RESETTLEMENT + COMMUNITY CENTER

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RESETTLEMENT + COMMUNITY CENTER

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ABSTRACT

RESETTLEMENT + COMMUNITY CENTER

Following decades of steady population decline, the former mill town of Lewiston, Maine has recently experienced significant resettlement. Among Lewiston’s 36,000 inhabitants, 6,000 are Somali refugees who have relocated to the city since 2001. A new Resettlement + Community Center, a major architectural intervention for the city of Lewiston, will bolster two worldwide dynamics—assisting resettled refugees and revitalizing shrinking downtowns in an unprecedented way. Resettlement centers in declining industrial cities can foster entrepreneurship, stimulate the economy, and act as mechanisms for inclusion and integration. This program functions as a framework to bridge the ambitions of the emerging immigrant population with the recovery of American cities, often in the Rustbelt, that have suffered decades of economic decline, population loss, and urban decay due to deindustrialization. In addition, the center bridges the Riverfront and Downtown districts, working to reactivate Lewiston’s neglected canal network for maximum impact. An integrated resettlement and community center is a new type of urban typology that maximizes investment in the city by providing social services to both new and existing Lewiston populations.
American small-town industrial decline and global political economic instability are interconnected. The recent US presidential election have shown how Americans are reacting to the issue of immigration. While cities across the globe are being shaped by political unrest and mass migration, American legacy cities (older industrial urban areas that have experienced significant population decline and job loss, resulting in high residential vacancy rates and diminished services and resources), are particularly primed to benefit from embracing a new wave of refugee migration.
The former mill town of Lewiston, Maine has followed a pattern of significant resettlement. Among Lewiston’s 36,000 residents, 6,000 are Somali refugees who have relocated to the city since 2001. Refugee resettlement has curbed significant population loss and reversed the city’s slow decline.
Resettlement centers in declining industrial cities like Lewiston can foster entrepreneurship, stimulate the economy, and act as mechanisms for inclusion and integration. This program functions as a framework to bridge the ambitions of the emerging immigrant population with the recovery of American cities, often in the Rustbelt, that have suffered decades of economic decline, population loss, and urban decay due to deindustrialization.
In Lewiston, the textile industry collapsed after World War I when Lewiston’s water mills became outmoded and companies moved to the South. Subsequently, other businesses closed and the economy went into a sharp decline. Today, much of the infrastructure constructed during that period – the canals, buildings – remain idle or underused even as Lewiston’s economy is facing an identity crisis and is struggling to grow.
LEWISTON, 2017
HISTORIC LEWISTON

Fig 6. Androscoggin Mill c. 1915, Lewiston, Maine

Fig 7. Textile Mills and canal c. 1915, Lewiston, Maine

Fig 8. Textile Mills and canal c. 1915, Lewiston, Maine

Fig 9. Main Street c. 1915, Lewiston, Maine

Fig 10. Bates Mill and canal c. 1915, Lewiston, Maine
While refugee resettlement initially can be costly, investing in refugees yields tangible economic benefits. Refugee resettlement grows the labor pool and increases local revenues through investment, taxes and increased consumption. Resettlement centers can strengthen the economy, bolster civic pride, and make cities work better for all residents.
CAAMIR ELMI - ENTREPRENEUR

Caamir learned that in order to be a successful entrepreneur with specific plans for growth, it was important to engage networks of other professional. Having a forum of like-minded business owners gives created a space to share ideas and seek advice on shared challenges.

HUSSEIN AHMED: WEB DESIGNER

Hussein thought that owning his own business would be more profitable than working for others. He wanted a storefront downtown, not one of those stalls located in the suburban malls. He was able to learn how to secure a loan to buy property through workshops at the Resettlement Center.

HIBAQ YUSUF: CLOTHING DESIGNER

Hibaaw creates her own clothing designs that aim to blend modesty and fashion in contemporary ways. She completed workshops, seminars, and courses aimed to provide crucial resources to immigrant entrepreneurs. She has a shop in one of the original textile shops in central Lewiston.

DHUULO YASIN: JUBBA RESTAURANT

Dhulo gives 20% of her income to dependents back in Somalia. Because of this, she has a hard time supporting the expansion of her business. Through the Resettlement Center, she now has the tools she needs to secure the financing need for the expansion process of her new business.

FAARAX HARB: CAFE

Faarax has written a business plan and now has business training. He learned that this is extremely important component in the success of businesses. Providing family support was a major factor in Faarax’s decision to go into business himself, like the majority of Somalis in the USA.
American legacy cities including Syracuse, Buffalo, Minneapolis and St. Louis share many of the same economic challenges and urban conditions with Lewiston—a long history as industrial powerhouses with distressed downtowns. The city centers of these post-industrial cities can benefit most from resettlement and revitalization.
CITIES WITH DYNAMICS SIMILAR TO LEWISTON

- CITIES RECEIVING SOMALI REFUGEES: # DURING 2015-16
- SHRINKING CITIES: % DECLINE FROM PEAK

CITIES RECEIVING SOMALI REFUGEES:
- ST CLOUD, MI 243
- MINNEAPOLIS, MI 646
- KANSAS CITY, MI 145
- DURHAM, NC 108
- BALTIMORE, MD 34.6%
- CINCINNATI, OH 41.1%
- CLEVELAND, OH 56.6%
- DAYTON, OH 46.1%
- COLUMBUS, OH 41.1%
- LOUISVILLE, KY 236
- CHARLOTTE, NC 34.8%
- DURHAM, NC 108
- ATLANTA, GA 37.9%
- SAVANNAH, GA 37.9%
- CITIES WITH DYNAMICS SIMILAR TO LEWISTON:
LEWISTON IS BETTER THAN THIS

IT'S OUR CITY TOO!!

ALL-AMERICAN CITY

People Uniting
In Lewiston, Somali immigrants already are making a positive impact. Leveraging this momentum, the new Lewiston Resettlement complex consolidates and formalizes the existing scattered resettlement network into a centralized catalyst to help revitalize Lewiston’s downtown and its underutilized historical infrastructure.
An integrated resettlement and community center (RRC) is a new type of urban catalyst that maximizes investment in the city by providing social services to both new and existing Lewiston populations.
LEWISTON ELECTION DATA

1996 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS
- DOLE (26%)
- CLINTON (57%)
- BUSH (41%)
- OTHER (18%)

2000 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS
- GORE (53%)
- BUSH (41%)
- MCCAIN (41%)
- OTHER (6%)

2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS
- OBAMA (57%)
- MCCAIN (41%)
- OTHER (2%)

2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS
- ROMNEY (42%)
- OBAMA (55%)
- OTHER (3%)

2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS
- TRUMP (50%)
- CLINTON (41%)
- OTHER (7%)

Fig 18. Protesters outside Lewiston City Hall after mayor made unfavorable comments about Somali refugees, 2012
YOU ARE MY MAYOR TOO!

LEWISTON IS BETTER THAN THIS
This Center uses economies of scale to provide the maximum impact toward making Lewiston a more vibrant and equitable destination for everyone, in turn, creating a sense of optimism, to help stop the flight of long-time locals and recent resettlers alike. A major architectural investment of new construction (as opposed to the reuse of existing buildings) helps create this sense of progress and concretizes refugee resettlement as a mechanism of urban revitalization.
Phase I - Core programs

Phase II - New centralities
The RRC hosts a spectrum of social services and community support resources designed to serve both new immigrants (Somali or other refugees) AND the longtime Lewiston residents. The wide array of programming offered includes temporary and transitional housing, job training, childcare, English as a Second Language tutoring, legal counseling, citizenship assistance, computer resources, a library and cafe, several classrooms, meeting rooms, studios, economic empowerment support spaces including a market and bazaar and over 100,000 square feet of programmed recreation spaces including basketball courts, a flex space, exercise rooms, a playground, a vegetable garden, and facilities for canoing on the canal.
The Resettlement and Community Center is situated blocks away from the Androscoggin River. Almost 200 years ago, this river drew industry to the area when a now antiquated canal system harnessed the river’s mighty power to turn water wheels that served the textile mills.
The old textile mills closed 70 years ago and the city has encouraged re-branding these industrial relics as the “Riverfront District,” in an attempt to reorient the city center to face the Androscoggin River, and make it a revived “urban destination, a place for recreation, cultural activities, work and urban living.” The Resettlement + Community Center will leverage and enhance this anticipated “destination.”

The Center also borders the historic Downtown District to the east. The RCC’s program includes commercial “practice spaces,” where immigrants can set up shop and launch careers. These practice spaces help activate Lewiston’s Main Street corridor, and, in turn, stimulate nearby businesses, and capitalize upon the existing resettlement success in Lewiston.
Textile mills (re-branded as “Riverfront District”)

Main Street Corridor

DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

CANALS

OLD MILLS

RIVERFRONT DISTRICT
The RRC consists of four buildings totaling 170,000 square feet, and spanning two downtown blocks. This central location acts as a bridge, not only between new and existing populations, but also between the Riverfront and Downtown districts, working to reactivate Lewiston’s neglected canal network and have maximum impact on the urban area.
The Resettlement and Community Center activates not only the Main Street and Canal, but also opens to an alley passage that is energized with a variety of market stall and programmed courtyards that foster interaction between diverse communities through technology, art, culture, and education.
Residents ranging from high school students to city officials discussed the need to increase cross-cultural dialogue and opportunities for community engagement in Lewiston and in the Downtown specifically.

Suggestions for improving connections among Downtown residents include introducing a new community center that can be programmed with activities for all residents in the area.

Invest in connecting Downtown residents with consistent employment—English language learning and job preparedness training need to be better aligned with immigrant residents' needs.

Housing, jobs, and social services are all interconnected: questions about one topic prompt discussion of the others, and planning should therefore be directed towards strategies that address these three elements in combination.
The most private spaces of the RRC exist on the third and upper levels. These floors consist of 28 units of new immigrant transitional housing (in the Main Street-facing buildings)
and 32 units of temporary housing (in the canal-facing buildings).
TEMPORARY HOUSING
In the temporary housing, each unit is linked by a series of sliding doors, so the size of the “apartment” can grow or shrink depending on the size of the family occupying it.
TEMPORARY HOUSING DIAGRAM

ONE BEDROOM

TWO BEDROOMS

THREE BEDROOMS
In addition, a childcare center anchors the first floor, allowing immigrant adults access to affordable childcare while they attend job training classes, workshops, or focus on growing their businesses.
CHILDCARE
The Education and Job Training Center consists of several classrooms, meeting rooms, co-working spaces, and a media center. Programs provide assistance, training, and resources in finding a lasting career.
EDUCATION/JOB TRAINING
In addition, there is a public library, flex space and a gallery for large events, a cafe and a gym. These community-based programs add additional (Resettlement) resources and amenities not only to immigrants, but provide accessible social services open to all of Lewiston’s residents.
The primary approach to attract the existing communities to the site is to offer the varied commercial programs. These include small market stalls lining the alley and an interior pop-up market for fledgling entrepreneurs to develop their businesses. These spaces provide a new zone to incubate local entrepreneurial activity and help reinforce the district’s longtime commercial identity.
The four buildings of the complex are integrated with each other and the surrounding urban fabric through three programmed plazas. These outdoor spaces blend with the indoor spaces through continued ground and surface conditions, drawing people into the RRC and leading them out into the city.
Each of these plazas has a unique identity.
The Alley Plaza acts as a formal square linking the job training center with the more commercial programs.
ALLEY PLAZA
The Canal Plaza extends across the canal to link the four buildings to the urban farm, where agriculture skill training takes place. Many of the job skills immigrants bring to Maine are agriculture-based, so the urban farm and the resettlement center are designed to feed off each other.
CANAL PLAZA
The Play Plaza is programmed with equipment to encourage child and adult play.
This indeterminate site edge condition imbricates the life of the building and the life of the urban street, interfacing between street and interior. Formal and informal spaces of encounter add positive and porous relationships between newcomers and existing residents aiming to maximize social interaction.
PROGRAM TO EXTERIOR
The RRC has a commercial facade and arcade facing Lewiston’s Main Street, designed to draw passersby into the interior courtyards, commercial alley, and other public programs.

The arcade, one of several points of entry to the center, directs visitors to the pedestrian alley lined with market stalls where entrepreneurs, artists, and makers sell goods and provide services and wares.
The arcade and the alley lane aim to produce a porous pedestrian precinct connecting the new plazas, Main Street, the canal, and the riverfront district beyond, placing the resettlement community center at the heart of a new Lewiston and promoting exchange between recently arrived and longstanding residents.
Fig 41. View from vegetable garden across canal

Fig 42 (opposite). View of pedestrian alley
The four buildings are united as one object through colored panels that link the buildings’ facades.

The cohesive system engages with the surrounding fabric through the red and purple hues that mimic the brick colors seen in buildings nearby, without seeking to hide through contextualism.

Fig 43. Colored panels in axonometric
FACADE STRATEGY
Investing in Resettlement Centers is an investment in the future. The US Office of Housing and Human Services should partner with the office of Housing and Urban Development to provide federal funding. The Lewiston Resettlement Community Center is the first of its kind, developing critical infrastructure that pays dividends in the long run. While immigration resettlement may be the mechanism, the impact of design-based development touches nearly every aspect of the city’s economy by attracting investment, boosting local tax revenues and increasing consumer spending, offering multiple touch points, including retail, and growing dense, unique commercial districts.
Under the new administration, The Department of Housing and Urban Development should prioritize more time and funding for intercity regeneration and refugee resettlement in cities like Lewiston. Ignoring the two critical situations would forego legitimate possibilities to regenerate depressed urban cores in Republican leaning states.
Resettlement centers leverage refugees as community and civic assets, injecting new energy and perspectives into the declining urban centers.

Over time, the locus of activity will begin to permeate into the broader city fabric.
The program allows new populations to tap into resources, build public-private alliances and eventually reach out into the urban neighborhood to revitalize unused downtown spaces in creative and unconventional ways. Immigrants are specifically well-suited to activate Lewiston’s many unused spaces and see opportunity in areas that may not be apparent to the native-born population. According to the Small Business Administration, immigrants are 30% more likely to start a business in the United States than non-immigrants, and 18% of all small business owners in the United States are immigrants.
America is a nation of immigrants. Immigrants have built and strengthened the US economy and continue to do so in many ways, including boosting demand for local consumer goods, creating new jobs for themselves, and generating jobs for American workers.

Immigrant populations participating as small business owners, artists, or other community actors, if equipped with the right tools, will become key players in future city development. When this happens, and if the building no longer needs to serve its Resettlement purpose, it can still exist and transition over time into a Community Center. This premise is predicated on a shared vision for how resettlement centers can be a force for good and can serve the city as a whole.
With any form of economic development, the true impact comes only after decades of strategic investment and planning. This proposal acts as a template and demonstration project for other cities to follow. Differing from other speculative more formal solutions, like Andrew Zago’s proposal for the 2016 Venice Architecture Biennale, this proposal emphasizes social connections and programmatic relationships to the urban fabric.

Through a major architectural intervention on behalf of the city of Lewiston, the built outcome will architecturally bolster two worldwide dynamics—assisting resettled refugees and revitalizing shrinking downtowns in an unprecedented way. In this case, both Somali immigrants and the city of Lewiston are the beneficiaries.
TEMPORARY HOUSING

Fig 55. Transitional housing from above

Fig 56. View of transitional housing and Alley Courtyard
Fig 57. Color panel system unites four buildings as one
Fig 38. View from Main Street looking toward canal
Fig 59. North section mainly presents clearly segmented residential space, while the West section depicts the overlap of several community programs
Fig 60. Students pass through the Medial Lab on their way to an after-school coding workshop
Fig 61. After a morning visit to the library, children enjoy lunch while neighbors catch up at the cafe.
As the leaves begin to turn, Lewistonians enjoy the day at the community garden and on the canal before the weather gets cold
Fig 63. As it gets dark early, lighting activates the alley market where goods are sold through the evening.
MARKET
Fig 64. The arcade provides places to pause, window shop, and people watch.
MAIN STREET ARCADE
On winter days, the alley courtyard is filled with neighbors drinking hot chocolate, making snow angels and building snow forts.
ALLEY COURTYARD
Fig 66. The flex space constantly hosts a wide array of community activities, including large meals and meetings.
Fig 67. The flex space easily transforms into a crowded gym of basketball enthusiasts.
Fig 68. The playground gives Lewiston's youngest residents a place to cultivate relationships.
Fig 69. The second floor learning space hosts a diverse calendar of classes and workshops, for children AND adults.
The library is usually filled with students of every age in the evenings and on weekends getting ahead on assignments.
Fig 71. The farm gives immigrants and locals a place to hone agriculture skills together.