

## A New Old Town

The historic City of Kaunas has a great urban structure. Our design builds upon these principals, with a contemporary interpretation. The site itself is extraordinary, the key to our design is to preserve what is already great about the site and highlight those elements, while providing high quality new spaces. It is simple, create a contemporary addition the city center, provide the city with a new park, and in the process create an active, attractive riverfront for all.

The site is currently filled with expansive, low-quality open space. The first step in our design process is to define each public space, giving each space a different quality. Grand spaces are highlighted and intimate spaces are framed. The next decision was to extend the historic city grid through our site, linking the city to the Neris River. This simple move provides easy access to the river for the entire city and all citizens. Between these cuts, city blocks are created. Each block is given its own separate identity, with intimate interior spaces. Thus each user has a strong sense of comfort in their personal space within the block. The cuts through these blocks provide more than just access to the river, they create a series of differing public passages that allow for citizens to stroll, bike, chat, sit, eat, perform, etc. When these passages intersect the riverside, they each arrive at elements that allow users to better experience and interact with the quality of the riverside. This allows the Neris riverside to be activated with users, creating a safe, comfortable environment. The buildings within the blocks are terraced, lowering to 2 or 3 stories along the historic city center, riverfront, and along the passages toward the river. The buildings rise in height in the middle of the blocks. This accomplishes a few goals. It provides the users with south facing, sunny terraces to overlook the city. Also, it creates a variety of private and public spaces to overlook the river landscape. Additionally, it creates a few higher structures that can be more signature buildings that give the area further character and users helpful visual cues for orientation.

The riverfront itself is already quite fantastic, but is underappreciated. We do not want to completely change the space; instead, we feel we can add strong connections (walking and bike paths) and a variety of active uses in the space; which will allow it to be appreciated for what it is – beautiful, natural, and now – diverse with activities. Whether it is walking amongst the tree tops via the pier and its kiosks; the riverside green extending into the blocks and then extending out to create a amphitheater for public performances; a pedestrian bridge to cross the river with a look-out tower midway - allowing distant views; sitting on a large deck looking out over the landscape; descending down the steps into the park and onward to the water taxi and swimming area, or a series of covered basketball courts for year-round play; a visitor or a local is given the chance to recreate freely and interact with the rich landscape in a variety of ways.

The program is thought of as a way to enhance the city center's existing uses and to provide activities to the riverside park. Medium scale retail, with a space for a few anchors, and the reuse of the existing grocery store give both residents and visitors a great variety of reasons to visit the site and the city center. Office space is seen as occupying the eastern portion of the site, including a block replacing the roundabout. A key addition for our design is a new public facility. On the west of the site, we foresee the opportunity to provide a proper space for a future program that may emerge (aquarium, art school, etc). This would provide another anchor for the site and different visitors to the area. Additionally, the building should be formed to create a large tilted lawn, affording great views of the castle and the riverside. Residential uses are key for the city and the site, creating users for the site, thus providing safe, observed spaces. The parking can be handled in 1 story of underground spaces (with a second level possible if necessary) spread across the site.

We spoke to a traffic and parking expert and he suggested the solution to roundabout and the parking entrances be handled in one simple move. By removing the roundabout, we can create a simple 4 way intersection. This creates a smooth flow from south to north, traffic coming from the east forms a simple T intersection, and the west end of the intersection is the entrance to the parking. This keeps new traffic from having to flow through the city and the site; it cleans up existing traffic movements; and creates more land to develop, thus allowing for lower buildings across the site.