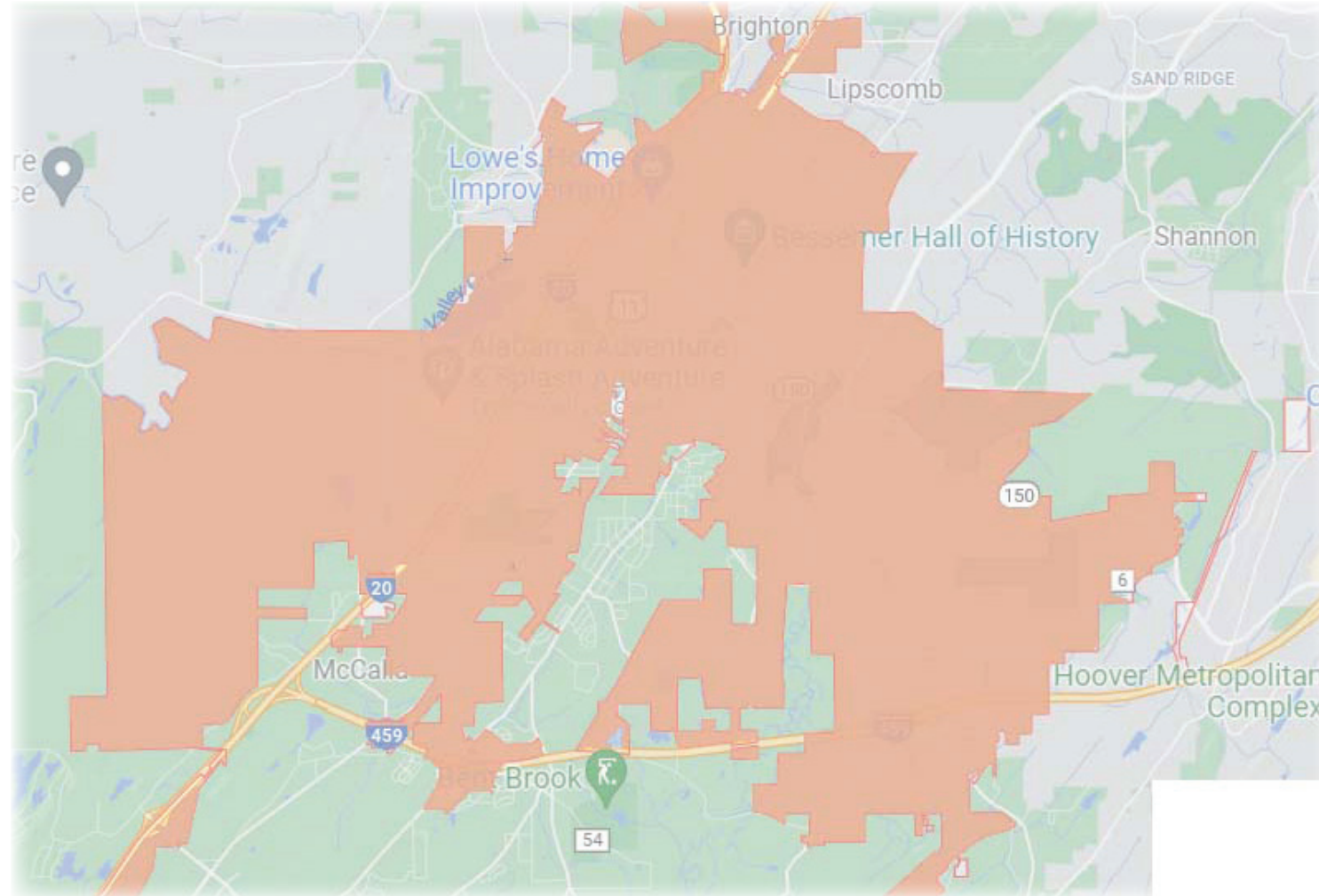


# THE HISTORIC DISTRICT OF DOWNTOWN BESSEMER

## An Urban Market Concept

Rikeya Wallace | Fourth Year Architecture Student | Tuskegee University



Map of Bessemer, AL Present Day

## INTRODUCTION

What factors qualify a neighborhood to be worthy of a decent set of living conditions? Are these factors racially motivated? Is it based on income, land value or the type of job opportunities in the area?

In 1866, the city currently known as Bessemer, Alabama was founded on the back of the steel industry. With just 4,000 acres, this city was able to bloom into a historic district that it is today, even though it has not been treated as such lately. As stated earlier, Bessemer's income has been based on manufacturing and mining jobs. Besides mining and manufacturing jobs there were also truck farming and iron smelting. The people who mostly worked these jobs were

African Americans, poor whites and other races who wanted to provide a better lifestyle for themselves and their families. Since the steel factory closed and the recession that took place in 1907, many people moved out of Bessemer, but the remaining population around that time consisted of 69 percent and has now turned to 72.39 percent today. The downtown area was designed to provide government buildings, educational buildings and others to support the basic needs of survival.

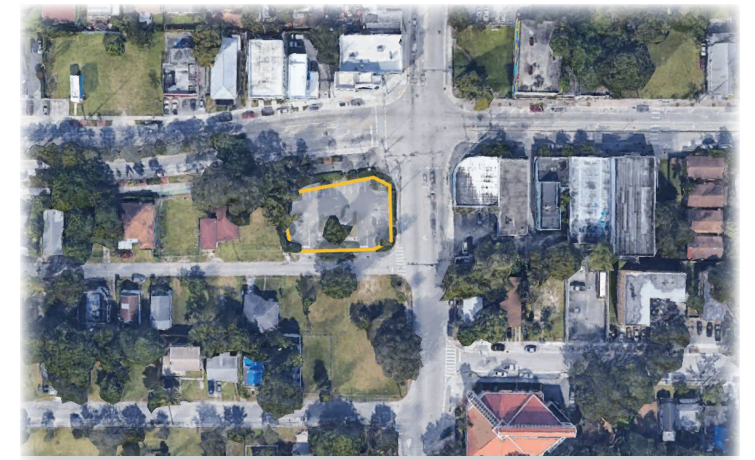
## CONTEXT

To give a brief context on this area, Bessemer has grown from 4,000 acres to 25,958.4 acres from 1866

to present day. In the northeast region of the city is where the downtown district is located. This is also the same portion of Bessemer where my family and I were born and raised. The current state of the district can be described as half functioning while the other half is filled with open lots and abandoned properties. Although there are still some functioning government buildings, grocery stores and retail stores, citizens are still driving to surrounding cities such as Birmingham and McCalla to access a better quality product because the quality of meats, produce and other necessity products are not up to par.

## ISSUES

Many accessible resources are on the outskirts of Bessemer for example grocery stores like ALDI, Publix, Sprouts Market or any other healthy supermarket or restaurants are 30 minute drives minimum away from Bessemer. What's accessible are some mom and pop shop grocery stores that barely have quality produce and when they are up to par, there isn't enough to last. There are many different fast food restaurants mainly serving fried chicken or other greasy foods that people should not eat on a daily basis. With our shopping also not being esthetically pleasing and have gained the reputation of being unsafe, it has been hard to maintain a steady income within our own city and we tend to outsource to "better" quality communities. Some attempts have been made to keep the income within Bessemer with the Bessemer Flea Market but the problem is that it was only opened on the weekends and the establishment has been closed down ever since the pandemic started. At this flea market citizens were able to purchase affordable fresh produce and other foods, personal hygiene products, etc. while feeling comfortable in a shopping outlet. Since this establishment has been closed down people had to start selling items on the side of the road out of their trucks which led to some possible concerns of "stranger danger", car accidents and a lack of economic boost for the entire city. I intend to create a possible solution that would allow the downtown district to rehabilitate itself and start a ripple effect causing people to want to invest back into Bessemer.



Site map and context



Current view of the site



Current context of the downtown district to show how the district is half way functioning.

## DESIGN

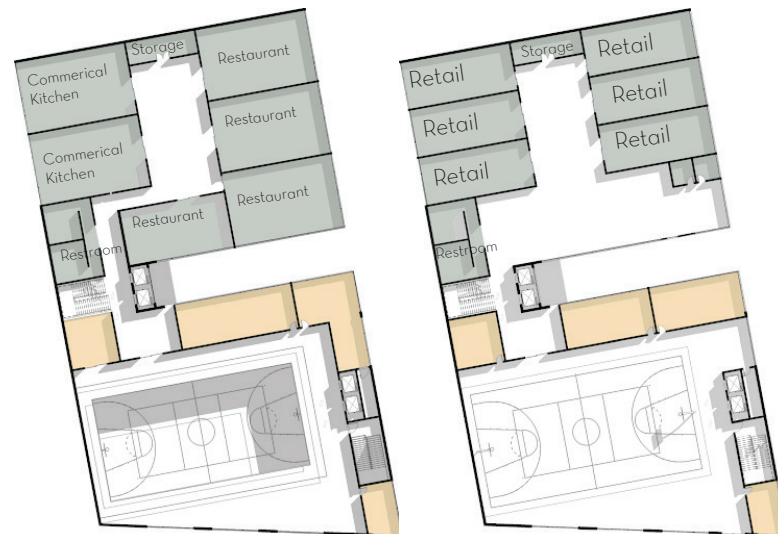
For this project, I plan to design an updated urban market to reflect the current Bessemer Flea Market. This new urban market would be located in the downtown district between DeBardeleben Park and Bessemer Hall of History to allow as much walkable access through the market as possible and also allow pedestrians to want to be curious about the entire downtown area. I hope the design will be taken slowly into a two phase process to be able to conduct a mini observation to conclude if this is the right approach to begin economical growth for Bessemer.

Phase one will consist of three to seven affordable rental kiosk spaces that can be booked day to day so that the process of set up can run smoothly and business owners would not be worried with the troubles of being stuck in a lease that they cannot afford due to business or other financial reasons. To see how this process would run I'd survey and list pros and cons of rental kiosks by the citizens to see how the users are adjusting to this style of market. The survey would last approximately 18 months. With a good success rate I hope to develop the market further in phase two.

In addition to the kiosks developed in phase one, phase two would consist of a more stable building that would allow more rental (or permanently owned) spaces, restaurants and a courtyard area where citizens can relax and enjoy the views. Food trucks would also be able to access this area to promote their businesses as well.

## OUTCOME

With this newly designed urban market in Bessemer it would allow access to an affordable market area 7 days a week that will be able to consist of both healthier food options and products for one's household. This marketplace would also allow for the local blackowned businesses to gain a platform to grow. Finally, my last hope for this market is to contribute to a ripple effect of starting a new self-sufficient economy.



These images show the possible outcome and design esethic that I would like to achieve within this market-place. Precedent Study: Eastville Marketplace



## CONCLUSION

To conclude my counter-story, it is seen in too many predominantly populated African American cities that they are being deprived of basic necessities to survive properly. It's blamed on crime rates, our income or other biases that make absolutely no sense but it is our reality. While discovering myself within this project, I know that my hometown has a long way to go, but I hope I can start with an idea to help elevate us as a people as far as I can. Restoring the downtown district to the Black Wall Street my parents and grandparents once knew could be a start.

# Why?



Many accessible resources are on the outskirts of Bessemer for example grocery stores like ALDI, Publix, Sprouts Market or any other healthy supermarket or restaurants are 30 minute drives minimum away from Bessemer. What's accessible are some mom and pop shop grocery stores that barely have quality produce and when they are up to par, there isn't enough to last. There are many different fast food restaurants mainly serving fried chicken or other greasy foods that people should not eat on a daily basis. With our shopping also not being esthetically pleasing and have gained the reputation of being unsafe, it has been hard to maintain a steady income within our own city and we tend to outsource to "better" quality communities. Some attempts have been made to keep the income within Bessemer with the Bessemer Flea Market but the problem is that it was only opened on the weekends and the establishment has been closed down ever since the pandemic started. At this flea market citizens were able to purchase affordable fresh produce and other foods, personal hygiene products, etc. while feeling comfortable in a shopping outlet. Since this establishment has been closed down people had to start selling items on the side of the road out of their trucks which led to some possible concerns of "stranger danger", car accidents and a lack of economic boost for the entire city. I intend to create a possible solution that would allow the downtown district to rehabilitate itself and start a ripple effect causing people to want to invest back into Bessemer.

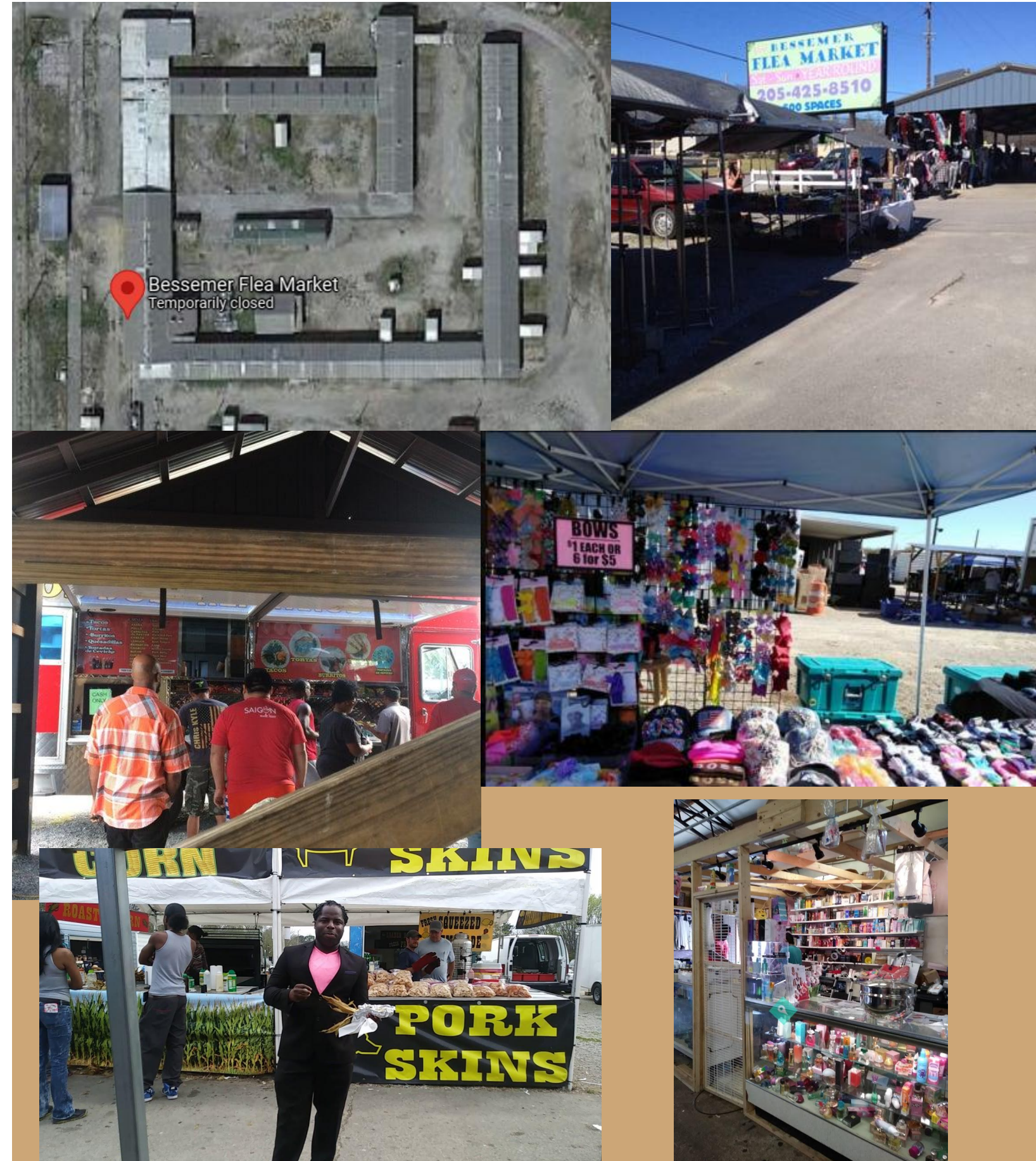
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# Precedent Studies

## 1. Bessemer Flea market

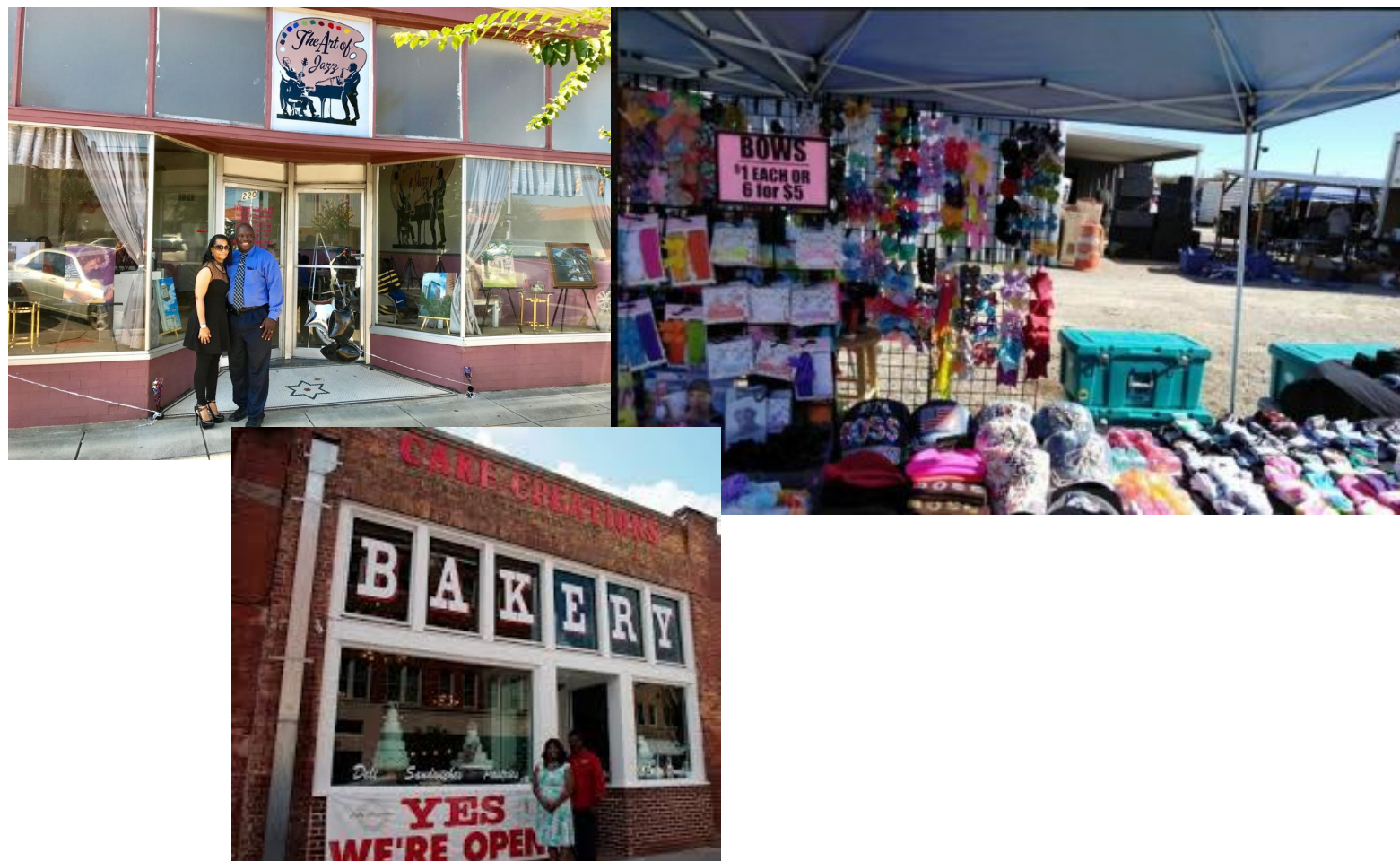
- Location: Bessemer, AL
- Approx: 1.5 miles from the site
- Only opened on Saturdays and Sundays

This is a local flea market utilized during the weekends to promote and sell foods, clothing and other miniature necessities at extremely low prices.



# Concept Statement

For this project, I plan to design an updated urban market to reflect the current Bessemer Flea Market. This new urban market would be located in the downtown district between DeBardeleben Park and Bessemer Hall of History to allow as much walkable access through the market as possible and also allow pedestrians to want to be curious about the entire downtown area. I hope the design will be taken slowly into a two phase process to be able to conduct a mini observation to conclude if this is the right approach to begin economical growth for Bessemer.



# Scheme 1: Indoor/Outdoor combination

## Wish List Program:

Retail Kiosks

Food Kiosks

Restrooms

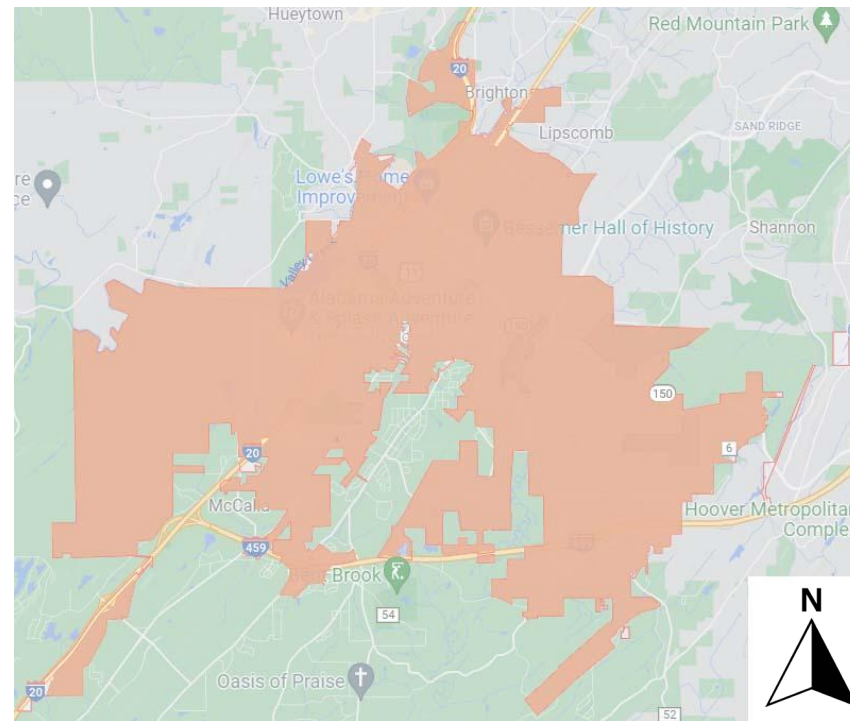
Outdoor seating

Possibly a garden(s)



# Phase One

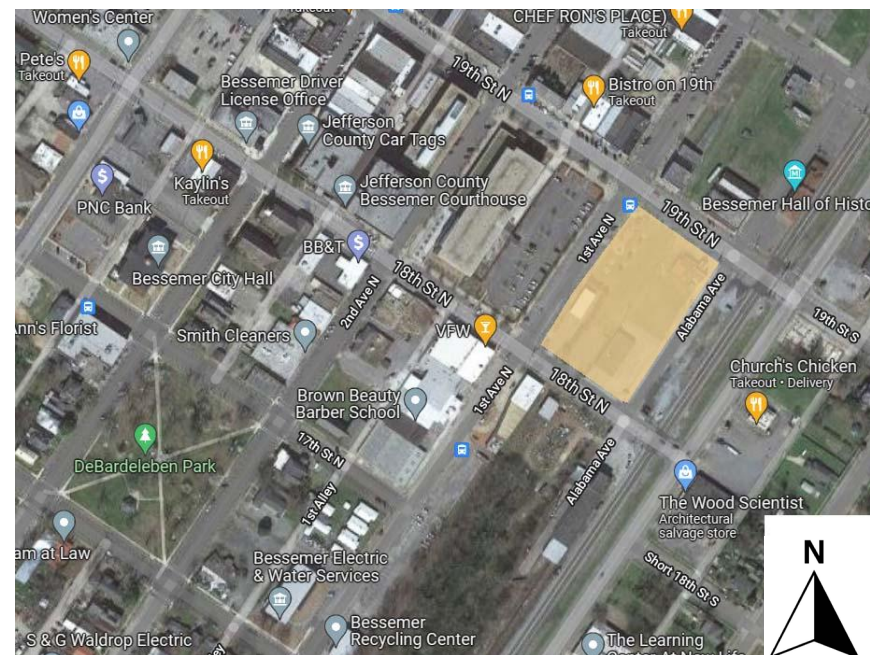
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Context map: Bessemer, AL



Kiosk Design one



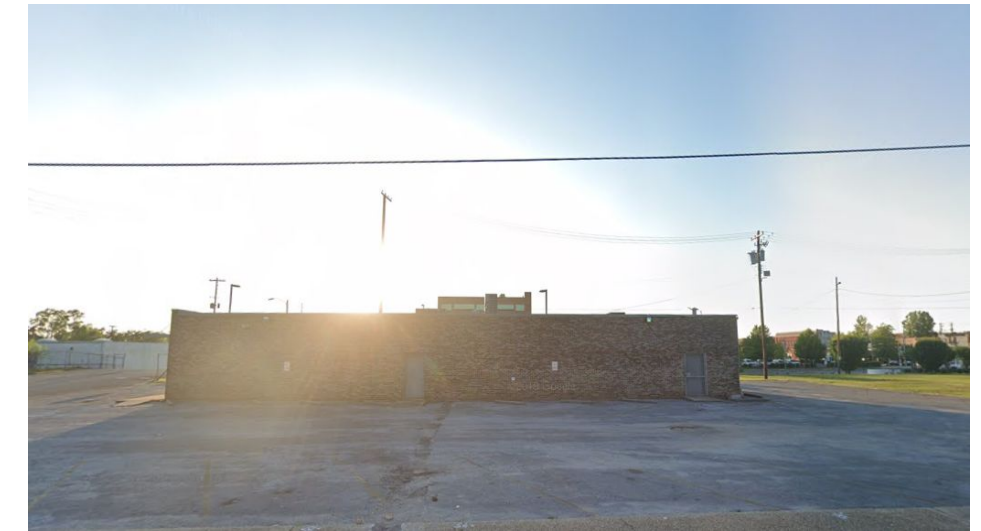
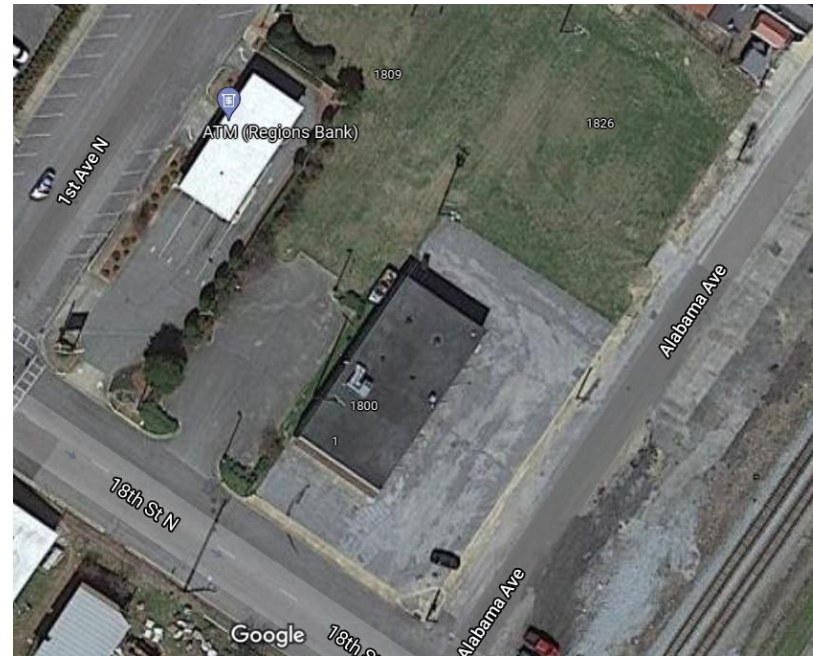
Site Map: Downtown Bessemer, AL



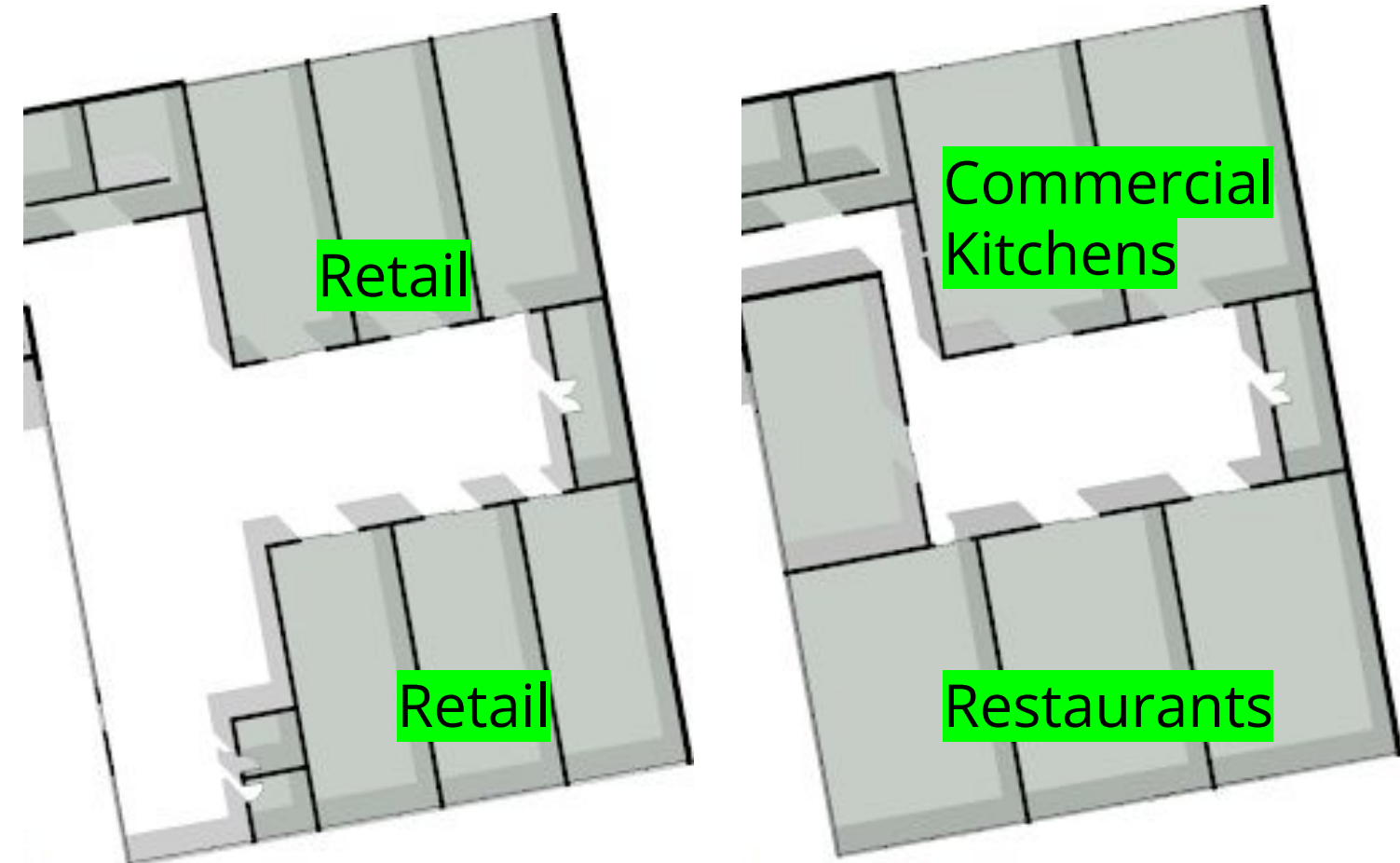
Kiosk Design two

# Phase two

In addition to the kiosks developed in phase one, phase two would consist of a more stable building that would allow more rental (or permanently owned) spaces, restaurants and a courtyard area where citizens can relax and enjoy the views. Food trucks would also be able to access this area to promote their businesses as well.



Site context



Artificial floor plans for interior marketplace