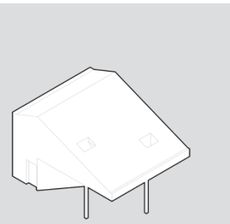


Shopping

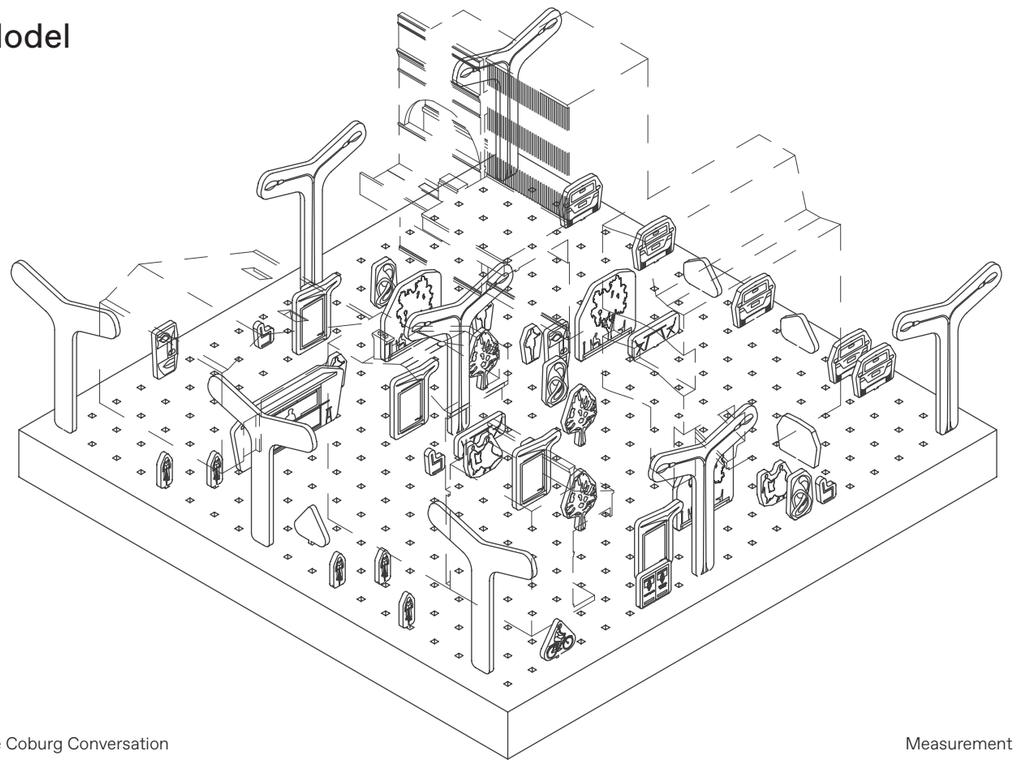


Group 3

Public Realm Elements

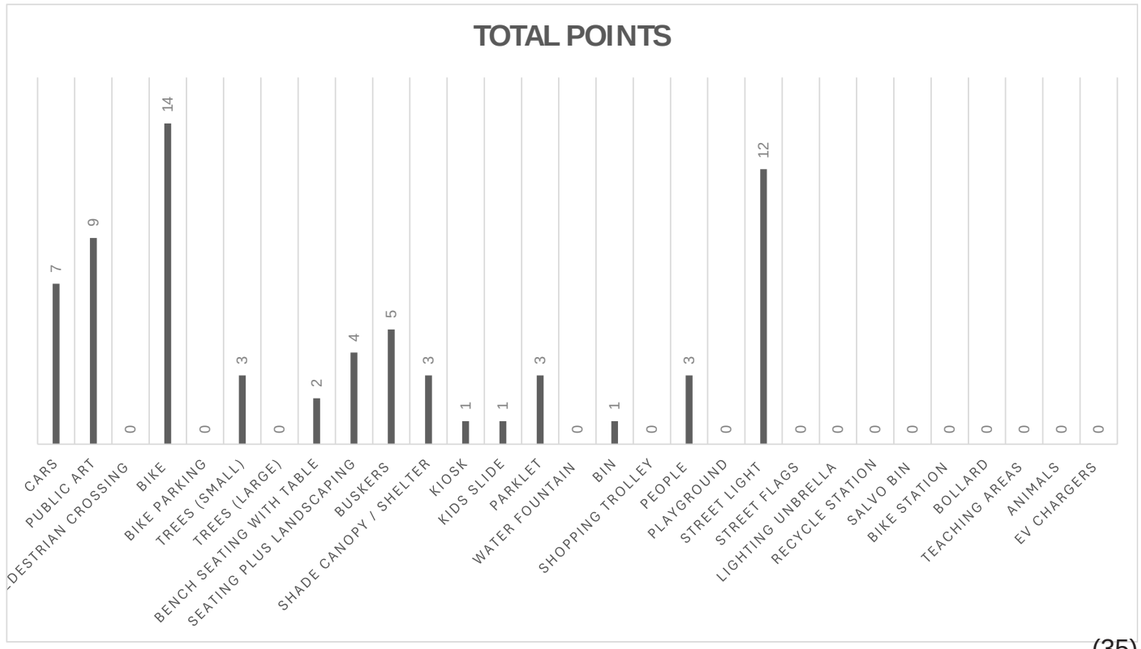
Element	priority 1	priority 2	priority 3	priority 4	priority 5	overall used	total points
Cars				2		5	7
Public Art			3			6	9
Pedestrian Crossing						0	0
Bike	5					9	14
Bike Parking						0	0
Trees (small)						3	3
Trees (large)						0	0
Bench seating with table						2	2
Seating plus landscaping					1	3	4
Buskers						5	5
Shade Canopy / Shelter						3	3
kiosk						1	1
kids slide						1	1
Parklet						3	3
water fountain						0	0
bin						1	1
shopping trolley						0	0
people						3	3
Playground						0	0
street light		4				8	12
street flags						0	0
lighting unbrella						0	0
recycle station						0	0
salvo bin						0	0
bike station						0	0
bollard						0	0
teaching areas						0	0
animals						0	0
ev chargers						0	0

Model



Group 3

Graph



Analysis

Group 3 echoed Group 1's emphasis on cycling infrastructure, assigning bikes a consistent high priority rating (8 across all members).

This suggests strong support for active transport and a willingness to explore alternative urban typologies less dependent on private vehicles.

Public space accessibility was a key concern:

Street lighting was ranked second overall, reflecting priorities around safety, visibility, and extending the use of public space into the evening.

Their design approach represented a hybrid model between Groups 1 and 2:

While bikes were championed as the primary mode of transport, car access was not excluded: suggesting a balanced, pragmatic response to urban mobility.

Overall, Group 3 proposed an urban environment that integrates active transport and safety with practical access, supporting a flexible and inclusive public realm.

OUTCOME SUMMARY:
Active Transport, Safety, and Accessibility

3.0 Engagement Report

(36) Following the workshop, RMIT PlaceLab and the Master of Architecture group reviewed the material generated across the session. This included transcripts of group discussions, photographs of the models, building selections, and the spatial arrangements proposed by each group.

From this body of work, six recurring themes emerged, highlighting common values, preferences, and tensions expressed by participants. These themes were not pre-determined but surfaced through a process of mapping, coding, and comparative analysis.

These six themes provide a framework for interpreting the collective outcomes of the workshop. Each theme brings together spatial strategies, design preferences, and shared concerns voiced across all three groups, serving as both a reflection on community values and a prompt for future engagement and design inquiry.

1. Pedestrian Priority and Transport Access
2. Green Space and Streetscape Design
3. Lighting, Safety, and Public Ambience
4. Building Form and Urban Fabric
5. Spatial Quality and Threshold Design
6. Implementation and Co-Design Potential

3.0 Engagement Report

Pedestrian Priority and Transport Access

Key themes:

1. Pedestrian and Cyclist Priority
2. Vehicle Re-routing and Edge Access
3. Shaded, Accessible, and Comfortable Public Realm
4. Incremental Change and Prototyping

The overwhelming consensus was for streets that prioritise walking, community interaction, and cyclist access, with a firm desire to reduce vehicle presence along the main road. Instead, residents proposed redirecting traffic (especially delivery vehicles, emergency access, and private cars) to rear or side lanes.

Some raised Barcelona's covered pedestrian corridors as a precedent, noting how simple design moves can create engaging, slow-paced environments. There was also recognition that such changes must be implemented with care, such as ensuring sufficient emergency and accessible parking, loading zones, and delivery access without undermining pedestrian comfort.

Residents were open to trialing changes through pilot projects before committing to larger-scale redevelopment. Bike lane connections and shaded walking routes were seen as essential to improving active transport and reducing reliance on cars.

Recommendations:

1. Retain tram corridors with minimal curvature for safe operation
2. Introduce rear lane access for vehicles
3. Widen side streets where necessary to accommodate redirected traffic
4. Provide regular seating to support elderly and less mobile users
5. Consider hybrid-use streets allowing limited, slowed vehicle access where needed

Green Spaces and Streetscape Design

Key themes:

1. Informal street forms
2. Increased vegetation and ecological design
3. Pocket parks and social zones

The removal of car-dominated infrastructure opens up major opportunities for softening and reimagining the streetscape. Community members advocated for more organic, curving street layouts that encourage social activity and make the street visually interesting. There was a strong desire to move away from traditional straight, functional corridors toward more park-like environments.

Pocket parks were a particularly popular idea. These could serve as green access points between the main road and side streets while offering seating, gardens, play spaces, or even opportunities for pop-up businesses. Participants stressed the need to balance the number of these spaces to avoid creating neglected or underused zones.

Participants also stressed that green spaces should not be “add-ons,” but fully integrated into the architectural and urban form—part of the buildings themselves, not just between them.

Recommendations:

1. Increased greenery, tree cover, and native planting
2. Include public seating and water fountains throughout
3. Distribute rubbish bins consistently
4. Design green pockets for day and night use (with lighting and passive surveillance)
5. Use empty lots incrementally to test green space ideas

Lighting, Safety, and Ambience

Key themes:

1. Nighttime safety
2. Avoiding light pollution
3. Comfort and soft urban lighting

Safety after dark emerged as a priority, with a clear emphasis on increasing street lighting, but without contributing to harsh glare or light spill into residential buildings. Residents requested soft lighting solutions such as bollard lights, pedestrian-level illumination, and directional lighting design.

The idea is not just safety, but creating a warm and welcoming ambience that respects Coburg's night-time environment. There was also support for preserving or introducing natural soundscapes—like birdsong and soft music—instead of car noise and harsh urban sounds.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate urban lighting strategy into early design stages
2. Use directional, shielded lighting near housing
3. Employ lower, warmer light sources
4. Consider undergrounding services (e.g. cables) to improve both visuals and safety

3.0 Engagement Report

Building Form and Urban Fabric

Key themes:

1. Human-scaled architecture
2. Mixed-use and mixed-density
3. Eclectic visual identity

(44) Participants strongly opposed monolithic developments. They preferred low-rise, varied architecture that reflects Coburg's existing character—eclectic, small-scale, and community-friendly. However, they also acknowledged the difficulty in authentically replicating the richness of decades of piecemeal development.

Many supported a street frontage with a mix of retail, community spaces, and residential uses. Apartment buildings were acceptable if designed to feel embedded and respectful, ideally no more than three stories tall. The key is to avoid overly uniform or generic facades, even if that means embracing a more restrained, honest modern aesthetic over false historicism.

Recommendations:

1. Prioritise horizontal mixed-use with active frontages
2. Maintain variation in building mass and setback
3. Avoid imitating heritage styles without depth
4. Explore retaining sections of existing streetscape for continuity

(45)

Spatial Quality and Threshold Design

Key themes:

1. Blurred public/private edges
2. Livability and sunlight access
3. Semi-public spaces for engagement

(46) Participants appreciated the role of threshold spaces: gardens, stoops, or porches, that act as social buffers between private homes and the public street. These spaces allow gentle interaction and soften boundaries, fostering a stronger sense of community.

Ensuring good access to natural light was raised repeatedly, not only in homes but along streets and in public gathering areas. Residents wanted to avoid narrow or shaded corridors, preferring open, sunlit spaces that support wellbeing.

Recommendations:

1. Incorporate small front gardens or patios
2. Maintain solar access through height control and setbacks
3. Use cantilevers and awnings strategically for shading without overdarkening spaces

(47)

Implementation and Co-Design

Key themes:

1. Gradual change
2. Ongoing community input
3. Testing before scaling

(48)

There was a consistent call for small, testable interventions: like adding a pocket park or piloting a shared street, before committing to large-scale transformations.
Residents wanted to be involved not only at the consultation stage but throughout the process, helping to shape the public realm with lived experience and local insight.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a staged rollout plan with pilot projects
2. Embed co-design frameworks into future planning processes
3. Allow for flexibility and adaptation based on community response

(49)

4.0 Conclusion

4.0 Conclusion

Comfort and Amenities

Participants consistently valued infrastructure that supports lingering and interaction: seating, shade, bike parking, water fountains, and lighting were all seen as the most essential to comfort. Shaded walking routes, large trees, and pocket parks were highly popular for cooling, ecology, and social use. Comfort was also tied to diversity of spatial conditions: most participants preferred large open spaces, while others valued more sheltered, intimate areas. The consensus leaned towards a mix, allowing users to choose.

Entrances and Building Interfaces

There was broad support for human-scaled, clearly legible thresholds, such as entries with generous overhangs and a welcoming presence. Participants preferred expansive, open entries for public and community buildings, paired with more intimately scale points for specific services. Variation along the street was valued as a way to avoid monotony and signal different uses.

Welcoming Qualities

The most inviting buildings featured generous glazing at street level, offering clear views into active public spaces. Architectural diversity, greenery, and informal seating further contributed to a sense of approachability.

Gathering vs. Passing Through

The ideal street was seen as more than a transit space, participants wanted it to support gathering, cultural activity, and informal social encounters. Small social zones, and pedestrian-priority areas were key to this. However, some mobility needs meant that a balance between flow and dwell spaces was important.

Welcoming a Diverse Community

Spaces should reflect Coburg's cultural diversity through inclusivity in design: accessible seating, shaded and sunny areas, multi-purpose public realm elements, and a blend of uses to support different ages, abilities, and cultural practices. Food, markets, and informal performance spaces were seen as the key cultural connectors.

Shade and Exposure

Participants wanted varied microclimates. Uniform shading was not preferred; flexibility and seasonal adaptability were seen as more valuable.

Mobility and Access

All participants endorsed and prioritised active transport infrastructure, protected bike lanes, pedestrian-priority streets, and connections to public transport. Reducing car dominance (particularly along the main street) and rerouting vehicles to side or rear lanes was popular, although some groups also maintained car access for practicality. The street design was seen as a tool to shift travel habits toward walking and cycling.

Coburg's Character

Loved elements included eclectic shopfronts, varied building and signage scales, heritage textures, and active, food-centred street life. Participants wanted to preserve this irregularity and resist overly uniform or generic redevelopment. Pocket parks, verandahs, and public art were seen as key ways to embed and express local identity within the streetscape.

Connection to Community

Public spaces were expected to enable informal interaction and civic participation. Threshold spaces (gardens, stoops) were valued for creating social buffers and fostering casual encounters. Participants supported co-design approaches and small-scale interventions as ways to strengthen community ownership. Local art and cultural expression were considered integral: not as add-ons but embedded in the public realm through integrated artworks, performance spaces, and cultural references in materials and design.

Street Density and Atmosphere

While some preferred denser, more active streets, others valued calmer, more spacious environments. The dominant preference was for a varied rhythm, lively nodes interspersed with quieter pockets, allowing for both bustle and retreat.

Appendix

5.0 Benchmark Precedents

The following buildings were identified in conversations during the community workshop: everyday structures and notable landmarks that capture the distinctive built character of their context. They encompass civic, commercial, and public realms, each presenting street interfaces that are active, permeable, and engaged.
Each was documented and analysed using a consistent quantitative framework:

DIAGRAM 1
Hierarchy, scale, and the recurrence of key architectural elements.

1. A trio of shopfront buildings along Sydney Road.

1. Tight frontages and narrow plots create a dense, rhythmic street wall
2. Deep verandah(s) with pressed metal undersides offer pattern & continuity
3. Signage is eclectic (vinyl, neon, hand-painted) layered over time without strict cohesion
4. Upper levels feature gentle stepping in height, ornamentation, arched windows, and faded grandeur
5. Thresholds are glazed, creating immediate transitions between street and shop

DIAGRAM 2
Balance of permeability (solid, glazed, and open) and quantifies visual irregularity through detailed element counts.

RATIO OF SOLID, GLAZED AND OPEN FRONTAGE AREAS:
2 : 1 : 0

96M² SOLID
47M² GLAZED
0M² OPEN

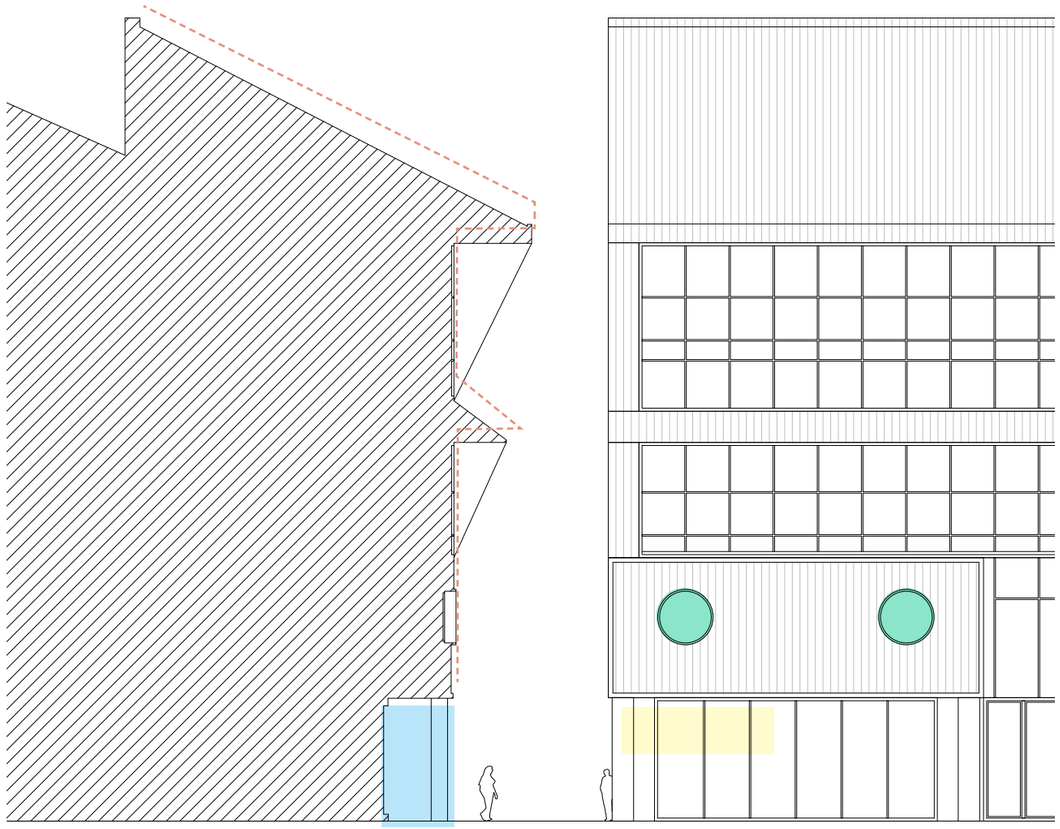
VISUAL IRREGULARITY SCORE:
3 DISTINCT FORMAL GESTURES
1 FACADE MATERIAL
6 FACADE COLOURS
0 CHANGES IN POROSITY

9 OVERALL

5.0 Benchmark Precedents

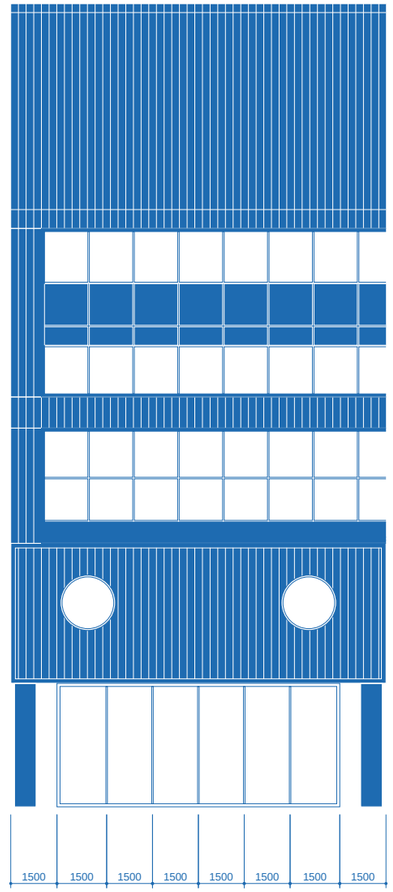
DIAGRAM 1
Hierarchy, scale, and the recurrence of key architectural elements.

2. Balam Balam, Kennedy Nolan x Openwork



1. Strong material contrast between brick base and upper cladding creates a legible, civic-scale threshold
2. Circular windows and vertical ribs provide visual interest and texture at street level
3. Angled silhouette provides shade and introduces a sense of formal playfulness
4. Illuminated signage suspended in front of the glazing, visual interest, transparency, safety
5. Setback entry and verandah create a soft, welcoming interface for community access

DIAGRAM 2
Balance of permeability (solid, glazed, and open) and quantifies visual irregularity through detailed element counts.



RATIO OF SOLID : GLAZED : OPEN FRONTAGE:
1.8 : 1 :0 .5

424M² SOLID
238M² GLAZED
0M² OPEN

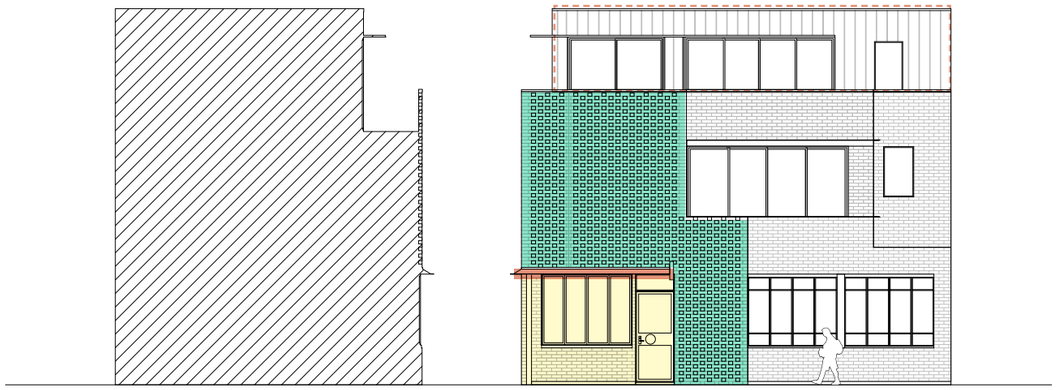
VISUAL IRREGULARITY:
1 DISTINCT FORMAL GESTURE
2 FACADE MATERIALS
2 FACADE COLOURS
0 CHANGES IN POROSITY

5 OVERALL

5.0 Benchmark Precedents

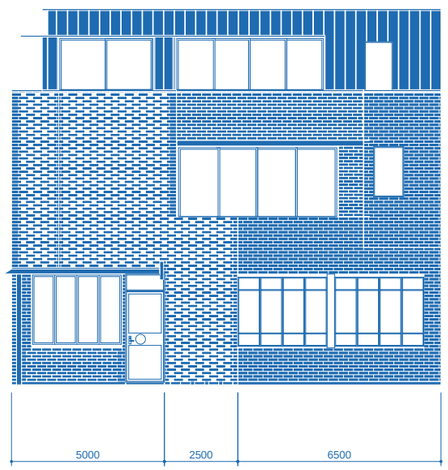
DIAGRAM 1
Hierarchy, scale, and the recurrence of key architectural elements.

3. Coventry Street Apartments, EAT Architects



1. Commercial interface articulated with domestic proportions
2. Perforated brick façade adds texture, shadow, and visual porosity
3. Change in façade treatment distinguishes the volume above
4. Clear, recessed access points improve legibility
5. Material palette (brick, steel, timber) responds to local context

DIAGRAM 2
Balance of permeability (solid, glazed, and open) and quantifies visual irregularity through detailed element counts.



RATIO OF SOLID, GLAZED AND OPEN FRONTAGE AREAS:
2.8 : 1 : 0

124M² SOLID
45M² GLAZED
0M² OPEN

VISUAL IRREGULARITY:
2 DISTINCT FORMAL GESTURES
2 FACADE MATERIALS
2 FACADE COLOURS
1 CHANGES IN POROSITY

7 OVERALL

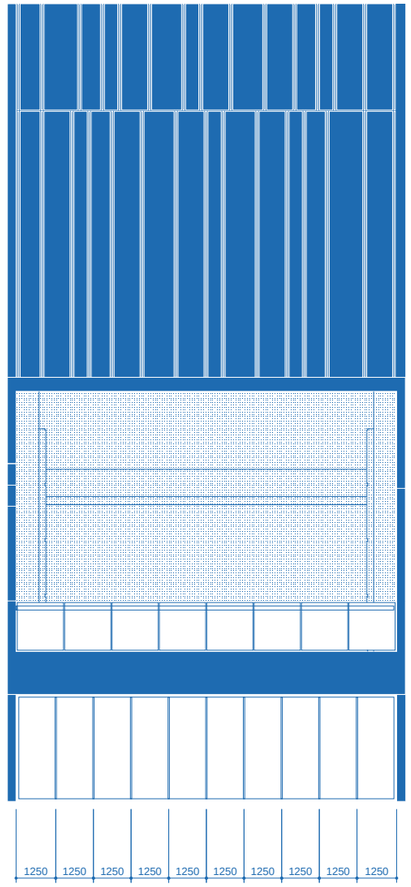
5.0 Benchmark Precedents

DIAGRAM 1
Hierarchy, scale, and the recurrence of key architectural elements.

4. Queensland Library, Donovan Hill

1. Ground-level interface defined by deep verandahs and shaded walkways along the riverfront
2. Layered façade elements create texture, depth, and filtered light across circulation zones
3. Open-air transitional spaces blur the threshold between interior and exterior
4. Recessed entries and active balcony frontages enhance accessibility and civic legibility
5. Material palette of vegetated zones, timber, concrete, and steel reflects climate and vernacular forms

DIAGRAM 2
Balance of permeability (solid, glazed, and open) and quantifies visual irregularity through detailed element counts.



RATIO OF SOLID, GLAZED AND OPEN FRONTAGE AREAS:
3.3 : 1 : 1.5

194M² SOLID
58M² GLAZED
85M² OPEN

VISUAL IRREGULARITY:
3 DISTINCT FORMAL GESTURES
4 FACADE MATERIALS
5 FACADE COLOURS
2 CHANGES IN POROSITY

14 OVERALL

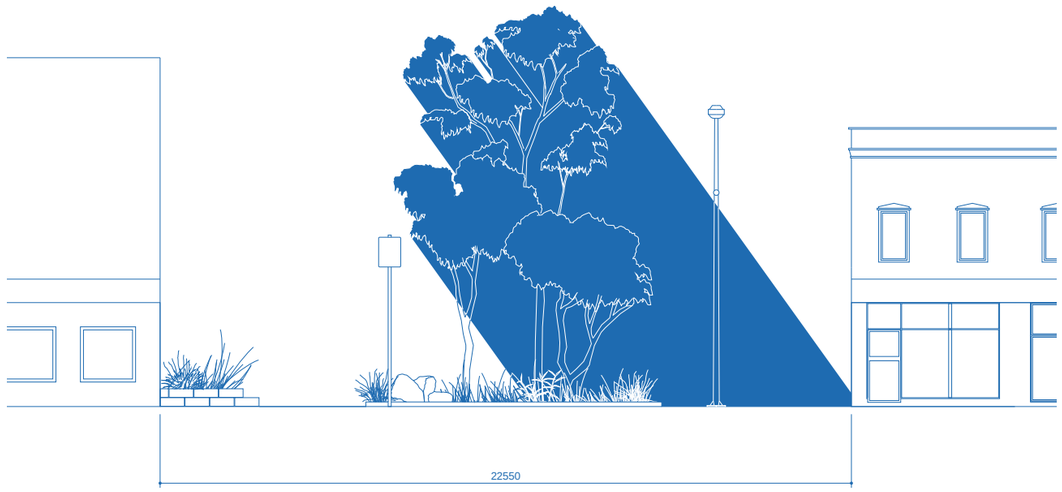
5.0 Benchmark Precedents

DIAGRAM 1
Hierarchy, scale, and the recurrence of key architectural elements.

5. Michelle Guglielmo Park, Brunswick, GLAS

1. Timber decking, stone plinths, and native planting create a soft, permeable edge along Sydney Rd
2. Tapered canopy structure provides shade and defines a civic threshold between street and park
3. Tactile materials: spotted gum, bluestone, and recycled brick, ground the project in local texture and memory
4. Integrated public art and custom laser-cut shade elements activate the entry and express community identity
5. Abundant seating, lighting, and informal lawns support flexible occupation and encourage day-to-night use

DIAGRAM 2
Balance of permeability (solid, glazed, and open) and quantifies visual irregularity through detailed element counts.



RATIO OF SHADED TO UNSHADED AREAS:
1.8 : 1

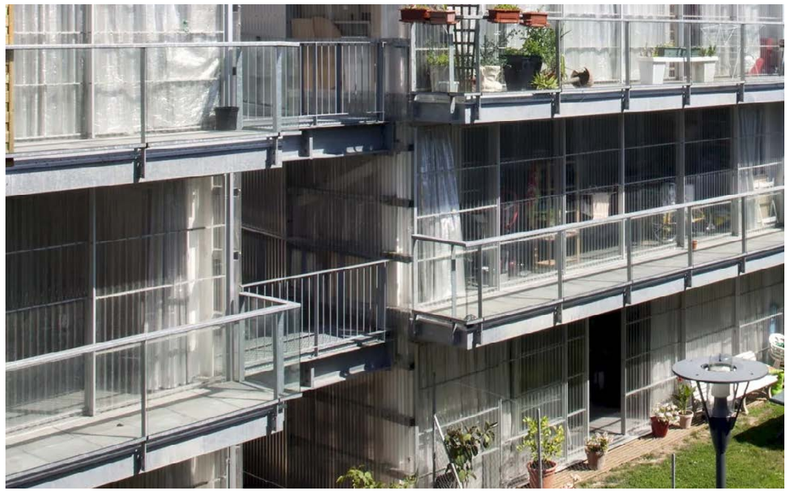
751M² SHADED
427M² UNSHADED

VISUAL IRREGULARITY:
3 DISTINCT FORMAL GESTURES
5 GROUND CONDITIONS
4 SEATING TYPES
3 LEVELS OF SHADING

15 OVERALL

5.0 Benchmark Precedents

These buildings were identified through research conducted by RMIT architecture students. Starting from a catalogue of over 50 precedents, a select few were distilled for their emblematic use of specific urban interface strategies. Their qualities made them effective catalysts within the workshop methodology, enabling focused discussion on high-quality public and mixed-use buildings and their relationship to the public realm.



Location and Vassel, Saint Nazaire Housing Complex

- Layered threshold with semi-private gardens and open stairwells
- Repetitive balcony forms create rhythm and permeability
- Use of raw, modular materials (concrete, steel) adds texture and tactility
- Soft edge conditions through planting and minimal fencing
- Interfaces feel open yet defensible, balancing access with privacy

EAT Architects, Coventry Apartments

- Commercial interface articulated with domestic proportions
- Perforated brick façade adds texture, shadow, and visual porosity
- Change in façade treatment distinguishes the volume above
- Clear, recessed access points improve legibility
- Material palette (brick, steel, timber) responds to local context

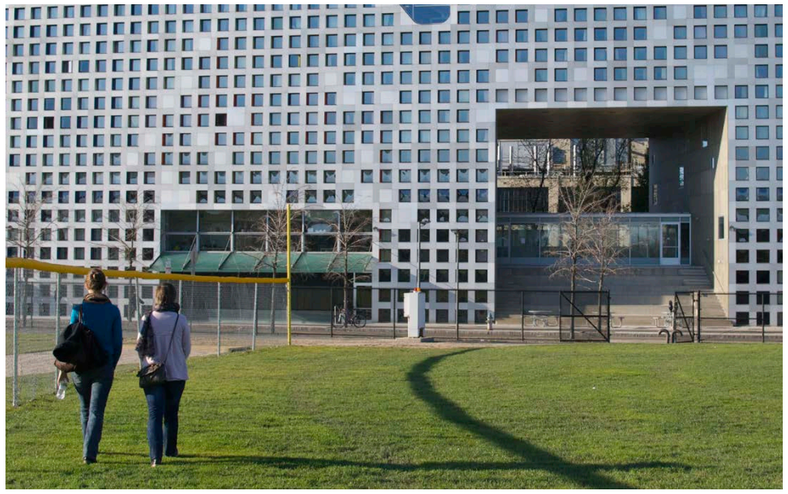
5.0 Benchmark Precedents

Balam Balam, Kennedy Nolan with Openwork

- Strong material contrast between brick base and upper cladding creates a legible, civic-scale threshold
- Circular windows and vertical ribs provide visual interest and texture at street level
- Deep overhang provides passive shading and a transitional space at the entry
- Setback entry and verandah create a soft, welcoming interface for community access

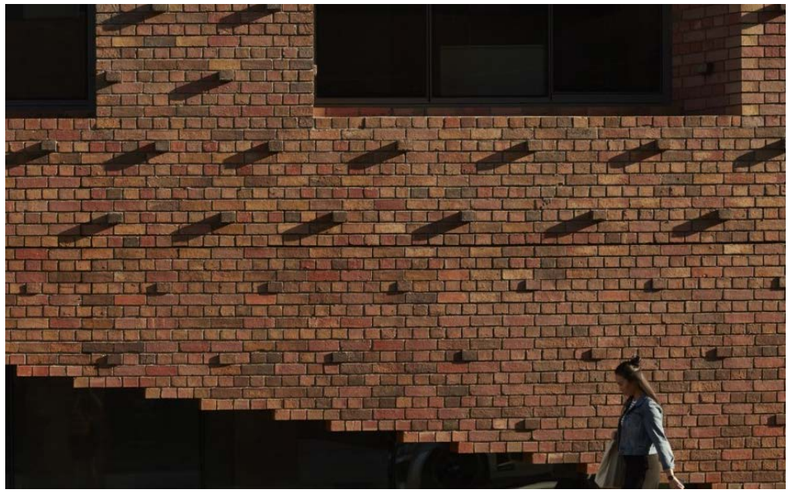
Architectus, Kangan Institute

- Generous colonnade and tree-lined frontage encourage pedestrian movement and shade
- Repetitive vertical elements offer rhythm and legibility across the façade
- Glazed ground level enhances visibility and transparency between inside and street
- Materials and planting work together to create a tactile and civic-minded edge



Lyons, Springvale Community Hub

- Pixelated façade plays with light and permeability: creating a porous yet monumental street presence
- Ground-level threshold is defined by cut-outs and framed entries, reinforcing movement, scale, and creating an outdoor amphitheatre space
- Metal cladding produces a matte, tactile finish while responding to light shifts
- Public-facing courtyards provide spatial relief within a dense urban block



John Wardle Architects, Holme Apartments

- Preserved brick base maintains a familiar, human-scale street condition
- Subtle shifts in brick patterning create texture and movement along the façade
- Defined plinth and entry zones produce a respectful threshold to the public realm
- Integration of old and new materials softens transition from street to residential form

5.0 Benchmark Precedents

Balam Balam, Kennedy Nolan with Openwork

- Strong material contrast between brick base and upper cladding creates a legible, civic-scale threshold
- Circular windows and vertical ribs provide visual interest and texture at street level
- Deep overhang provides passive shading and a transitional space at the entry
- Setback entry and verandah create a soft, welcoming interface for community access

Heritage Shopfronts, Coburg

- Tight frontages and narrow plots create a dense, rhythmic street wall
- Deep verandahs with pressed metal undersides offer shade and continuity
- Signage is eclectic (vinyl, neon, hand-painted) layered over time without strict cohesion
- Upper levels feature symmetrical ornamentation, arched windows, and faded grandeu
- Thresholds are glazed, creating immediate transitions between street and shop

Lyons, Springvale Community Hub

- Bold façade articulation using colour, geometry, and texture
- Large circular cut-outs and overhangs create shaded public zones
- Transparent ground floor enhances access and civic legibility
- Use of robust materials reinforces permanence and identity
- Thresholds allow for gathering, entry, and passive occupation

Searle x Waldron, The University of Melbourne

- Angled canopy marks entry and provides generous shade
- Contrasting materials (metal, glass, timber) create layered tactility
- Recessed glazing and open sightlines make the interface visually accessible
- Strong formal expression animates the campus edge
- Ground-level design supports flow between public and institutional space

6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

(72) Following the workshop, the research team undertook a critical reflection on the structure, tools, and facilitation methods used throughout the engagement process. This section outlines a series of suggested refinements aimed at sharpening the workshop framework, expanding its reach, and deepening its impact.

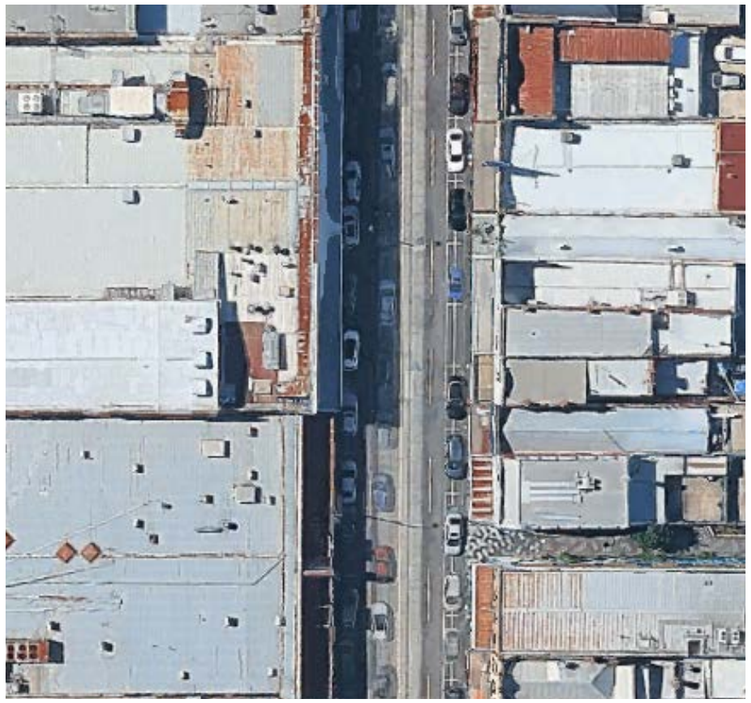
The following section explores how the workshop model might be adapted to strengthen university–council–community partnerships, and how participatory tools (such as a point system and modular models) can more effectively translate qualitative and quantitative data into meaningful insights for both learning and decision-making within local government contexts.

6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

STREET TYPE AND MODEL SETUP

Condition 1: Sydney Road

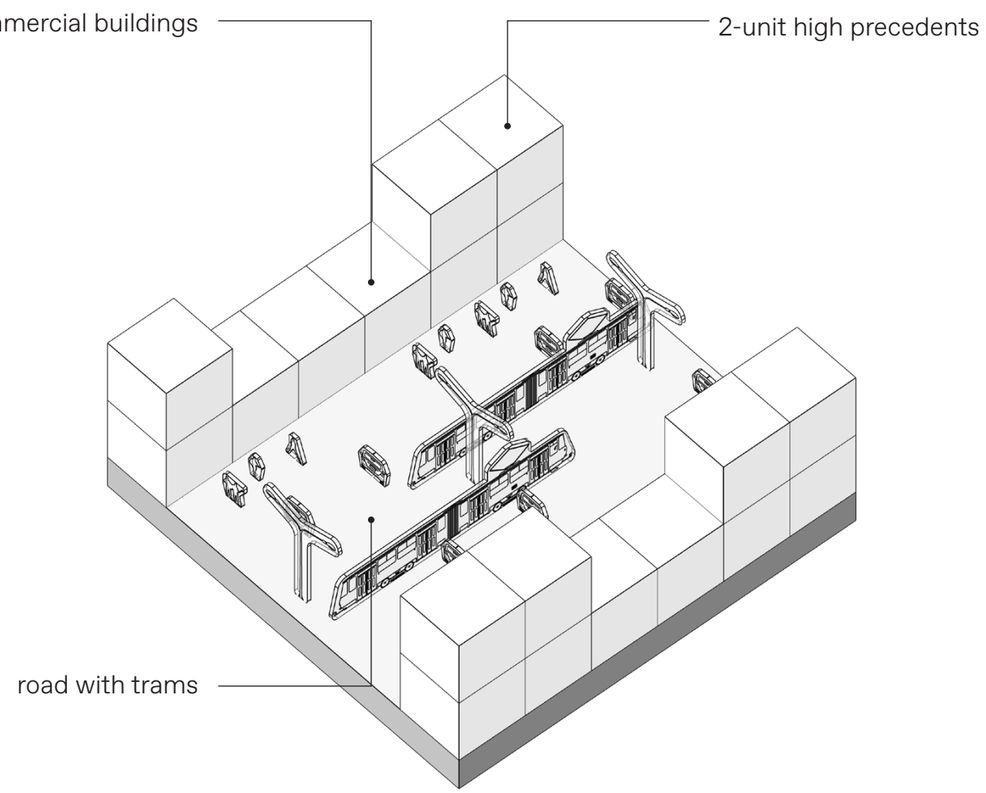
At the beginning of the community engagement day, many participants assumed the model would be representative of Sydney Road, outlining its importance to the community. Therefore, Sydney Road can be identified as a useful example condition for the model set up.



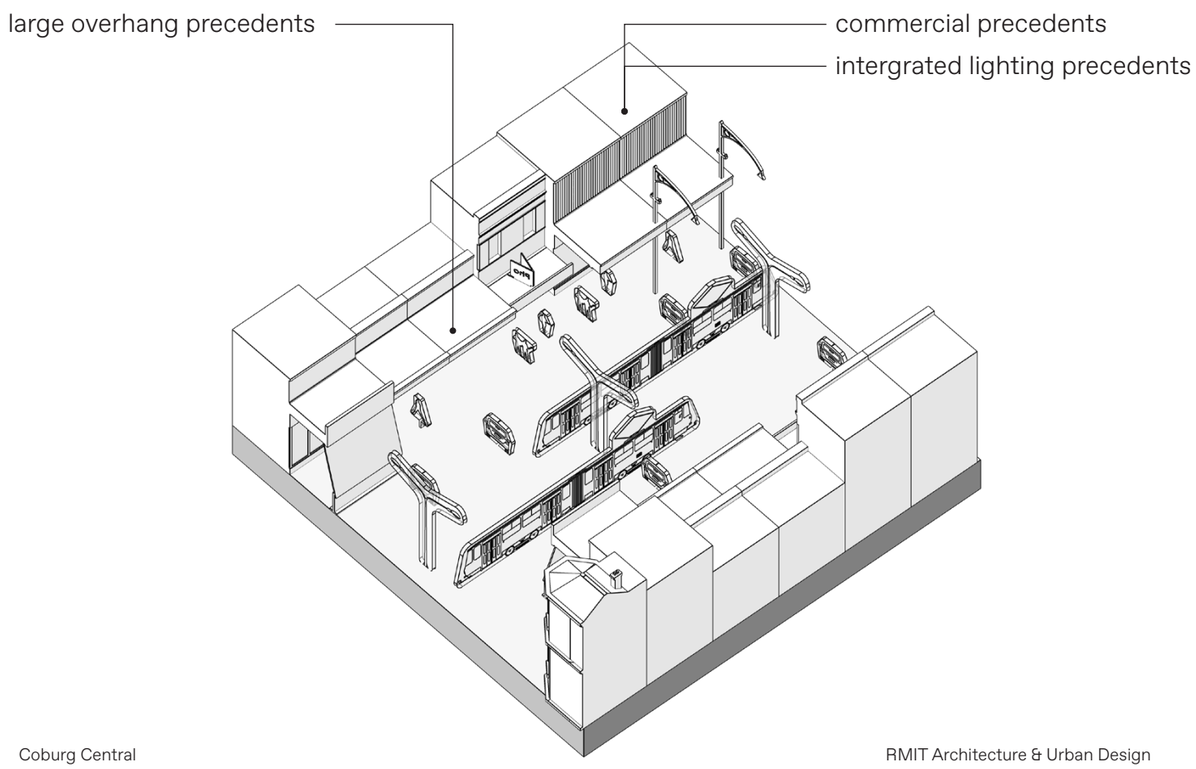
Condition 1

Sydney Road is occupied by a mix of residential and commercial buildings, and a tramway.

Diagrammatic Model



Model with precedent building blocks



6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

STREET TYPE AND MODEL SETUP

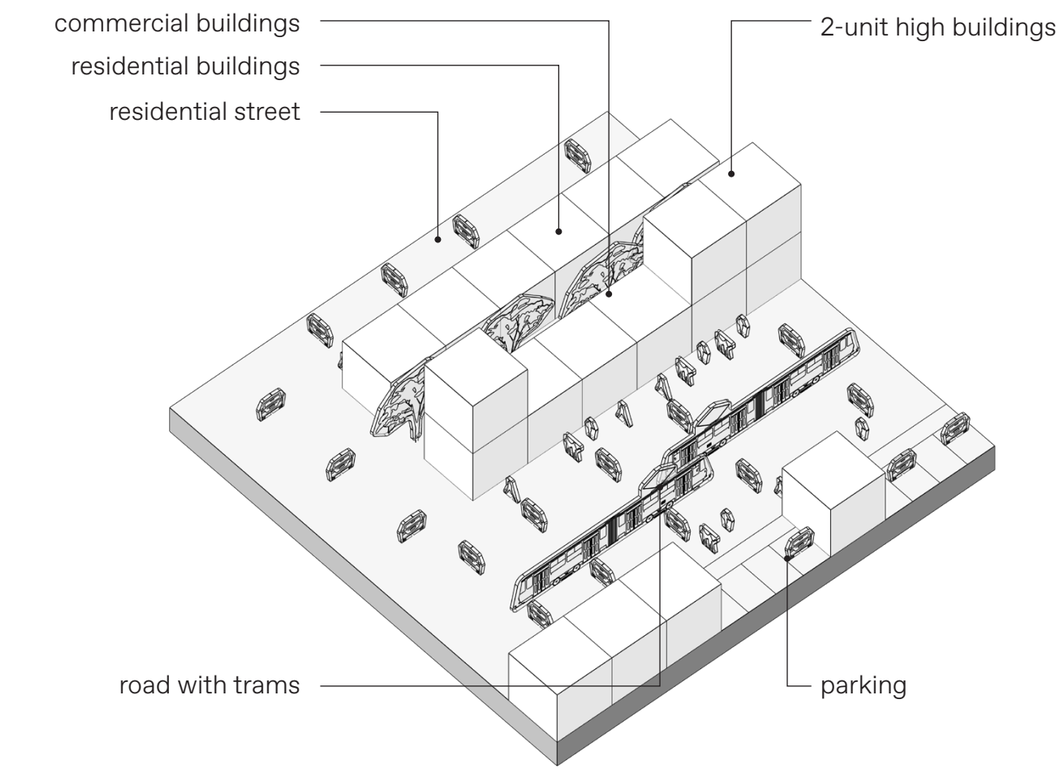
Condition 2: Adjacent Residential and Commercial Streets

We can utilise existing conditions in the area to make a range of simplified street types, without a need to specify the original location. This way, the participants can identify the qualities they like/dislike about the street's conditions, and alter it to their ideal street.

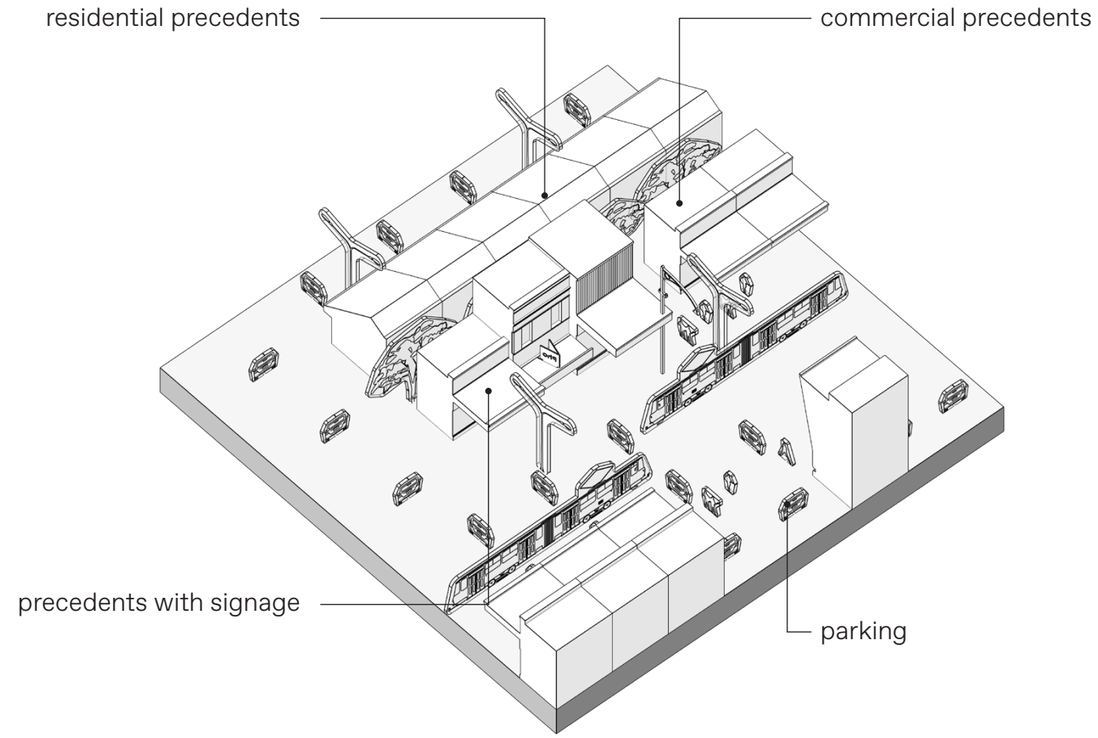
A common intersection of conditions in Coburg is the connection between residential streets and a commercial/main street.

Condition 2
A large commercial road with trams. Behind it, residential areas are connected by a small street.

Diagrammatic Model



Model with precedent building blocks



6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

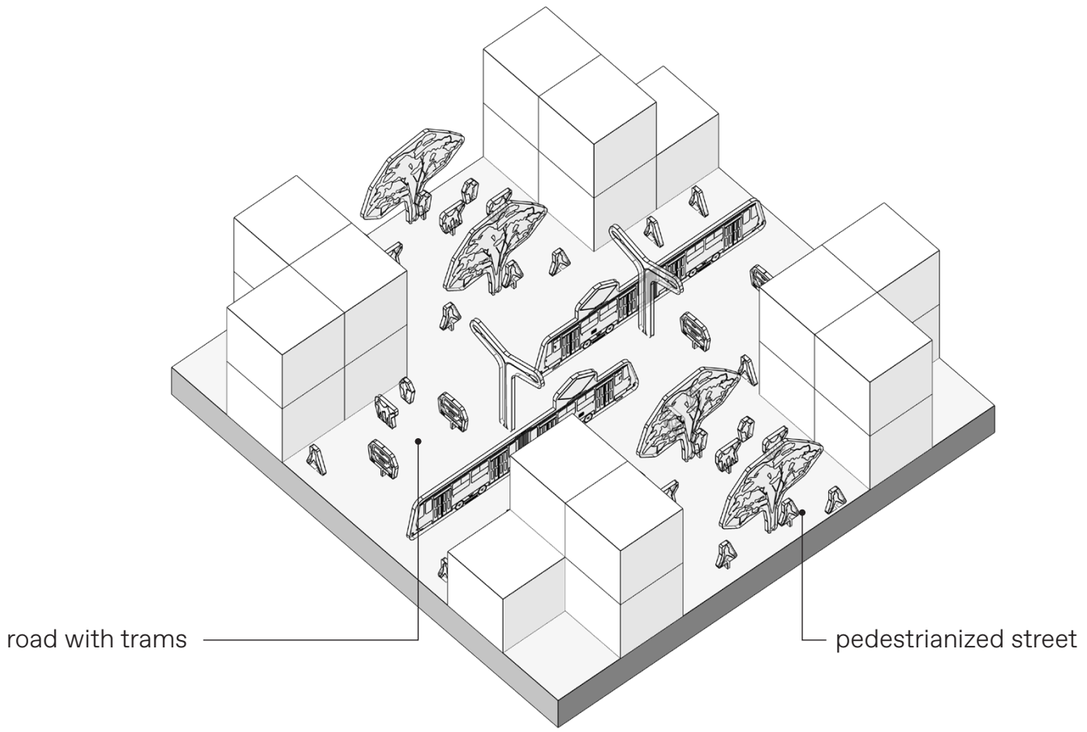
STREET TYPE AND MODEL SETUP

Condition 3: Main Intersection

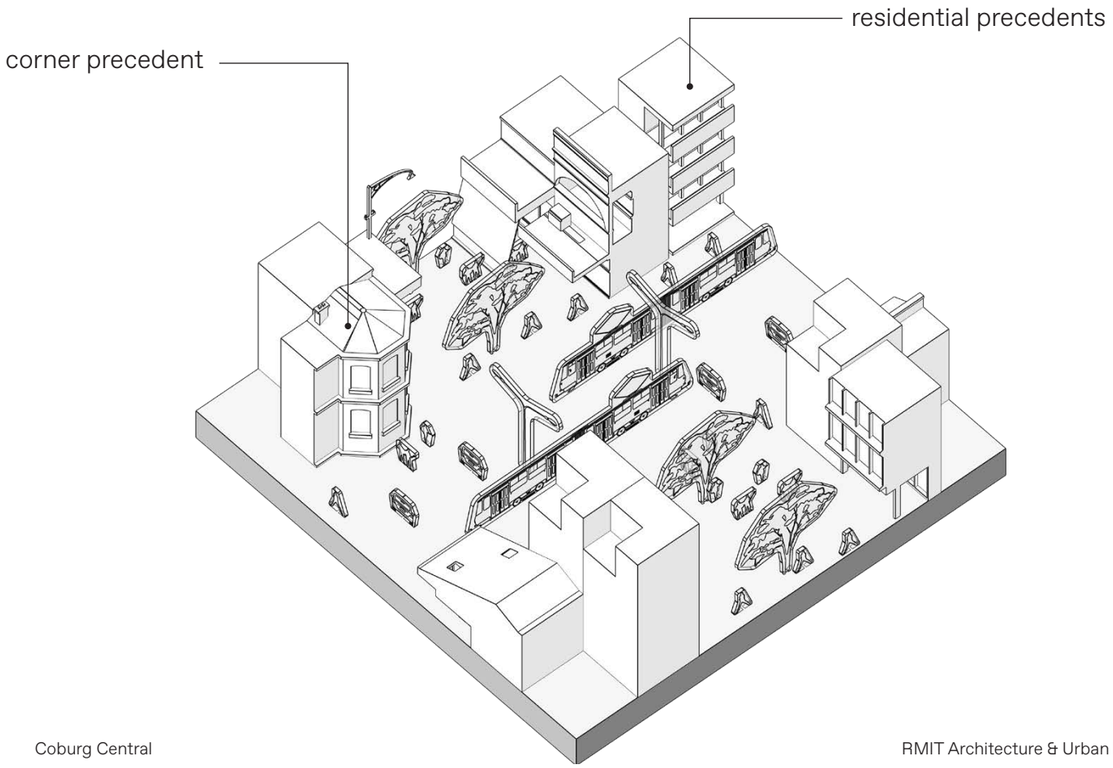
As well as simplifying existing conditions, street types can be modified to generate conversation around alternate public spaces. For this example, one of the streets in a central cross-intersection is fully pedestrianised.

Condition 3
Existing cross-intersection.

Diagrammatic Model



Model with precedent building blocks



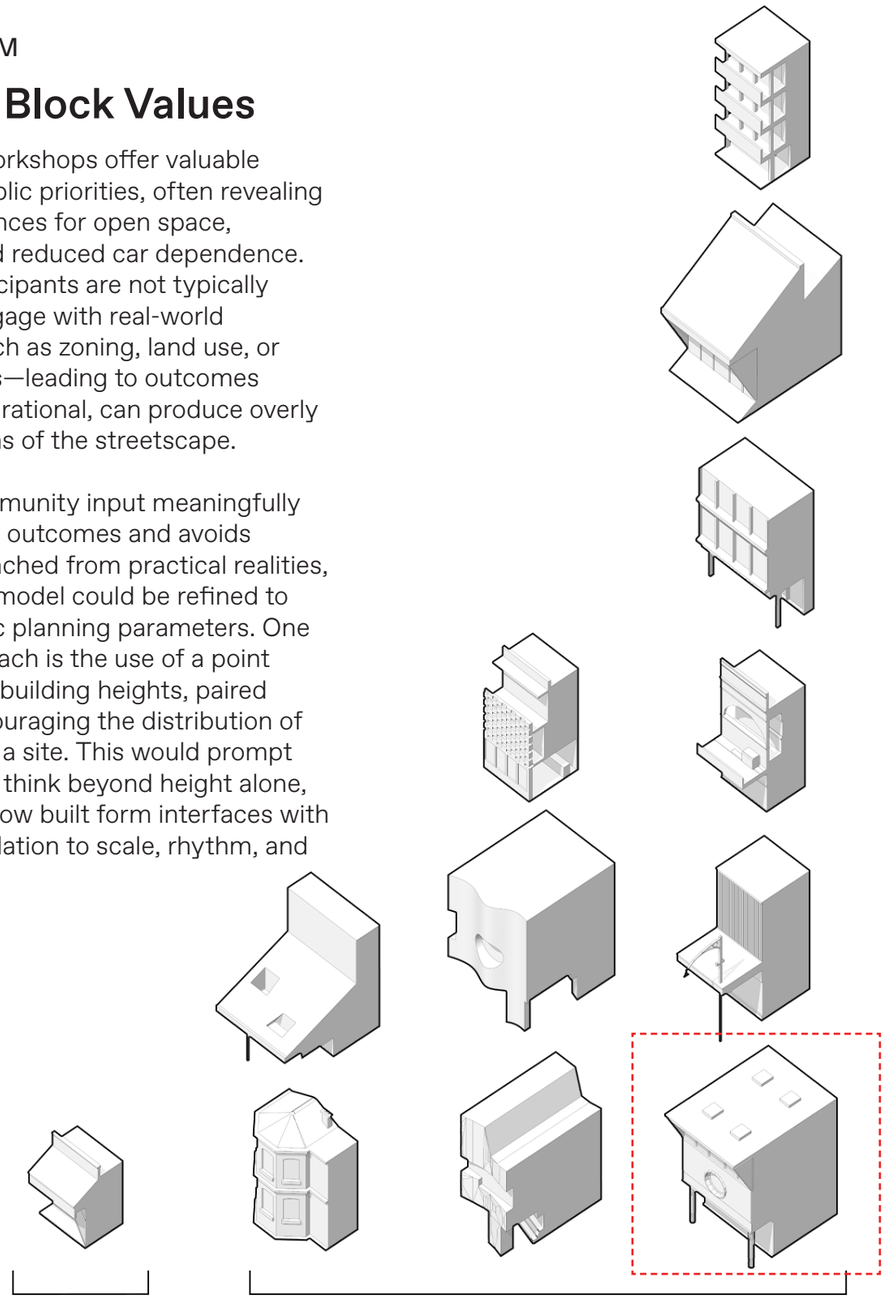
6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

POINT SYSTEM

Building Block Values

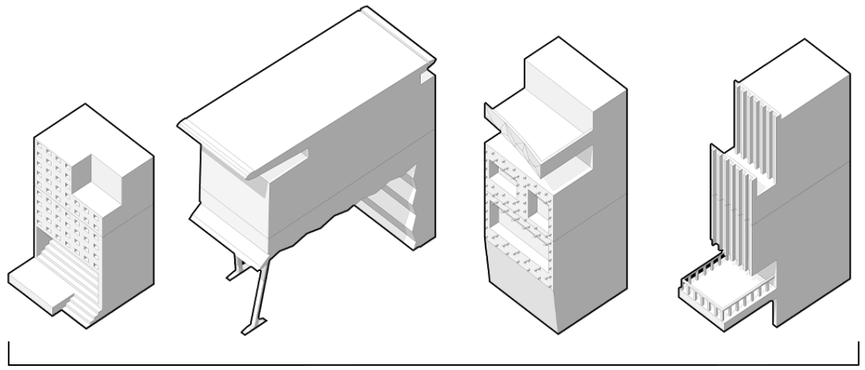
Community workshops offer valuable insight into public priorities, often revealing strong preferences for open space, walkability, and reduced car dependence. However, participants are not typically required to engage with real-world constraints such as zoning, land use, or density targets—leading to outcomes that, while aspirational, can produce overly idealised visions of the streetscape.

To ensure community input meaningfully informs design outcomes and avoids becoming detached from practical realities, the workshop model could be refined to introduce basic planning parameters. One possible approach is the use of a point system tied to building heights, paired with rules encouraging the distribution of density across a site. This would prompt participants to think beyond height alone, and consider how built form interfaces with the street in relation to scale, rhythm, and urban logic.



S
1 STOREY
1 POINT

M
2-5 STOREY
3 POINT



L
>5 STOREY
4 POINT

6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

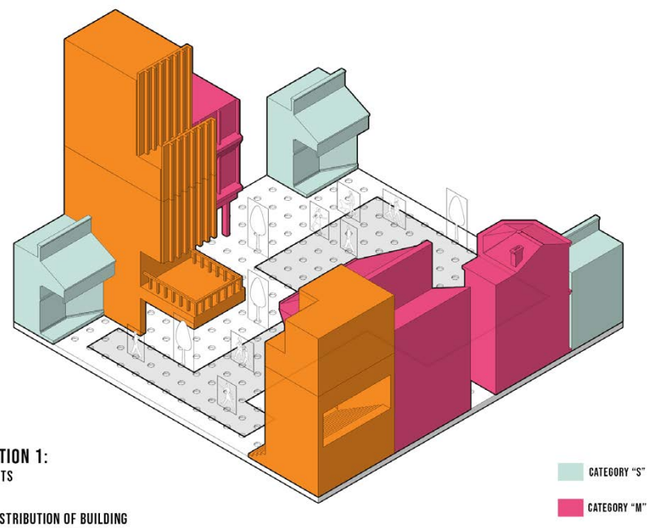
POINT SYSTEM

Minimum Point Requirement

Creating a framework in which the workshop can be guided by the following set of rules:

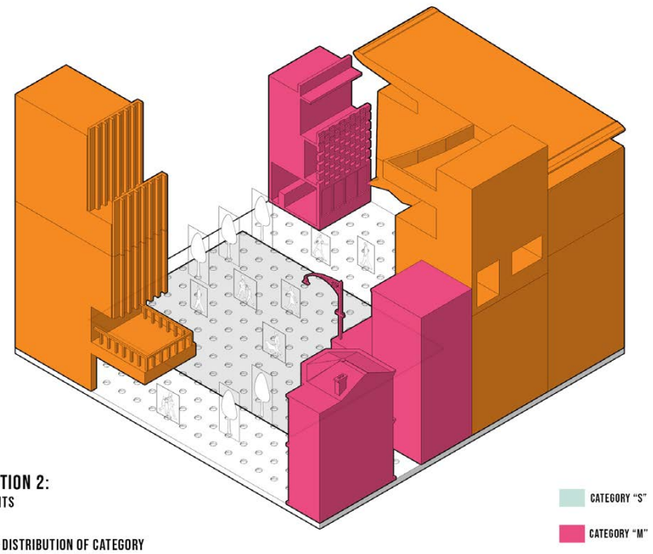
- A minimum requirement of 20 points
- At least 2 buildings from each category

Implementing a set of rules can result in iterations which are more aligned with pragmatic density requirements.



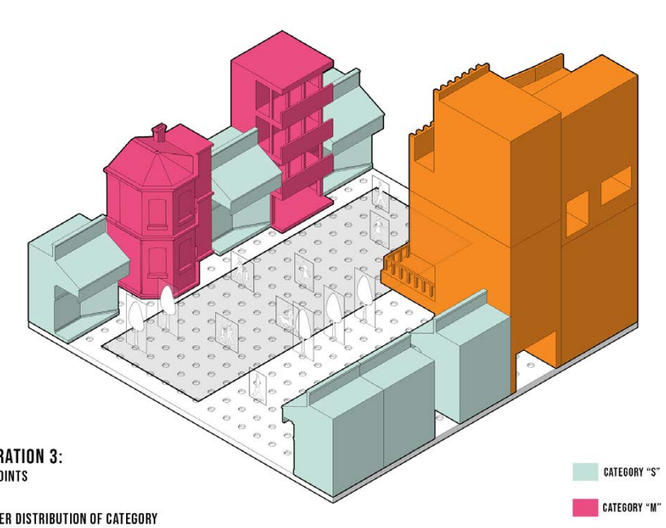
ITERATION 1:
20 POINTS

EVEN DISTRIBUTION OF BUILDING CATEGORIES, CREATING POCKET SPACES.



ITERATION 2:
21 POINTS

HIGHER DISTRIBUTION OF CATEGORY M & L BUILDINGS, CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LARGE CENTRAL SPACE.

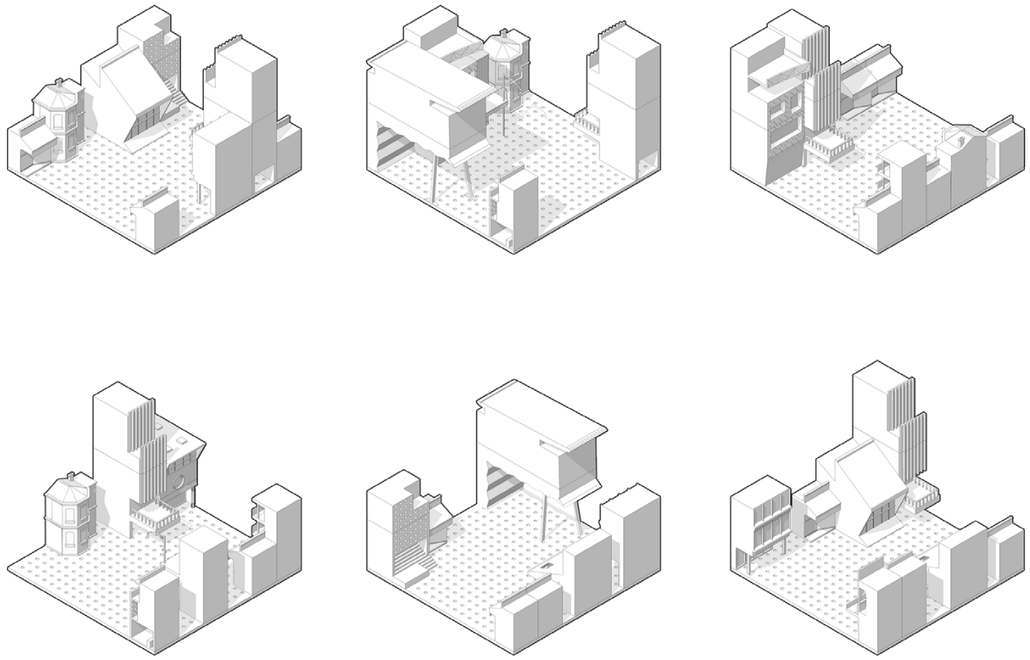


ITERATION 3:
20 POINTS

HIGHER DISTRIBUTION OF CATEGORY S BUILDINGS, CREATING A THOROUGHFARE SPATIAL DESIGN.

6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

The workshop generates multiple iterations of street conditions based on participant priorities. However, each group works in isolation, which can lead to fragmented outcomes and disconnected programmatic relationships along the street. The value of the findings could be significantly enhanced by embedding a broader contextual framework, enabling participants to situate their proposals within a more cohesive urban vision and providing council with more integrated, actionable insights.

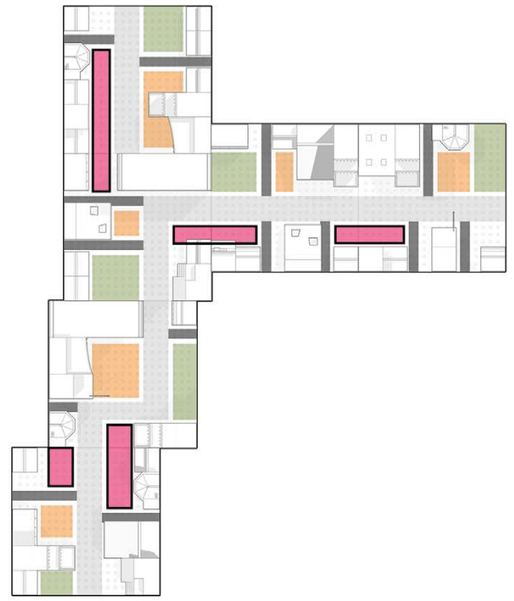


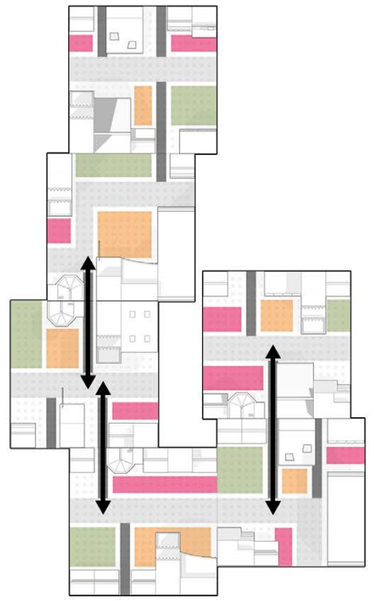
After the initial round of the workshop, programs can be mapped onto the board to give a clearer sense of how space is distributed across different uses.

6.0 Suggestions: Changes to Methodology

These spatial plots can then be reorganised in multiple configurations to establish a broader, more coherent context that links each individual board into a collective streetscape.

(86)





STREET BACK ALLEY PARK F&B PUBLIC ART/ OPEN SPACE

(87)

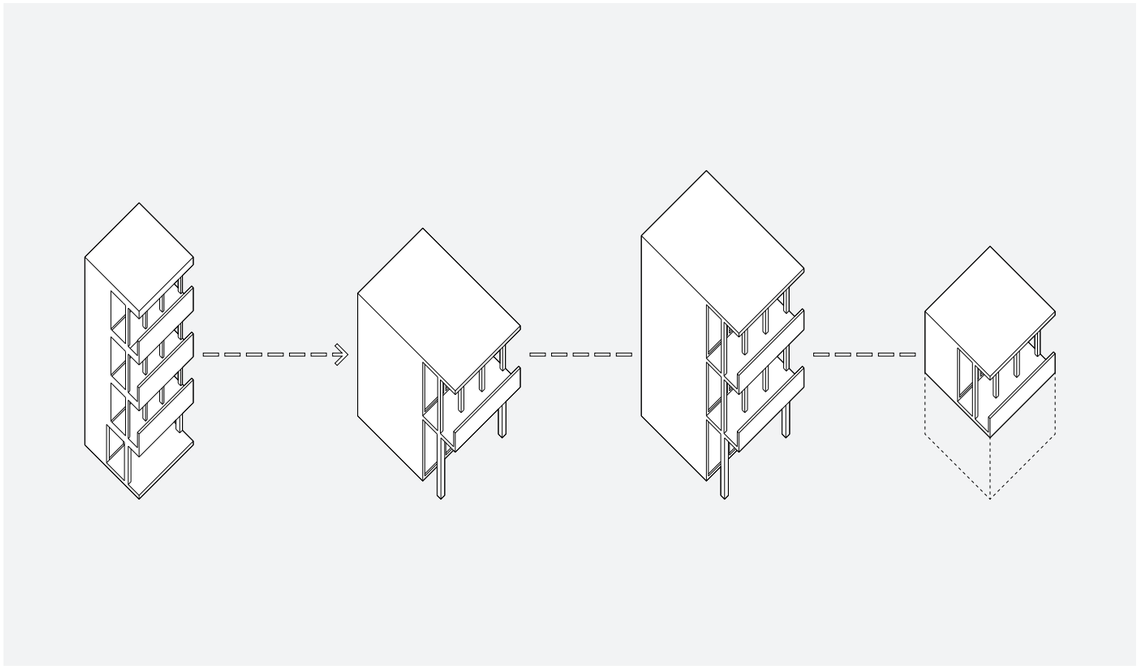
6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

BUILDING BLOCK ALTERATIONS

Rationale

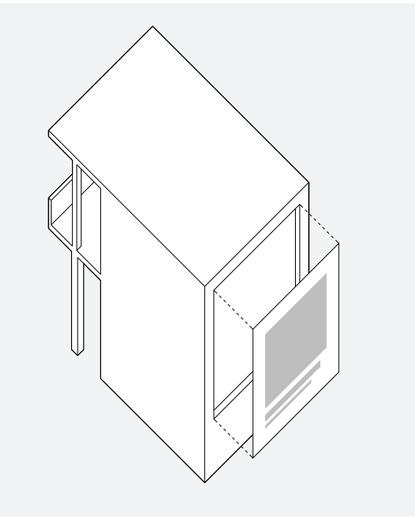
(88) One observation to come out of the Coburg community meeting was a need to create a more unified set of building blocks. While the outcomes from the meeting were successful in utilising the initial building blocks to create an ideal streetscape, differences in scale and detail across blocks possibly created a certain level of inhibition in the goal of understanding each block by its experiential qualities at the street level. To rectify this issue, blocks should be remodelled to follow a strict envelope which defines a series of invariable conditions (see page 00).

Another benefit of redesigning the blocks to a defined envelope is the opportunity to allow stacking above the street condition with new, one-storey blocks (120×120×80mm). By giving community members the opportunity to experiment with building heights they can, through the process of the activity, respond to this concern without becoming preoccupied with it. This opportunity can coincide with the redesigning of the prior models, with one-storey segments being pulled out of the new building blocks.



Example: Original block, new two-storey block, new three-storey block, new stackable one-storey block.

(89)

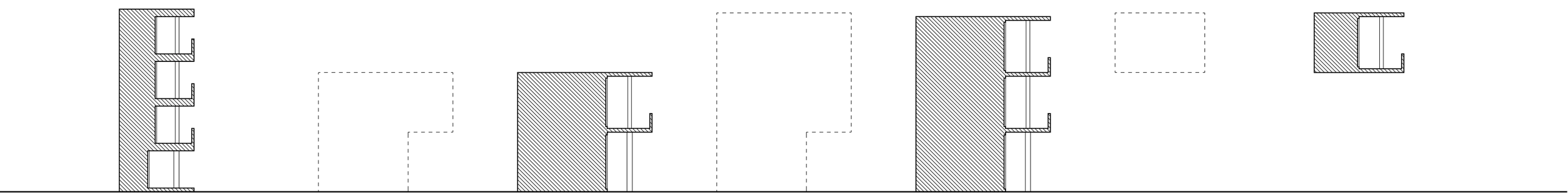


To create a better understanding of each block and what it represents, an information card can be added to the back of the block, showing the building it is based on, its name, and its location (see page 00).

6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

BUILDING BLOCK ALTERATIONS

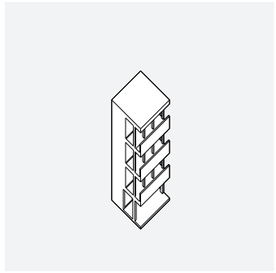
Alteration Methodology



6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

BUILDING BLOCK ALTERATIONS

Original Building Blocks



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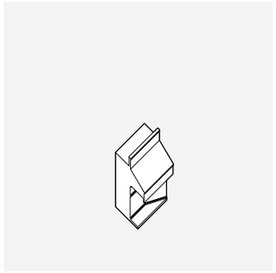

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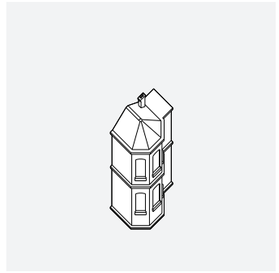

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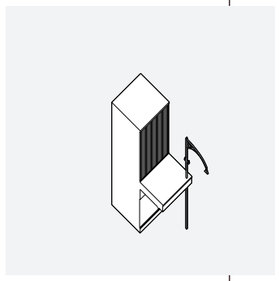

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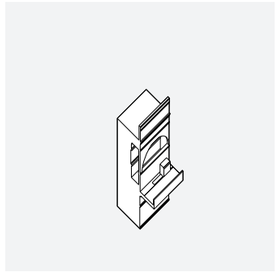

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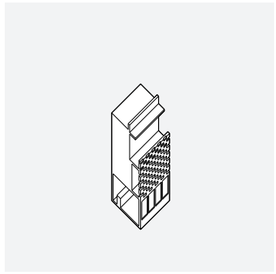

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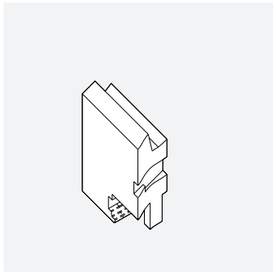

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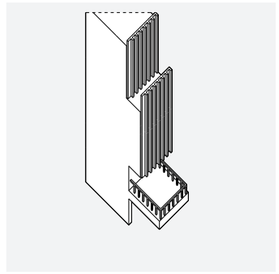

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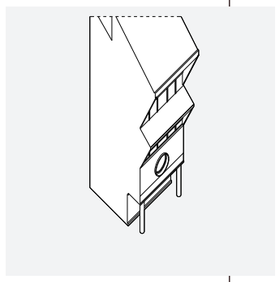

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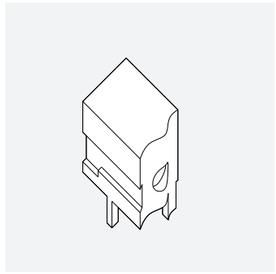

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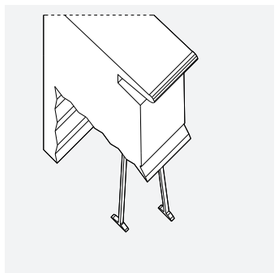

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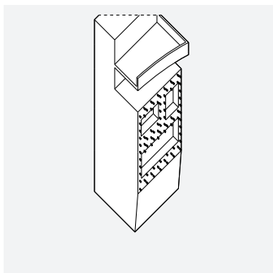

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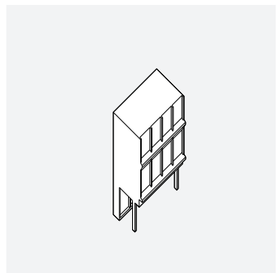

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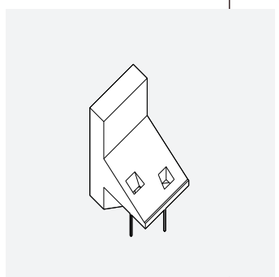

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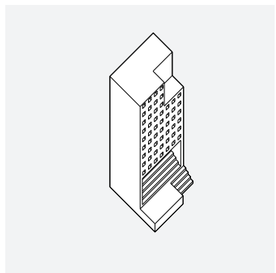

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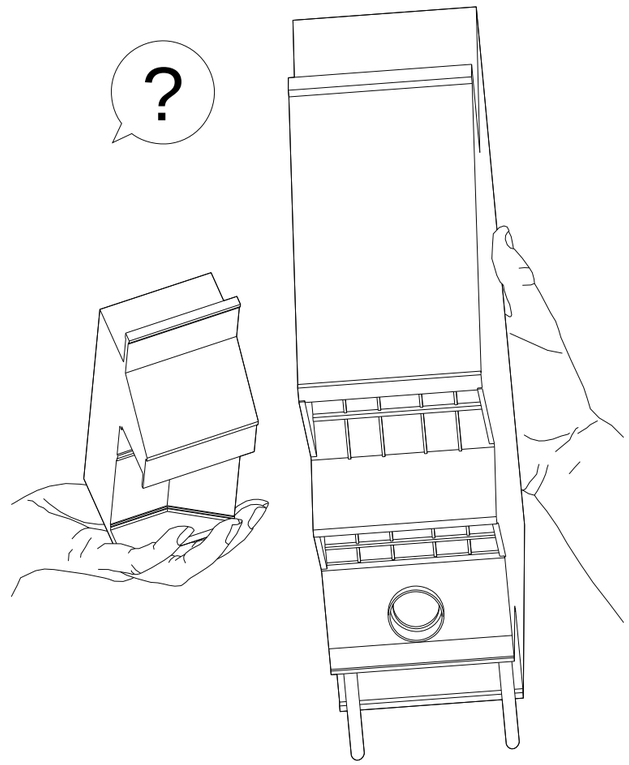
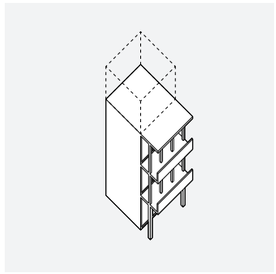


6.0 Suggestions

BUILDING BLOCK ALTERATIONS

Altered Building Blocks



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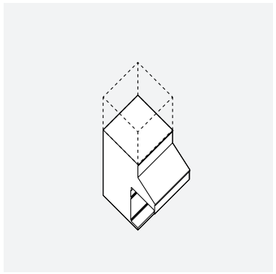

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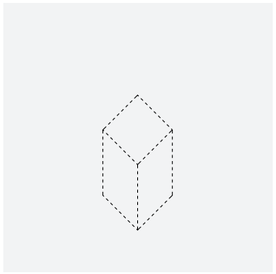

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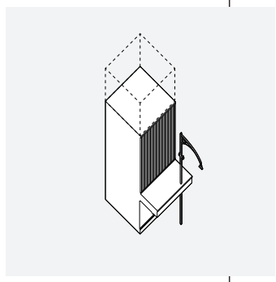

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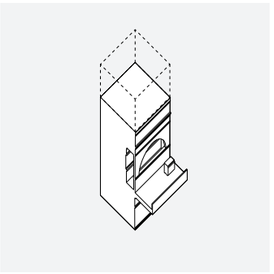

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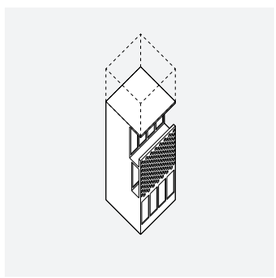

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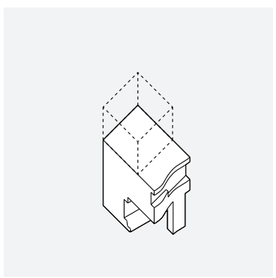

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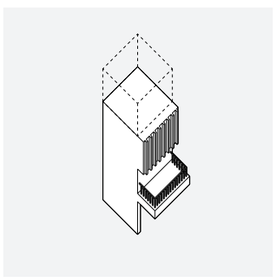

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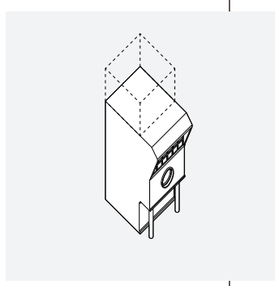

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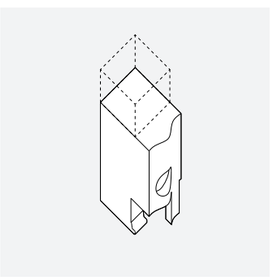

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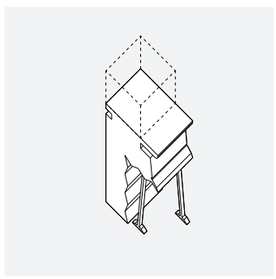

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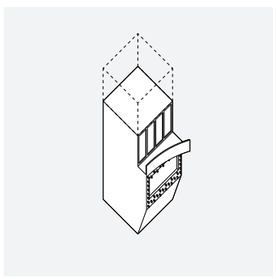

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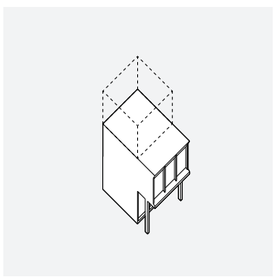

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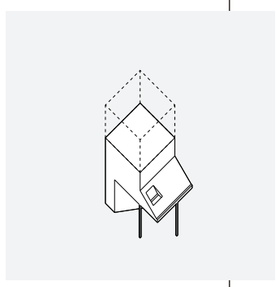

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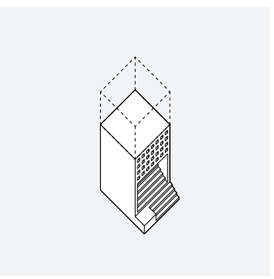

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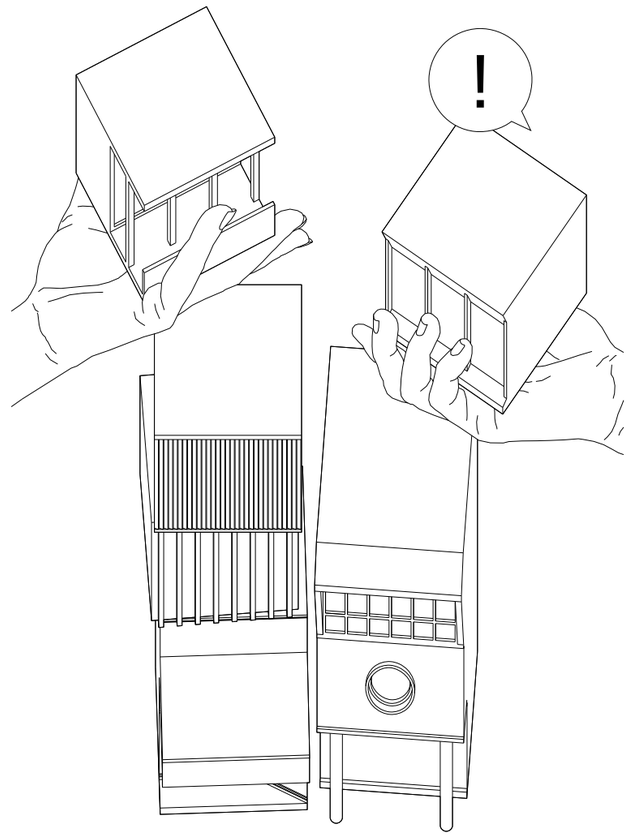
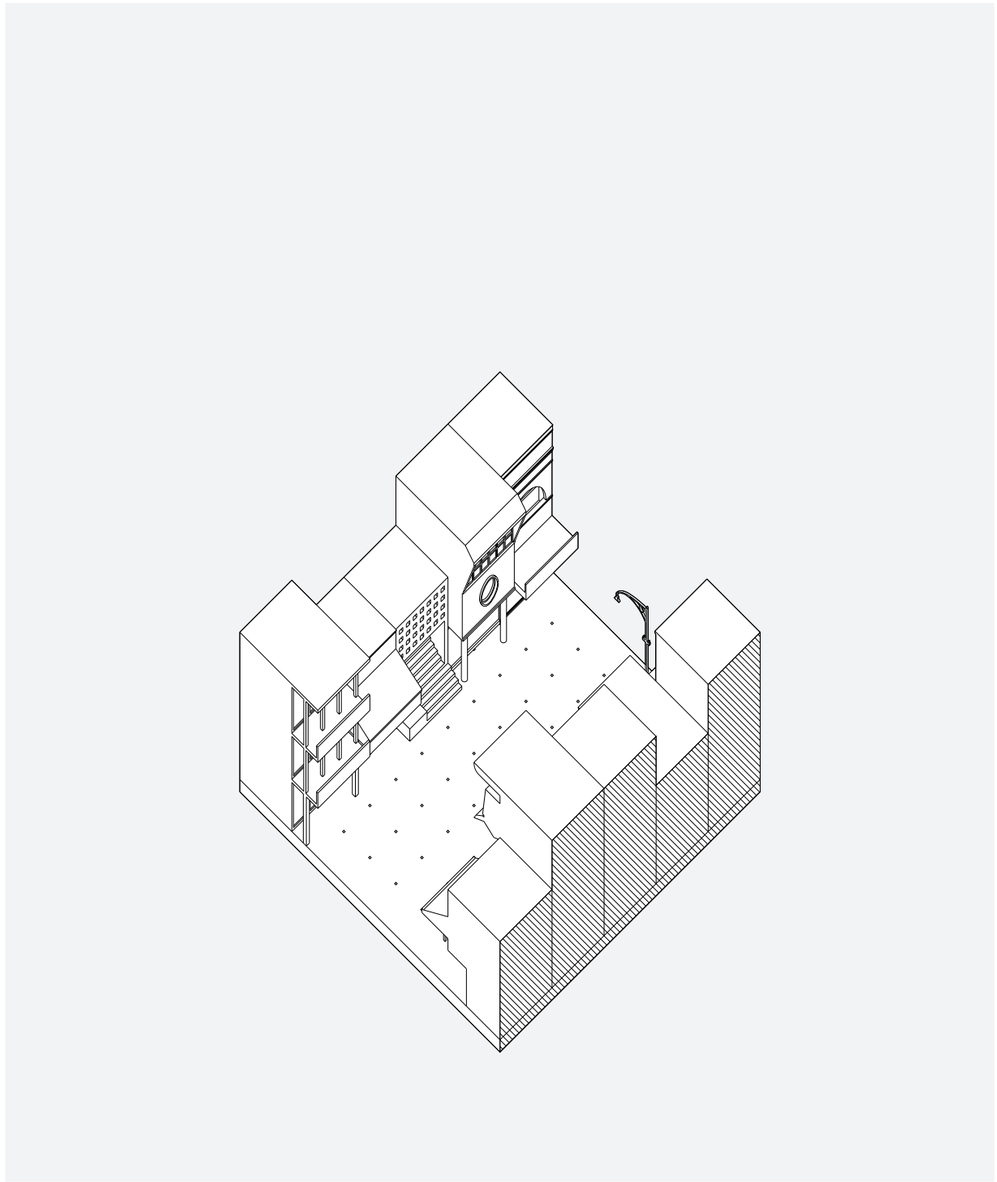
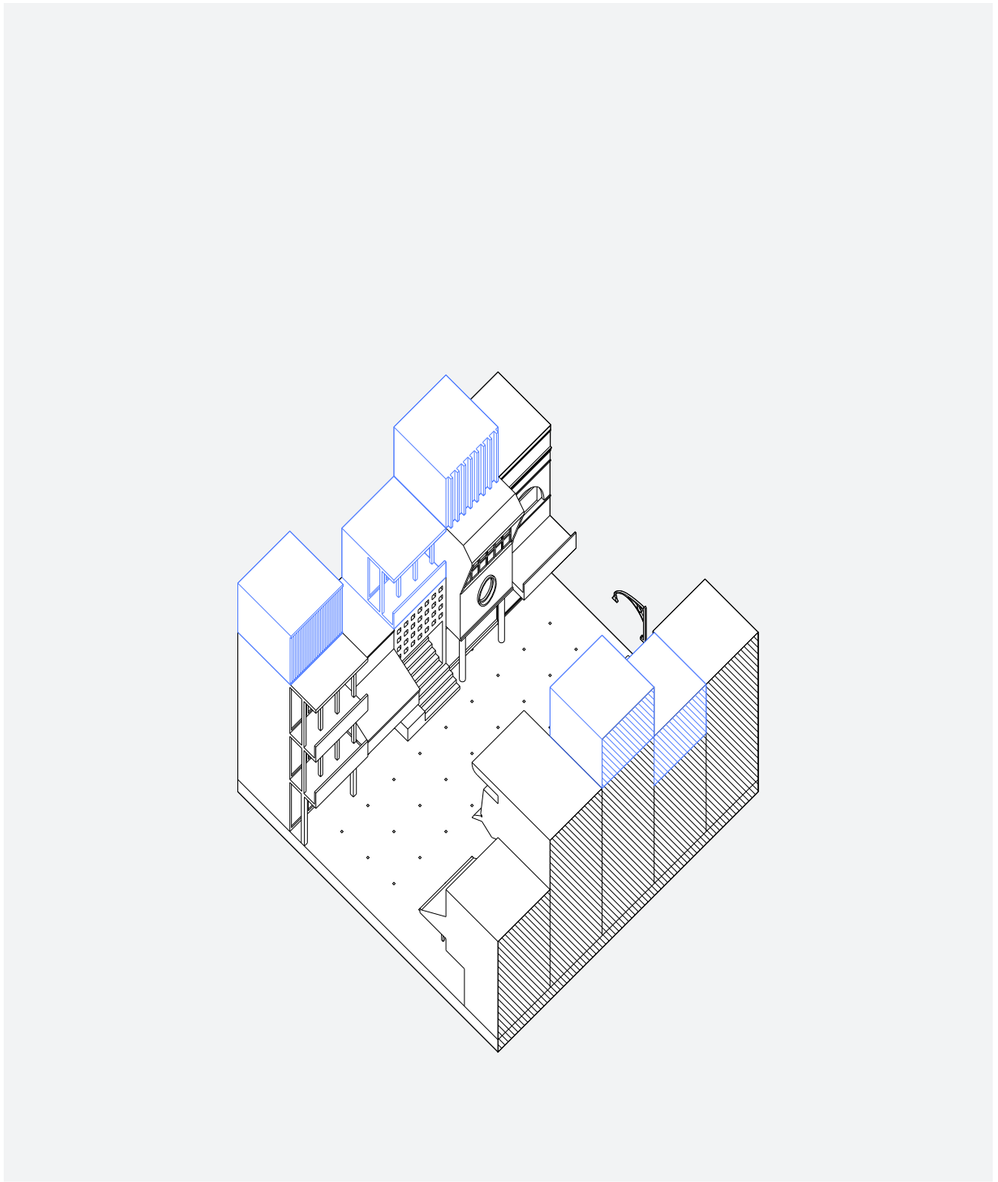


6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology



(96)

Example: New stackable blocks allow differences in height.



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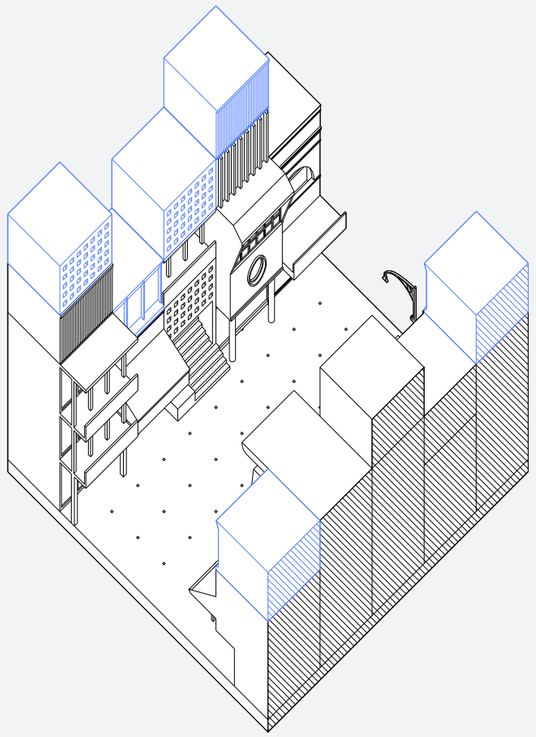
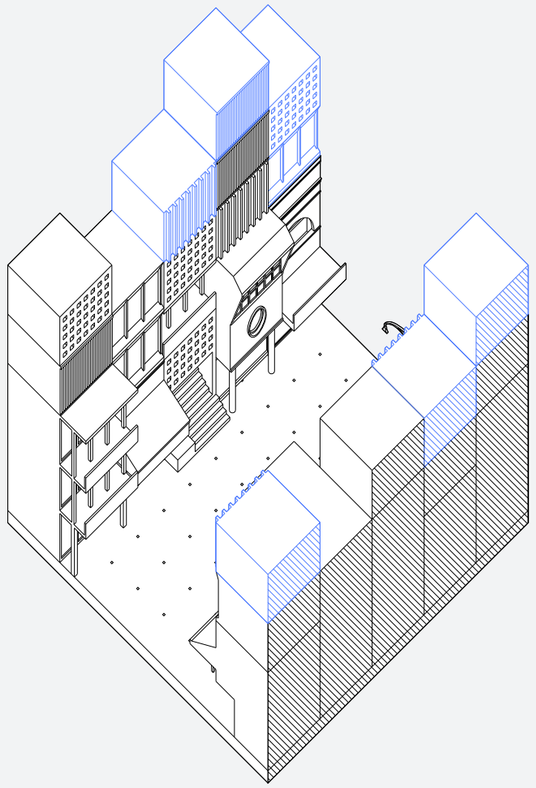
6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

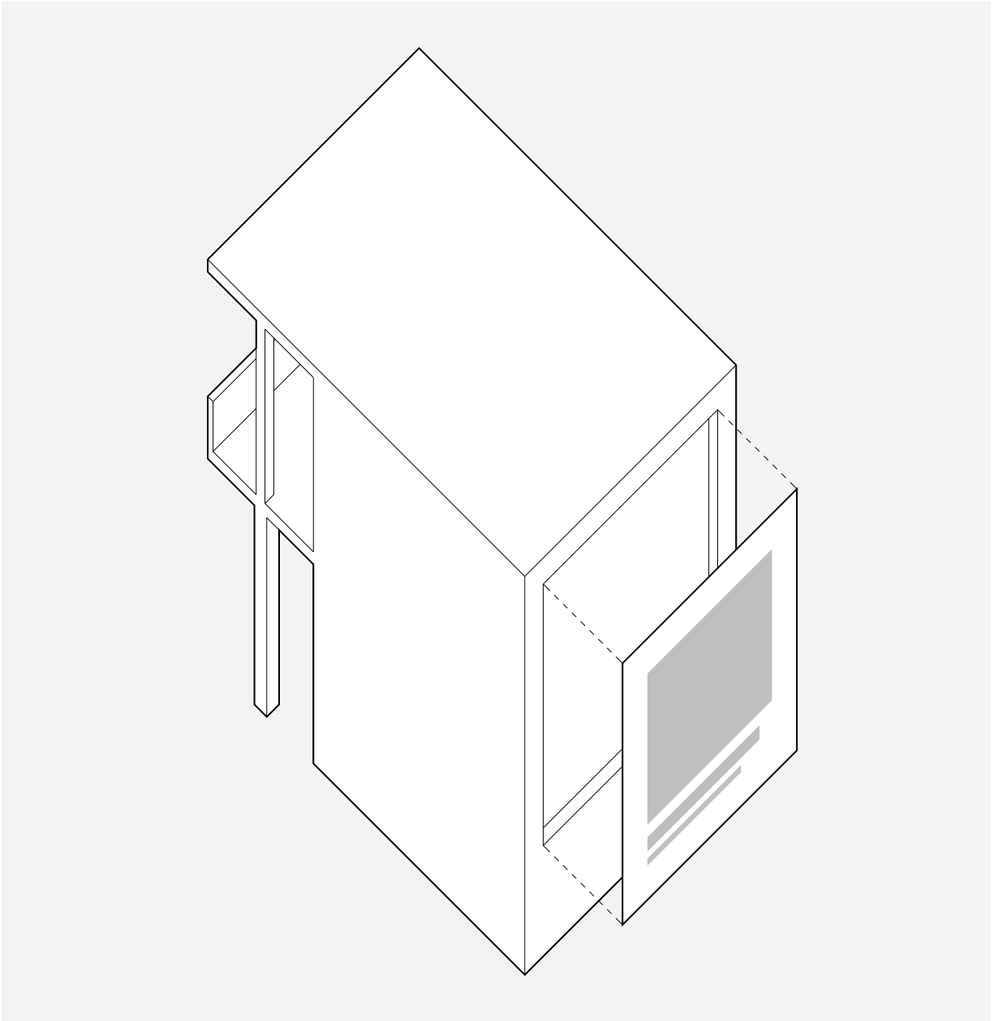




6.0 Considerations for Workshop Methodology

BLOCK ADDITIONS

Card Attachment



CARD ATTACHMENT

Reasoning

It was noted throughout and after the community engagement session that there was confusion between those participating - not understanding exactly what each buildings program was.
It became difficult for participants to visualise what the blocks might look like from street level.

It was agreed that small cards with an image and short synopsis of each building would be included to the back of each block.

Card Dimensions 70(h) x 100(w)

1. Ensure community members had more visual representation for each building chosen.
2. Put a name to the building / block.
3. Understand the program of the chosen building
4. Allows for community members to make a more informed decision about where such blocks go.

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