In the Spring 2004, this second-year BCRP studio class embraced a community outreach project as a response to a request from the Community Development Department of Paso Robles, California. Damaged by the San Simeon 2003 earthquake, the city wanted the class to develop an urban design scenario for the revitalization of an important area of its historic downtown.

In the pursuit of CRP’s continuing community outreach efforts, students of the second-year design studio (Intermediate Environmental Design, CRP-203) faced a very complex challenge in the spring of 2004: responding to a request for help from Paso Robles’ Community Development Department, instructors Zeljka Howard and Vicente del Rio led their sessions together in developing a concept for the revitalization of the area south of the downtown – nicknamed SoDo by the class. Having suffered a major earthquake in December 2003, Paso Robles also desires reconstruction efforts to encourage revitalization, mixed-use development, and a pedestrian-friendly environment in the downtown.

Although highly accessible from Highway 101 and served by the railroad, well located within the city structure, and with a strong development potential; the area suffers from “development blight” – underutilized and vacant sites, low density, and not very noble uses. The studio followed a design process in which the class was first divided into large groups to develop a concept for the revitalization of the area south of the downtown – named SoDo by the class. Having suffered a major earthquake in December 2003, Paso Robles also desires reconstruction efforts to encourage revitalization, mixed-use development, and a pedestrian-friendly environment in the downtown.

Students were able to experiment with a wide array of information gathering techniques, such as GIS mapping, site surveys, visual preference surveys, mental mapping, and behavioral observation. They also designed using freehand and technical drawings, as well as computer programs such as Photoshop and Sketchup, a new versatile and easy-to-operate electronic modeling which produced incredible imagery.

This was a very gratifying quarter, with results reaching high levels of quality, both in terms of our pedagogical objectives for the students developmental progress, and as useful products for the City of Paso Robles. The students did a terrific job and at the request of the Community Development Department they presented their work in the Paso Robles City Library at the end of the quarter in a special session of the Planning Committee. The Community Development Department, the Planning Commission members, and the community appreciated having a well thought concept plan for the area and a number of important ideas which will help them choose among the possible future directions for downtown redevelopment.
Figure 1. Image of the townhomes proposed for the blocks.

Figure 3. View of the project showing its major components and the City Park on the top of the image.