

### **Program Summary:**

This Early Learning Center offers quality education for children from infancy to age three, supporting families in underserved areas with essential learning opportunities.

### **Program Statement:**

A 150-year-old landmark in Donaldsonville, Louisiana has been transformed into an innovative early childhood facility for children from infancy to age three. Funded by reallocating resources originally earmarked for a local Juvenile Detention Center, the project signals a profound shift from punitive infrastructure toward education and community development. Once a vital commercial and social hub, the Lemann Building now embodies renewed purpose, offering quality early education modeled on the Perry Preschool Project. This research-backed approach emphasizes the long-term benefits of high-quality early learning, particularly in underserved communities. Our team's design prioritizes natural light, nature-inspired materials, and flexible learning spaces, creating an environment that supports play, exploration, and nourishment. While adaptive reuse and sustainability are central, the vision reaches beyond architecture. This center stands as a symbol of hope, equity, and intergenerational impact—repurposing a historical space not just for preservation, but for progress.

# RR310.01

Building Area: (sf)  
7,920

Cost per Square Foot:  
\$210

Construction Cost  
\$1,668,179

Date of Completion:  
01/29/2024

# RR310.02

## Historic Context

Built in the late 1870s and opened in 1878, this historic building is a striking example of Italianate commercial architecture, designed by New Orleans architect James Freret. Characterized by its stuccoed brick façade, arched windows, and ornate cornices, the building stood out in small-town Louisiana for its size and sophistication. Originally home to a department store, the structure reflected the economic optimism of post-Reconstruction and served as a cornerstone of the city's commercial life for generations.

Once a bustling hub in the city of Donaldsonville, Louisiana, this historic landmark has been a constant in the community for over 150 years. The general store was more than just a place to buy necessities; it was a social hub, a lifeline, and a symbol of community spirit.

Using this symbology as a catalyst, the design team, in collaboration with the Parish Government, has reimagined this historic building and transformed it into an Early Learning Center. Funded with resources previously allocated for a local Juvenile Detention Center, the project represents a new direction in community focus and a commitment to its future.



# RR310.03

## Geographic Context

Donaldsonville, positioned on the west bank of the Mississippi River in Ascension Parish, lies roughly midway between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Its location at the intersection of the Mississippi river and Bayou Lafourche once made it a vital hub of commerce and governance, even serving briefly as Louisiana's state capital in the 19th century.

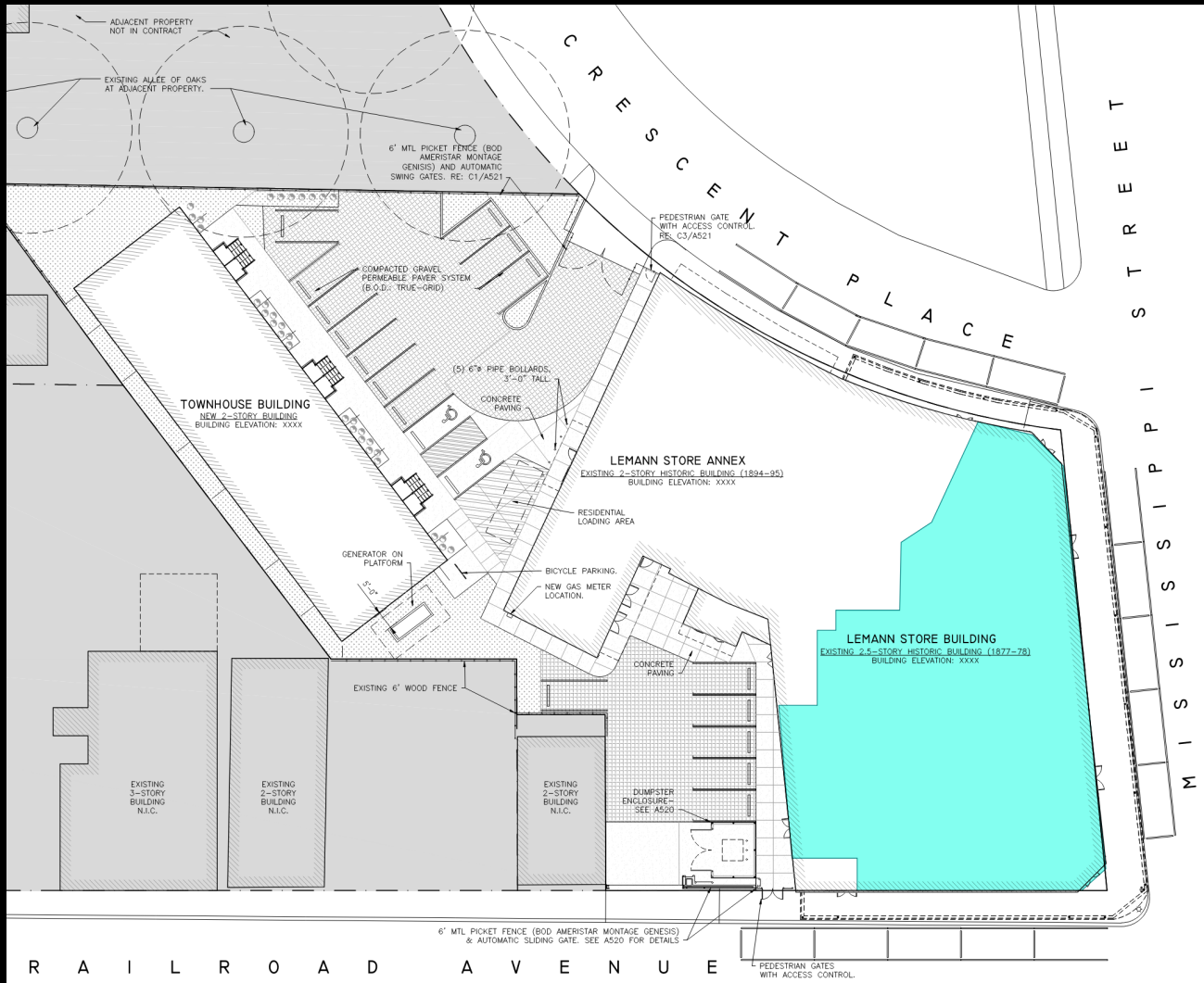




# RR310.04

## Site Plan / Context

Located on Mississippi Street in downtown Donaldsonville, the Lemann Building sits at the key intersection of Mississippi Street and Railroad Avenue—two of the city's main commercial arteries.





# RR310.05

## Importance of Embedded Community Partners

Throughout the design process, our team collaborated closely with community members, local governmental leadership, and industry partners to ensure proper support to realize a successful project.







## RR310.06

### Community Engagement

Multiple design charrettes—including immersive sessions using virtual reality headsets—enabled future users to experience and provide feedback on the spaces in 3D, deepening engagement and shaping the final outcome.

Other tools included the Deck of Spaces, an engagement tool that served as a guide for design parameters throughout the project, helping the team and stakeholders visualize programmatic relationships and spatial flow early in the design process.

Mapping out key functions and adjacencies in a clear, accessible format enabled productive conversations with clients and community members, aligning priorities and uncovering opportunities for flexibility and innovation.

This shared visual language fostered transparency and collaboration, ultimately guiding the development of a more intuitive and responsive design.

# RR310.07

## Floor Plan

This project was a full adaptive reuse of a historic general store, transforming it into a vibrant mixed-use facility housing both affordable housing and an early learning center. Our team was responsible for reimagining half of the building's interior for the learning center, while the other half was developed into residential units.





# RR310.08

## Lobby

The lobby was designed as a warm, welcoming entry that honors the building's past while looking toward its future. Our team created custom signage and wayfinding that acknowledge the building's historic significance and include space to recognize future donors.

The original tall doors were carefully preserved, and the front desk was thoughtfully integrated into the existing architecture, with a carved-out niche featuring pendant lighting and an accent wall that invites visitors into the heart of the space.





# RR310.09

## Classrooms

Classrooms now line the original storefronts, reinvigorating the building's presence along the street and connecting it to the community. A central circulation corridor organizes movement through the space, leading to support areas at the rear—including restrooms, a café, and an additional classroom—with direct access to an outdoor play area. The design respects the building's historic fabric while introducing modern functionality to serve the needs of children, families, and residents.





# RR310.10

## Play Based Learning

Play-based learning is an integral design feature of the early learning center creating flexible, engaging spaces that encourage exploration and discovery.

Indoor classrooms connect to outdoor play areas, providing children with opportunities for hands-on, imaginative learning in both environments. The design supports a variety of activities that promote creativity, social interaction, and development, reflecting the core principles of play-based education throughout the center.



# RR310.11

## Healthy Materials

Healthy, non-toxic materials were carefully selected and used throughout the building to create a safe, comfortable environment that supports the well-being of children, staff, and residents.

Rubber flooring and felt pendant lighting enhance comfort and acoustics for staff and children.



# RR310.12

## Dining / Indoor Play

The design includes inviting dining and indoor play areas that encourage social interaction, physical activity, and comfort, supporting the center's holistic approach to child development.





# RR310.13

## Pilot Program – What's Next?

This adaptive reuse serves as a pilot program, demonstrating innovative community-centered design. Next steps include evaluating its impact and exploring opportunities to replicate the early learning center model throughout Louisiana.

