Revised Retail re-imagines an underutilized strip mall in the 46th Ward. In otherwise thriving neighborhoods, these vacant retail structures are considered blights on the streetscape. And yet, these structures and spaces can be repurposed and turned into neighborhood amenities.

A typical, single-story rectangular retail strip mall structure set between a street-facing parking lot and an alley can be easily converted into market-rate residential units, live/work spaces or day care facilities with green spaces. Reusing existing structures and services of this building type and converting the parking lot into individual gardens and small community parks transforms an otherwise barren space into a vibrant urban landscape.
As the retail and economic landscape has shifted over the past decade due to changes in technology and lifestyle, there has been a growing number of vacant retail buildings. These retail shells have been successfully converted into churches, libraries and schools across the United States. One such conversion is the Montessori Primary School in Fayetteville, Arkansas, which transforms an outdated office building into a nine-classroom school. Completed in just eleven months and in a very cost-effective manner, the renovation utilizes the original structure of the building, including the rhythm of the storefronts along the south and west elevations. Angled, metal wall panels provide the windows with shade and visual privacy from the street. An addition on the north side of the building not visible from the school entry, intersects the existing building at the reception area. This insertion creates a corridor extending to three additional classrooms and frames two courtyards used for outdoor play. The school is an extension of the nearby Montessori Elementary School (2012) also designed by Marlon Blackwell Architects.

Photo, top: Marlon Blackwell Architects; bottom: Timothy Hursley.