Tracing Lineages
Curriculum Unit Plan Overview

Natasha Flowers

Unit Title	**Dreaming Up Our World**
Unit Length (How long and how often)	Daily for 4-6 weeks (each lesson about approx. 15 mins each)
Grade Level(s)/Subject(s)	Preschool (Math, Social Studies, literacy, science)
Unit Overview (Include unit narrative of at least 200 words with compelling question)	**Unit Title:** Dreaming Up Our World: Architects, Builders, and Community **Compelling Question:** *Who has the power to build our world, and how can I be a builder too?* This unit transforms our block area from a place of simple play into a studio of history, identity, and possibility. While many early childhood construction units focus solely on the mechanics of stacking and balancing, "Dreaming Up Our World" is deliberately designed to center the perspectives and heritage of young Black students. The built environment is not neutral; it tells a story about who matters and who belongs. For our students, seeing themselves as the architects of the future is an act of empowerment. The unit begins by validating the children's natural instincts to create, using Christy Hale's *Dreaming Up* to draw direct visual lines between children of color at play and major architectural feats. We then move from the general to the specific by introducing **Norma Merrick Sklarek**. For a young Black child, learning that a Black woman designed the massive, playful "Blue Whale" building (Pacific Design Center) shifts the narrative

	of architecture from a field they are excluded from to a field where they have already led. Critically, this unit grounds these concepts in the students' own backyard—the 5th Ward of Evanston. By studying the construction of the new neighborhood school on the historic Foster School site, students engage with a profound truth: buildings are the "bones" of a community. Through stories told by key stakeholders from the Evanston community, Mrs. Helen (Kitty) Fulce and Mrs. Patricia Anderson. Students will learn of the rich history and legacy the Black community of Evanston have built. Using stories of the past will help to connect how the Evanston community has come full circle. They will learn that their community fought to bring this school back, making the construction site a tangible symbol of resilience and care. By the end of this unit, students will understand that being a builder isn't just about wearing a hard hat; it is about having the vision to design spaces where their community can thrive. Whether they are drafting blueprints with white crayons on blue paper or observing the steel beams of their future school, they are learning that their hands possess the power to shape their world.
Objectives & Outcomes (Supporting questions)	**Students will be able to...** 1. Students will be able to understand how buildings and homes are made and structured 2. Students will be able to identify different buildings 3. Students will talk about how people build different places 4. Talk to students about the buildings in our community 5. Talk to students about the people who work in different buildings in our community. 6. Students will be able to describe the type of home they live in 7. Students will use drawing to symbolize/represent meaning

Standards	● 5.C.ECa Participate in group projects or units of study designed to learn about a topic of interest ● 9.A.ECa Recognize and name common two- and three-dimensional shapes and describe some of their attributes (e.g., number of sides, straight or curved lines) ● 17.A.ECa Locate objects and places in familiar environments. ● Exhibit pride in my own unique family without judging other families ● Understand, appreciate and respect differences and similarities in my classroom and school
Unit Resources	**Texts:** *Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Building* by Christy Hale, *Building a House* by Byron Barton **Video:** **Video: History in a Minute (Norma Sklarek)** **Additional visuals to inspire performance task projects:** Buildings around Evanston slideshow, **Teaching Materials:** Creative Curriculum, D65 Preschool Curriculum Framework Equity Curriculum, Canva, StoryChamps curriculum, Teacher Pay Teacher Buildings unit curriculum supplement **Additional Resources:** I want to be a Construction Worker, Construction Vehicle song, Meet an Architect | Small Meets Big | KiwiCo, Black Architects Making History (Article) **Primary Source 1**: Interview with Patricia Anderson **LOC Primary Source:** Willard, Frances E. A classic town; the story of Evanston. Chicago, Woman's Temperance Publishing Association, 1892. Pdf. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/08022367/>.

	Smith, Bill. “Most Black Residents No Longer Live Near Old Foster School.” *Evanston Now*, 19 Aug. 2021, https://evanstonnow.com/most-black-residents-no-longer-live-near-old-foster-school/. Feniak, Hannah. “12 Black Architects Making History Today.” *Architizer*, https://architizer.com/blog/inspiration/industry/black-architects-making-history Drajpuch, Eden, et al. “It Was a Pillar: Examining Legacy of Evanston’s Former Fifth Ward School.” *The Evanstonian*, 28 Jan. 2022, https://www.evanstonian.net/feature/2022/01/28/it-was-a-pillar-examining-legacy-of-evanstons-former-fifth-ward-school/
Performance Task(s)	1. **Hands-On Building Stations:** Divide students into small groups and rotate them through the prepared building stations inspired by the book. Encourage them to replicate a structure from the book or "dream up" a new one. 2. **Blueprints:** Ask students to draw a "Blueprint" of what they want to build. Is it a tower? A house? A whale? Focus on drawing the shapes (squares, lines). 3. **The Blue Whale Build:** Move to the block area where only **blue** materials are set out. *"Can we build a building that looks like Norma's Blue Whale?"*. Encourage students to stack the blue blocks long and low (horizontal) rather than just high, or try to match the shape of their blueprint. 4. **Shape Hunt:** Ask students to look at the classroom or photos of houses. *"What shapes do you see?"* (Triangles for roofs, squares for windows). 5. **Stick Structures :**Explain the steps to the students: *"First we build the base, then the walls, then the roof."* 6. ***Field Trip: Visiting the Site :****Walk the class to the viewing area of the new 5th Ward school construction site (viewing from a safe distance behind the fence).* 7. ***On-Site Activity: Field Sketches (15 Minutes):*** *Ask students to draw what they see. Encourage them to draw the "busy machines" or the "big frame" of the school. Ask*

	them to draw one happy student in their picture to show that this is a place for people.
Accessibility Needs for Children Across Ability and Language	**1. Physical & Fine Motor Support** ● Stabilize Materials ● Adaptive Tools ● Partner System: Pair students for tasks (e.g., one "Architect" who points/plans, one "Builder" who places items) to allow participation without physical strain. ● Accessible Paths: Ensure field trip routes and classroom stations are wide enough for wheelchairs/walkers and free of tripping hazards. **2. Communication & Language (DLLs & Non-Verbal)** ● Visual Vocabulary ● Picture Communication: Provide a portable communication board or ring of cards with key icons (e.g., "Look," "Help," "More," "Loud") so students can express needs non-verbally during building and trips. ● Total Physical Response (TPR): Teach vocabulary with hand gestures (e.g., pretending to hammer for "Carpenter," creating a triangle with hands for "Roof").

	3. Sensory Processing & Regulation ● Auditory Safety: Have noise-canceling headphones available for loud activities (crashing towers) or environments (construction sites). ● Defined Spaces: Use masking tape on the floor or carpet squares to visually define personal building zones, helping children who feel anxious in open or crowded spaces. ● Tactile Alternatives: Offer smooth/plastic alternatives for students who have aversions to rough textures (wood, chalk, dirt). **4. Cognitive & Visual Support** ● First/Then Boards: Use simple visual schedules to help with sequencing and transitions. ● High Contrast: Place building materials on contrasting surfaces (e.g., light cups on dark rugs) to assist students with low vision in identifying edges and boundaries. ● Concrete Examples : When introducing abstract concepts like "cement" or "blueprints," pass around real physical examples (a hardened piece of concrete, a real blue paper plan) to bridge the gap between word and meaning.

Lesson 1: Dreaming Up Designs

Lesson Objective(s) and Supporting Question(s)
Objectives: ● Students will be able to identify connections between simple play structures and real-world architecture. ● Students will explore concepts of balance, stacking, and stability using various building materials. ● Students will use vocabulary words related to construction (e.g., *stack*, *tall*, *wide*, *curve*, *architect*). ● Students will create their own unique structure using "loose parts" inspired by the book. **Supporting Questions:** ● What kinds of things do you like to build with at home? ● How does the building in the photo look like the toy structure the children built? ● What happens if we put a big block on top of a tiny block? ● Can you find a shape in this building that you know (circle, square, triangle)?
Lesson Materials and Resources
Book: *Dreaming Up: A Celebration of Building* by Christy Hale. **Visual Aids:** Printed photos of famous buildings (optional, for comparing side-by-side). **Building Stations (choose 3-4 based on availability):** ● **"Cup Tower" Station:** A large supply of plastic or paper cups. ● **"Pillow Fort" Station:** Cushions, sheets, and clamps/clips (or a dollhouse with fabric scraps). ● **"Stick & Stone" Station:** Craft sticks, small smooth stones, and playdough (to act as mortar). ● **"Box City" Station:** Empty cereal boxes, shoe boxes, and paper towel tubes.

Documentation: Camera or tablet to take photos of student creations.

Lesson Activities

1. **Introduction (5-10 Minutes):**

- Gather students on the rug. Place a few different building materials in the center (a block, a cup, a stick).
- Ask the supporting question: *"What do you like to build with?"*
- Introduce the word **Architect**. Explain that an architect is someone whose job is to "dream up" and draw plans for buildings, just like kids dream up forts and towers.

2. **Read-Aloud (10-15 Minutes):**

- Read *Dreaming Up* by Christy Hale.
- **Pause on the pairings:** On each spread, point to the left side (children playing) and then the right side (the real building).
- **Interactive Looking:** Ask, *"Do you see the tower made of cups? Now look at this big building. How do they look the same?"* (e.g., "They are both round," "They both go up high").
- Highlight the concrete poetry (the way the words are shaped like the building) on one or two pages to show that words can build pictures too.

3. **Hands-On Building Stations (20 Minutes):**

- Divide students into small groups and rotate them through the prepared building stations inspired by the book.
- **Challenge:** Encourage them to replicate a structure from the book or "dream up" a new one.
- *Teacher Role:* Circulate and ask prompt questions. *"How can you make that base stronger?" "What shape is your roof?"*

4. **Gallery Walk & Clean Up (10 Minutes):**

- Have students freeze their building. Walk the class around to see each station.
- Ask one student from each group to explain what they built.
- Sing a "Construction Cleanup" song while putting materials away.

Lesson Materials

Plastic Cups: 30-50 cups per group (for the Petronas Towers inspiration).
Playdough: 5-6 cans (used as "cement" or "mud" for the New Gourna Village inspiration).
Craft Sticks: 1 large bundle.
Cardboard: Recycled boxes and tubes (for the Paper Tube School inspiration).
Fabric: Scraps of felt or cloth squares (for the Yoyogi National Stadium/Blanket Fort inspiration).
Buildings around Evanston slideshow

Lesson 2: **The Blue Whale Builder**

Lesson Objective(s) and Supporting Question(s)
Objectives: ● Students will learn about **Norma Sklarek**, the first African American woman to become a licensed architect in New York and California. ● Students will identify geometric shapes (rectangles, cylinders) in real-world buildings, specifically the **Pacific Design Center** (known as the "Blue Whale"). ● Students will practice the concept of "planning before building" by creating a simple blueprint. ● Students will collaborate to build a structure using a single color (blue). **Supporting Question(s):** ● What color is the big building in the picture? What animal does it look like? (A whale). ● Have you ever been the **first** person to do something? (Norma was the first!) ● Why do architects draw a picture (blueprint) before they start building with blocks? ● How can we work together to make sure our "whale" building doesn't fall down?
Lesson Materials and Resources
Visual Aids: ● Video: History in a Minute (Norma Sklarek) ● Photos of Norma Sklarek ● Photos of the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles—specifically the Blue Building **Blueprint Station:** Blue construction paper and white crayons or chalk. **Building Station:** A large collection of **blue** building materials (LEGOs, Magna-Tiles, blue painted boxes, or blue foam blocks). **Book Connection:** *Dreaming Up* (revisit the page with the "Blue" building or the page showing blueprints/drawings if

applicable, or simply use the book's concept of pairing play with buildings).

Lesson Activities

1. **Circle Time: Meet Norma (10 Minutes):**

- Show a picture of **Norma Sklarek**. Tell the class: *"Norma was a very important builder. She was the first African American woman to become an architect in her state. That means she was a pioneer—a leader!"*
- Play video about Norma Sklarek (**Video: History in a Minute (Norma Sklarek)**)
- Show the picture of the **Pacific Design Center**. Ask: *"What color is this building? Is it huge or tiny?"* Explain that people call it the "Blue Whale" because it is so big and blue.
- Explain Norma's job: She was a **Project Director**. Her job was to make sure the drawings turned into real buildings that were strong and safe.

2. **Activity A: Blueprints (15 Minutes):**

- Explain that before Norma built the Blue Whale, she had to have a plan.
- Give students blue paper and white crayons.
- Ask them to draw a "Blueprint" of what they want to build. Is it a tower? A house? A whale? Focus on drawing the shapes (squares, lines).

3. **Activity B: The Blue Whale Build (20 Minutes):**

- Move to the block area where only **blue** materials are set out.
- **Challenge:** *"Can we build a building that looks like Norma's Blue Whale?"*
- Encourage students to stack the blue blocks long and low (horizontal) rather than just high, or try to match the shape of their blueprint.
- *Teacher Prompt:* Act as the "Site Manager" (like Norma). Walk around and check for safety. *"Is this wall strong*

enough? Do we need another block here?"

4. **Conclusion:**

- Gather around the blue structure. Review that Norma Sklarek helped build this famous blue building and that she was the **first** to do many things in architecture.

Lesson Materials
Blue Construction Paper (1 sheet per student) White Crayons/Chalk (1 per student) Blue Building Toys (Blue LEGO bricks, blue wooden blocks, or cardboard boxes wrapped in blue paper) Printed Photos (High-quality printouts of the Pacific Design Center [Blue Building])

Lesson 3: Building a House

Lesson Objective(s) and Supporting Question(s)
Objectives: ● Students will understand the sequence of how homes are structured and built (base, walls, roof). ● Students will recognize and name 2D and 3D shapes found in buildings (squares, triangles, rectangles) ● Students will build empathy and connection by discussing how different families live in different types of buildings ● Students will participate in a group project to create their own popsicle stick structures **Supporting Question(s):** ● What types of buildings do you see in our community (homes, stores, swimming pools)? ● What shapes can you find in a house? ● Who are the people that help build a house? (Carpenters, plumbers, painters). ● Does this building look tall or wide? How many stories (floors) does it have?
Lesson Materials and Resources
Book: *Building a House* by Byron Barton ● **Vocabulary slide deck (English/Spanish):** ○ Build / Construir ○ Cement / Cemento ○ Machines / Maquinaria ○ Bricklayer / Albañil ○ Dig / Escarbar ○ Carpenter / Carpintero ○ Plumber / Plomero

- Painter / Pintor
- Electrician / Electricista

- **Visual Aids:** Photos of community buildings (Evanston Township Highschool, apartment buildings, houses).

Lesson Activities

1. **Introduction: Community & Shapes (5-10 Minutes):**

- Gather students and discuss: *"What does it mean to build something?"*
- Talk about where the students live. Ask about the buildings they see in their neighborhood.
- Discuss that buildings can have meaning (e.g., a library is for books, a house is for sleeping).
- **Shape Hunt:** Ask students to look at the classroom or photos of houses. *"What shapes do you see?"* (Triangles for roofs, squares for windows).

2. **Read-Aloud (10 Minutes):**

- Read *Building a House* by Byron Barton.
- **Vocabulary Focus:** As you read, introduce the English and Spanish words for the workers. Point out that it takes many different people working together to build a home.
- **Measurement Moment:** Help students measure and talk about the dimensions of the house in the book. Is it long? Is it wide? How many stories (floors) does it have?

3. **Hands-On Activity: Stick Structures (20 Minutes):**

- Explain the steps to the students: *"First we build the base, then the walls, then the roof."*
- Distribute materials. Students will glue popsicle sticks to create the frame of a house.
- Use construction paper to fill in the walls and roof.
- Students use crayons to draw the "finishing touches" (door knobs, windows, bricks).

4. **Wrap Up:**
- Have students share their structures. Ask them to name one worker (e.g., *Carpenter* or *Carpintero*) who would help build a house like theirs.

Lesson Materials

Popsicle Sticks: (Jumbo or regular size).
Construction Paper: Various colors (cut into squares/triangles or full sheets for tearing).
Glue: Liquid glue or glue sticks.
Crayons: For decorating the paper walls.

Lesson 4: Our New Neighborhood School

Lesson Objective(s) and Supporting Question(s)
Objectives: ● Students will observe a real-world construction site and identify the machinery and safety equipment used. ● Students will understand the concept of "Community" as a group of people living and learning together in a neighborhood. ● Students will learn a simple history of the site: Understanding that the "Foster School" was once there, and now a new school is returning to the 5th Ward so children can learn near their homes. ● Students will practice observational drawing by sketching the building site. **Supporting Question(s):** ● Why is it special to have a school right in your own neighborhood? ● What happened here a long time ago? (There used to be a school, and now it is coming back). ● What machines do you see working to build the new school? ● How do the builders stay safe? (Hard hats, vests, fences).
Lesson Materials and Resources
Lesson Materials and Resources ● **Visual Aids:** ○ (Historical photo of the original Foster School). ○ (Images of construction equipment they might see). ● **Field Trip Gear:** Walking rope, safety vests for children (if available), first aid kit. ● **Observation Tools:** Clipboards, paper, and crayons for every student. ● **Book Connection:** Revisit *Building a House* (from Lesson 3) to remind them of the vocabulary (Cement, Dig,

Machines).

Lesson Activities

1. **Circle Time: The Story of Foster School (15 Minutes):**

- Show the students the historical photo of the old **Foster School**.
- **Storytelling:** Explain that a long time ago (1979), there was a school here where children learned, but it had to close, and the children had to take buses to schools far away.
- Tell them that the families in the "5th Ward" (the neighborhood) worked very hard together because they wanted a school back in their community. Now, builders are making a brand new school so friends can walk to school again.
- Define **Community:** *"A community is like a big family of neighbors who help each other."*

2. ***Field Trip: Visiting the Site (30-45 Minutes):***

- *Walk the class to the viewing area of the new 5th Ward school construction site (viewing from a safe distance behind the fence).*
- ***I Spy Game:*** *Ask students to point out the things they learned about in previous lessons.*
  - *"Who sees a machine digging?"*
  - *"Who sees a builder wearing a hard hat?"*
  - *"Can you see the steel or concrete bones of the building?"*
- *Discuss how big the building is. Ask: "Imagine how many children will get to learn here together!"*

3. ***On-Site Activity: Field Sketches (15 Minutes):***

- *Have students sit in a safe area near the site.*
- *Hand out clipboards. Ask them to draw what they see. Encourage them to draw the "busy machines" or the "big frame" of the school.*
- *Ask them to draw one happy student in their picture to show that this is a place for people.*

4. ***Debrief (Upon Return):***

- *Ask students how they felt seeing the big machines.*
- *Reiterate that buildings aren't just bricks and glass; they are places for **people** and **community**.*

Lesson Materials

- Clipboards: 1 per student (or hard books to lean on).
- Crayons/Pencils: For field notes.
- Safety Vests: (Optional) For the children to wear to feel like "site inspectors."
- Printed Photos: Historical photo of Foster School to compare with the new construction, photos of new construction, construction plans of new school.

Supplementary Materials:

Teacher Created Resources
Examples of Student Work

Buildings Around Evanston

Joseph E Hill Building

Central Street Fire House

Valli Produce Grocery Store

Evanston Township High School

Robert Grown Community Center

St. Francis Hospital

Historical Gross Point Lighthouse

Dollar Tree

McGaw YMCA

Dr. Martin Luther King Arts School

Evanston Public Library

Mitchell Museum of the American Indian

Bahai Temple

Evanston Post Office

Ryan Field - Northwestern Football Stadium

Evanston Animal Shelter

Historic Charles A. Brown House

The Albion Evanston

Gibbs-Morrison Cultural Center

Walgreens

Quad Indoor Athletic Fields

Ecology Center

McGaw YMCA

New Ryan Field Plan

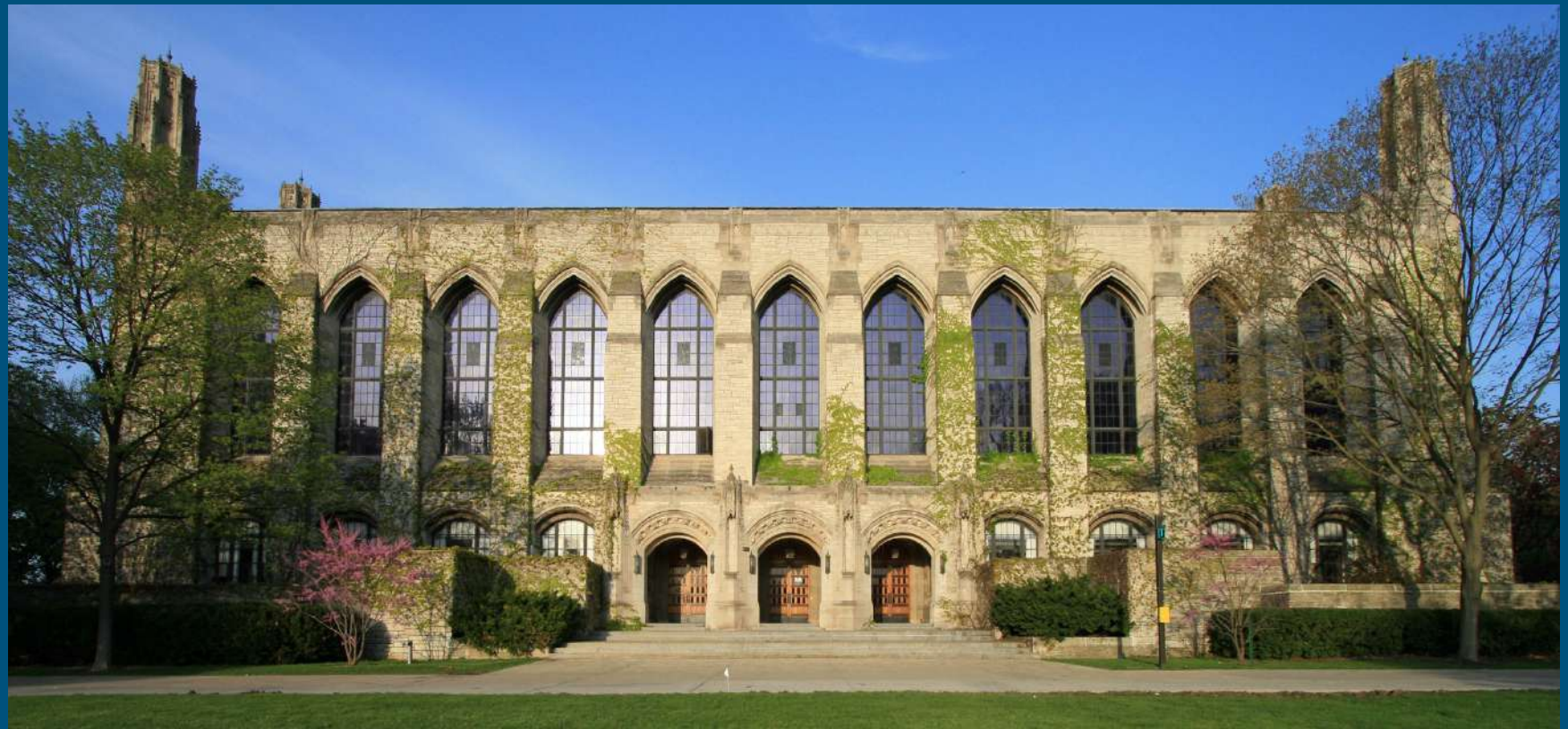
Evanston Hospital

Evanston Recycling Center

Hotel Orrington

Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

Charles Deering Library



Old Foster School

Foster School Construction Update

West end along Dewey Ave.

The sun screens on the south and west facing windows have been installed.

Entrance on Simpson

Double set of doorways await their doors.

October 2025

Team work building

Lesson 2

I can build a school.

I can build a tower
Rowan
Lorexi

Geometry in

GEOMETRY in CONSTRUCTION
Geometry in Construction

Welcome to "IO City"
Nykel Blvd
Robinson Road
Flower Lane
Korleski Court
Bonnie Ave.
We can build!