FAIRGROUND FLATS

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MASTERS **OF** ARCHITECTURE

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30 April 2010

This book is dedicated to:
My family, whose love and support is my greatest treasure in life,
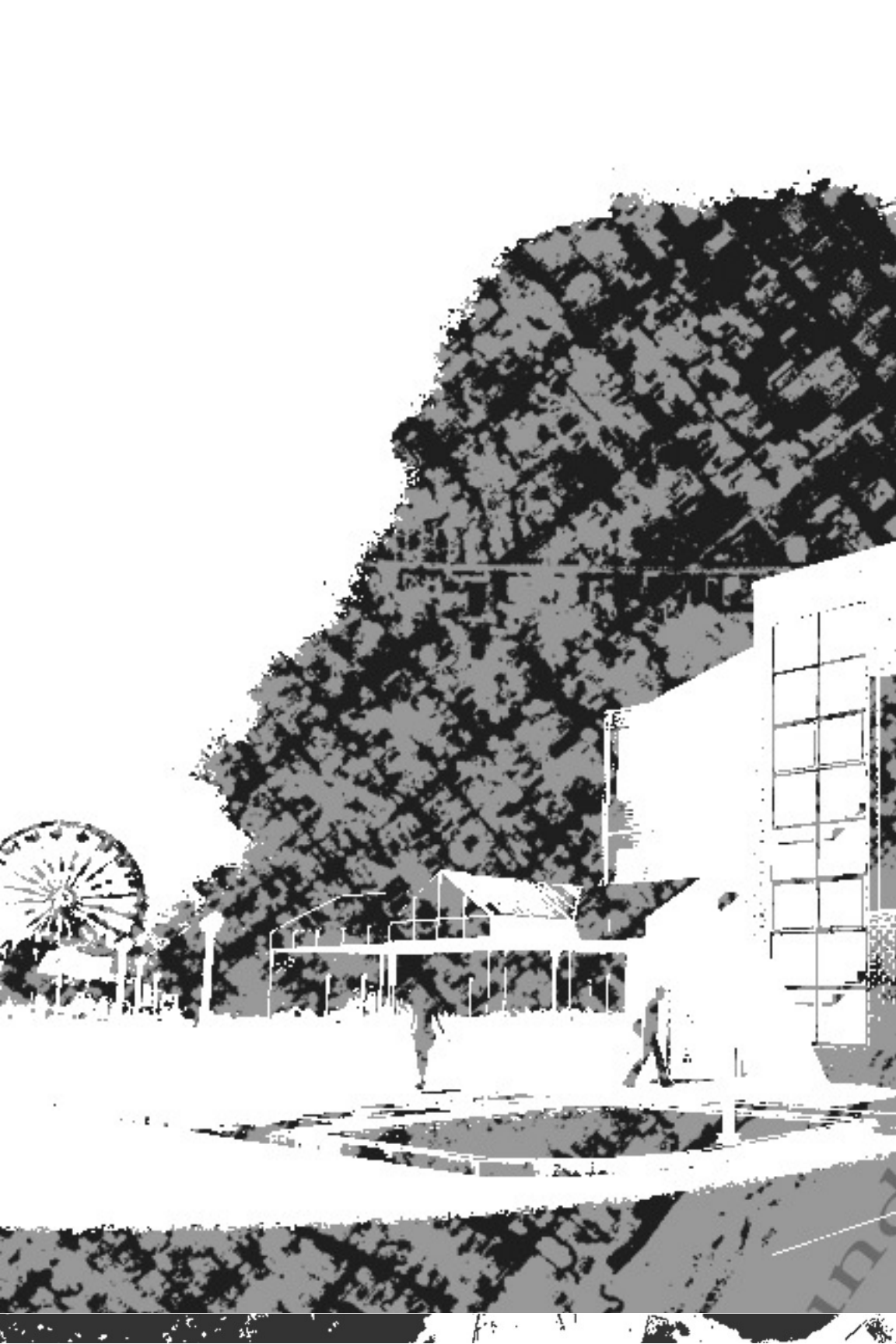and my roomates, who helped me considerably along the way
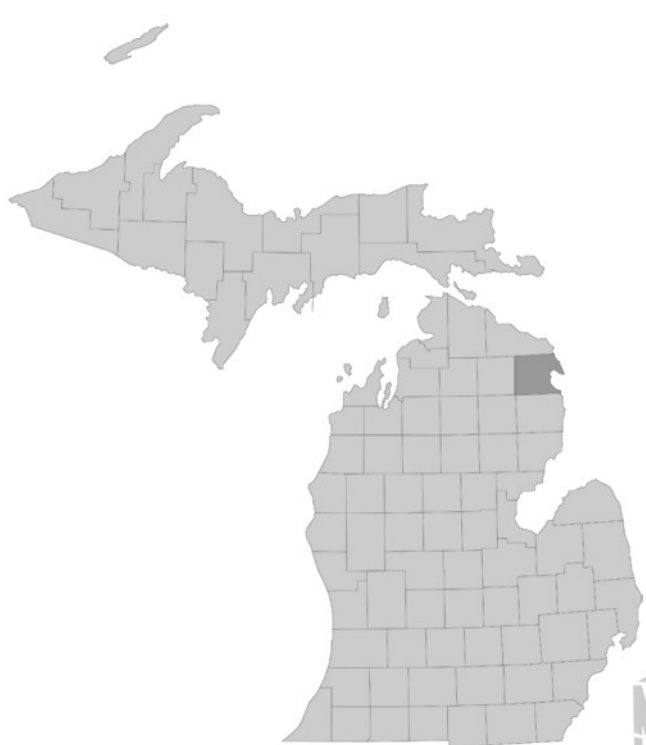
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the city of alpena,

thunder bay

michigan

NORTH

Abstract

As a result of today's economic downturn, many people are leaving the state of Michigan in pursuit of greener pastures. Accordingly, many of the unique traditions and lifestyles that people celebrate in this area have become increasingly ignored when designing within the state of Michigan due to a lack of knowledge about the state's past. In order to combat this, architecture must seek to understand the primary aspects of a local community–its history, tradition and landscape among other things–so that it can become a culturally relevant and economically viable source of interest and pride within a neighborhood. By seeking out and embodying this type of inherent city identity, architecture can therefore produce renewed interest in Michigan's distinctive vernacular through the physical manifestation of culturally relavent structures.

In particular, the Alpena County fairgrounds located in Alpena County, Michigan provide an interesting location for the development of this project. The fairgrounds were chosen as the final location for this study not only because of their cultural significance within the area, but also because Alpena County itself has fallen victim to many of the problems associated with the post-industrial downturn. As a result, local commerce

has consequently deteriorated. This creates a scenario by which the emptiness of the fairgrounds during the offseason is reflected in the perpetuating "emptiness" of Alpena County itself. In essence, the Alpena County Fair has become an isolated event of activity within an otherwise declining community atmosphere.

As cities like Alpena continue to lose population, revitalization of the local environment becomes crucial to community survival. Instead of continuing to rely upon a dilapidated manufacturing market to stay relevant in today's economy, therefore; Alpena must develop new ways of enhancing its national identity. In doing so, Alpena will not only become better equipped for handling the massive crowds present during the week of the fair, but the fairgrounds themselves will also transform into a renewed source of lasting identity and economy for the local neighborhood.

Thesis Paper

Introduction

"I exist in life only on the condition that I see" – Le Corbusier

Sight has historically been regarded as the noblest of all the senses[1], and its privileged status has consequently narrowed our lived world focus to an almost exclusively visual understanding. Since the Greeks, this ocular bias has been manifesting itself in writings of all eras to the point that knowledge has become analogous with clear vision and light is regarded as the metaphor for truth[2].

This preference for the sense of vision has permeated all facets of our culture, creating a scenario in which the ocular realm of experience has effectively erased our other four senses. Because we believe that we can 'see' our surrounding environment better than we can experience it with any of our other senses, we no longer choose to observe with our eyes and our ears together because it does not seem significantly important. This is unfortunate, because the human body is capable of receiving extraordinarily large amounts of sensical data well beyond those things

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[1]   Pallasmaa, Juhani. The Eyes of the Skin. pg 15
[2]   The Eyes of the Skin. pg 16

we perceive with just our eyes. Since we only endeavor to visualize our spatial environment rather than experience it, however; our supplementary-to-the-eye senses have become exceedingly unresponsive to our surroundings.

The resulting architectural understanding is a degraded one. We have become focused on the ocular aspects of large, predictable and boring corporate structures[3] that look good in the pages of a magazine rather than smaller-scale and more holistic architectural experiences that can truly enhance a community's atmosphere. The predominance of the eye has skewed the layperson's perception of architecture as something to be observed visually rather than to be experienced with the body. By attempting to discover and understand how we can reintegrate meaningful architecture within a community, therefore; this thesis seeks to provide an architectural enhancement to a community lacking in social interaction and public appeal.

I intend to develop this thesis project by drawing upon a number of architectural factors outside the traditional realm of corporate design and describing how they can enhance a community's sense of spatial comprehension, understanding and pride. These factors include the science of phenomenology, the flow of time, the theory behind the fair, community involvement within a neighborhood, the desire to command a local identity and the negative effects of globalization. A phenomenological description of the essential qualities of each of these factors will aid in the focus and direction of this discussion. The descriptions will also begin to offer a more holistic understanding of

3   Bjarke Ingels. Unpublished Quote.

architecture as a result of their connections to each other and the community.

For many people, architecture is seen as a commodity rather than as an opportunity. Although architecture itself is important to an overall community aesthetic, thinking more deeply about how we design and who we design for can provide us with more unique opportunities for affecting social change and emphasizing the unique characteristics of a particular region. This thesis hopes to help with developing an understanding of how architecture can collaborate more intimately with communities and social groups to create a greater sense of public pride.

Concerning Phenomenology

"But phenomenology is also a philosophy
which puts essences back into existence,
and does not expect to arrive at an
understanding of man and the world
from any starting point other than that
of their facticity." – Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Because it seeks pure essence as its thesis, phenomenology has become the framework by which I have established my research. A textbook definition of Phenomenology, if taken from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, might read as "the study of essences."[4] By tracing the history of the word phenomenology itself, as done by Martin Heidegger, one would produce the root word "phenomena", which in

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4   Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Temporality." pg 180.

Greek means "that which appears,"[5] making phenomenology the study of essences which appear. Heidegger fleshes this idea out further with his definition of appearing; "in the sense of making itself known as something that does not show itself and, second, in the sense of what does the making itself known."[6] These descriptions by themselves are ambiguous if left alone without elucidation. What Merleau-Ponty calls essence–that which is revealing itself–might be clarified by calling it the naked object–object in the sense of anything that may be apprehended intellectually, as in objects of thought. The naked object, in this sense, has been stripped down to its purest form; "to the things themselves" in Heideggarian[7].

It is not enough to simply sum up the discipline like one might define any hard science, however. Such disciplines may be studied objectively since they may be observed within a system of patterns measurable in a quantitative way. Like the subject of hard science, the naked object or essence, to the conscious observer, will also appear objectively. The approach of phenomenological analysis, however, does not mirror the hard sciences in that essences, to be seen in their givenness, may only be observed qualitatively. Quality may not be measured in a quantitative way, making the only means for phenomenological observation subjective experience. It should be mentioned, that because the nature of the act is subjective, there must be a direct relationship between the body and the essence under investigation. A greater emphasis must then be put on the process of phenomenological investigation, an "act," according to Merleau-Ponty, "of

5   Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." pg 100.
6   "Being and Time." pg 104.
7   "Being and Time." pg 109.

bringing truths into being."[8] Herbert Spiegelberg in his writing "the phenomenological movement" expresses a step by step approach to Phenomenology, where he takes the qualitative study and breaks it down into stages. Although it's not pivotal to follow the format Spiegelberg lays out exactly, it stresses the importance of investigating the "phenomena" and "general essences" early on, and understanding the relationships the essences share[9]. This first stage is a logical place to start, but the structure of the method itself doesn't account for the biggest dilemma; the subjective nature of the investigation. The fact that personal experience is the basis for subjectivity doesn't mean that one cannot expressly reveal an essence, but the effort done in solitude is subject to personal biases and solipsist thought. For this reason Spiegelberg repined the isolated effort, instead suggesting that Phenomenology be the endeavor of the collective mind.

This thesis, although completed in physical form, is intended to be an ongoing study and jumping-off point for those who wish to continue developing and reimagining the research. It is through Spiegelberg's workshop method that this thesis will flourish into something much larger than itself.

8   "Temporality." pg 179.
9   Spiegelberg, Herbert. *The Phenomenological Movement.*

Concerning the Flow of Time

*"Being and time determine each other
reciprocally, but in such a manner that
neither can the former – being – be
addressed as something temporal nor
can the latter – time – be addressed
as a being." – Martin Heidegger*

Time is a subject that is often discussed phenomenologically. For Edmund Husserl in particular, time is a phenomenon, "constituting of temporal objects"[10]. What this means is that anything temporal in nature has an imposed time limit to its existence. In contrast, Husserl furthers our understanding of temporal objects by comparing them to things he calls, "immanent objects", objects that exist with no regard for the passage of time. In stark contrast to temporal objects, immanent objects appear to the conscientious observer as a type of, "running off phenomenon", existing without any sort of pre-defined lifespan. This is the basis for the observations concerning the flow of time.

Time is an inescapable construction that affects many different aspects of our lived world. On a clock, the passage of time is represented physically by the second hand's constant ticking. On a much grander scale, humans experience the passage of time as they grow older and their bodies' progress through the various stages of life. The world in which we live is one of perpetual movement through time that all temporal objects must adhere to. This does not explain how architecture exists in time, however; because architecture

10   Husserl, Edmund. "The Constitution of Temporal Objects."

is an aspect of the immanent environment. Architecture, therefore; presents a number of compexities when developing within an environment that is prominently affected by the passage of time because architecture must remain static in its existence. It is this duality between temporal human dwellings and the immanent nature of architecture that has become a major focal point of for this thesis study.

In this mode of thinking, we may begin to theorize about an appropriate site for the architectural investigation at hand. The primary focus of the exploration revolves around a desire to create an advanced sense of fellowship within an existing community, while also combating with the opposing natures associated with immanent architecture and temporal human dwellings. With that in mind, it was crucial that the final site for the project be unique in its daily interaction with the community surrounded by it, as well as provide for an opportunity for enhancing an already established local identity. Following that logic, the Alpena County fairgrounds in Alpena County, Michigan was chosen as the final location for this thesis study.

Concerning the Alpena County Fair

"Everything being a constant carnival,
there is no carnival left." – Victor Hugo

A fair is a gathering of people for the purpose of displaying or trading produce or other goods, to parade or display animals and to enjoy associated carnival entertainment. In particular, the Alpena County fair takes

place during the first week of August every year so that the area residents can come together in celebration of local culture, custom, food, sport and tradition. This annual practice, however; leaves behind a large plot of barren land known as the fairgrounds each year which go largely unused and unappreciated for the remaining fifty-one weeks out of the year. Temporally speaking, the Alpena County fair exists as an event dependent upon the vehicle of time (temporal), occurring at specific yearly intervals while the fairgrounds themselves(immanent) are void of time–existing constantly despite it. This unique dichotomy between the temporary nature of the fair and the permanent nature of architecture was extremely important to the overall attitude taken towards the project, and served as another great example of the temporal–immanent dichotomy.

Throughout the course of this examination, the Alpena County fairgrounds have presented a multitude of unique architectural curiosities. The fairgrounds were chosen as the final location for this project not only because of the fascinating disposition that exists between the celebratory state of exuberance during the fair and the dormant state of nothingness without the fair, but also because Alpena County itself has fallen victim to many of the problems associated with the post-industrial era. A post-industrial society is a society in which an economic transition has occurred from a manufacturing based economy to a service based economy (Wikipedia). Similar to several of the smaller cities located throughout the state of Michigan, therefore; the declining manufacturing market has forced many of Alpena's lifelong residents to search for work in other parts of the country. As a result, local commerce has consequently deteriorated. This

creates a scenario by which the emptiness of the fairgrounds during the offseason is reflected in the perpetuating "emptiness" of Alpena County itself. In essence, the Alpena County Fair has become an isolated event of activity within an otherwise declining community atmosphere.

As cities like Alpena continue to lose population, revitalization of the local environment has become crucial to community survival. Instead of continuing to rely upon a dilapidated manufacturing market to stay relevant in today's economy, therefore; Alpena must develop new ways of enhancing its national identity. In doing so, Alpena will not only become better equipped for handling the massive crowds present during the week of the fair, but the fairgrounds themselves will also become a new source of perpetual identity and economy for the local community. But how does one enhance and/or create identity?

Concerning Identity

"The loss of national identity is the greatest defeat
a nation can know, and it is inevitable under the
contemporary form of colonization." – Slobodan Milosevic

Identity is the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another[11]. Identity, therefore; is not something that can be shared between things or people, because our own identities describe who we are as individuals. We appear to others through our own defined identities. Architectural identity exists much in the same way, as famous cities, designers,

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11   "Heritage and Identity." *New South Wales Government.*

buildings and time periods have all been defined throughout history by their own set of unique identifying traits. New York, for example; has been known for many generations now as, "the Big Apple". This architectural exploration has been majorly influenced by the notion of identity and how the inherent qualities of an identity can be utilized as a vehicle by which an existing identity can be enhanced or expanded.

In order to properly expand upon an existing identity, however; the architect must first design in such a way that serves as a reflection of the existing local aesthetic, paying respect to the history of an area. This means that the architect must examine local materials, forms, construction methods and programs so as to gain a more complete understanding of the site as a whole. The materials used in the building construction should also convey some sort of meaning relative to the city's history, and even make an attempt at educating a visitor about the city's past[12]. By doing this, not only is the architect paying homage to local customs, but he is also ensuring a proper match within the surrounding architectural aesthetic.

In the book, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" by Kenneth Frampton, it is said that architecture must look to its surroundings in order to discover local identity[13]. In doing so, the hope is that not only will designers begin to develop more climate-appropriate structures for their clients, but they will also begin to define many different local aesthetics depending on the region of the design itself. According to Frampton, "Architecture can only be sustained today as a

12   Norberg-Schulz, Christian. "The Phenomenon of Place."
13   Frampton, Kenneth. *Towards a Critical Regionalism.* pg 81

critical practice if it assumes an arriere-garde position, that is to say, one which distances itself equally from the Enlightenment myth of progress and from a reactionary, unrealistic impulse to return to the architectonic forms of the pre-industrial past." What Frampton means by this is, rather than designers simply applying the same exact building techniques that they do for the same buildings throughout the world, designers must look to the context of the community to inform their design decisions, considering what is important to the city itself. In suggesting this, Frampton is implying a sort of regional dictate for how buildings should be designed, ensuring the perpetuation of a new local identity.

Frampton also writes, "It is my contention that only an arriere-garde has the capacity to cultivate a resistant, identity-giving culture while at the same time having discreet recourse to universal technique."[14] This "arriere-garde" is the deciding factor which will encourage not only the local residents of an area to realize their city's potential for growth, but also attract new populations and economies to the area. With an increase in the overall positive outlook for the city, therefore; businesses will be created and nurtured so as to attract new communities.

Concerning Globalization

In the developing local identities, it is important that we do not fall into the trap of designing for a global market, however. Many of us love to visit character-laden cities such as St. Petersburg, Paris, Rome, Venice, Agra and Bangkok,

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14   *Towards a Critical Regionalism.* pg 81.

or wander through picturesque towns and villages in Tunisia, Greece, Spain, Mexico and Japan–or, for that matter, in the United States. Much of what appeals to us about these places is traditional architecture that is locally distinct. We admire historic buildings, neighborhoods and communities shaped by site, climate, history, native culture and locally available materials and construction technology because they cannot be found anywhere else on Earth.[15]

But are such unique places at risk of being engulfed by the rise of "global" cities that eventually could look more or less the same, full of buildings that could be anywhere? Is architecture becoming increasingly globalized, standardized, sanitized?[16]

If something has changed with this idea of globalization it is our sense of place. What does place mean in an era that has allowed everything to be found everywhere: the same products, the same stores, the same architectural structures, etc?[17] Foreign goods and alien architectural products have started to give the world a more homogenous look. As sameness increases, the need to be distinct emerges. Architecture has unfortunately departed in many from the traditional postmodernist notions of place, context and identity. The authors of new or supermodernist architecture "don't look backwards historically or sideways contextually; they look optimistically forward". The supermodernists allow themselves space for artistic self-expression while the concerns of place have become secondary.[18]

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15   Lewis, Roger K. "Will Forces of Globalization..." Web.
16   Lewis, Roger K.
17   "Heritage and Identity."
18   Morgado, Patricia. *Architecture and Identity*. pg 165

While this may not be a problem in some of the larger cities mentioned above, smaller scale communities such as Alpena County would be more hurt than helped by such a blatant disregard for local identity. Alpena County needs to design for the advancement of local customs so as to maintain its small-town fell while also benefitting from increased interest from tourists and prospective residents alike. In this way, architecture can begin to enhance the already existing community dynamic rather than destroy it.

Concerning Community

"Our citizens will lose their confidence or trust in the values and principles of the international community, especially if our personal identity is denied." – Boris Trajkovski

The Alpena County community is composed of a number of different people from many walks of life. Like many Midwestern towns in Michigan, however; the one vibrant industrial economy of Alpena is slowly giving way to a post-industrial landscape. This recent economic shift has resulted in a higher than normal unemployment rate, displacing many of the local residents. Even the Besser Company–one of the world's leading manufacturers of concrete products located within the city–has fallen under hard times. In order to combat that trend, new communities must be introduced to fill the void left behind.

An example of this idea coming together in practice is Mitchell Park, located in Greenport, New York.[19] Greenport, like Alpena, was suffering from an economic depression prior to the park's construction. According to David E. Kapell, the mayor of Greenport, "In a profoundly depressed place such as this, people are preoccupied by what they can't do rather than what's possible. We had to break out of that insular thinking." This same statement is very applicable to a number of other places around the state of Michigan today, and as people move out of this region the people left behind suffer due to a lack of available funds, economy and social life. Like Alpena, Greenport suffered because the level of interest in the town was unfortunately low–and slowly getting worse.

The design of Mitchell Park, therefore; focused on creating an environment to attract new communities and visitors to Greenport. Built in three separate phases, it began attracting visitors after the very first phase. The design for the park includes a marina, a carousel, an ice rink, an amphitheater, a boardwalk, a beach and a camera obscura. Upon completion of the park, the town started gaining attention from visitors, and investors began to renovate all of the old houses of Greenport. Also, with the increase in visitors businesses were able to stay open for longer hours and on the weekends.

The ideas presented by Mitchell Park could be applied to any town or city. The park has activities for every season which increased its success. Mitchell Park took an underutilized and undesirable piece of land and transformed

19   Russell, James S. "Mitchell Park and Marina, New York." pg 95

it into a advantageous recreational site. It managed to unite a town that had nothing to be proud of and it provided a source of identity for the city.

The new identity for Alpena's fairgrounds will not limit itself to one week out of the year, therefore; but will become a constant fixture within the local community.

Conclusion

Architecture is composed of much more than what we see on the outside. The desire to create meaningful and appropriate architectural installations for the betterment of an area should be at the forefront of any major developer's mind, filling the specific needs of a community. With all of the various elements discussed above, this project hopes to successfully provide a fresh look for the City of Alpena, its citizens and its visitors. This revitalization can only occur, however; if the underlying identity of the city is understood and expressed. By attempting to discover and understand how we can reintegrate meaningful architecture within a community, therefore; this thesis seeks to provide an architectural enhancement to a community lacking in social interaction and public appeal.

Precedent Analysis

precedent:
Mitchell Park
Greenport, New York
Sharples Holden Pasquarelli Architects (2006)

The design of Mitchell Park, as mentioned in the thesis; focused on creating an environment to attract new communities and visitors to Greenport, New York. Built in three separate phases, it began attracting visitors after the very first phase. The design for the park includes a marina, a carousel, an ice rink, an amphitheater, a boardwalk, a beach and a camera obscura. Upon completion of the park, the town started gaining attention from visitors, and investors began to renovate all of the old houses of Greenport. Also, with the increase in visitors businesses were able to stay open for longer hours and on the weekends.

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Sharples Holden Pasquarelli Architects - Mitchell Park

images courtesy of: greenportvillage.com

precedent:
Underground Atlanta

Atlanta, Georgia
Cooper Carry & Associates with Turner Associate Architects and Planners (1989)

Atlanta Underground is a collection of businesses located underneath downtown Atlanta that combine shopping, food and entertainment for locals and travelers alike. Located in the Five Points neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia, the Atlanta Underground is conveniently near the intersection of the Mart rail lines. First built in 1969 by a group of Atlanta businessman who hoped to attract tourism business and attention, it is an existing area of historical significance within the city.

Underground events in Atlanta include musical concerts at a number of bars and venues. One of the most popular underground events in Atlanta is the New Year's Eve celebration, in which a giant foam peach is dropped form a tower followed by fireworks and celebration. Underground events in Atlanta tend to be a bit on the rowdy side as well, making it the perfect place for any kind of celebration.

This project was examined because of its celebratory nature, its historical significance within the city of Atlanta, and it's overall thriving nature. Underground Atlanta is a perfect example of a thriving local community that also has the power to attract travelers from all over the world.

Underground Atlanta
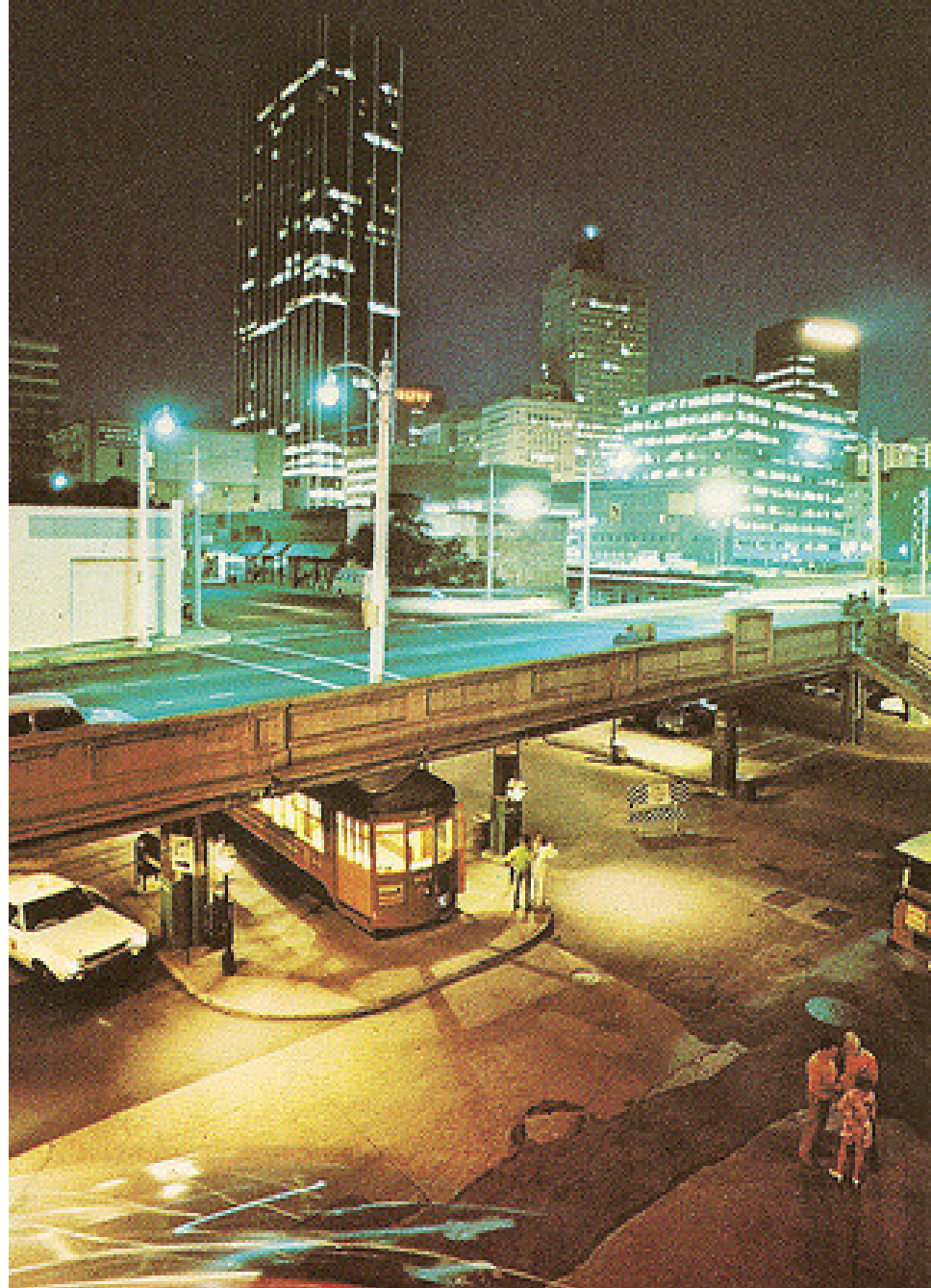
precedent:
Landschaft Park
Duisborg-Nord, Germany
Latz and Partners (2002)

Landschaft Park is a reclaimed post-industrial landscape site formally occupied by a steel mill. As it exists today, however; the site is home to a multitude of new community programs and conditions designed by German archiitectural firm Latz and Partners.

What was once known as the, "powerhouse of Germany" is now a place for visitors and locals alike to enjoy recreational activities, landscapes, services and entertainment. The park contains multiple adventurous activities including scuba diving, a high viewing platform, multiple bicycle trails and even a series of rock-climbing caverns.

The old engine house on the site has also been repurposed into a series of entertainment spaces. There is a lecture hall that accommodates 800 guests, a restaurant in the control house, and a performance space for concerts, plays, and even a night club. Each space is delicately lit with the use of multiple colored lights that bring a sense of wonder and awe to the dynamic spaces.

What was once a barren and completely unuseable landscape has therefore become a visiting destination to more than 500,000 people every year, as well as a souce of pride within the local community.

images courtesy of: google.com/images and latzundpartner.de

images courtesy of: google.com/images and latzundpartner.de

precedent:
Berry College Student Housing
Mount Berry, Georgia
### Cooper Carry & Associates (2009)

This project consists of two separate dormitory facilities containing approximately 350 total beds in single and double occupancy configurations. Students are welcomed to share a 2,000 square foot common lounge, study rooms, laundry facilities, and bathrooms located throughout the facility in an effort to encourage students to interact more with each other.

This project was examined for its communal nature between the students at Berry College living within the dorm rooms. The environment created by the structure houses an inner-working community of students all striving to achieve the same goal: to graduate. This type of focused community is an extremely effective incubator for bringing together like-minded individuals for the purpose of area revialization. If many people with the same goals in life commune, their ideals will influence those people around them and the overall nature of an area as well.

Cooper Carry is well known for creating environments that connect people and places, making communities more valuable.
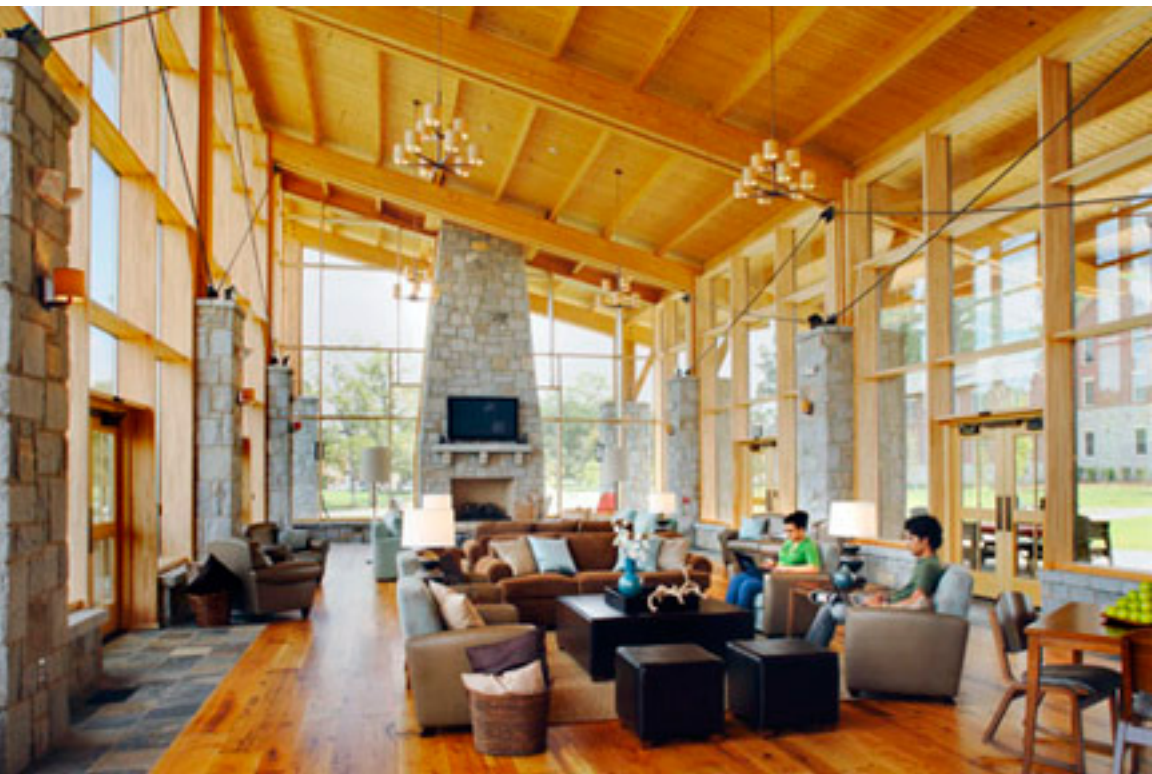
images courtesy of: coopercarry.com

Site Analysis

The sites that were studied for this project all contained many of the qualities important for developing this thesis. The site had to have an environment which could become host to a new community of individuals within an already existing community, as well as become a cultural hub for those people living near the site. The site also had to be readily identifyable within the city it was located within, and preferrably have a historical or cultural significance within the area.

images courtesy of: alpena county and author

site candidate:
Globe Trade Building
Detroit, Michigan

The first site tested for this thesis proposal is located on the corner of Atwater and Orleans Streets in downtown Detroit, Michigan. Situated on the site, the Globe Trade Center has been standing for over 145 years in Detroit's downtown district. This structure has historical significance within the city for two reasons. First, it was one of the very first industrial buildings constructed using a steel frame skeleton combined with a brick curtain wall, and second; from 1867 to 1925 the Globe Trade Center was a renowned manufacturing and repair center for marine steam engines and boilers for Great Lakes freight liners and passenger vessels.

This site holds not only historical significance for an architectural intervention, therefore; but also caters well to a wide variety of program types, uses, and developments. Located directly on the Detroit River, the Globe Trade Center is prime real estate within the city limits and could no doubt become a cultural hotspot for all of the local Detroit residents.

images courtesy of: author

site candidate:
Central Park
New York, New York

Central Park is an urban park in the heart of Manhattan in New York City. It is host to approximately twenty-five million visitors each year. Central Park was opened in 1859, completed in 1873 and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1963. Eighty-five percent of the park's operating budget comes from private sources via the Central Park Conservatory, which manages the park pursuant to a contract with New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Even though Central Park fit many of the criteria for this project, the thriving community on the site illustrated an existing healthy sense of wellbeing, and for this reason it was rejected.

images courtesy of: author

final site:
County Fairgrounds
Alpena County, Michigan

Architecture illustrates the complexities inherent in things that are dependent upon their tangible nature. Whereas the Alpena County fair exists as a temporal event happening each year for a fixed period of time, architecture must remain permanent and unchanging despite the passage of time. The structures we inhabit remain constant so that we may dwell within them indefinitely. This is an interesting dynamic, because the more permanent an architectural design seemingly becomes, the less control an individual may have to adapt an event within that design. The fair is able to change its shape and adapt its structure depending upon the site it inhabits – whereas an architectural intervention is forced to remain stagnant in its location.

It is for this reason that the site selected for the completion of this project is the Alpena County fairgrounds located in Alpena County, Michigan. This site is particular to the fact that it inherently lends itself to the idea of temporality. The Alpena County Fairgrounds are often being assembled and dismantled in order to accommodate for the many different annual celebrations and gatherings that occur on the site, including the Alpena County Fair, the Alpena Blues Festival, the Great Lakes Lighthouse Festival and the Michigan Brown Trout Festival. The fairgrounds support a symphony of distinctive events throughout the course of the year, but the vast majority of its time is spent in a state of hibernation.

images courtesy of: author

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Final Site - Alpena County Fairgrounds - map

Not only does the fairgrounds go empty for the vast majority of the year, however. Alpena County itself has fallen victim to many of the problems associated with the post-industrial era. Similar to several of the smaller cities located throughout the state of Michigan, the declining manufacturing market has forced many of Alpena's lifelong residents to search for work in other parts of the country. As a result, local commerce has consequently deteriorated. This creates a scenario by which the emptiness of the fairgrounds during the offseason is reflected in the perpetuating "emptiness" of Alpena County itself. In essence, the Alpena County Fair has become an isolated event of activity within an otherwise declining community atmosphere.

As cities like Alpena continue to lose population, revitalization of the local environment has become crucial to community survival. Instead of continuing to rely upon a dilapidated manufacturing market to stay relevant in today's economy, therefore; Alpena must develop new ways of enhancing its national identity. In doing so, Alpena will not only become better equipped for handling the massive crowds present during the week of the fair, but the fairgrounds themselves will also become a new source of perpetual identity and economy for the local community, just as Mitchell Park, Underground Atlanta and Landschaft Park have become for their own respective communities.

images courtesy of: google.com/maps and author

Final Site - Alpena County Fairgrounds - pictures

Legend:

1. South face of grandstand structure
2. Raked bleachers facing the field
3. Northeast perspective of site
4. Interior structure of grandstand
5. Southwest perspective of grandstand
6. Perspective of track and field
7. MSU soil testing facility
8. View looking out over the water
9. Storage structures located on site
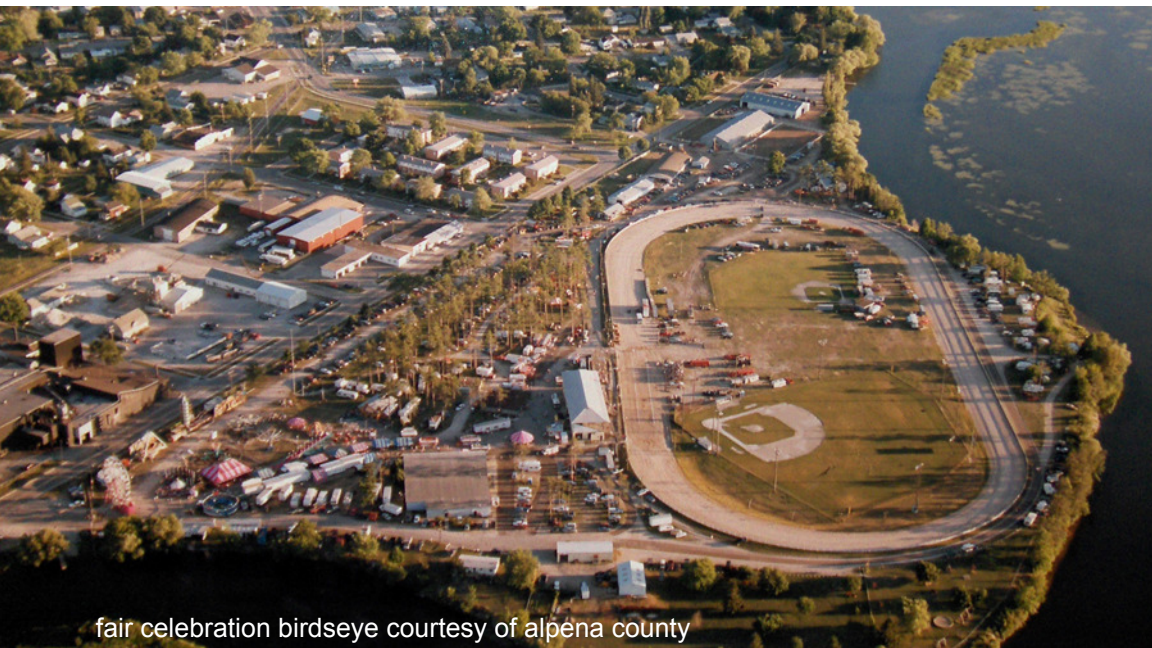
fair celebration birdseye courtesy of alpena county

Final Site - Alpena County Fairgrounds - bike paths

image courtesy of: author

veterans memorial

alpena county fair grounds

fairgrounds rennovation project

city center landsculpting project
bike path extension and upgrade

private commercial development and noaa visitor's center
fletcher street upgrade
pedestrian boardwalk installation
lamarre park fishing deck installation
south riverfront park pedestrian walkway and redevelopment
riverside condominiums
expanded farmers market and arts center
alpena marina upgrade

bayview park upgrade

avery park
north riverfront park
sorth riverfront park
alpena marina
noaa building
riverside skate park
bayview park
lamarre park

michigan highway 32
us highway 23

erial park

ALPENA
MICHIGAN'S ADVENTURES

- - - - - - - - ● thesis planned development
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image courtesy of: author

Additional Research
The History of Alpena, Michigan

As the precedent studies have illustrated, an understanding of local environments, cultures and histories of an area are all essential to providing culturally relevant architecture. By taking the time to understand a site's past, architecture can translate that knowledge into valuable data used for providing a more holistic architectural experience and identity for its users. In this way, the site provides a basis for design that strives to fulfill a client's specific needs.

Alpena is the county seat of Alpena County, and it's only major city. At the 2000 census, the population of Alpena was 11,304, however; this number swells with the large number of visitors that come to the area during the summer.

Despite its small population, Alpena is by far the largest city in the sparsely-populated Northeast Michigan area, serving as its commercial and cultural hub. The region, known as the "Sunrise Side" from its location on the east shoreline of Michigan, was first a site of commercial fishing activity and is still home to extensive commercial fishing activities. Later, the region was shaped by the logging era of the 1800s. Today, Alpena is known for its limestone quarry, one of the largest in the world, owned and operated

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by the Lafarge Corporation and is a major cement manufacturer and exporter. Alpena is also the world headquarters of Besser Company, a manufacturer of concrete block machines. Tourism (fishing, hunting, camping and a variety of water sports) is also vital to Alpena's economy.

Even with these many accolades, however; Alpena is a city that goes largely unnoticed within the Michigan community. Overlooked by many of the larger cities such as Detroit and Grand Rapids, Alpena's unique traditions and lifestyles have consequently been disregarded throughout history. By taking an underutilized and undesirable piece of land such as the fairgrounds and transforming it into an advantageous recreational site for the area, therefore; the design of this thesis project will unite a town with nothing to be proud of and transform it into a source of identity for the city.
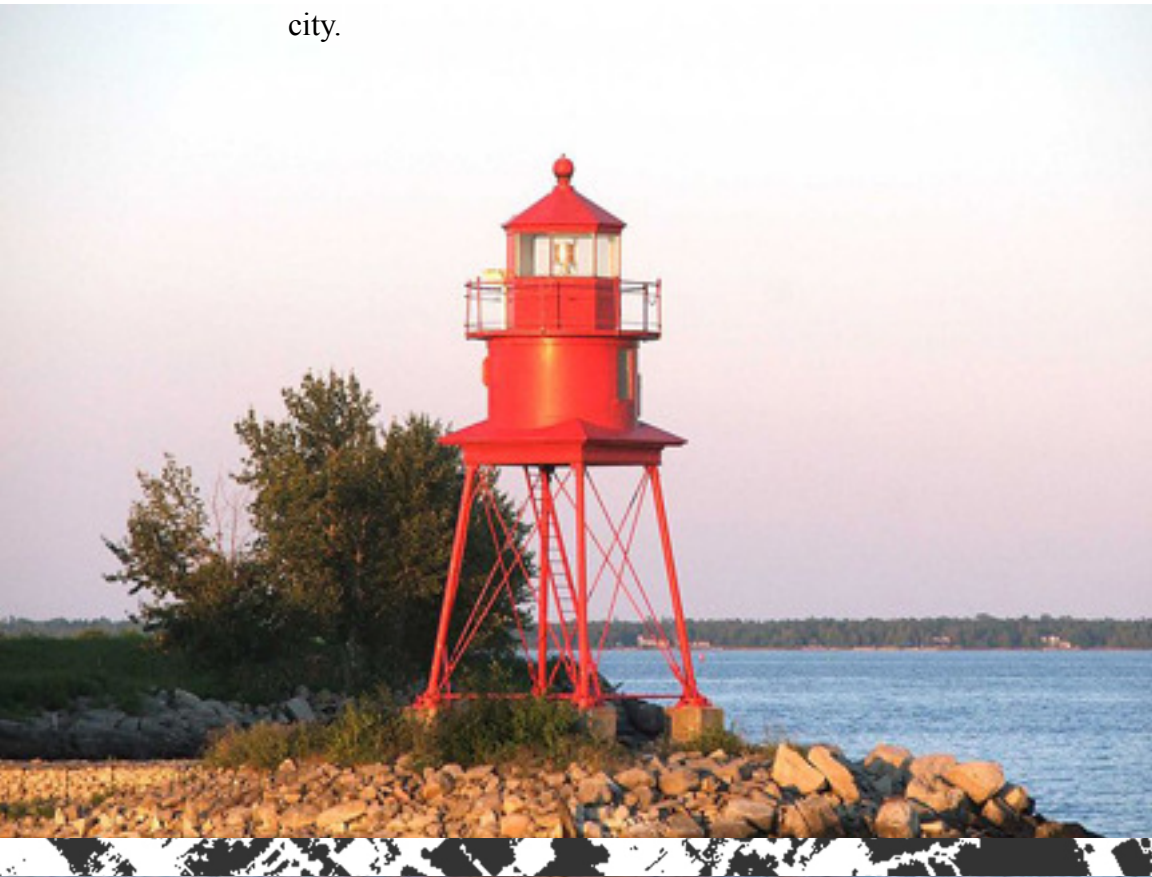
Project Program

Through the vehicle of the program, the identity of the city should be expressed. The history of the city, what the city is currently, and the future of the city will all be considered, sparking revitalization through renewed interest in the identity of the area.

What was formerly known as the Alpena County fairgrounds will therefore become a place for visitors and locals alike to enjoy recreational activities, northern Michigan landscapes and planned city entertainment. What was once a site used for one week out of the entire calendar year will become a bustling staple of local commerce, entertainment and fun.

images courtesy of: coopercarry.com

Major Project Components

Events Center: The largest aspect of the design, the events center will be an incubator for community interaction and celebrat ion. This area will provide lounging for those who wish to relax, places for people to gather together in celebration and large reprogrammable areas for any sort of community event.

Eating/Drinking Spaces: Places for people to get together and eat are extremely important in large park settings, and this setting is no different. Because the fairgounds carry with them an inherent culinary idea, the spaces themselves should reflect the nature of the traditional hotdog stand.

Exterior: The exterior portion of the design will no doubt have a huge impact on the way people experience the surrounding structure in relation to the fair. It is for this reason that the structure must be able to become connected with the exterior fair celebrations and any other outdoor activities that may take place on the fairgrounds. The Alpena bike path on the site also provides the opportunity for those unfamiliar with the area to discover Alpena.

Education Space: This space will become vital to the educational community being housed on the site. Promotions of Alpena's community history will also be on display throughout the space, helping to educate people unfamiliar with the area about Alpena's past and also its future.

images courtesy of: coopercarry.com

Student Dorms: This space is designed with the intent of housing students of the local Alpena County Community College and any other visitors who attend events on the site. The students living here will also be able to take full advantage of the vast land, baseball diamonds, track and marshlands on the site for recreational purposes as well as receive a more complete college dormitory experience. The rent money that each student pays will also go forward into improving the available opportunities for recreation on the site, hosting neighborhood events in the community center below and providing a new and exciting hotspot for personal events and parties.

Design Process

Phase 1 - **Physical Models**

During phase one of my design process, I worked mostly with physical models and hand drawings in order to better understand the relationships that exist between the architecture and the site. This was important, because the models express the ways in which site can become integrated into the design process itself rather than becoming ancillary to the finished product.

Analyzing the site through the modeling process can also provide for a better understanding of existing conditions. This knowledge renders with it the ability to better plan and effectively design solutions to fit within a certain context. These studies were the first steps toward understanding the existing architectural site conditions and how those conditions could be used in the finished design product.

images courtesy of: author

Design Process - Phase 1 - Physical Models

images courtesy of: author

Design Process - Phase 1 - Physical Models

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Phase 2 - **Collapsible Design**

Phase two of the design process took on a shape that sought to mimic the temporal nature of the fair within the nature of the structure itself. The resulting construction could be set up and torn down as it is needed for celebrations on the site. Underneath the structure, an excavated portion of the fairgrounds would serve as a physical representation of the structure and its location within the site context.

With this attempt, the translation of the fair's inherent nature into an architectural form became far too literal for me to consider it a successful design attempt. Not only did the design completely ignore the temporal nature of architecture, the idea that the fairgrounds themselves could become more culturally significant within the community would be removed as the building was taken down along with the celebration it played host to. The manpower and cost it would take to construct such a structure was also deemed extremely farfetched.

This first attempt was valuable, however; in my search to discover the appropriate balance between temporary/ permanent and intrusive/isolated for the finished design product on the site.

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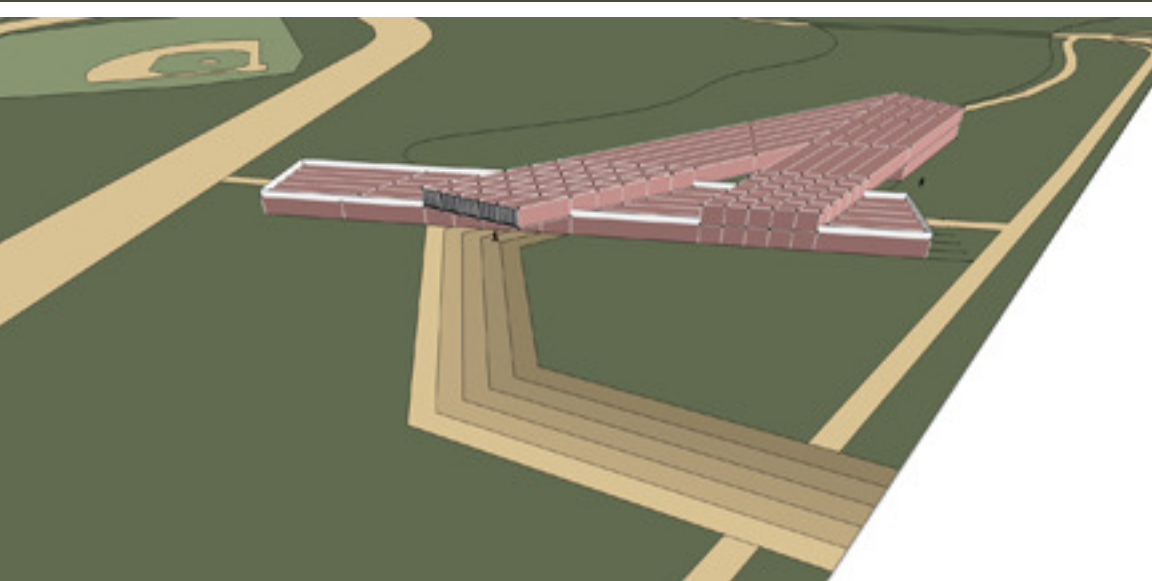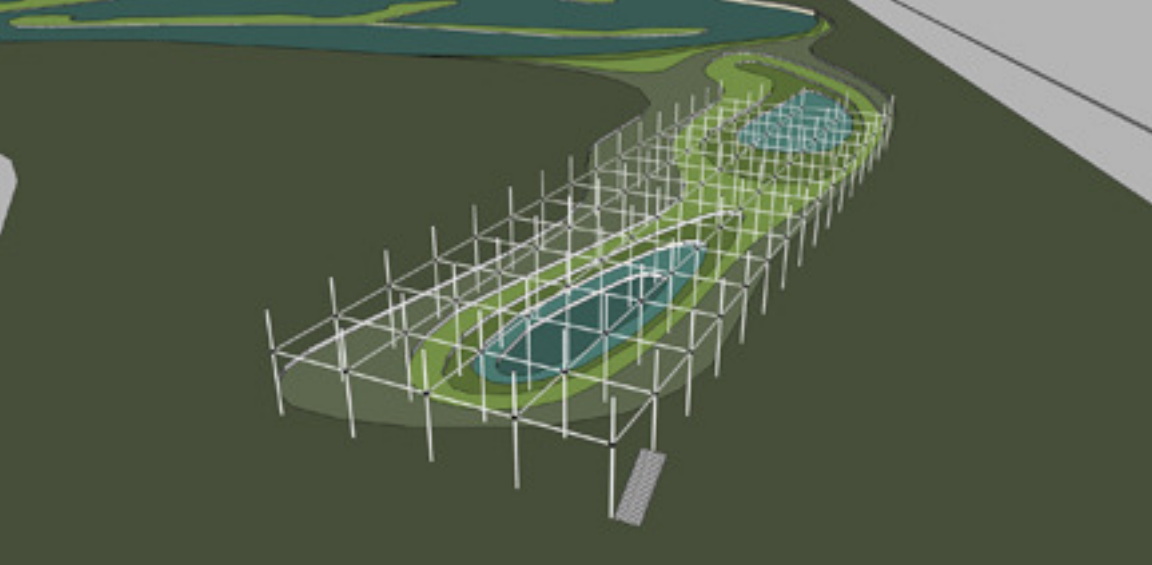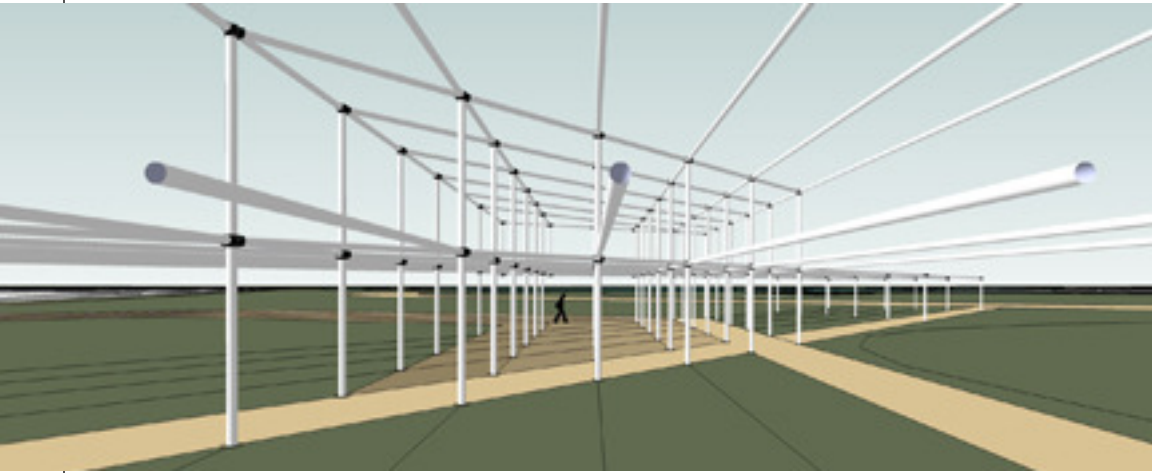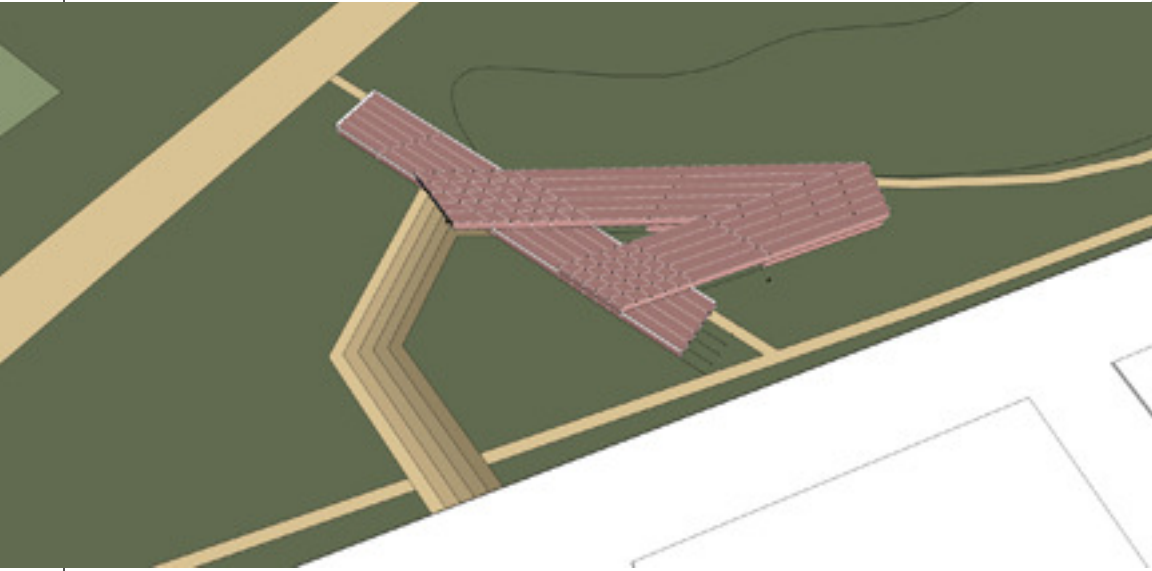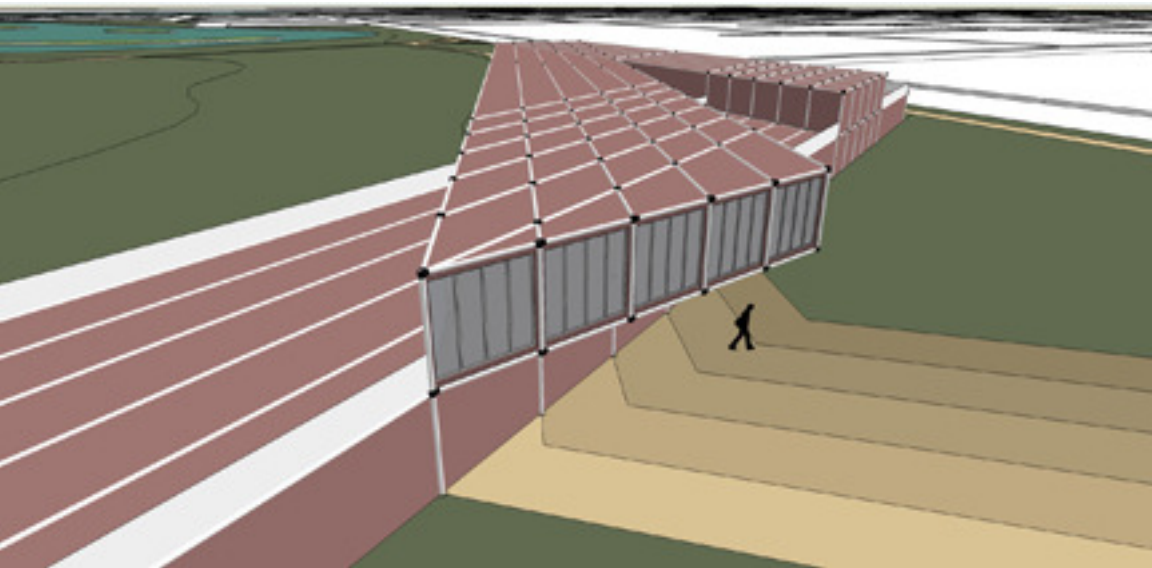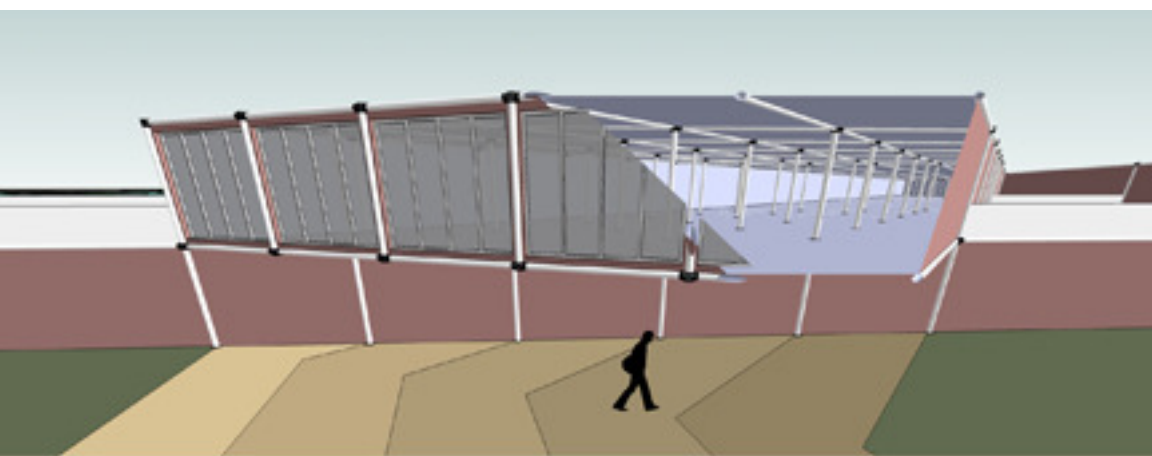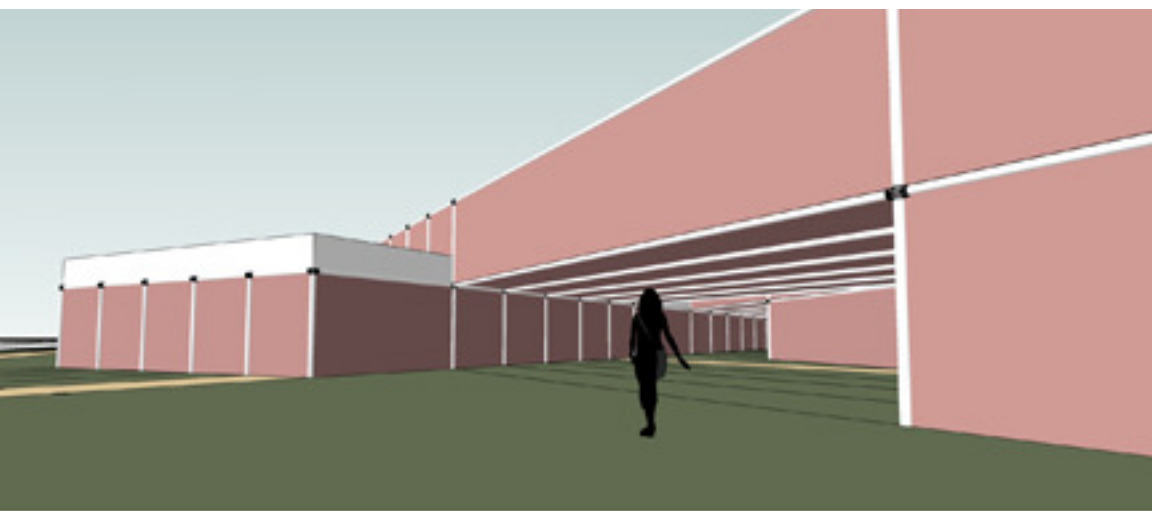
Phase 3 - **Grandstand Design**

In design phase three, the focus shifted from a temporary structure that could be removed from the site to an existing structure already standing on the fairgrounds. By redesigning the fairgrounds grandstands, the site would be able to host a multitude of new programs within without affecting the existing and familiar layout of the fair itself. Located in a centralized location within the County Fair's blueprint, the grandstand was also seen as an opportune base point for the temporal fair structures to be referenced by.

The redesigned structure contains storage space for fair equipment, a community room, concession stands and restrooms. The design of the space also makes an attempt at representing the temporal nature of the fair by physically manifesting many of the different temporal events that occur within nature. When rain falls on the roof, the specially perforated roof creates a unique sound. When the wind is blowing, it filters through a series of plastic tubes built into the structure's cantilevered overhang that can create creating a musical, "wushing" noise.

This design also incorporated a traditional symbol of the fair, the ferris wheel, and turned it into a permanent beacon. By doing this, local residents of the area would become more aware of any activity occuring on the site via the ferris wheel's illumination, affording them the opportunity to attend if they didn't already know about the particular gathering. This idea also is a mindful representation of Alpena's celebrated port

images courtesy of: author

town status.

Upon completion of this phase, the grandstands accounted for a multitude of new design elements and functions for the enhancement of the site's hospitality capabilities. The new functions were designed to become a means of activation for the site on a more constant basis as well as to become an iconic cultural hub for the community's identity and togetherness.
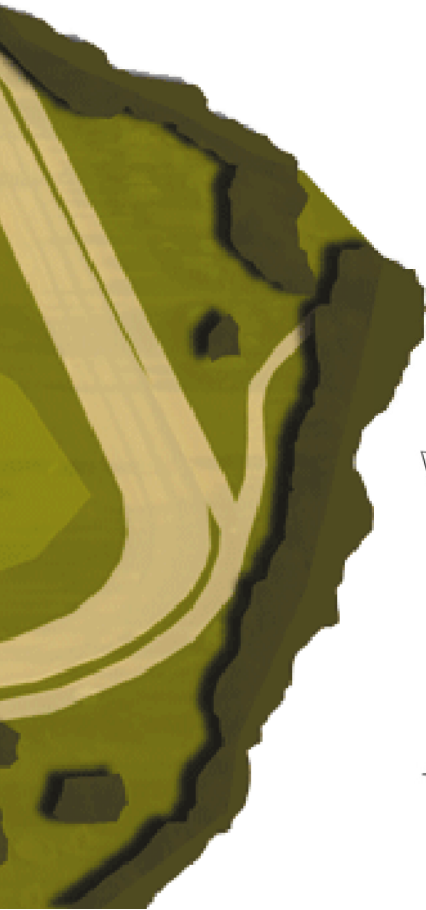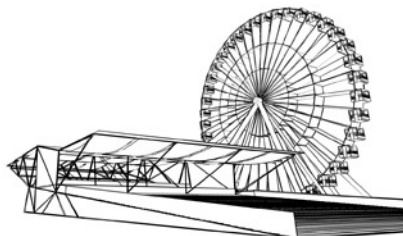

perspective rendering

Design Process - Phase 3 - Grandstand Design
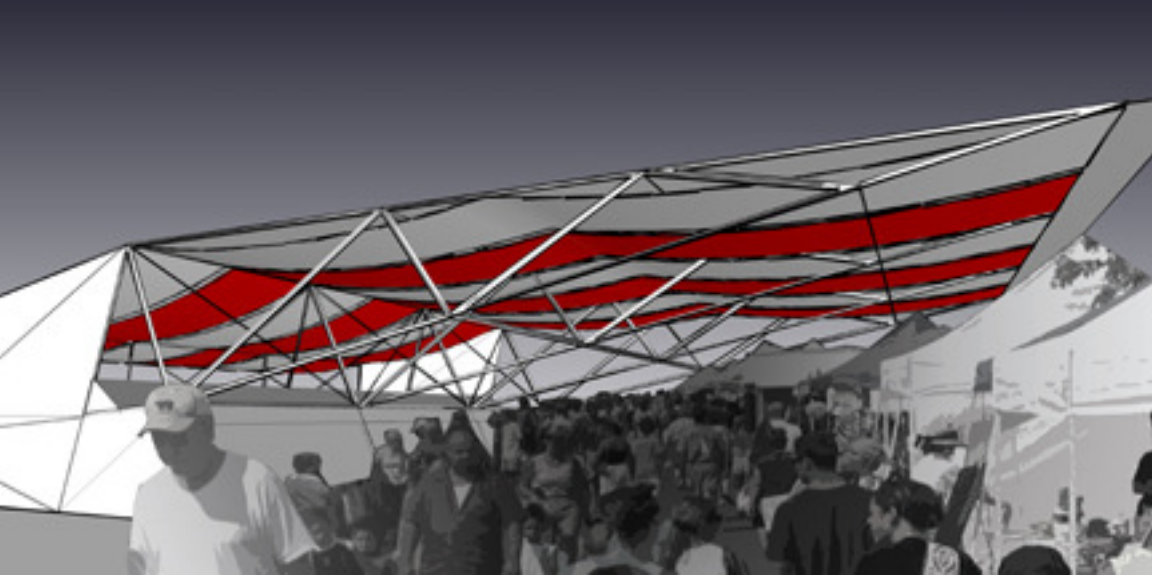
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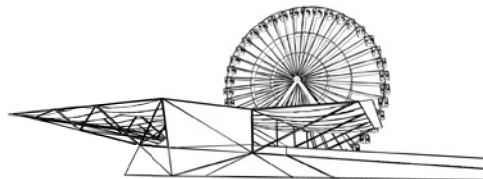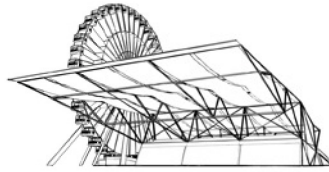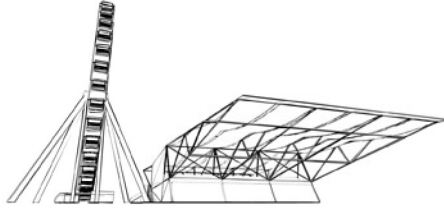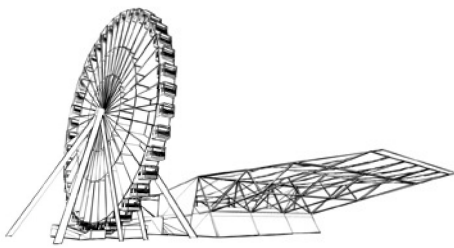
360 degree view

Phase 4 - **Final Project Design**

Even though all of the previous designs for the project addressed the complexities of permanent architecture on a site used for semi-permanent celebrations, none of them wholly immersed the site within the community as the fair does during the celebration. My dream for the Alpena County fairgrounds was not to create a semi-used structure that slightly raises the activity of the site throughout the duration of the year, but to create a new sort of constant interaction on the site so that it's unique attributes and recreational opportunities didn't go unnoticed like they do now.

The final solution to this problem is now known as the Fairground Flats. Fairground Flats is a 21,000 square foot structure situated in the northeast corner of the fairgrounds site. Its primary function is a 50 bed loft dormitory for use by the students of the Alpena County Community College located about a thirty minute walk away from the site and connected by both bike path and roadway. Underneath the loft space also exists a brand new 8,000 square foot community events center and exhibition space fully open to the public at all times, providing a flexible and adaptable space for multiple uses and events to take place. By introducing the community of students onto the site and giving them a place to live, the site has automatically been activated for the purpose of education, study, friendship and fun on a much more regular basis.
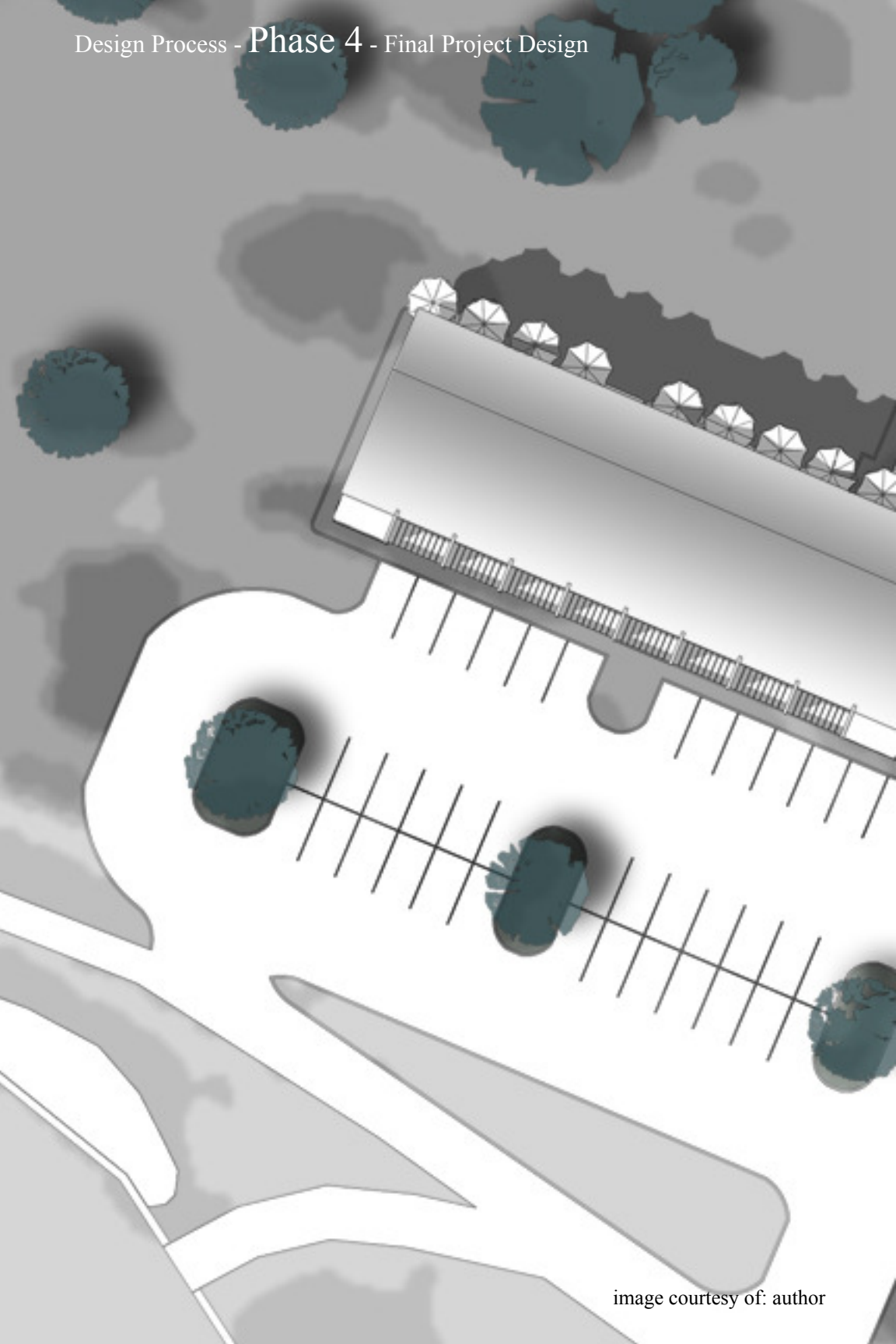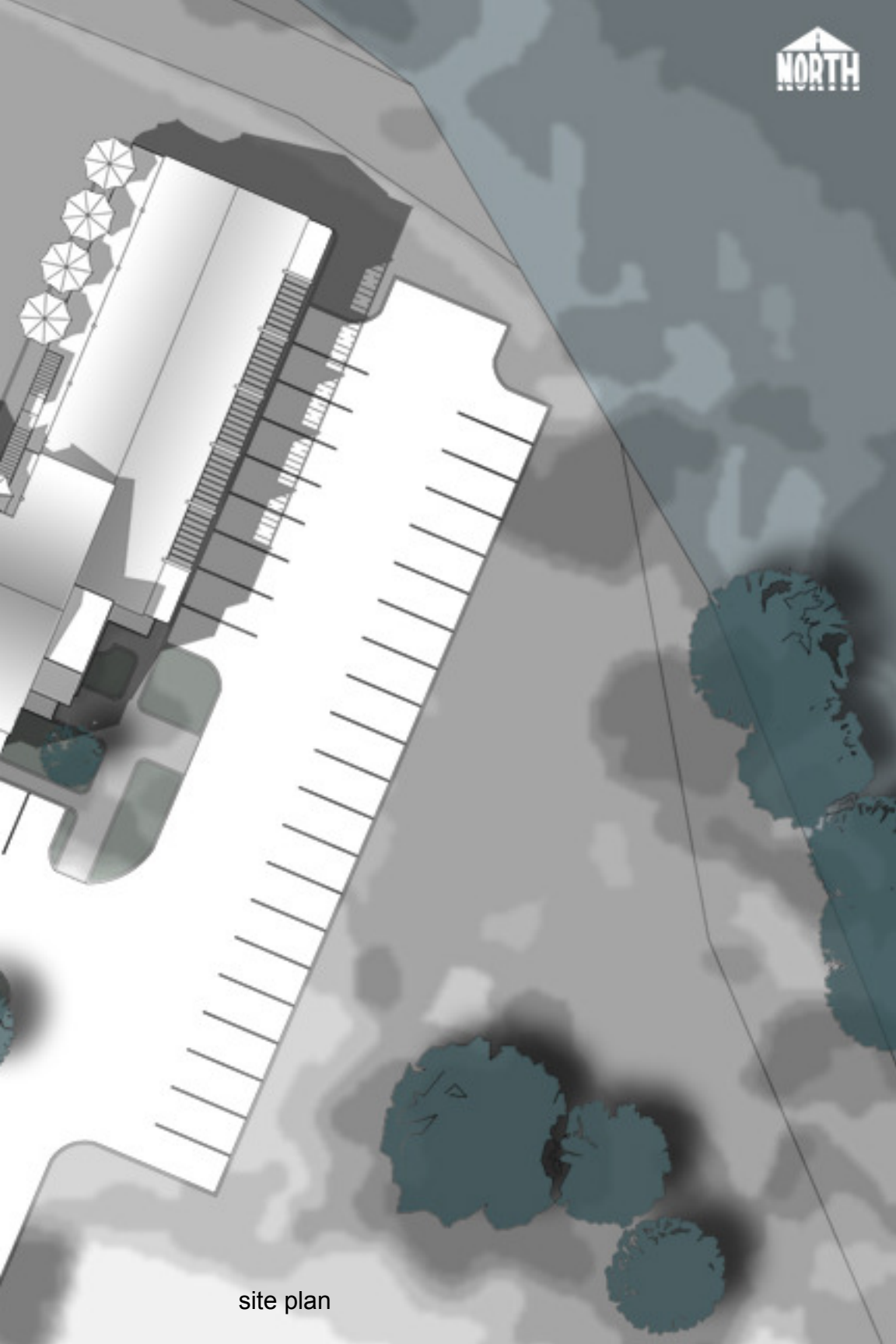
[site]

thunder bay

the city of alpena, michigan

NORTH

NORTH

site plan

front elevation

back elevation

left elevation

right elevation

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Not only does this new design incorporate the student life community onto the site, but it does so in such a way that enhances the community as a whole. The students living in Fairground Flats will be able to take full advantage of the vast land, baseball diamonds, track and marshlands on the site for recreational purposes as well as receive a more complete college dormitory experience. The rent money that each student pays will also go forward into improving the available opportunities for recreation on the site, hosting neighborhood events in the community center below and providing a new and exciting hotspot for personal events and parties. I believe this location to be a fitting scene for these types of events because of its centralized location within the community as well as the fairgrounds instinctively playful nature.

The blueprint of this new structure is masonry construction designed with the intention of reinforcing the nature of the permanence of architecture within the confines of the fairgrounds. White vinyl siding, tent awnings and the pitched roof of the structure were also designed to incorporate Fairground Flats with the existing structures on the site as well as giving the structure itself a fairgrounds-esque aesthetic. Large hydroswing garage doors on both of the front facing facades allow for the structure to become open to the surrounding environment so that the structure can become an element of the fair celebration, as well as providing for a market-style opportunity on weekends for local farmers to have a forum for selling their crop to residents. In the rear, open air patios covered by umbrellas provide for relaxation opportunities as well as invite bird
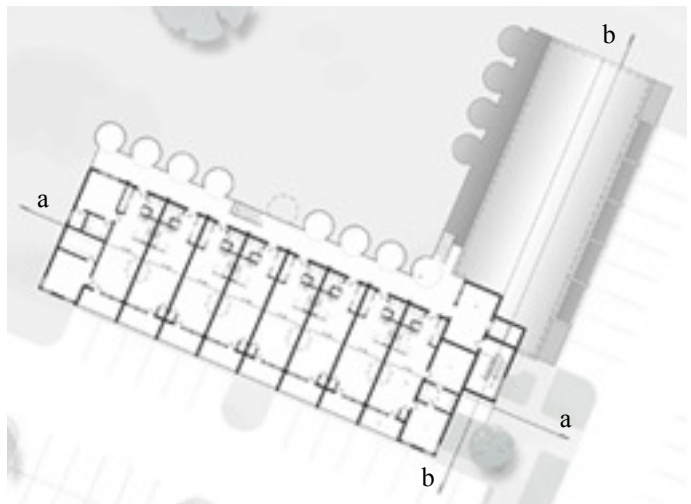
Design Process - Phase 4 - Final Project Design

first floor plan
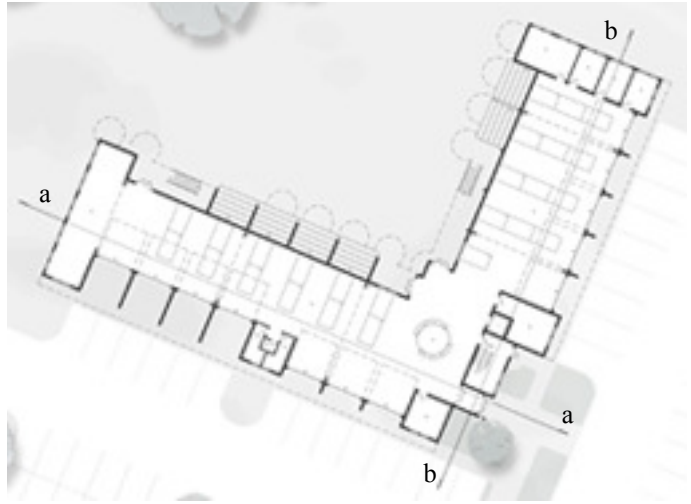
second floor plan

third floor plan

ALPENA
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
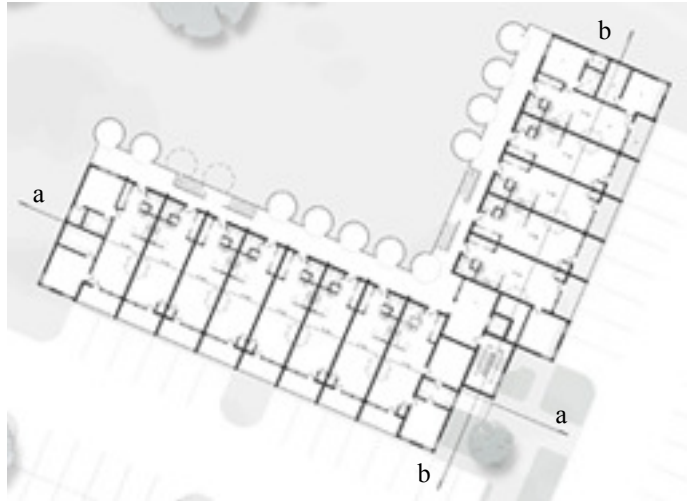
30 minute walk

30 minute walk

[site]

30 minute walk

bike path connection to ACC

watching in the marsh waters below. Of course as already stated, when no particular event or celebration is occurring on the fairgrounds or within Fairground Flats, the student community living in the dorms can play baseball, soccer, run around the track, and enjoy a more complete college experience surrounded by their fellow classmates.

Fairground Flats is a permanent structural intervention located within the confines of a constantly changing site. Even still, the dual-natured program of student lofts and community center strive to create the perfect storm of activity and kinship so that the fairgrounds themselves can become a source of many new design elements and site functions that will work to enhance the fairgrounds as well as the annual fair celebration. These new functions will serve not only as a means of activation for the site on a more constant basis, but also as an iconic cultural hub promoting education and community togetherness.

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section "a"

section "b"

Phase 5 - **Project Renderings**

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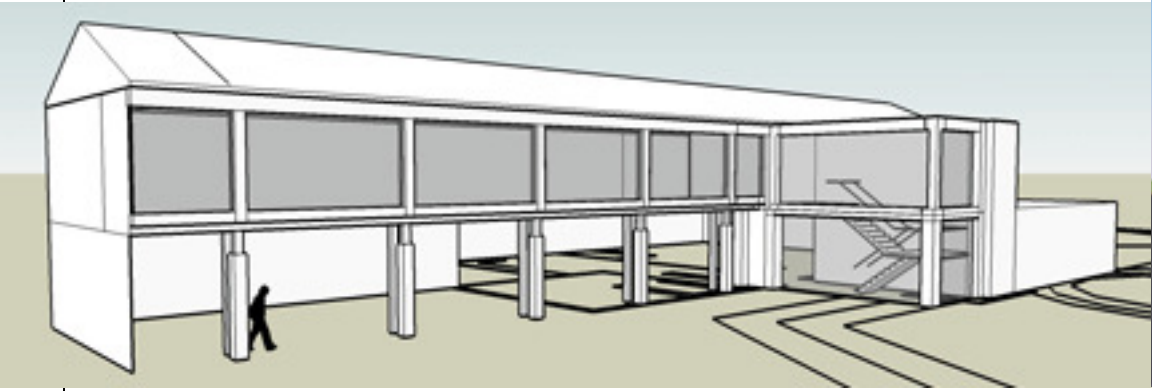
Progression of a Rendering

Final Program Quantitative Summary

Public Spaces

- Circulation (Including Exterior Circulation) - 2,600 sq ft

- Lobby - 800 sq ft

- Community Events Center - 7,000 sq ft

- Large Classroom - 600 sq ft

- Small Classroom - 400 sq ft

- Cafeteria/Banquet Hall - 1,200 sq ft

- Kitchen - 300 sq ft

- Restrooms - 200 sq ft

Total: 13,100 sq ft

Private Spaces

- Office #1 - 200 sq ft

- Office #2 - 150 sq ft (3) = 450 sq ft

- Dorm Room #1 (2 bed) - 500 sq ft (15) = 7,500 sq ft

- Dorm Room #2 (4 bed) - 900 sq ft (6) = 5,400 sq ft

- Storage - 450 sq ft

- Mechanical - 1,000 sq ft

Total: 15,000 sq ft

Combined Total: 28,100 sq ft

Concluding Statement

Overall, the process of developing this thesis has been a rewarding one. I have learned a great deal about the immense amounts of work, time and dedication required in developing an architectural work of art, and this knowledge will prove beneficial as I begin pursue a career in my chosen field. If I could do it again, however; I would have focused more of my time building physical models rather than digital ones. The majority of the second semester was focused on developing a 3D model for the design, but I feel as though I lost a few of the opportunities that I had set forth for myself in the physical models along the way. Even still, I am extremely proud of what I have accomplished here.

For architecture to be accepted by its users, it must come from within them, their culture and their history. Without taking these types of things into account, the architecture will fail to meet the high standards set forth by any given community. The design I have prepared for the Alpena County Fairgrounds falls short in many ways, however; it succeeds in many others. The architecture draws very well upon the history and culture of the existing community and reflects that passion within the foundations of the design. The building structure reproduces in many ways Alpena's growing aesthetic, and the structure ultimately speaks to the fulfilled need to be recognized as a vital addition to the community.

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