



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-260349-OLS-26
Project Category: Community-Centered Implementation

Hesburgh Library

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$62,813
Amount of cost share:	\$12,500

The Hesburgh Library of the University of Notre Dame Du Lac in Indiana will transform the digital project “Building South Bend: Past, Present, Future” from a study of national and local historic districts into a digital tool to study the full urban and architectural history of the city of South Bend, Indiana. This project will take the existing model, and expand it to incorporate other neighborhoods, including those of working-class families who built homes and institutions in difficult circumstances to tell the whole story of South Bend. This project will advance the study of the urban and built environment through traditional archival and library resources, combined with advanced mapping and immersive technologies into a new digital toolkit and replicable model any municipality could use to build community understanding of complex narratives in architectural and urban history.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

“Better Homes of South Bend:” Documenting the Legacy and Enduring Value of Black Architecture in South Bend, Indiana, and the Urban Impact of Underrepresented Communities and Housing Inequities

Introduction

The University of Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Libraries and partners seek \$62,813 over 18 months to transform the digital project *Building South Bend: Past, Present, Future* (BSB) from a study of national and local historic districts into a digital tool to study the full urban and architectural history of the city of South Bend, Indiana. America’s 250th anniversary offers a timely opportunity to help ensure that a more complete story of American communities are preserved, especially those whose perseverance and self-determination has gone undocumented. This Community-Centered Implementation Grant would take the existing BSB model, created to study the architectural history of a city through founding families and historic neighborhoods and expand it to incorporate other underrepresented neighborhoods, including those of working-class families who built homes and institutions in difficult circumstances in order to tell the whole story of South Bend. This aligns with IMLS Agency-Level Goal 2 by promoting broad community engagement and supporting community collaboration. Project partners, Professor Emerita of Indiana University South Bend and author Dr. Gabrielle Robinson, Indiana University South Bend’s Civil Rights Heritage Center, Notre Dame’s School of Architecture and the Lucy Family Institute for Data & Society, will combine content and resources to transform the existing model created by the Hesburgh Libraries. This project will advance the study of the urban and built environment through traditional archival and library resources combined with advanced mapping and immersive technologies into a new digital toolkit and replicable model any municipality could use to build community understanding of complex narratives in architectural and urban history.

Project Justification

In many communities throughout the United States, the documentation of architectural history is incomplete. Municipal historic preservation efforts, archival collections and academic research tend to focus on the homes, institutions and neighborhoods of the historically wealthy and powerful communities. The built environment of other communities, including working class, immigrants and minority populations, is frequently poorly documented. South Bend, Indiana, with a complex history of industrial and economic decline and resurgence, serves both as a good opportunity for many of these processes, but also as an area well positioned to model a different approach. This model will benefit other rust belt towns in the midwest, and similar towns across the country, looking to share and understand their urban history.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION SUMMARY TABLE	
NEED:	To advance the study of the urban and built environment with traditional archival methods along with developing sophisticated new digital toolkits and effective processes for community engagement.
ACTIVITIES:	Part 1: Identification and inclusion of already curated missing local history (e.g., 'Story of Courage')

	Part 2: Missing neighborhoods, missing history: identification and processes to include missing neighborhoods (e.g., "Placing History")
	Part 3: Partnerships & Possibilities: community solutions to local housing issues (e.g., Habitat for Humanity partnership with ND)
RESULTS:	Results: Development of a new model of practice and digital toolkit for understanding complexities of architectural and urban history.
BENEFICIARIES:	Urban planners, archivists, researchers, neighborhood groups and associations, residents, community members, businesses. (The specific SB project will be of most interest locally, but the approach and model we offer will benefit the entire architecture community, community and neighborhood groups, planners, cities, and the full range of stakeholders doing this work.)

Building South Bend: Past, Present, Future (buildingsouthbend.nd.edu) is an *existing* online multi-format digital humanities project that explores the architectural history of South Bend through a combination of digitized archival materials, modern photographic documentation, GIS mapping, and other relevant data. This project, launched in 2015, was the result of successful collaborations between the Notre Dame Hesburgh Libraries, the Historic Preservation Commission of South Bend and St. Joseph County, and The History Museum of South Bend. In 2025, BSB averaged 2,000 visitors per month. The initial project focused mainly on the architecture of South Bend's white founding families, the Studebakers and the Olivers, and the elite and middle-class housing preserved in local and national historic districts within the boundaries of South Bend. While *Building South Bend* has become an important public-facing resource for architectural history, its original scope reflects long-standing inequities in preservation and documentation. The omission of Black neighborhoods, underrepresented communities, and housing access reinforces a partial historical record and limits the ability of communities, scholars, and policymakers to understand South Bend's full urban and architectural history. As redevelopment pressures increase and historically Black neighborhoods face continued erasure, the need for intentional documentation and public interpretation is urgent.

Content for this project will be divided into three parts, 1) *Northwest Neighborhoods and Better Homes of South Bend*, 2) *Placing History - Black Architecture, Business, and Residential Enclaves*, and 3) *Housing Inequalities & Future Opportunities*. The first will focus on documenting the northwest neighborhoods of South Bend and the history of redlining and exclusionary housing practices. The second will look at historic Black architecture, businesses, and smaller community enclaves. The third will explore the affordable housing crisis caused by discriminatory housing practices and provide examples of possible solutions to address blighted neighborhoods and housing options. Each part of this project will begin with essays detailing a comprehensive history of the founding of South Bend and its urban history.

In 2015, project partner and content contributor Dr. Gabrielle Robinson, published *Better Homes of South Bend: An American Story of Courage*. This publication shares the story of a group of Black factory workers from the Studebaker car manufacturing company who had been forced to live in substandard housing surrounding the factory. In 1950 they secretly started meeting with a

plan to create a neighborhood away from the factory to raise their families. They succeeded by creating the first African American building cooperative in the region and fought through discriminatory housing practices to build a series of homes in the Far Northwest part of South Bend.¹ This project will form the basis for Part 1.

Similarly, in 2013, Indiana University South Bend's Civil Rights Heritage Center (CRHC), started the "African American Landmark Tour."² This initial tour led project partner CRHC Assistant Director and Curator George Garner to seek an IMLS grant to research, expand, and publish the tour. This publication, *Placing History: An African American Landmark Tour of South Bend, Indiana*, provides an incredibly detailed tour of ten locations in South Bend. Content for these tours was based on existing buildings, historic photographs, archival research, and oral histories. In addition to the freely downloadable book, the CRHC provides a walking tour of 17 historic locations in South Bend created using Google Maps. This project is the inspiration for Part 2.

These publications detail the past practices of housing exclusivity and lack of resources available for affordable housing. Part 3 of this project will build on the previous sections and look at future urban and architectural solutions for South Bend. Racial inequities in urban environments often lead to a lack of affordable housing. To counter that, the University of Notre Dame's School of Architecture has established a partnership with Habitat for Humanity to design and build affordable housing in the city. Additionally, ND has created the Housing and Community Regeneration Initiative which provides urban planning and affordable housing solutions to areas in the city suffering from Urban Renewal and years of neglect. The team will incorporate these architectural and urban solutions to address housing inequities through a series of essays, images, 3D models, and presentations available to any city looking to address similar challenges.

Inspired by these publications and projects, this project seeks to update, enhance, adapt, and expand the existing BSB information architecture to address racial disparities in the municipal history of the city by providing an accurate account of those who lived, worked, and built in South Bend. The project will combine the resources created by IUSB's Dr. Robinson and Mr. Garner with an updated interface and fabric of BSB into a model for presenting a city's holistic urban and architectural history. It will include other neighborhoods in South Bend that are not designated as historic districts but contain significant urban stories and historic landmarks and buildings. Much of what will be represented on this site has been noted elsewhere. However this will be the first cohesive representation of the architectural and urban history of South Bend presented on a unique public facing platform. By incorporating the story of historic Black and underrepresented neighborhoods into this project the team will present a more complete picture of the architectural and urban history of the city. Additionally, the project will provide a template for other communities to examine both their architectural and urban heritage and the challenges

¹ Gabrielle Robinson. *Better Homes of South Bend: An American Story of Courage*, (Charleston, The History Press, 2015) 11-13.

² George W. Garner. *Placing History : An African American Landmark Tour of South Bend, Indiana*. (South Bend, Indiana: Civil Rights Heritage Center, 2023) 2.

representing race and housing disparity within their city.

The project team, made up of programmers, developers, archivists, librarians, graphics and modeling specialists, and advanced architecture students will compile and add new data from archival research and field work in the city. The team will incorporate all current data found in BSB, add ArcGIS StoryMaps, update the current ArcGIS Esri mapping tool, update the presentation of 3D models, and create walking tours and immersive experiences in an updated and easily accessible web platform. Members of this team were responsible for the original BSB site and also instrumental in the development of three additional digital projects - The Seaside Research Portal (seaside.library.nd.edu) Cities in Text: Rome (hue.crc.nd.edu/Rome), and the Latinx Murals of Pilsen (hue.crc.nd.edu/pilsen).

Funding for this project will support the redesign of the website, development of the maps and tours, development of new 3D models and modeling, and creation of immersive experiences into a new digital product. Additionally, it will support photographic and oral history supplies, student research assistants, and developers.

Project Work Plan

PI Jennifer Parker will provide architectural expertise, overseeing and directing the content for the project. Co-PI Matthew Sisk and the Lucy Family Institute will oversee the technical development work. Work for this proposal will take place over 18 months, much of it simultaneously.

The current BSB website is built on a proprietary architecture developed at Notre Dame called CoNDuctor. Due to the ease of maintenance and updates, it was decided to stay on the CoNDuctor platform. The interface will undergo general updates, adding space to house content and new features, and will be outsourced to Digital Hill Multimedia, an authorized content developer in CoNDuctor. The estimated time to complete the updates is six weeks.

Written content for the new site will be broken down into three parts, each assigned to an advanced student in the School of Architecture, and led by PI Jennifer Parker. Team archivist Morgan Wilson will lead archival research and the creation of ArchGIS Story Maps. While the content is researched and written, the development of the new features on the site will take place concurrently. Mapping, tours, and related metadata will be led by Matthew Sisk and his team at the Lucy Family Institute. 3D modeling will be led by Matthew Noffsinger and the Architecture Library's Makerspace. Immersive technologies will be led by Adam Heet and his team at the Immersive Technologies Lab, part of the Navari Family Center for Digital Scholarship located within the Hesburgh Libraries of Notre Dame. The CRCH will serve as consultants in the data collection.

Part 1: Northwest Neighborhoods and Better Homes of South Bend

South Bend, Indiana will serve as the model for digitally documenting underrepresented neighborhoods. The first part of the project will focus on documenting the Northwest

Neighborhoods of South Bend, including the Near Northwest Neighborhood (NNN) and the Far Northwest Neighborhood (FNN) which was home to the community-driven “Better Homes of South Bend” profiled in the publication written by Dr. Robinson, who will serve as an advisor and content contributor. Notre Dame’s Michael Christopher Duda Center for Preservations, Resilience, and Sustainability will provide a graduate research assistant to assist with this part of the project.

As shown on Figure 1 below, the NNN is a uniquely shaped neighborhood bordered on the north by Angela Blvd, on the northwest by Diamond Ave., on the southwest by Lincolnway West, and on the east by the St. Joseph River and North Main Street. The area is heavily supported by Near Northwest Neighborhood Incorporated (<https://nearnorthwest.org>) who have long championed the residents and buildings in the area. It is home to many income based housing opportunities and a growing business district.

The FNN is bordered on the north by Lathrop Street, on the west by North Bendix Drive, on the east by Portage Ave, and on the south by Lincolnway East and Diamond Ave. It is home to the surviving houses written about in “Better Homes of South Bend”. Digitally documenting this content will aid in knowledge, understanding, and preservation.

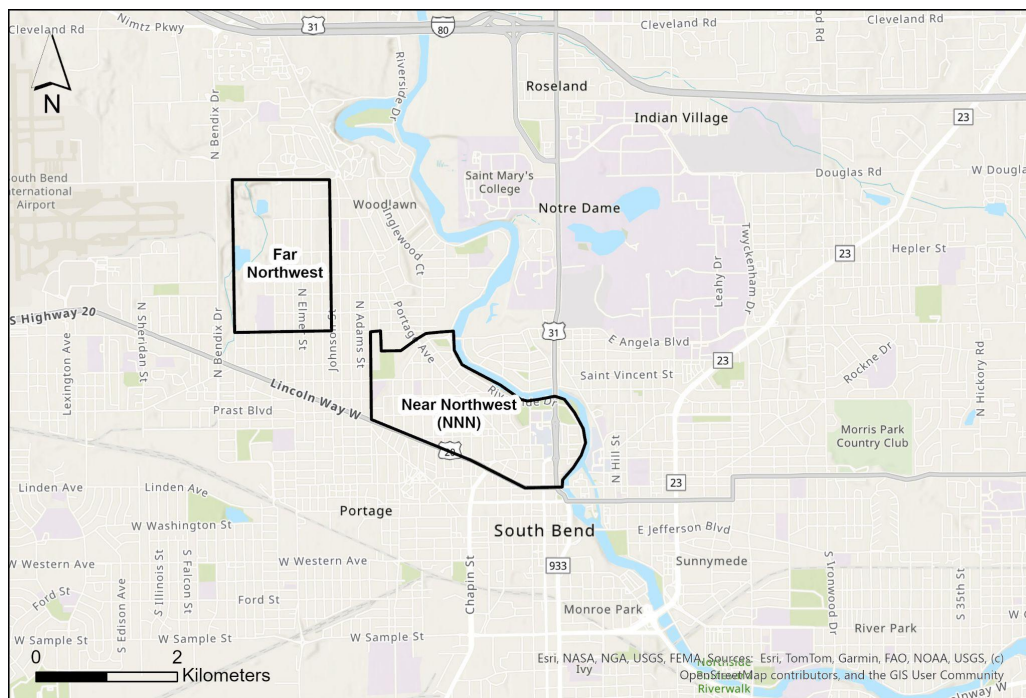


Figure 1. Locations of the Near Northwest Neighborhood and Far Northwest Neighborhood in South Bend

Part 1 will include:

- Archival research
- Selection and digitization of maps, photographs, and architectural plans
- Creation of metadata for neighborhoods and structures
- Development of interpretive narrative content based on Robinson's research
- Map and 3D model existing and original homes
- Develop the frame for the new interface
- Development of a content submission form

The team will conduct pedestrian surveys of the properties listed in *Better Homes of South Bend*, to photograph, and record GPS points in both locations and document architectural characteristics of the remaining *Better Homes of South Bend* houses. This will culminate in records in the GIS database allowing these structures to be interpreted alongside other significant structures and landmarks, be augmented with locations of other significant structures and landmarks, and geolocate the structures within the ArcGIS framework.

In addition to mapping these neighborhoods, Part 1 of the project will include additional research into mapping racial disparity, redlining, and visually presenting racial covenants in South Bend. Partnering with Prof. Marianne Cusato's class U.S. Housing & Social Justice: The History of Housing Segregation and the Future of Equitable American Cities (ARCH 43201/AMST 30922) in Fall 2026 and Fall 2027, the team will gather data and documentation on historic housing policies that marginalized the Black community in South Bend. This data will then be mapped digitally and linked to the represented neighborhoods.

As part of this, the team will hold the first of two open crowdsourcing sessions. In conjunction with project partner the Civil Rights Heritage Center, the team will engage the community to participate and provide content including photographs and oral histories. This content will be utilized to create the StoryMaps visually presenting a timeline of the history of this part of South Bend. Where applicable, this information will be augmented with existing oral and photographic information currently housed at partner institutions (e.g., The St Joseph County Public Library and the Civil Rights Heritage Center at Indiana University South Bend).

Content gathered from Part 1 will aid in re-writing the History portion of the BSB website, adding essays on a more complete architectural and urban history of the city, and creating a new high-level navigation element devoted to *Better Homes of South Bend*.

Part 2: Placing History - Black Architecture, Business, and Residential Enclaves

The second part of this project will focus on significant historic Black architecture and early marginalized neighborhoods in other areas of South Bend. The foundations for Part 2 are based on project partner and Civil Rights Heritage Center (CRHC) co-director George Garner's

“Placing History: An African American Landmark Tour of South Bend.”³ The CRHC has access to extensive archival collections, oral histories, historic photographs, and artifacts having spent years cultivating relationships in the community to build their research resources and walking tours. Mr. Garner will serve as a partner collaborator providing content on the BSB site to update the walking tour, including photographs and oral histories. An advanced architecture student will be assigned to this part of the project.

While the existing “Placing History” publication and walking tour are an important resource, the locations have yet to be incorporated into an architecturally driven digital platform. Part 2 expands this work within the *Building South Bend* framework by mapping these sites, documenting their history, and integrating them into the digital environment created for this project. Sites examined will include historically significant churches, businesses, and neighborhoods that played an important role in South Bend’s Black community.

Several parts of South Bend are poorly documented due to the lack of available resources. Two specific areas in South Bend, the African American Business District and the Lake Neighborhood, have been identified by the CRHC as priorities for seeking additional documentation and crowdsourced content. Mr. Garner has provided preliminary information and will continue to assist with the gathering of data to be mapped, digitized and presented on BSB. Additionally, the second of two public crowdsourcing events will take place at the CRHC to engage the community and provide ample opportunity to contribute content and provide feedback.

Activities in Part 2 will include:

- Mapping and geolocating sites identified in “Placing History”
- Incorporation of the “Placing History” walking tour into the site
- Development of 3D models of selected building where sufficient documentation exists
- Integration of the sites into the updated *Building South Bend* platform
- Documentation of the Business District and expanded research on the “Lake” section of South Bend

Part 3: Past Inequalities & Future Opportunities

Building on the historical framework of Parts 1 and 2, the third part of the project examines how architectural and urban design initiatives can respond to these historic inequities and support more equitable housing development in the future. Many of the underrepresented and marginalized communities in South Bend suffered from neglect and decay after the Studebaker Corporation closed its South Bend facilities in the 1960s and governmental urban renewal policies led to the city’s suburbanization. This is not unique to South Bend. The rapid decline of rust-belt communities post urban renewal and loss of manufacturing businesses in urban cores has left many cities with the need to redevelop parts of their communities. The greater downtown South Bend, including many of the neighborhoods previously discussed, was nearly

³ For the complete tour please visit <https://aalt.iusb.edu/index.html>.

decimated. Major roads were transformed from two-way to one-way and the “city” became just another pass-through Midwestern Rust Belt town. In 2011, Newsweek published an article declaring that South Bend was one of the top 10 dying towns in the United States.⁴ This led to a radical shift in South Bend’s narrative. Unwilling to let the city succumb, South Bend residents elected an energetic new mayor, Pete Buttigieg, who led a series of initiatives to transform the city. Less than 15 years later, South Bend was considered one of the top 10 places to live in the United States.⁵

While these initiatives led to a downtown revitalization and an influx of industry, many of the same marginalized, lower income communities documented in the earlier parts of this project continued to experience disinvestment. One initiative, a plan to remove vacant and abandoned homes called “1000 homes in 1000 days”,⁶ removed more than 1000 homes, many from the neighborhoods mentioned above, creating large numbers of vacant lots and contributing to a lack of affordable housing in the city.

In response to the growing need for affordable housing, the University of Notre Dame’s School of Architecture began collaborating with Habitat for Humanity through a course offered by Professor John Mellor.⁷ This course, “Building the Affordable Home,” taught students the importance of affordable home design and housing equity. In 2020, the University of Notre Dame expanded that partnership to develop an area south of campus that had several vacant lots.⁸ Architecture students designed five homes that were then built as part of a large community service project. These homes filled multiple vacant lots and provided much needed family housing in the community.

Part 3 will highlight the work of the University of Notre Dame architecture students’ collaborations with Habitat for Humanity as an example of how design and planning initiatives are addressing housing inequities within South Bend. Houses built in South Bend’s Near Northwest, and similar neighborhoods will be fully illustrated and presented virtually. Along with that, all affordable housing designs created for Habitat for Humanity will be presented as a pattern book for future affordable housing projects in the city. This part of the project will be supported by an advanced architecture student who has been involved in the research and design of these homes.

Concurrently, the School of Architecture founded the Housing and Community Regeneration Initiative (<https://housingandcommunityregeneration.nd.edu/>). They have created three proposals for urban and architectural interventions in South Bend. The team will integrate the South Bend project proposals into the interactive map and the housing inequities section of the

⁴ <https://www.newsweek.com/americas-dying-cities-66873>

⁵ <https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/news/local/2024/06/03/south-bend-ranks-25-in-best-cities-to-live-in/73816618007/>

⁶ <https://southbendin.gov/initiative/vacant-abandoned-properties/>

⁷ <https://fightingfor.nd.edu/stories/a-home-by-design/>

⁸ <https://news.nd.edu/news/notre-dame-joins-with-habitat-for-humanity-to-increase-access-to-affordable-housing-in-south-bends-northeast-neighborhood/>

site. This integration, along with the Habitat proposals, will provide a community resource for understanding and supporting future developments at the urban and individual scales.

Activities in Part 3 will include:

- Integrating Habitat for Humanity housing designs into the BSB platform
- Creation of digital illustrations and 3D renderings of newly constructed homes
- Incorporating proposals from the Housing and Community Regeneration Initiative

Project Results:

Despite the incredible architectural history of South Bend, information about the history of the city's built environment is split between differing archives, digital spaces, and communities. This makes it difficult for scholars, residents, and policymakers to comprehensively understand how history has shaped contemporary housing inequalities and neighborhood change. This project addresses this issue by creating a free, easy-to-use, and easy to update public website that combines the existing research on South Bend's neighborhoods with an opportunity for community engagement and contribution. The content presented will provide a more complete, accurate, and technically sophisticated digital publication that tells a fuller story of South Bend's complex municipal history, while also offering a replicable model for other universities, libraries, archives, local history museums, preservation commissions, and communities to follow in documenting their own architectural histories. It will synthesize resources into a creative new design and provide opportunities and ideas for the redevelopment of marginalized and underserved communities through this community-centered project.

A core outcome of this project is the development and publication of a methodological framework that any library, archive, university, or municipality can adapt to document the complete architectural and urban history of their own community. The project team will create a dedicated module on the Building South Bend platform called "How We Built This" documenting the project's development, including research methodology, community engagement protocols, data standards, mapping and metadata frameworks. This material will be designed for practitioners more than technologists to allow those organizations to augment existing platforms, whether proprietary or not, with rich mapping and documentation tools. As a model, the updated *Building South Bend* platform and website will include more community voices and diverse narratives through new data, maps, 3D models and corresponding stories. This will provide South Bend with a community resource to learn about, and contribute to, the history of South Bend. Through community crowdsourcing events, a contribution form on the site, and social marketing, community members will have the opportunity to provide visual content, descriptions, and oral histories that will be included in the site. The new BSB will provide other communities and institutions with a collaborative model to create their own resources to study urban and architectural history.

At each step of the process, the team will evaluate the development process, content, mapping, and visual tools for clarity and ease of use. As the design of the website is updated, focus groups made up of students and collaborators will evaluate the effectiveness of the site.

Outcomes will be measured by usage statistics and community engagement through contributions and updates. Team members will submit the project to the annual conference of their relevant professional associations to promote the project and offer guidance on creating similar projects. Additionally, the dataset and guidelines for creating a similar project will be published on the website.

The three parts of the project 1) *Northwest Neighborhoods and Better Homes of South Bend*, 2) *Placing History - Black Architecture, Business, and Residential Enclaves*, and 3) *Housing Inequalities & Future Opportunities* will combine community knowledge with archival and architectural evidence into an established, easy to use, freely available, public platform. It will provide digital documentation and interpretation of historically Black and previously overlooked neighborhoods in South Bend and integrate the information collected with established historical neighborhoods. This will lead to advanced community knowledge and engagement and provide useful tools for education, architectural history, preservation planning, and provide resources for neighborhood revitalization and sustainable development.

ACTIVITIES	WHO	STAKEHOLDERS	EVALUATION
Part 1: Better Homes of SB (NNN, FNN)	PI Parker; Co-PI Sisk; Robinson	CRHC; NNN; FNN	Expert review and user experiences
Archival research	PI; School of Arch	Duda (CPPS)	Archivist Morgan Wilson
Selection and digitization of maps, photographs, and architectural plans	PI; School of Arch	CRHC; NNN; FNN	Archivist Morgan Wilson
Creation of metadata for neighborhoods and structures	Co-PI; Lucy Institute		Lucy Institute
Development of interpretive narrative content based on Robinson's research	PI; Co-PI; Robinson; Lucy Institute		Local expert review (e.g., Robinson)
Map and 3D model existing and original homes	Noffsinger (ND Arch) / Co-PI Sisk		Pedestrian surveys
Develop the frame for the new interface	Heet (ND Navari)		User feedback
Development of a content submission form	Co-PI Sisk	Garner (CRHC)	Form usage
Future of Equitable American Cities	Cusato (ND Arch) students	neighborhoods of SB	Expert review; course evaluations
Part 2: Placing History	PI Parker; Garner (CRHC)	IUSB's CRHC	Expert review
Research, Mapping and geolocating "Placing History"	Lead Student Part 2	Garner (CRHC)	PI, User Feedback
Incorporation of the "Placing History" walking tour into the site	Co-PI Sisk; Garner (CRHC)	CRHC; neighborhood groups	User feedback
Development of 3D models	Noffsinger (ND Arch)	ND Arch	PI, CoPI
Integration of the sites into BSB	Heet (ND Navari)		Expert & User feedback
Documentation of the Business District & Lake Area	PI Parker; Cusato (ND Arch) students	Garner (CRHC); community	Local expert review (e.g., Robinson); course evaluations
Part 3: Past Inequalities and Future Opportunities	PI Parker	CRHC; City of SB	Expert and resident review
Integrating Habitat for Humanity housing	Lead Student Part 3	PI Parker	
Digital illustrations and 3D renderings	Noffsinger (ND Arch)		Expert feedback
Housing and Community Regeneration Initiative Proposals	PI Parker, Cusato (ND ARCH)	City of South Bend	Local expert and local resident feedback