

Category: **Conceptual or Theoretical**

**Office Retrofit - 2021**

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

**Project Description (500 words):**

Calgary's downtown core has long been a symbol of the strength of Alberta's energy industry. During the oil boom years, office space demand resulted in several towers being built, creating the skyline we see today. While in the past Calgary's skyline represented the industry's success, today its towers and streets sit largely empty, serving as a reminder of Calgary's dependency on the energy industry to thrive. In light of these changes, we tasked ourselves to explore what opportunities these vacant buildings could provide us in creating a more diverse, vibrant and robust downtown core.

The narrative that surrounds the retrofitting of office towers is one that often focuses on the incompatibility of converting office floor plates to other uses, or on the high costs associated with adding balconies or altering façades. We found that with some creative new approaches not only can these constraints be mitigated, but they can provide feasible opportunities to add much needed diversity to Calgary's downtown.

Our approach centered on creating a series of strategies that could be implemented in sequence or on their own to allow for small, medium or large-scale interventions which made use of as much of the existing structure as possible. The ground level was altered to allow retail components to occupy the former office lobby resulting in a more active base. Some of these existing barriers were an existing 1.4-meter wall around the building's perimeter and an opaque glazing strategy that prevented the building from having a presence on the street.

Our solution involved creating an accessible, programmed perimeter and a transparent glazing strategy to create a connection with the sidewalk. A perimeter canopy extending over the sidewalk completed the strategy, creating a strong presence and a delineation of the retail component from the rest of the building. This strategy could be extended to the first two levels of the building to allow for inner-city box stores or other larger amenities requiring additional floors to have a presence in the downtown core.

Finally, we focused on a strategy for the upper floors which would allow for residential uses. A typical approach to accommodate residential uses would involve re-cladding the entire building in a curtain wall system and the demolition of the existing façade. Instead, we proposed a strategy of inset balconies which allowed for all existing precast façade elements to remain while providing covered balconies for the units. The large office floor plates were navigated by creating storage rooms on each floor that could be rented by the units. This provided much needed storage while also allowing for alternative uses in the deeper areas of the floor plan which did not have access to natural light.

The result was a flexible approach that allowed the building's existing character to remain while also achieving our primary goal of creating a more vibrant and diverse street condition throughout the day, evening and seasons.