



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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urban activator

a contextually generated mixed-use building



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Preface

Set in the historic centre of the Pretoria CBD, this study draws extensively on its context to formulate an appropriate response to bringing about urban regeneration in this section of the city.

The study was initiated with the selection of a small site set in the perceived northern portion of the inner city. By challenging both the alleged threshold between the 'north' and the 'inner city' and the city council's proposals for the surrounding sites, the proposed building attempts to create meaningful space while enriching the visitor's experience of his immediate surroundings.



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Introduction

The city of Pretoria is the historic capital of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) and today shares the title with the city of Cape Town. Over the last decade, Pretoria has experienced an economic shift that has led to a lack of interest in portions of the inner city. This disinterest is most notable in the northern portion of the inner city, which is no longer perceived as integral to the CBD. In spite of its wealth in history and its dramatic setting, Pretoria does not feature strongly in the itinerary of either local or international tourists. While government departments attempt to boost investment interest, the area calls for a catalytic intervention to prevent further decay and bring about the required change.



Project Background

Due to the changing dynamics of the inner city, it is no longer the preferred residential location for the more affluent. The city has seen a consistent decentralisation, with low-density residential and commercial growth shifting towards the eastern regions. The changing location of employment opportunities has caused a lack of investment interest in the city. Factors such as crime, the decay of the urban environment and the absence of adequate social facilities have contributed to the momentum of the economic shift. Roberts refers to this trend as “*in-situ*”¹ decay. The city lacks a variety of activities that contribute to it functioning as a vibrant 24 hour city.

Selected Site

The selected site is located on the south-eastern corner of the intersection of Paul Kruger Street and Struben Street, and falls within the boundaries of the perceived inner city. The intersection with Struben Street acts as the threshold and forms an unplanned gateway into the city when entering from the north. The surrounding context is rich in historical value and architectural heritage, and it is this context that generates the design approach for the proposed building.

Delimitations

A large portion of this dissertation deals with the history and significance of the Old Synagogue, located adjacent to the selected site. It is important to note, that this project does not address the synagogue itself, but focuses on an approach that allows for the successful integration of the neglected building into the current and future context. The project goes as far as to propose a function for the synagogue in relation to the proposed spaces that surround it. It does not address any restorative measures that may be required. The proposed building is directed towards the Old Synagogue in an attempt to celebrate its history and value, rather than competing with it in the urban context.

Assumptions

Due to the theoretical nature of this dissertation and its obvious limitations, it is impossible for this proposal to address the issue of urban regeneration in its entirety. According to Roberts, regeneration goes “beyond the aims, aspirations and achievements of urban renewal”.² Only by addressing broader economic and social issues is the sustainability

of the intervention ensured. By nature, the process of urban regeneration is truly a process that must be seen as a long-term cycle of activity which inevitably requires flexibility due to the numerous parties involved.³ This dissertation focuses on the issue of renewal, but suggests a broader, more encompassing approach. Therefore, it is only the physical and environmental regeneration – often referred to as urban renewal – that is dealt with in this dissertation.

The study examines and responds to the current challenges and the present context, but is in line with the study group’s envisioned proposal⁴ for the northern portion of the Paul Kruger Street spine. The objective is to establish an optimum solution for the site, rather than being driven by the realities of economic and political trends.

1. Roberts (2005:27)

2. Roberts (2005:18)

3. Roberts (2005:6)

4. Students working along the northern section of the Paul Kruger Street spine jointly established a visionary framework

Proposed Group Framework

The objective of establishing an urban framework⁵ is to formulate a vision for the northern section of the Paul Kruger Street spine which can act as a guideline for decision-making. The proposal addresses the following:

- A network of public space that maintains the finer urban character of the northern portion of the city
- The network of public spaces mirrors the southern portion of the spine, namely Pretorius Square
- The activities contribute to the life on street, thereby playing a role in the surveillance and safety thereof (dependant on activities and participants/occupants)
- The introduction of a residential component west of Paul Kruger Street, in line with the city council's current proposal⁶
- The encouragement of local small businesses and the promotion of South African products
- The discouragement of private vehicular transport in the inner city, in line with the long-term vision of the partial 'pedestrianisation' of Paul Kruger Street and the future operation of a tram line along this route

5. refer to figure 4.01

6. refer to the Tshwane Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy (2005:17)

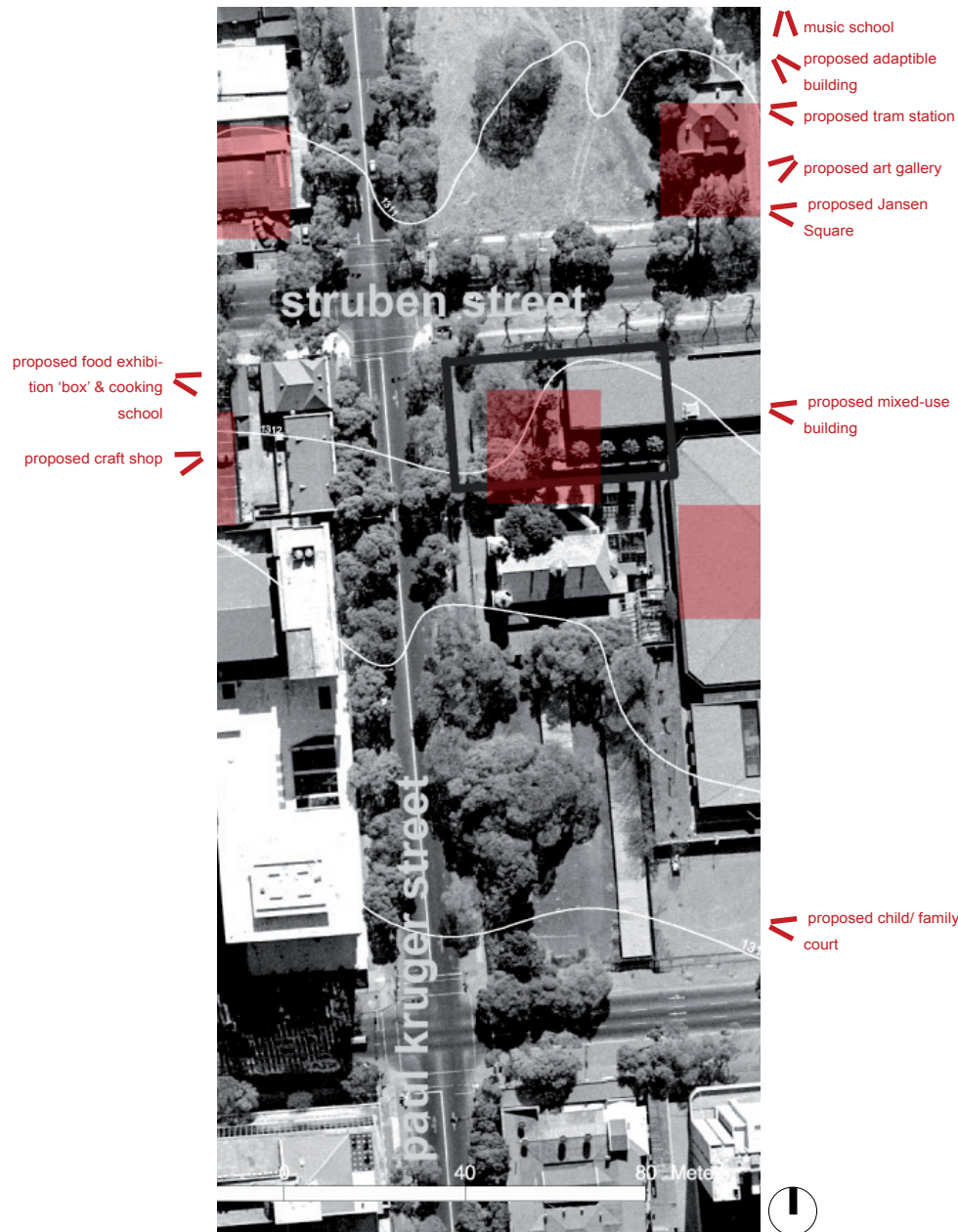


Figure 4.01: Map of proposed group framework and proposed projects



Approach

The City of Tshwane council maintains, “The Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy is based on a ‘catalytic intervention-approach’ whereby specific strategic interventions are proposed to address the challenges in order to achieve the critical success factors”.⁷ The mixed-use programme for the proposed building begins to activate the space over an extended period of time, while providing some of the basic amenities currently lacking in the urban environment, allowing it to function as the anticipated catalyst. As Gehl points out, “the integration of various activities and functions in and around public spaces allows the people involved to function together and stimulate and inspire one another”.⁸ In addition, the dynamics of various activities begin to address the issues of safety and security, and help to awaken the general public’s interest in their capital city.

Client /User

Due to its location and the city council’s current drive to encourage government departments to relocate to the area, the office space is required to house the Provincial Heritage Resources Agency of Gauteng (PHRAG), which currently operates from a private residence in the east of Pretoria. Other non-government and heritage organisations would be encouraged to occupy the available office space.

On an urban level, the increased density introduced to the site contributes to the goal of limiting urban sprawl by maximising land-use values as set out in the City of Tshwane Spatial Development Strategy: 2010 and Beyond.⁹

Proposed Building Programme

Primarily, the building addresses the lack of temporary accommodation in the inner city, by targeting tourists, interns and researchers that may want a budget accommodation option while experiencing the city of Pretoria. The mixed-use building accommodates retail facilities which target businesses and office space for small businesses, in addition to a small percentage of luxury accommodation, which is virtually non-existent in the area, to ensure a degree of continuity.

Due to the nature of such a catalytic intervention, the building itself allows for a degree of adaptability in order to accommodate unforeseen spatial requirements alongside changing city dynamics. It also ensures a smoother transition for residential developments that have been identified for the area west of Paul Kruger Street.

7. Tshwane Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy (2005:9)

8. Gehl (1987:97)

9. City of Tshwane Spatial Development Strategy: 2010 and beyond (2007:13)