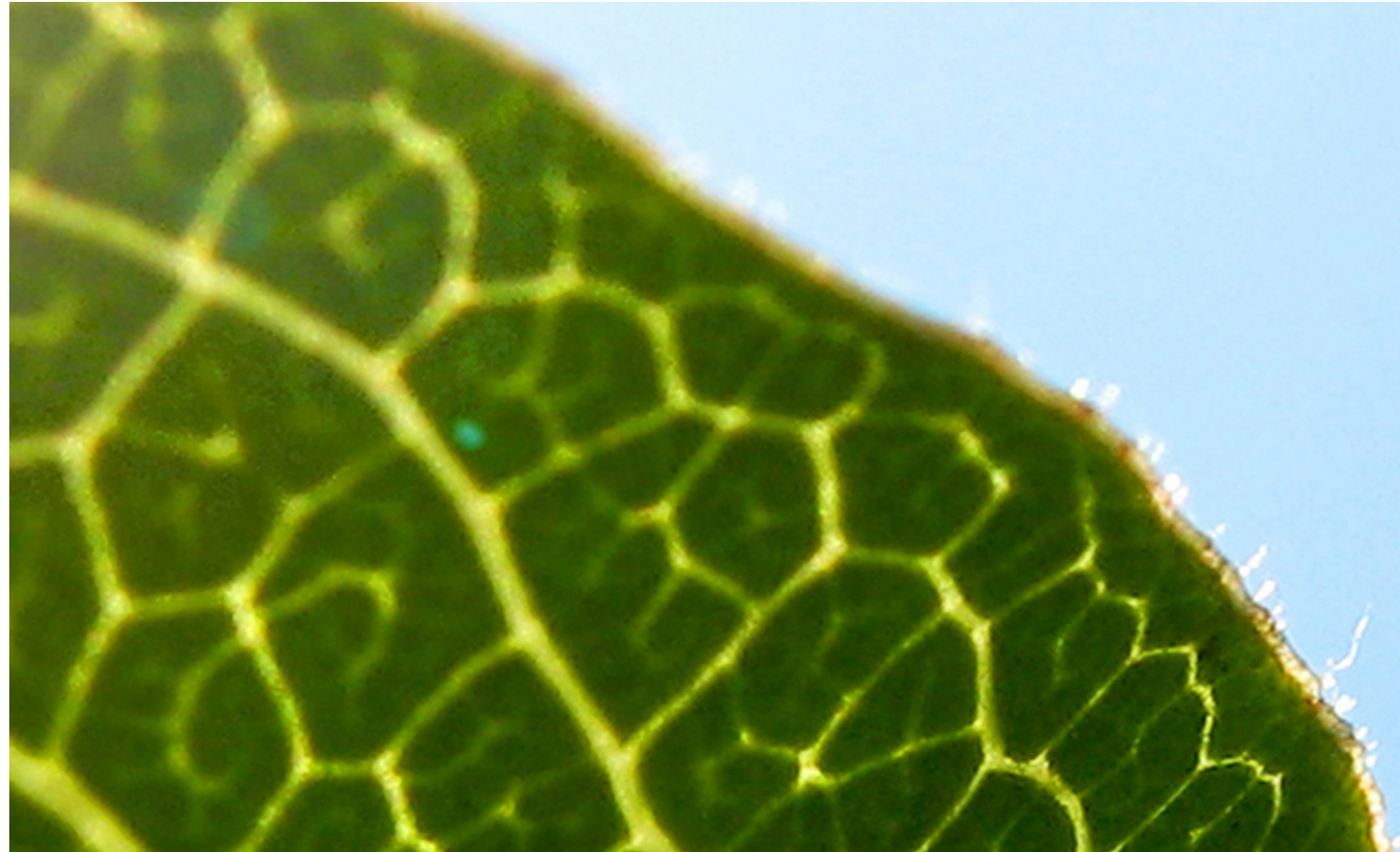


there's no place like....

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contents



thesis abstract	4
thesis paper	6
circumstance	14
initial response	20
architectural manifestation ..	42
precedent studies	50
design development	64
project proposal	76
concluding thoughts	98
3 bibliography	100

thesis abstract

What makes a city unique? What makes one place more distinguishable or desirable than the next? What about a city gives it identity or character? Is it the abundance of chain corporations, the efficiency of highway travel, or the predictability of its people? Most would say no and yet planners and political leaders utilize these strategies to somehow “better” their city. The result is nothing more than the spread of a dry, homogeneous way of life.

How then can one “plan” to have character or “plan” to be unique? Wouldn't it be more pure to take away the plan and allow true freedom, true organic growth? Theoretically this concept has validity, but realistically some overall vision must be in place. There must be some united goal of the community; an acceptance and a ground for which the people of that place can be creative and free to make it their own. A city does not need to mimic the successful endeavors of others to thrive; instead a city must embrace its history, landscape, and culture on the path of establishing its own unique identity.

This thesis will analyze the city of Muskegon, Michigan as a model to explore ways in which this ever-homogenizing growth of American cities can be diverted.

thesis paper

Alarm rings. Shortly after begins the transition from single family home to garage to protective SUV on the roadside sociality of the real world. First stop, drive through Starbucks to get the needed caffeine injection from the dispassionate worker at the window. He may be there everyday, but no one has ever bothered to look at his face. A 20+ minute drive allows avoidance of run-down or unfamiliar areas. The car halts atop a sea of concrete, one of many temporary storage containers for the chunks of metal that control modern life. Coffee in hand, a walk across the lot, past those lonely trees given a sliver of land in which to root, marks the commitment to this day in [INSERT CITY, INSERT STATE, U.S.A.].

This thesis is an exploration of the city without identity or heart; the effect these cities have physically, culturally, and socially in our world; and the role of architecture in diverting this course. It is a response to the no-place suburbs and abandoned city centers that the suburban condition and mass globalization foster. This thesis attempts to understand and express the hidden character of the city that is waiting to gain recognition, struggling to have a voice in its own home.

The suburban condition did not happen overnight or by chance, but is a result of a distinct series of events that gained momentum in the 1950's. Disapproval of the city and quest to connect with nature was a common theme initiated by Ebenezer Howard's garden cities. This idea of a Utopian frontier spread throughout Europe and the United States. People believed that they could better sustain themselves in a home away from the pollution and disease of the city. There were entire undeveloped countrysides to be had, and people wanted them. The government, focused on decentralizing cities to avoid mass destruction, supported this idea. An attack on America was a genuine fear for many citizens during WWII and the Cold war, and if moving away from the cities provided

¹ Koolhaas and Mau, S,M,L,XL (New York: Monaceli, 1998), 1952.

any sense of protection, people were bound to comply. An interstate highway system was implemented to make coming and going from the city a more efficient task. According to the post-war government housing policy, soldiers coming home were able to purchase cheap housing on the condition that they were built new. The government also made these homes affordable by covering infrastructure costs, which lowered the price of every single-family home by about \$40,000; and subsidizing coal, natural gas, oil, and nuclear power to keep energy cheap. Single-use zoning laws were created to segregate uses. These kept the suburbs clean of commercial, business, and factory developments; and added to sprawl and automobile dependence. Loans were easily obtainable at this time, making the option of owning a dream-like suburban home even more possible and enticing. The trend caught on like wildfire.

Homogenized suburban and urban conditions are further taking root as the world increasingly becomes globally influenced and dependent. Cities around the world are continuing to assimilate, to become generic. In his article, The Generic City, Rem Koolhaas states, "the generic city is always founded by people on the move, poised to move on. This explains the instability of their foundations."¹

A meandering society that lacks dedication to the environment is a reflection of the American psyche. Americans tend to validate themselves through possession and immediate self-gain. This mindset is an integral part of the American people and reflected in the landscape

they create. The masses are all too easily complied with this homogenous way of life. The individual is much too focused on competing for power and keeping up with current trends to take an interest in the dullness of the whole. In her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs denounces suburban compliance and the power of the government in such a system. She talks specifically about Ebenezer Howard, the originator of the world's first suburban condition.

“His aim was the creation of self sufficient small towns, really very nice towns if you were docile and had no plans of your own and did not mind spending your life among others with no plans of their own. As in all utopias, the right to have plans of any significance belongs only to the planners in charge.”²

This suburban condition and compliance towards it have produced the no-place suburbs and abandoned city centers that currently define America; a condition that simultaneously destroys the natural, the complex, and the social. The never-ending image of the utopian frontier continues to eat up undeveloped land, leaving previous cities in the dust. When exploring the ever-expanding rings of the city, Rem Koolhaas exposes the immediacy of it all. “Archaeology is a profession of digging: it exposes layer after layer of civilization (i.e., city). The generic city, like a sketch which is never elaborated, is not improved but abandoned. The idea of layering, intensification, completion are alien to it: it has no layers.”³ The abrupt nature of the American city dilutes complexity and character, fostering controlled social interaction. Gated communities and economically controlled neighborhoods produce single-minded inhabitants without exposure to “the other”. Forced interaction overpowers the opportunity for a spontaneous encounter. The protection and predictability of the forced interaction have become a psychological necessity for most Americans. This thesis prefers natural interaction, the exposed citizen, and seeks to encourage it.

It would seem that the purist way to encourage the spontaneous would be to take away the plan and allow true freedom, true organic growth. Theoretically complete freedom sounds nice, but realistically some overall united goal must be in place; an acceptance and a ground for which the people of that place can be creative in making

2 . 4 . 5 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961)

3 Koolhaas and Mau, *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monaceli, 1998), 1263.



it home. This vision would materialize more as an unconventional order, an order that Jane Jacobs praises in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. “There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretending order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and be served.”⁴ This unconventional order is not an “anything goes” type attitude, but is a respect for the natural, a focus on serving the people, and a pride in the unique.

“It is neither love for nature nor respect for nature that leads to the American schizophrenic attitude towards nature. Instead, it is a sentimental desire to toy with some insipid, standardized, suburbanized shadow of nature - apparently in sheer disbelief that we and our cities, just by virtue of being, are a legitimate part of nature too, and involved with it in much deeper and more inescapable ways than grass trimming, sunbathing, and contemplative uplift.”⁵

The natural environment is all too often forgotten when constructing the built environment. This misconception destroys much of the world's natural beauty and misses the opportunity to utilize distinct natural features. Planners satisfy the human quest for nature with false replacements. The landscape architect, Ian McHarg finds the understanding of site to be the most basic and elemental step of any design.

“If growth responds to natural processes, it will be clearly visible in the pattern and distribution of development – and, indeed, in its density. By responding to nature, one only avoids the allegation of ignorance, stupidity, and carelessness. When we can demonstrate this elemental level of intelligence and perception, then we may also aspire to more elaborate objectives, but that is clearly premature.”⁶

McHarg developed the quadrant, a method of analyzing site in order to find the most suitable location for development. By analyzing all the factors that affected site and then overlapping them, it is possible to see what site would be best for urban development. In the case where settlement has already occurred, McHarg also found it necessary to take an inventory of historically valuable features. The analysis of both historical and ecological factors aided in determining and ranking elements of the city that were most expressive and valuable. He found this to be the most basic step of any further development or growth. Without such studies, entire landscapes would be developed identically.

Just as it is elemental for a city to respect its environment, so is it basic knowledge that a city’s main purpose is to serve the people who inhabit it. A perfect example of a city that puts people before economics or worldly attention is Curitiba, Brazil. This city has been revolutionary in the way it views a city as a place that provides for the daily needs of its people. Beginning in the late 1960’s, a forward thinking strategic plan for the city along with devoted political leaders nurtured a rich comprehensive environment. In Curitiba, the average citizen puts only 10% of their income into transportation. An integrated and sophisticated public bus system allows this to happen. The city also consciously converted the city’s main street back to a pedestrian-only corridor, making the person dominant over the automobile once more. The city has a highly developed recycling program that finds a new use for 2/3 of the city’s garbage. The green exchange is the most unique investment in the people. Citizens in need collect recyclables and garbage all over the city and exchange these goods with the city for the appropriated amount of surplus fruits and vegetables. This simple system provides jobs, cleans the city, and nourishes citizens lacking the means to do so themselves.⁷ If a city’s goal is to serve its inhabitants then, in return, its inhabitants will want to

6 Ian McHarg, *Designing With Nature* (New York: Natural History, 1969).

8 Anna Kingmann, *Brandscapes* (Cambridge: MIT, 2007), 280.

7 (Curitiba – The Sustainable City Video)



care for it with pride.

If citizens are devoted to a city, it will blossom into an expression of their aspirations. There is a flaw in believing that it is possible for a planner to completely fix a city because the inhabitants of that city are ultimately the ones who will create a sense of place, who choose to embrace something or not. It is essential that the architecture and planning of a place encourage creativity and user influence. A city and its people must take pride in being different, but not just to be different. There is danger in oversimplifying a city, making it a logo or a brand. These one-liners make the city one-dimensional, flat all over again. “Re-imagining strategies tend overwhelmingly to homogenize places, with an endless repetition of standard devices, from advertising slogans to building types.”⁸ An identity isn’t something to construct for the purpose of competition among cities. Understanding and aiding the natural and cultural aspects distinctive to a place will produce a much richer experience for all.

Some may argue that allowing true freedom would produce the exact conditions that are sprouting up all over America. I agree that the suburban formula is a means to quick gain, and will not be washed aside by those who have greater aspirations. As long as there is a market, there will be a product. The suburban lifestyle is such a part of American spirit that it will take a great deal of effort and awareness to ever reverse the cycle; but to simply accept this movement as an

unbeatable current is irresponsible. It is reasonable to say that the consumer will eventually grow tired of the system.

“Freedom of choice is one of the most important gains of western society. Diversity is a prime condition of this. So a one-sided supply that is exclusively developed on the basis of the values of an all-comprehensive global culture will eventually fail to satisfy the public.”⁹

Designing the instrument doesn't define the quality of music and you can't assume that good architecture is going to fix the whole, but that is no reason to stop trying, to stop affecting people through design.

The ultimate question then is how can design materialize this theory; how can an architectural intervention cultivate a society that is passionate about its home. Any successful intervention would begin by understanding the faces of the city and the ways in which they are expressed.

Jane Jacobs defines the three types of outdoor spaces as: necessary activities - duties that are a part of everyday life; optional activities - a choice dependant upon surroundings; and social activities - places where interaction occurs. Jacobs finds the interweaving of all three forms to make for the most vibrant public setting. There are places that beautifully pull people away from their single-minded daily lives and spark awareness about the minds and characters of others. One of the best examples of this social blending is Eastern Market in Detroit, Michigan. Detroit is an extremely culturally diverse city. Racial tensions, dividing lines, and a never-ending suburb vs. intercity wars have plagued this city. With all of the factors that keep people apart, the Saturday morning open air Eastern Market allows all of the area's faces to meet and shine together.

It is these vibrant places that should be encouraged and maintained. “Just as it is possible through choice of materials and colors to create a certain palette in a city, it is equally possible through planning decisions to influence

10 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 145.

9 Anna Kingmann, *Brandscapes* (Cambridge: MIT, 2007), 282.

11 John Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski, *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: Monacelli, 1999), 15.



patterns of activity, to create better or worse conditions for outdoor events, and to create lively or lifeless cities.”¹⁰

After establishing an overall vision for a city, it is the already present social centers that should be nourished to spark the interest of a people wishing to be acknowledged. “Everyday urbanism seeks to release powers of creativity and imagination already present within daily life as the means of transforming urban experience and the city.”¹¹

circumstance

“Muskegon means a lot to me. I love it and at the same time I need to get the fuck out of here.”¹² There is a beautiful Muskegon, and there is an overwhelmingly stagnant and depressed Muskegon; the lines between these forces are blurred.

Muskegon, Michigan will serve as the context to analyze the rapid homogenizing of American cities. This west Michigan city was founded on the basis of its natural resources, which are continuously being depleted. These include lumber, oil, sand, fruit, farms, and its status as a port town.

Muskegon’s movement towards industrialization helped stimulate a slouching economy left by the decline of the lumber era. The city attracted business along with a culturally diverse workforce. Muskegon’s overwhelmingly labor-based workforce and laid-back attitude is evident in the education level and progression of its people. Only 15% of Muskegon’s working-age residents have obtained a bachelor’s degree or more. This one-dimensional workforce is also apparent in the high unemployment rate that the city is currently facing. Not only is the city failing economically, but the rapid unplanned growth is deteriorating the area as well. Like



12 Courtney Webber.

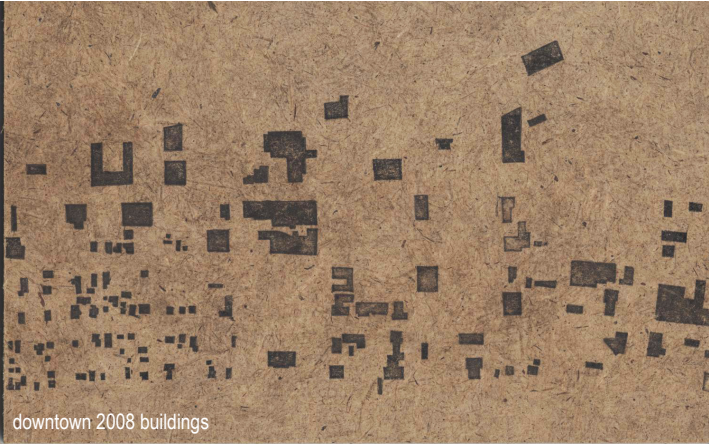
most American cities, the search for a cheap, quick, and easy solution has seen no limit in Muskegon. Suburban development has taken over so as to leave no city for it to support, no center to hold it together. It is a pattern that will devastate the area if not soon reversed. In the next 20 years the population of Muskegon is expected to rise to 195,000 people. If the current rate of land consumption remains constant, we will see over 20,000 more acres of Muskegon’s natural and rural land developed. This has all resulted in a dire need for a plan to reunite and re-densify Muskegon County as a whole.

The goal of this thesis project is to find a way to encourage an inward expansion, an act of awareness; to slow those grasping for easily obtainable, predictable, dry forms of material contentment, and get them excited about a civilization with substance. Muskegon needs to utilize its character in new ways that will attract the creative and educated inhabitants whom are increasingly leaving the area to find opportunity elsewhere. There are aspects of Muskegon that are free and beautiful and unique and any progress for the city will need to revolve around those characteristics

While the city is stagnant and failing economically, residents are committed to Muskegon as their home on the Lake. Muskegon is home to 27 miles of Lake Michigan waterfront,



downtown 1950 buildings



downtown 2008 buildings



downtown 2008 parking



13 Willa Cather.

20 inland lakes and more than 400 miles of rivers. It is the time spent exploring the area's natural beauty, and the vibe that summer brings that keep the people of Muskegon alive.

“The great fact in life, the always possible escape from dullness was the lake. The sun rose out of it, the day began there; it was like an open door that nobody could shut. The land and all its dreariness could never close in on you. You had only to look at the lake, and you knew you would soon be free.”¹³

There are activities and traditions unique to the people of Muskegon that utilize its natural beauty. There are distinctive social centers where the faces of Muskegon unite and express their character. Places like the beach on a day so hot that it is nearly impossible to be anywhere but on the shores of Lake Michigan, or the nightly downtown summer festivals along Muskegon Lake. These festivals succeed in attracting different crowds all season long. Both situations are extremely vibrant and telling of Muskegon's vibe. Both situations also have pungent problems in the way they are realized: they are restricted to warmer months, they lack proper facilities, and they manage to keep people segregated while they are together. The only time when man type A might take time to observe and relate to man B occurs in the food stand or beer tent lines. The third major social center of Muskegon



is the Saturday morning market. The farmers market is equally inflicted by the first two issues of the cities social gathering events, but has managed to integrate the people much more successfully. It is at this market that the people of one class, seeking a more economical way to acquire proper nourishment, and the people of another class, exploring the beauty of the event and striving to be a part of something, interact. It is in this place where all three of Jane Jacob's factors of outdoor spaces unite: necessary activities, optional activities, and social activities.

The development of this thesis project will seek to design a way in which architecture can enhance the above situations. A way that social interaction and natural appreciation can occur year-round without losing the magic summer brings. The project does not intend to create a series of utopian nooks within Muskegon, but does intend to strive with a perhaps unrealistic goal.

"Raising hopes may be the whole game. One of architecture's historic poignancies – and one of its charms – has been that its reach so often exceeds its grasp. Overreaching – like the Giraffe straining to nibble the tender leaves at the treetop – is the only way to grow tall." ¹⁴

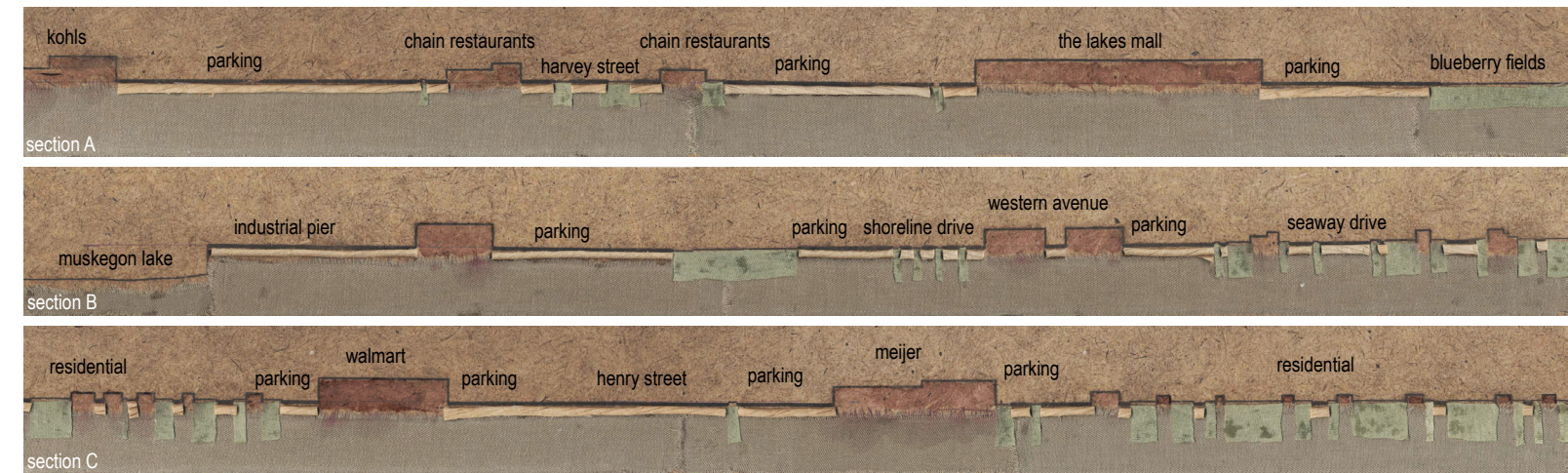
The vision is for these centers to invoke passion throughout the city and become a catalyst for further infill and redevelopment of the city's deprived core.



14 Michael Sorkin, *Some Assembly Required* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2001), 205.

existing social sections

The below sections expose the main centers of Muskegon and how little they encourage natural human interaction. The sections are littered with expansive parking lots, big box stores, and chain restaurants. Section A is through the recently completed Lakes Mall. The construction of this site destroyed acres of blueberry farms and drew business further away from the city. Section B is through the historic downtown, which is mainly vacant. The third section is in Norton Shores, showing the extreme separation between residential neighborhoods and commercial complexes. Within these locations interaction is sterile, predictable, and nearly inexistent.

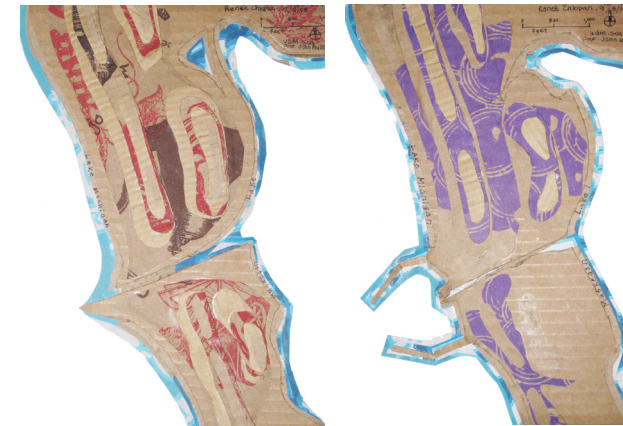
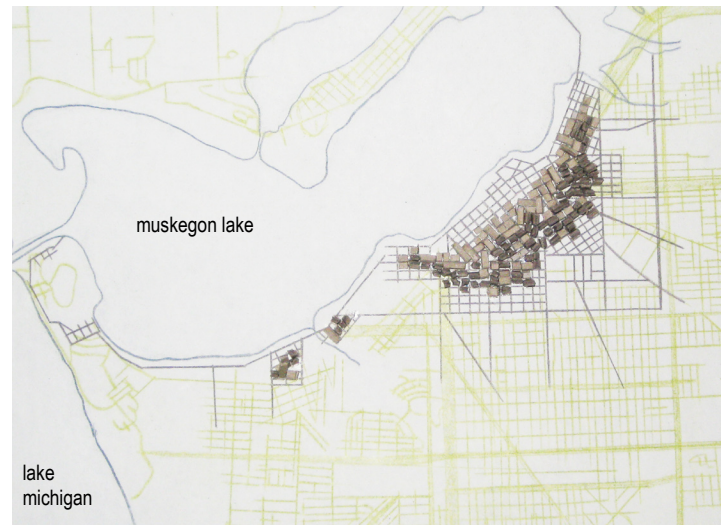


initial response

To grasp both the intimacy of human interaction as well as the coherence of Muskegon, it has been necessary to continually mediate between macro and micro. The macro established what neighborhoods of the city had character intact and ultimately what sites and activities would advance the micro.

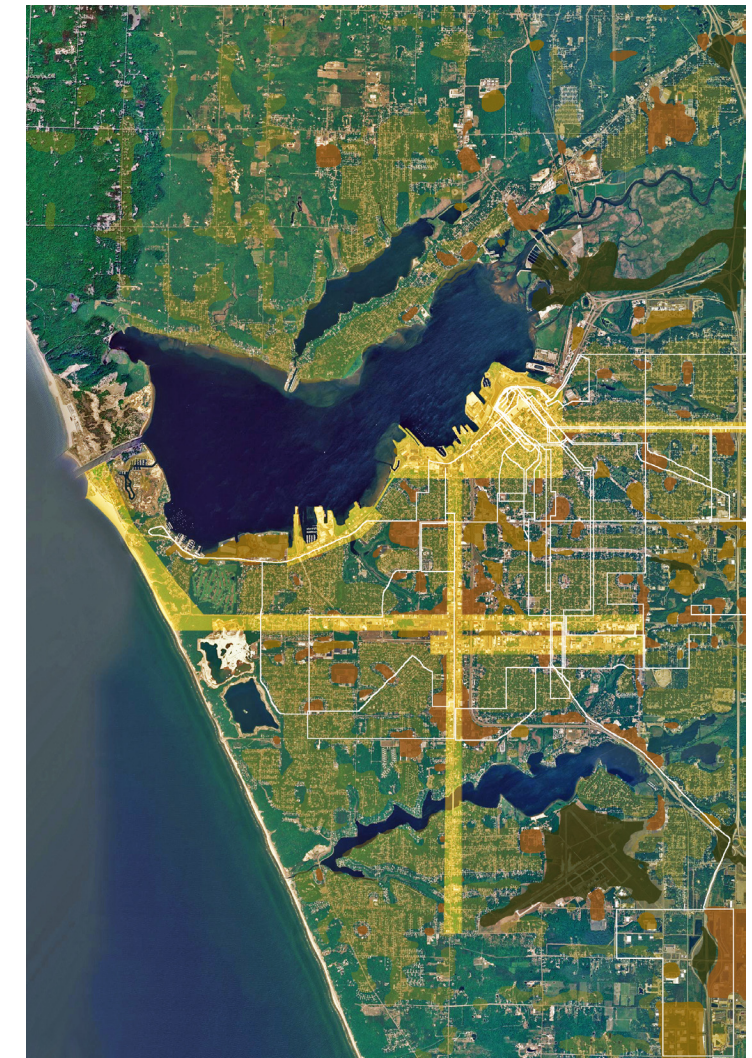
The model in the top right is a study of the racial and economical divides of Muskegon. The red lines traces seaway drive. This road is an extreme physical and mental barrier in the city. The neighborhoods on the left of the line consist of middle class Caucasian families. Those on the right of the line are primarily low to middle class African American and Hispanic families. As the map shows, the people on the left have every bit of the waterfront. This side also houses the city's necessary amenities that collect money from those on the other side of seaway.

The map on the bottom right is a study on the growth of Muskegon. The grey lines represent the original city and the green lines represent how the city has expanded. The brown chipboard overlay on the map shows how much space all of Muskegon County would take up if it were to have a density just less than that of San Francisco.



The two models above show the natural digression of the shoreline of Muskegon. On the left is the Lake Michigan shoreline in 1877 and on the right is the same view in 2008. You can see the effect that the man made channel into Muskegon Lake and sand mining have had on the landscape.

The map to the right shows land usage, public transportation, and areas viable for development. The Light green areas represent residential zones, which overwhelmingly cover the area. The orange areas represent commercial zones. As you can see, there is no center, or main hub of activity for the area to revolve around. The White lines show existing bus routes. The yellow highlighted sections are the main corridors and original centers of Muskegon.



initial response

The economical, racial, and cultural barriers of the city exposed less apparent issues demanding attention. The areas natural landscape and a documentation of the cities expansion and squandered resources helped reveal those areas naturally and historically viable for development.

To the right is a figure ground map of the current Muskegon Lake shoreline. Three specific neighborhoods shine as moderately excluded from the trends of suburbanization. These neighborhoods have experienced deterioration, and they have fallen victim to surface level strategies of revitalization; but their overall integrity remains intact. These neighborhoods also happen to be the original settlements of Muskegon, and the areas where the purist forms of human interaction continue to occur. Downtown, Lakeside, and Bluffton (Pere Marquette), and the connection between these sites are the main points of interest.



downtown response

existing conditions

Downtown Muskegon is the original seed from which this city has sprouted. It initially gained recognition as a booming lumber town that rebuilt Chicago after the great fire. As the lumber industry faded away in the 1950's, local activists began luring in industrial enterprises to keep the economy churning. Labor workers from all over Michigan and America flocked to the city to take advantage of the available employment. The town grew exponentially during this extensive industrial period but has continuously struggled to diversify its economy and workforce. Soon the local industry began to die down and shift to other areas. The economic shift, along with the migration of people to Norton Shores and other new suburban settlements, left the downtown nearly abandoned. Efforts have been made to draw people back into the city. In the 1970's six city blocks were demolished to make way for a mall that soon failed to attract consumers flocking to other suburban shopping centers. In recent years downtown has experienced steady attention from the entire community. The transformation of a Brownfield site to an outdoor music pavilion has allowed the downtown to host nonstop summer festivals. The mall has been demolished and city blocks are slowly reappearing. Western Avenue, the cities historic commercial corridor is currently a renaissance zone. This tax free



downtown response

zone has sparked development from entrepreneurs throughout all of Muskegon. The downtown is gaining a pulse and is the perfect condition for architectural assistance.

potential density

The image to the right models an optimal density plan for Downtown Muskegon. A mixed use, dense, walkable community would make downtown a rich urban condition and the heart of Muskegon once more.

what if?

The goal is not to force people into a new system, but to evoke awareness and individual action. But what does that mean and how is that done? How can one design identity, character, and community involvement into a city? My solution has been not to design a plan or establish a set of rules and regulations, but to instead develop a vision or goal to unite and motivate the people of Muskegon. A “what if?” model has been created for the downtown to expose potential density and infill. A program collage has also been created to show prospective activities and experiences.





lakeside response

existing conditions

Lakeside is a neighborhood of three components: a post-industrial disaster along Muskegon Lake, a struggling commercial strip along Lakeshore road, and a quaint neighborhood atop the bluff. Like most of the south shore of Muskegon Lake, the people are separated from the lake by abandoned and polluted infill piers.

“Artificial peninsulas such as (those) near the Lake Express ferry dock were created decades ago by companies that dumped concrete, foundry slag, and other debris into Muskegon Lake. By the time that the practice ended in the mid-1980’s, the lake had lost 27 percent of its original surface area. About 800 acres of the lake were transformed into artificial land.”¹⁵

Lakeshore was once a commercial strip offering all of the amenities to support Lakeside. Businesses have slowly died away as suburban chains continue to entice consumers. The strip is still alive having an active bar scene and a mildly successful series of artist workshops. A large marina stands between the commercial strip and the lake, blocking all views or natural interaction. The ferry to Wisconsin operates alongside the marina making this deprived area one of the main gateways to the city. Lakeside has the basic



lakeside response

components necessary to become a very coherent and distinctive neighborhood in Muskegon; it just needs a lot of nurturing.

potential density

The image to the right models an optimal density plan for Lakeside. A mixed use, medium density, walk able community is encouraged along Lakeshore drive and up to the shoreline. The existing medium density neighborhood is to be maintained atop the bluff. Public green space, encouraged wetlands, and natural habitat would take advantage of the abandoned infill piers. The twine represent public transportation that will run along Lakeshore Drive.

what if?

But again, the goal is not to force people into a new system, but to evoke awareness and individual action. A “what If?” model has been created for Lakeside to expose potential density and infill. A program collage has also been created to highlight prospective activities and experiences.

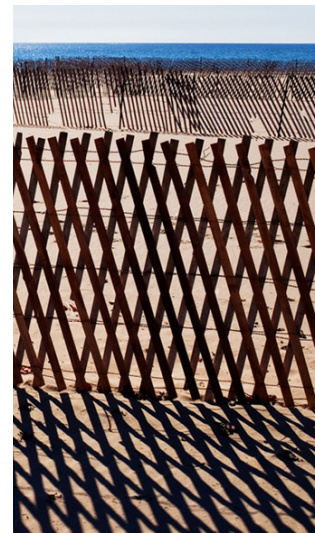
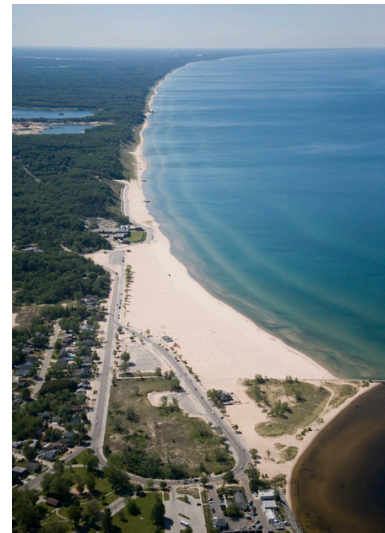




pere marquette response

existing conditions

Bluffton grew into an actor's colony and tourist location in the early 1900's. Buster Keaton, a silent film actor from Chicago, headed this community. The once tourist hot spot is now a residential neighborhood. Bluffton once sat beside the 300ft Pigeon hill sand dune. The dune has since been cleared by Nugent sand, but the location of the neighborhood is still a beautiful one framed by Muskegon Lake, the channel, and Lake Michigan. Michigan Park, now Pere Marquette beach has continuously served as the city's main public waterfront access. The lake to the people of Muskegon means life, joy, memories, relaxation, hope, and energy. All summer long Pere Marquette Park is flooded with life and interaction. This is the ultimate location to see all of the faces of Muskegon: the adventurous kite board or boat, the leisurely walk the pier or relax, and the social organize family barbecues or community activities. This place is full of life, but in the same suffocated way that the downtown festivals are. This front porch of the city has the potential to be a year round sanctuary for all the people in the area to find relief and enjoyment together.



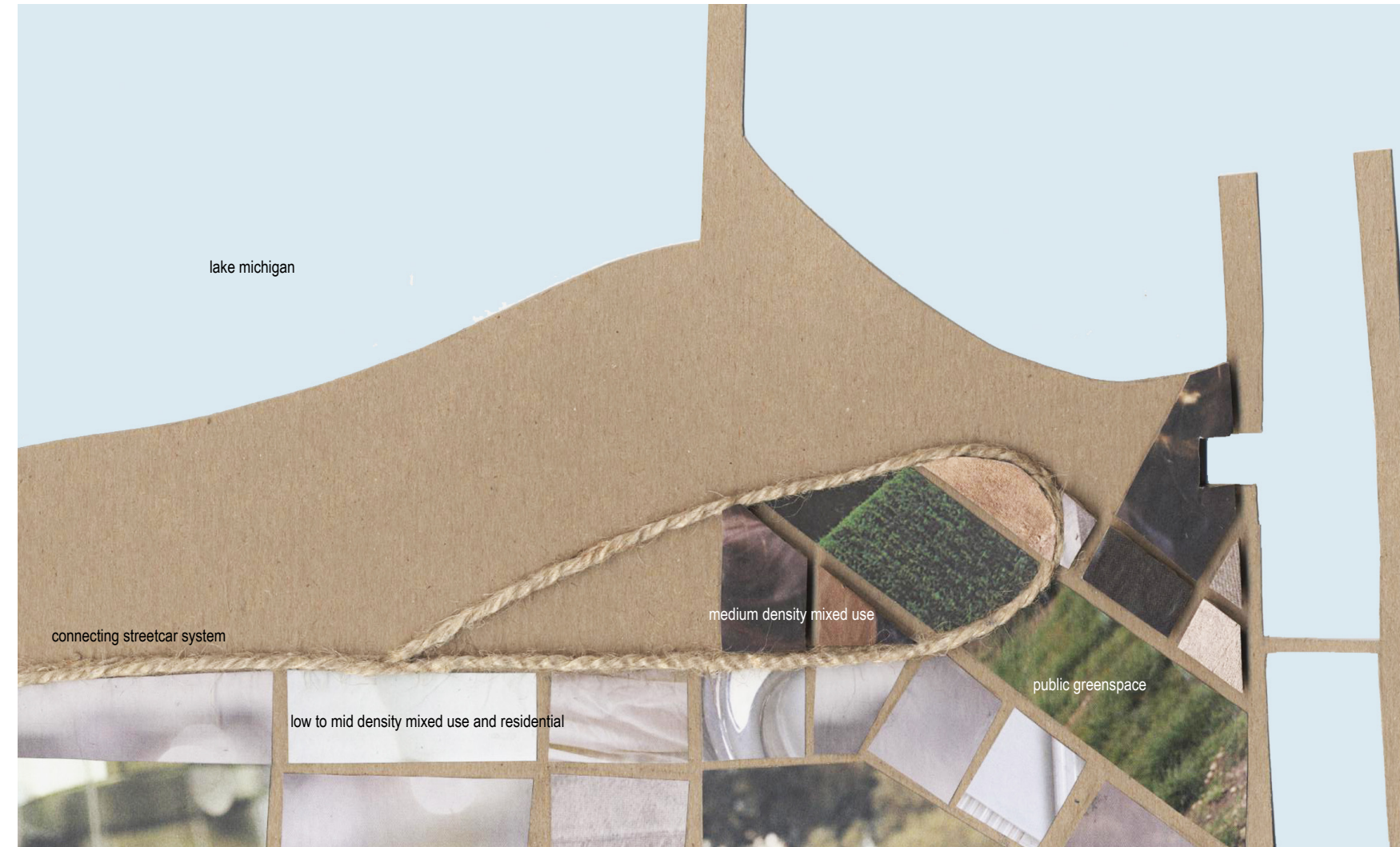
pere marquette response potential density

The image to the right models an optimal density plan for Pere Marquette. The public beach and public green space are to unite with medium density mixed use buildings surrounding the green space. The neighborhood facing the beach is to remain mainly residential, becoming slightly more dense. The twine represents some sort of public transportation to loop the site.



what if?

But again, the goal is not to force people into a new system, but to evoke awareness and individual action. A “what If?” model has been created for Pere Marquette to expose potential density and infill. A program collage has also been created to highlight prospective activities and experiences.





architectural manifestation



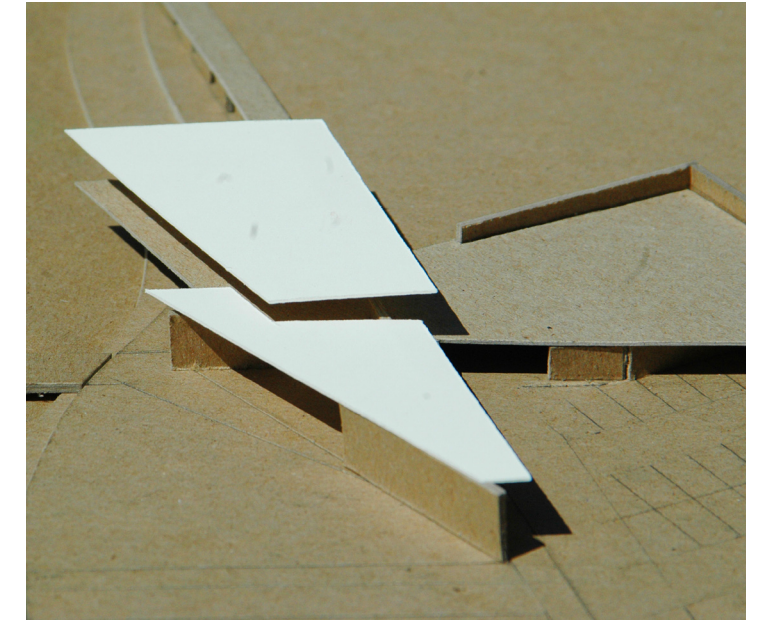
While these concepts are beautiful and intriguing, they will not magically get people moving. The next question is, how can design or architecture make the first move to spark action?

Manifestation: An act of showing or demonstrating something. The state or conditions of being shown or perceptible. An indication that something is present, real, or exists.

The book *Everyday Urbanism* contrasts urban planning vs. urban vernacular. Urban vernacular is “not a master plan, but a local improvisation; not a strategic plan, but a tactical strike.”¹⁶ Since this thesis questions the role of a suffocating urban plan, it is helpful to define the materialization of the project as a response

¹⁶ John Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski, *Everyday Urbanism* (New York: Monacelli, 1999), 19.

to local improvisation. All three sites house intermittent activities for the citizens. This thesis hopes to architecturally embrace those activities and expand their temporal abilities without losing the inherent spontaneity.



downtown manifestation market tents

The proposed downtown site is reclamation of three industrial/post industrial piers that currently separate downtown and its people from Muskegon Lake. These peninsulas are to evolve as a series of indoor/outdoor public spaces accommodating and enlivening existing activities that lack a proper home. The first structure is the permanent beer tent, evolving the many temporary beer tents that sprout up during summer festivals. Instead of degrading the activity by covering it with dull structures that tend to topple under the rain, the proposed beer tent would celebrate this cultural expression. The second structure would house the farmers market that currently operates just outside of the downtown. Relocating the market into the city tents would rejoice its role in the community and bring energy to the area. The proposed public spaces would be open to the public for individual activities as well. The uses of these structures are not to be restricted. The project would reach its highest success when the community begins to realize that they can utilize this space and transform this space in whatever way they wish. As Michael Sorkin has said, "Let us have an architecture of raised expectations and ceaseless elaboration. Architecture cannot escape the complexity of the world."¹⁷ These structures mediate between Muskegon's urban center and natural waterfront.

17 Michael Sorkin, *Some Assembly Required* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2001), 204.

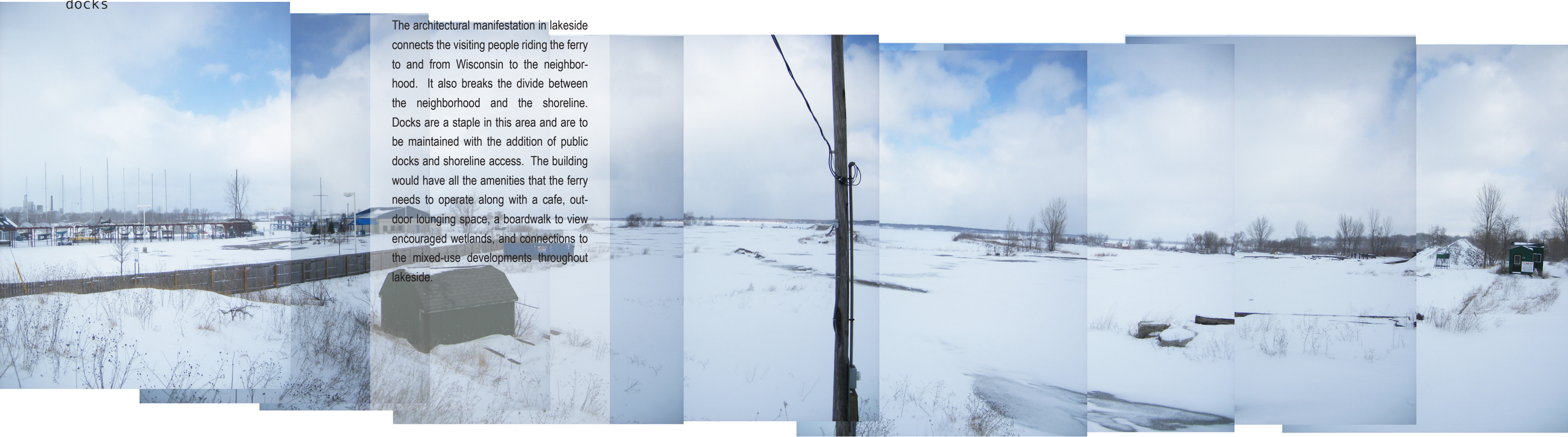
The landscape shapes the space and encourages a variety of evolving uses throughout the seasons. These city tents are meant to continually evoke liveliness on the downtown waterfront, whatever form that may take, to spiritually feed the city.



lakeside manifestation

docks

The architectural manifestation in lakeside connects the visiting people riding the ferry to and from Wisconsin to the neighborhood. It also breaks the divide between the neighborhood and the shoreline. Docks are a staple in this area and are to be maintained with the addition of public docks and shoreline access. The building would have all the amenities that the ferry needs to operate along with a cafe, outdoor lounging space, a boardwalk to view encouraged wetlands, and connections to the mixed-use developments throughout lakeside.



pere marquette manifestation

beach decks

The architectural manifestation at Pere Marquette will emerge as a series of public beach decks. Decks are a common addition to homes in the area as a spot for smaller gatherings. The multilayered beach deck would be a year round relaxation and celebration spot for the city. The program will accept the already occurring activities of both the beach and the neighboring park, allowing a place for them to unite. Activities that currently lack proper architectural expression will find a home within the city decks. Such activities may include a proper bathhouse, a wind surfing headquarters, a volleyball tournament organization center, a small convenience center for lost picnic items, a raised lookout café to view the areas natural beauty, and a relaxation deck. The beach deck is not meant to discourage all the beautiful individual activities that occur on the site, but rather to create one location that openly unites and accepts them when the city currently says the beach has set hours and is meant to be experienced independently. The structure will have a relationship with the ever-changing environment as the sand covers, reveals, and gathers around it. An already developing sand dune is encouraged beside the deck with a boardwalk above it, connecting the deck to the park.



precedent studies
maritime youth house



schouwburgplein (theatre square)



mason's bend community center precedent study
rural studio



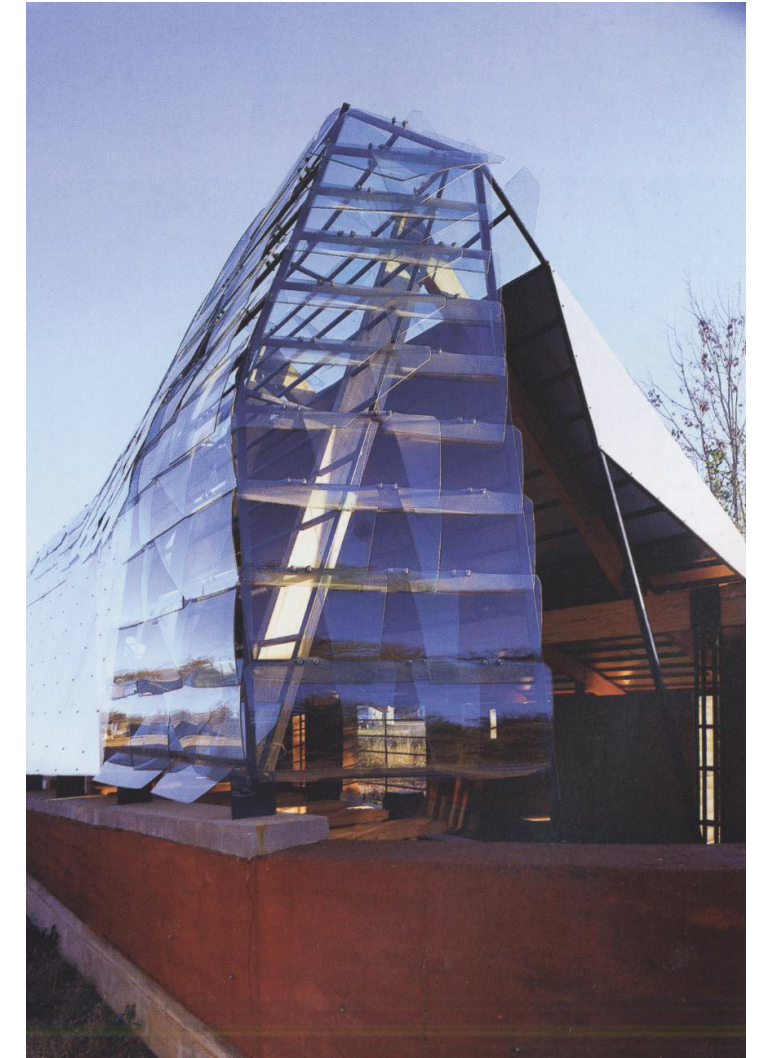
18,19 Andrea Openheimer and Timothy Hursley, Rural Studio (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 49,50.

52



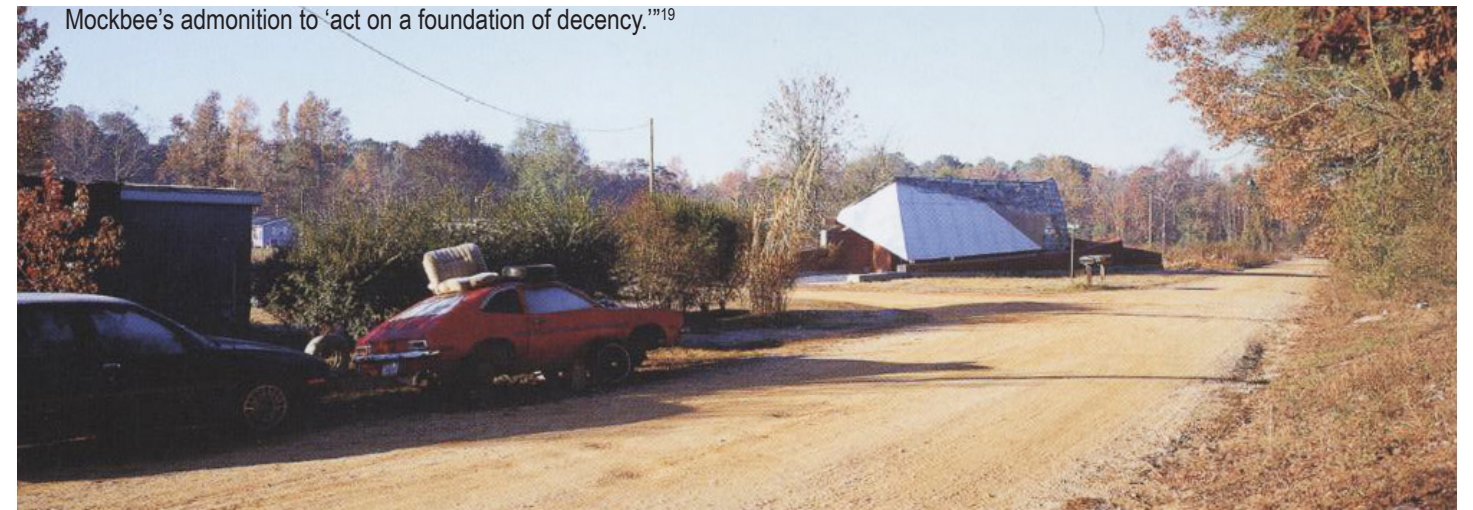
Mason's Bend Community Center is the final thesis project of four students in Samuel Mockbee's rural studio. The students did not hesitate when choosing to impact the Mason's Bend community with a unifying building. The site for the project was chosen for its current ability to function as a convening place for bookmobiles and other gatherings. The students wanted to enhance this interaction with a facility. Community gatherings and church services, which currently take place in trailers, would be housed in a new structure that shows their worth. "We wanted something pristine that would add value to the community, something that wasn't ordinary."¹⁸ While

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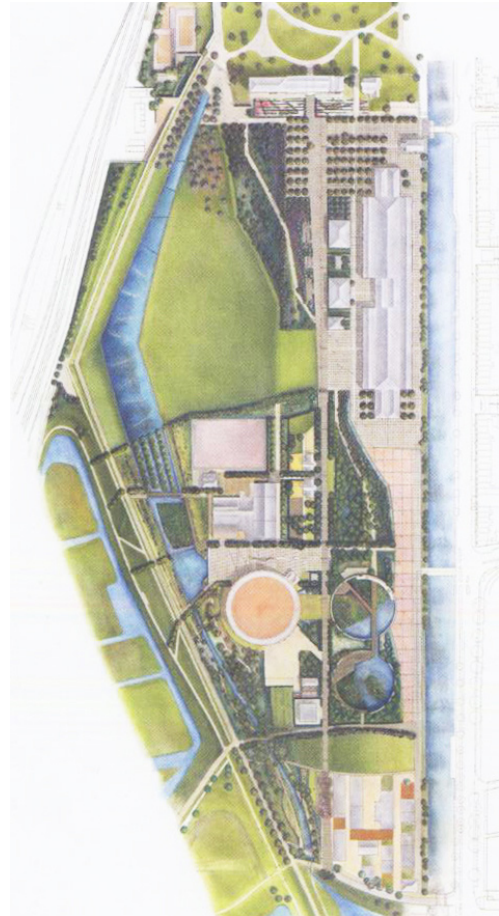




the building was to stand out, the architecture was still very successful in blending into its environment. Low elongated rammed earth walls draw out the rich color of the earth. The form of the roof gives the building a barnyard appearance. The students were resourceful in coming up with materials in order to keep the budget low. A large amount of the materials were donated. Recycled automotive windshields were pulled from a Chicago junkyard to serve as the glass roof. This projects ability to understand the community and give back in a practical way is where its success lies. "A work of avant-garde design perfectly at home in its rustic setting, a civic building created by altruistic twenty-one-year-olds for people too poor to pay rent, the Mason's Bend community center embodies Mockbee's admonition to 'act on a foundation of decency.'"¹⁹



culturpark westergasfabiek precedent study
rural studio



20 Jane Amidon, *Moving Horizons* (Boston: Birkhauser Publishers for Architecture, 2005), 183.

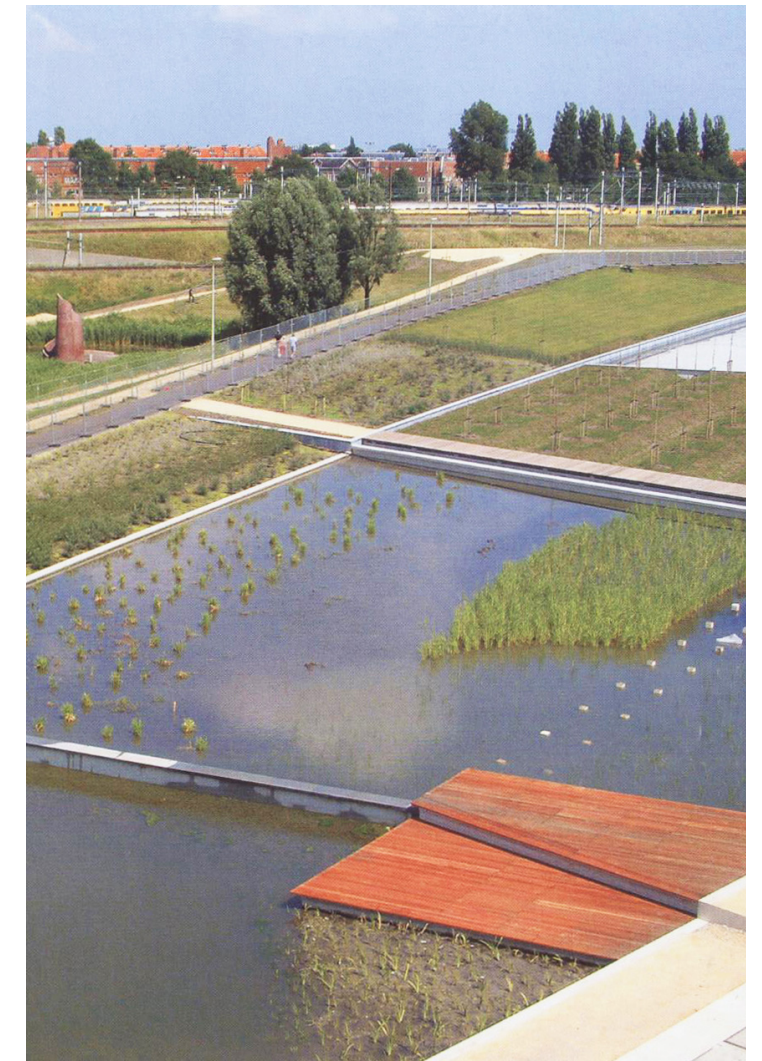


Cultuurpark is an innovative example of a reclaimed brownfield site in an urban context. This 19th-century coal-gas factory just outside of central Amsterdam closed in 1981 and has since become public recreational space. The reclamation began as an interim use plan activated by local inhabitants while the process of function decontamination of toxic soils took place. Over the ten years of detoxification, the site gained enormous popularity throughout the community leading to plans for permanent use of the buildings and surrounding grounds. Gustafson Porter's "changement" proposal transferred the vast site into a multi-layered culture and recreation park. "Changement" was programmed to enhance and connect the existing and blossoming activities





that were scattered throughout the site. The design's ability to reveal local identity through the reuse of a postindustrial site is an aspect of Cultuurpark that this thesis hopes to align with. "The Westergasfabriek scheme meshed the circulation of water and people in a way that references the site's ecological and industrial heritage while providing flexible spaces for both public agenda and individual exploration."²⁰ The temporal and adaptable nature of this project is also important to the development of this thesis. The field of events expands and contracts as people come and go. The adjacent lake can rise to the park's edge or recede to make way for larger crowds. Cultuurpark is an inspiring example of a derelict site reclaimed to allow the people and their environment to harmoniously express their own identity and character.



lurie garden

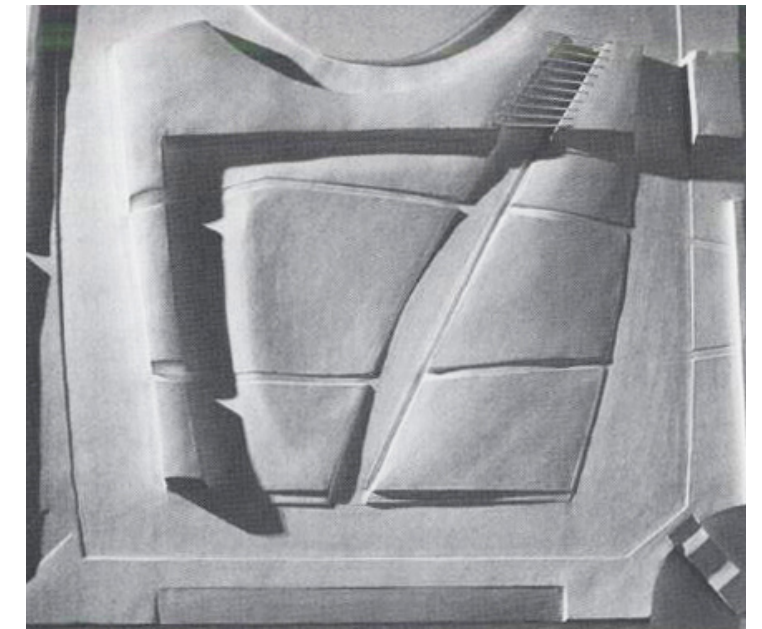
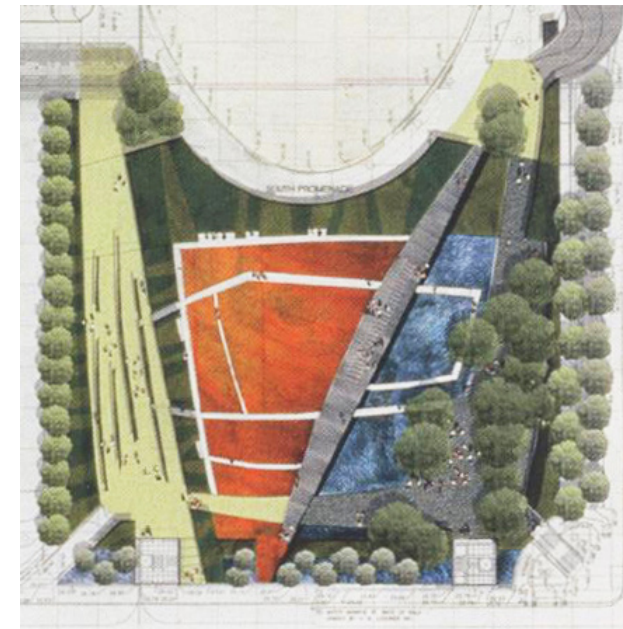
precedent studies



21 Jane Amidon, *Moving Horizons* (Boston: Birkhauser Publishers for Architecture, 2005), 184.

22 Peter Reed, *Groundswell* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 96.

Lurie Garden occupies three acres of the 24-acre millennium park in downtown Chicago. This reconstruction of the northwest corner of Grant Park is a roof garden covering an underground parking garage and operating rail yard. Gustafson Guthrie Nichol Ltd saw the project as a tool to express the progression of Chicago's shoreline. The design speaks of the physical deformation and reclamation the shoreline has experienced; "from wild, marshy shoreline to railroad yard, to parking garage, to roof top garden. The design allows people to experience the contrasts between past and present forms of





the site.”²¹ There are two zones of the site, the light plate and dark plate. A boardwalk, water channel, and pool separate the zones. “These elements cut an arc through the garden, tracing an old retaining wall that protected the city from the lake, reminding one that the entire park occupies a century-old artificial landfill.”²² Vegetation shapes intimate and open spaces as well as alters the gardens mood throughout the seasons. The relationships to the city’s natural and culture heritage as well as the garden’s ability to create dynamic year round spaces are successful aspects of this project and important to the development of this thesis.



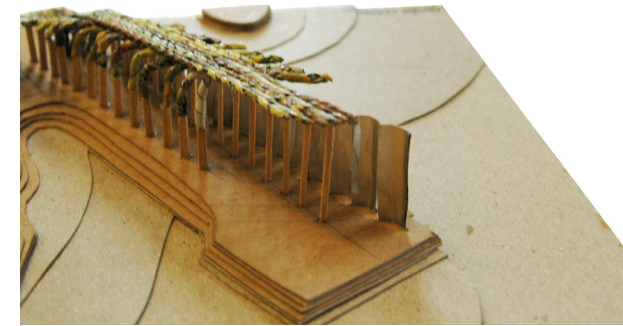
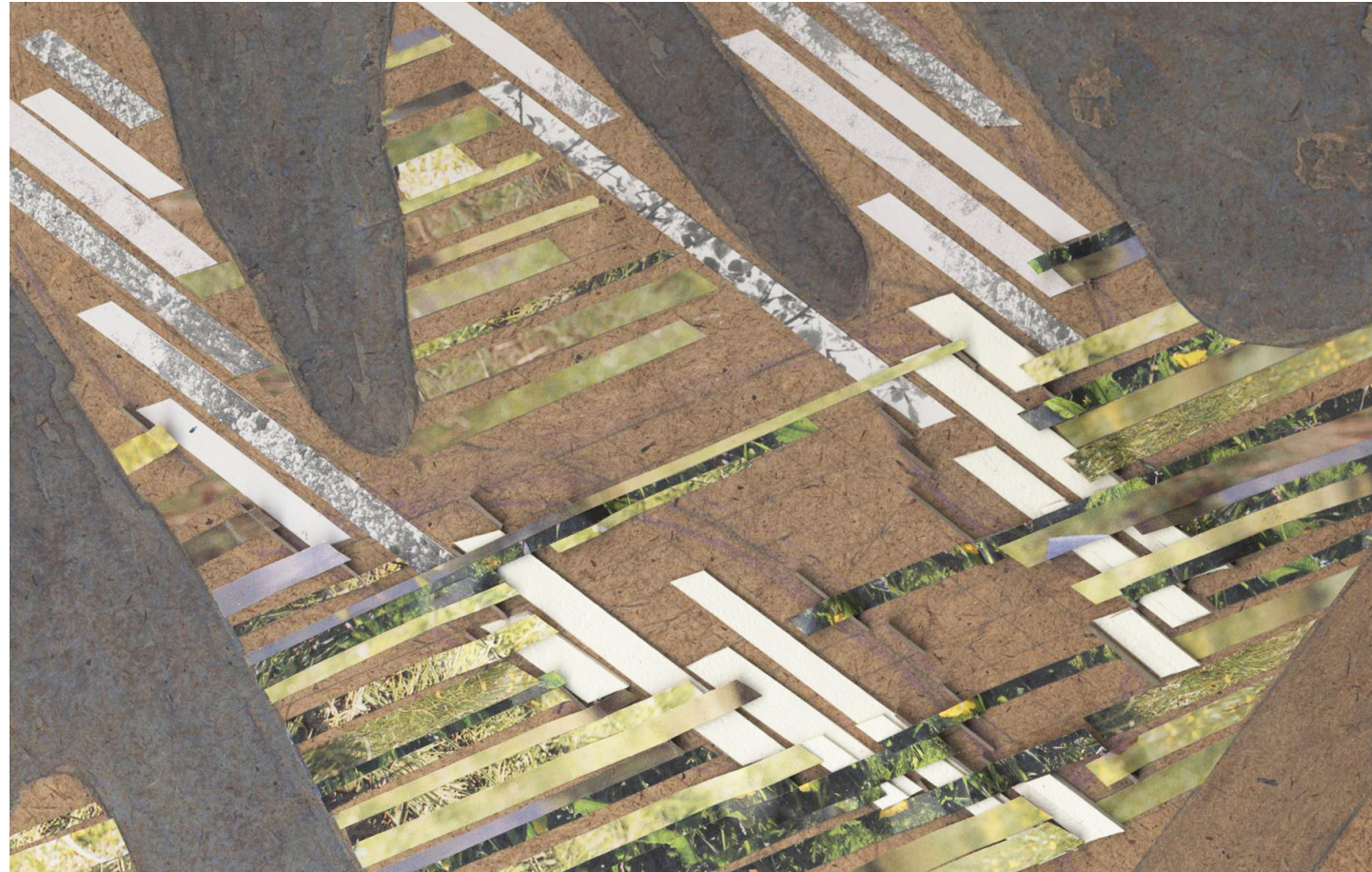
design development

It was important to keep in mind the context of Muskegon while designing. Context meaning the people and lifestyle of the inhabitants of Muskegon and the natural and environmental expression of Muskegon. These intentions led to landscape urbanism and the idea that the landscape can create performative spaces. The temporal abilities of each site

were given focus to allow each site to morph through the seasons while operating year round. The sites are also to evolve over the years as nature is allowed to take over in some locations, and inhabitants of the city in others.



downtown design development
market tents



The image to the far left is a site study model. This model explores ways that the buildings could move from the downtown to the lakeshore. It also explores how the landscape itself creates space by wrapping through the site and around the buildings.



The images on the left are of the first design model for the downtown site. They are purely an exploration of how permanent architecture can be successful indoor outdoors space that blends into its landscape.



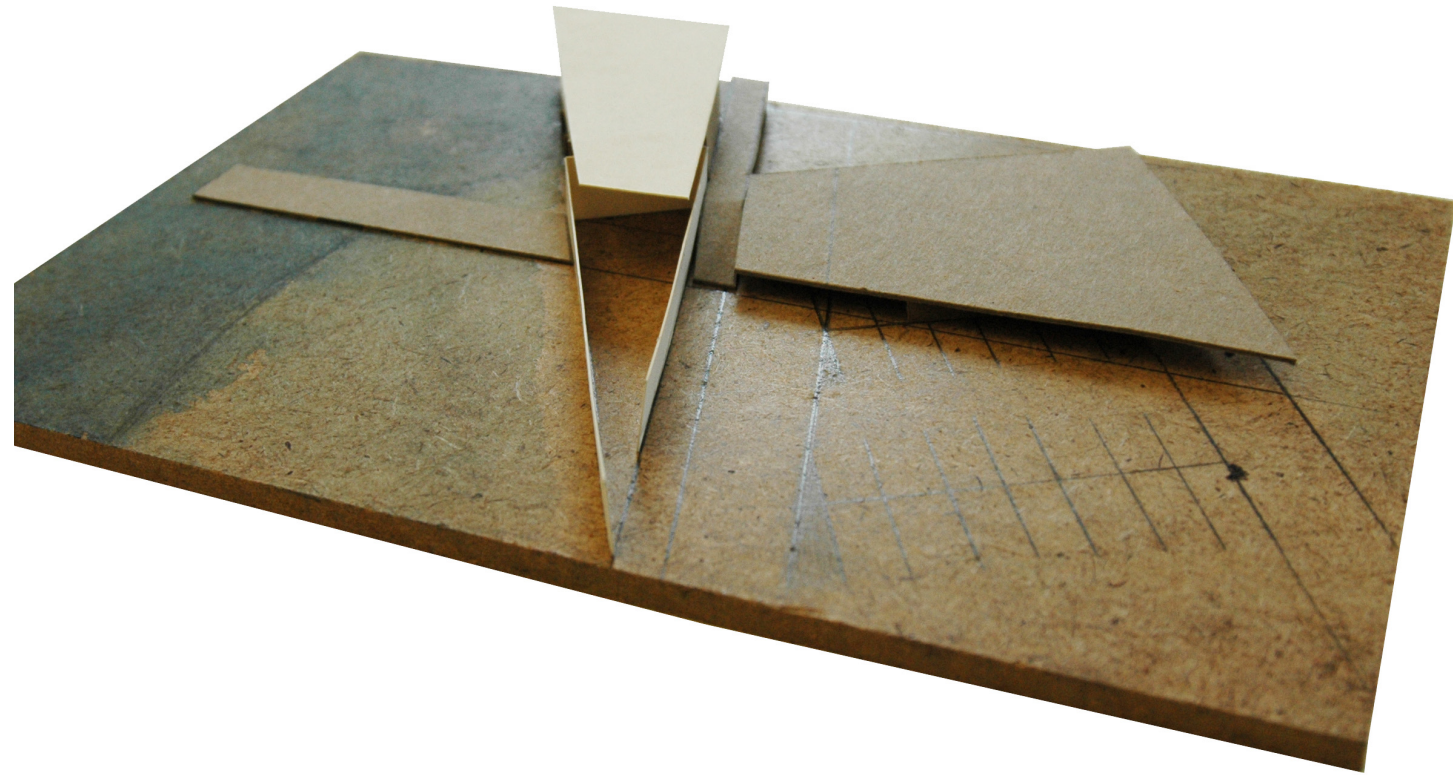


To the left are watercolor explorations of the downtown site.

The model to the right is an early study model of the market tents.

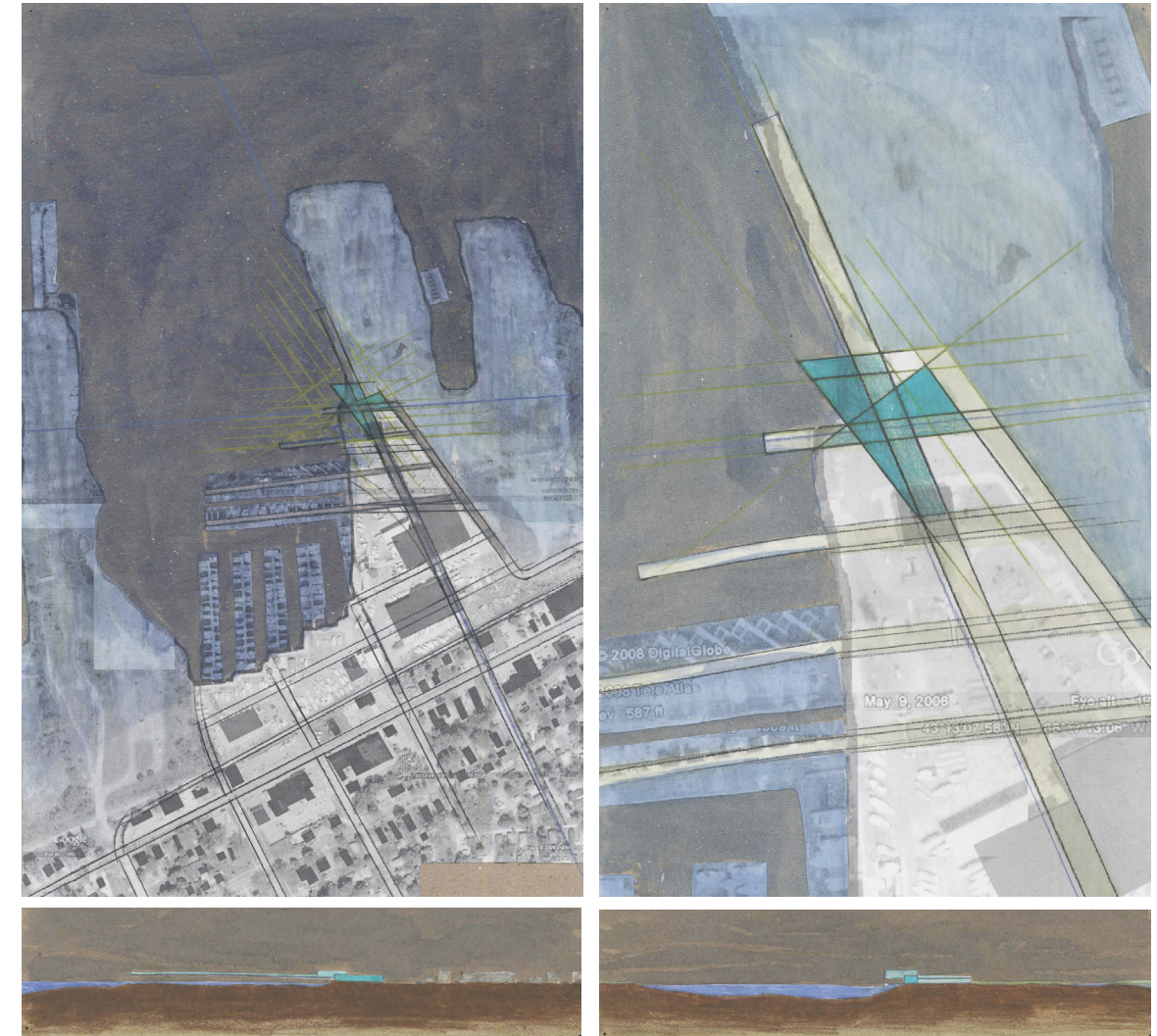


lakeside design development
docks



The model to the left is the first study model of the lakeside dock ferry building.

To the right are watercolor explorations of the lakeside site.

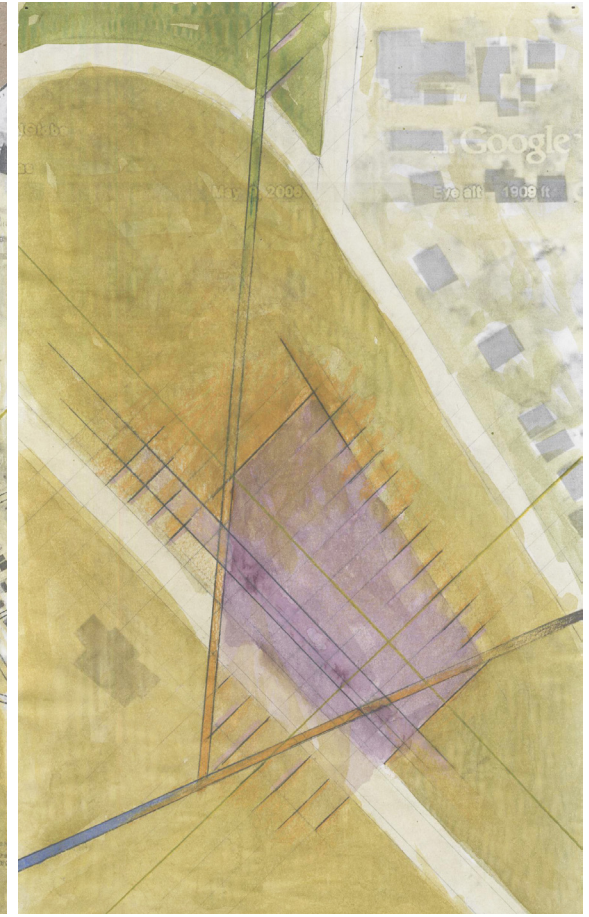


pere marquette design development
beach deck

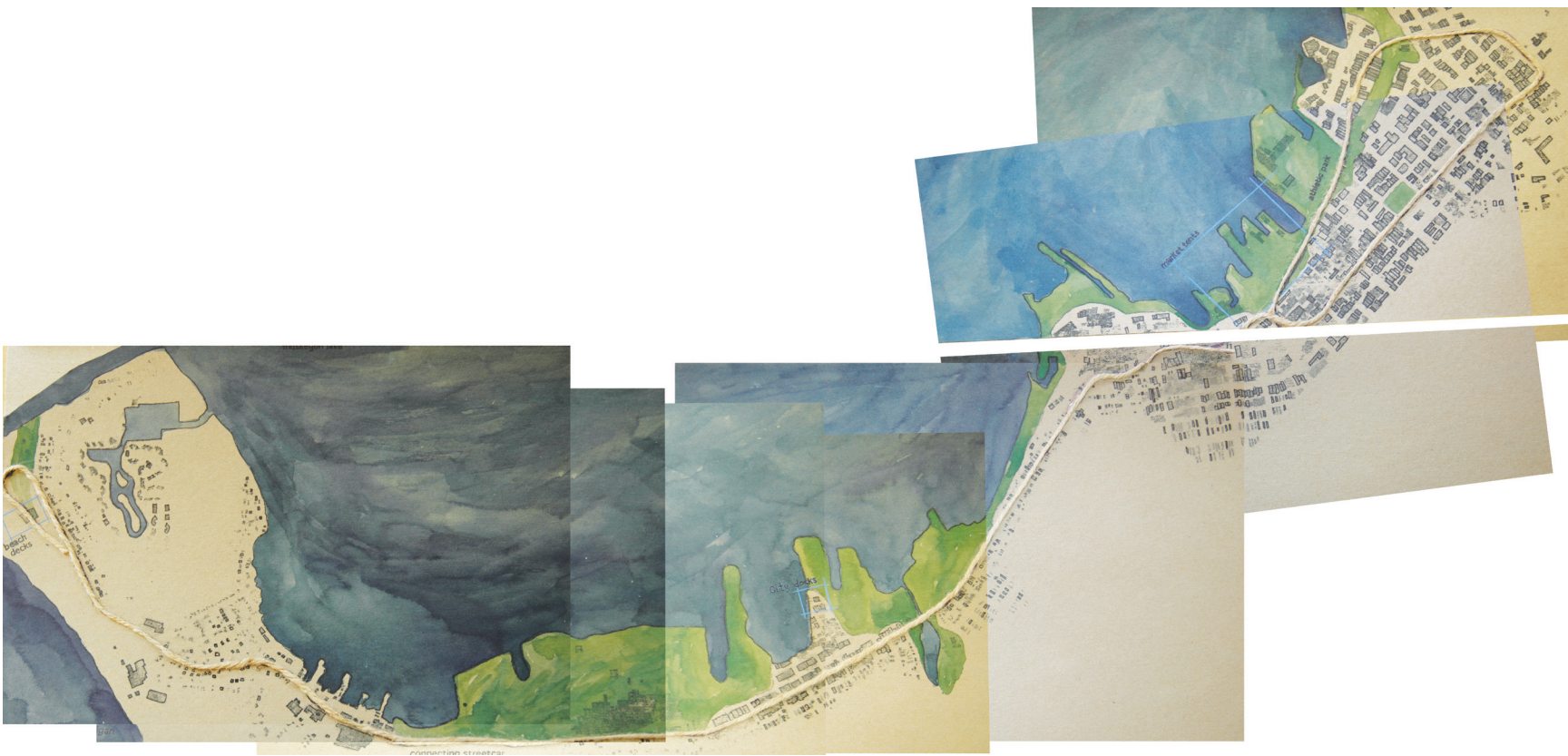


The models to the left are the first study models for the beach deck.

To the right are watercolor explorations of the pere marquette site.



muskegon lake shoreline design development



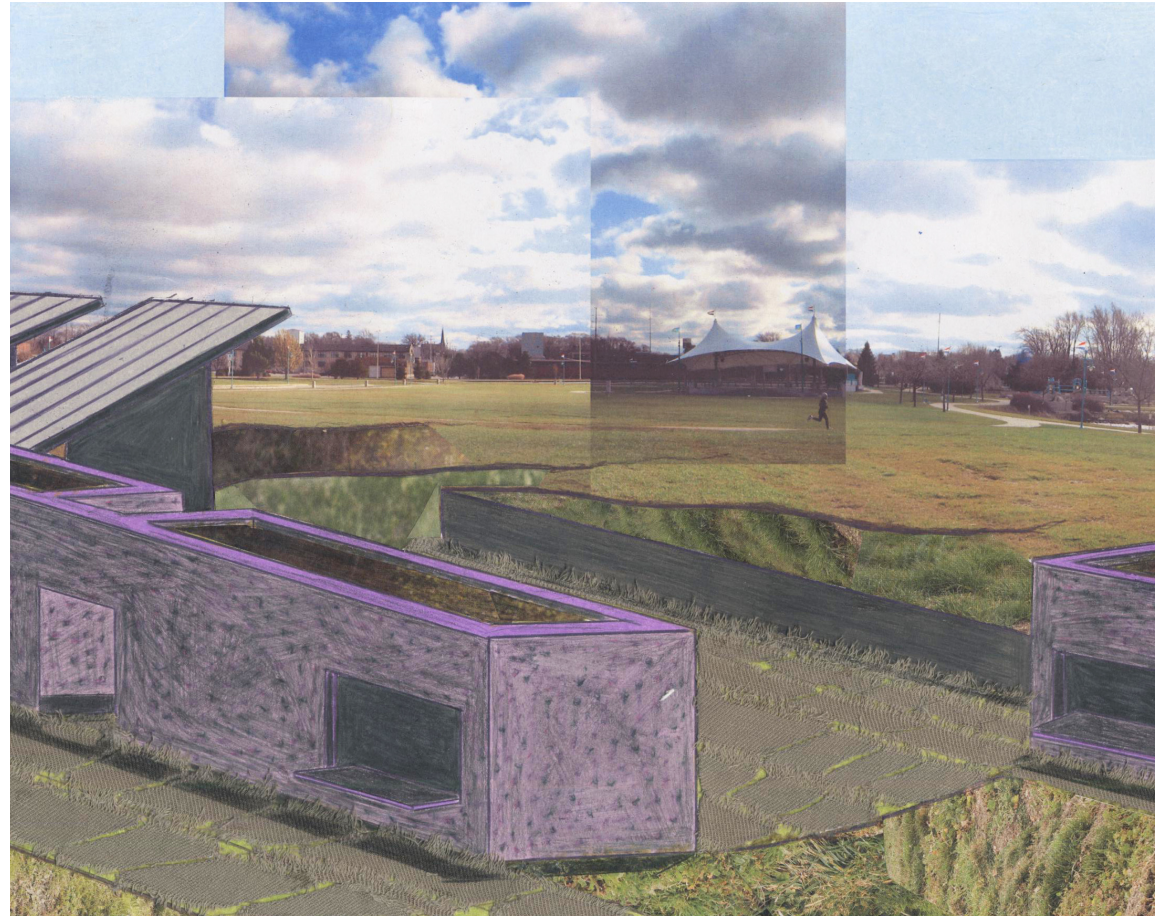
Each site has its own setting and vibe; this individuality is encouraged, but a unifying physical element is necessary to make Muskegon operate as a successful urban environment. Public transportation is to be implemented decreasing automobile dependence and encouraging spontaneous interaction. A streetcar once connected the sites and could greatly enhance the shoreline environment if re-established. The three neighborhoods that this thesis focus's on are not the only shoreline sites in need of care. All of the shoreline lots rendered green on the adjacent map are to be analyzed and given a vision of purpose to better unify the shoreline.

project proposal

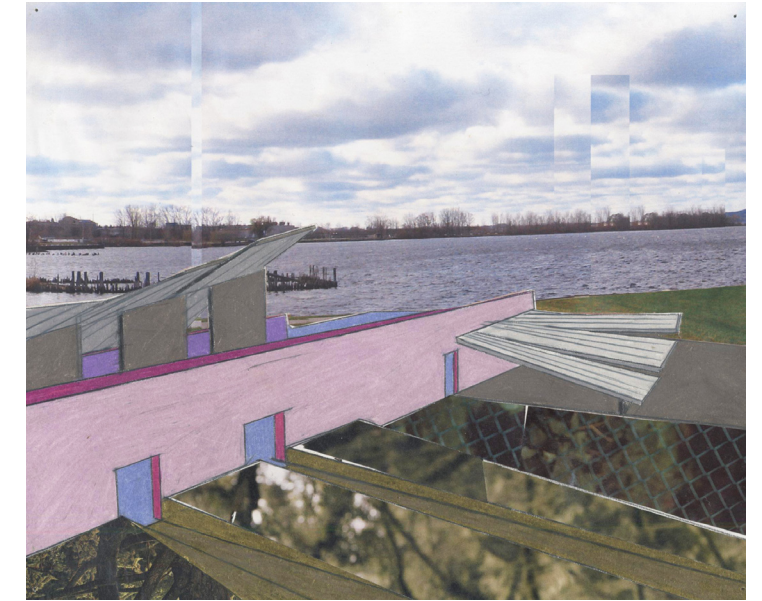
The final proposal allows architecture to enhance the already beautiful and unique activities of Muskegon. Each architectural manifestation allows the people to interact with their environment year round while in the company of others. These projects address issues of social interaction and individual expression at the human scale, inspiring inhabitants to step up and make their city home.

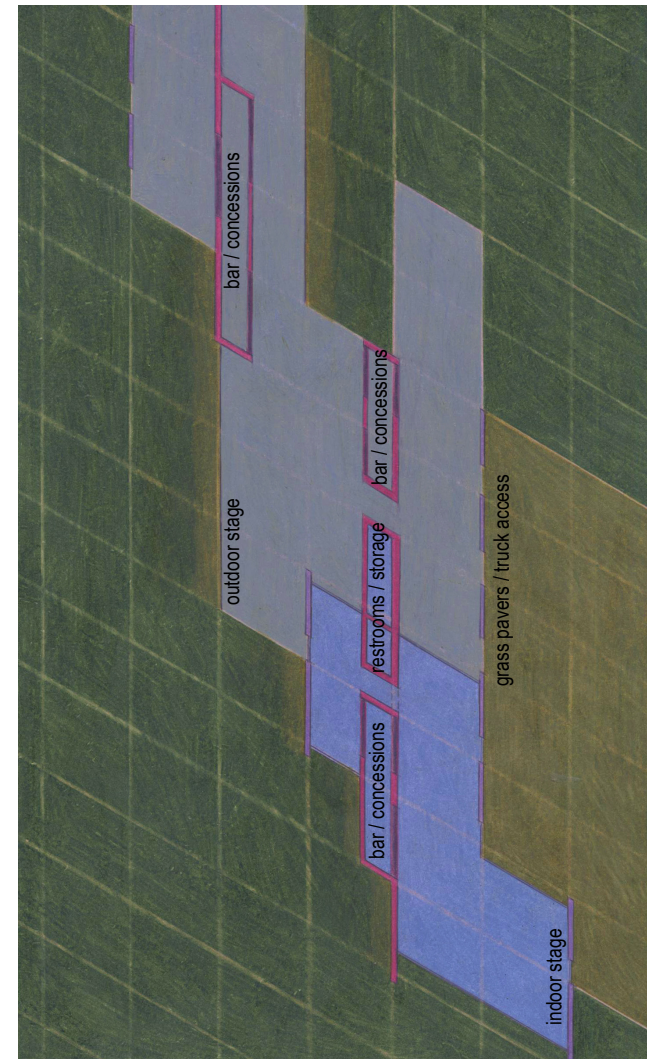
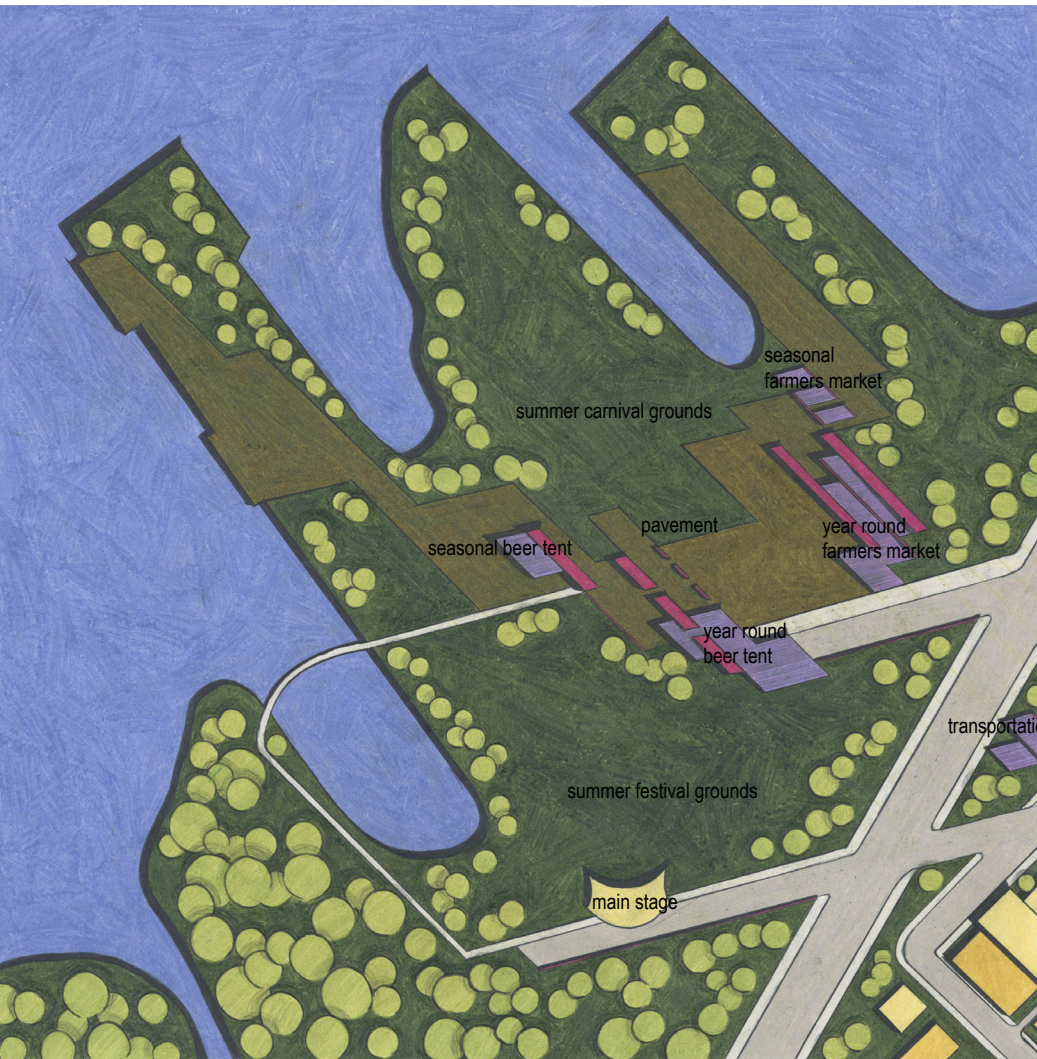
downtown project proposal

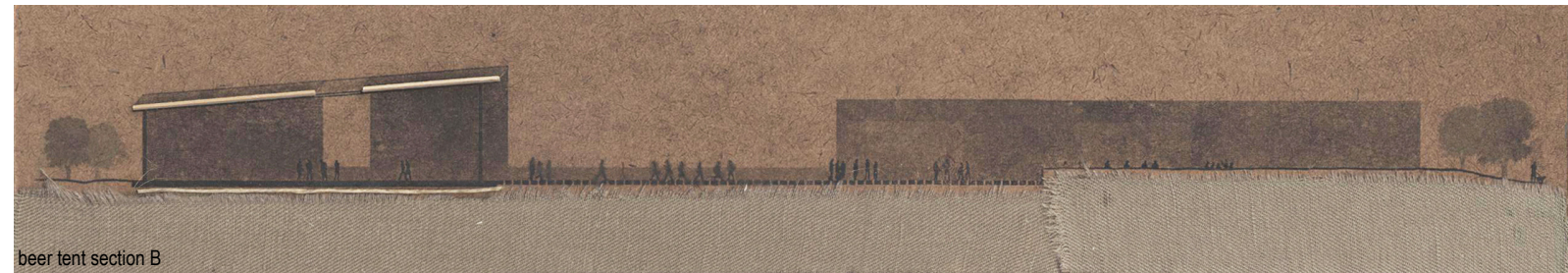
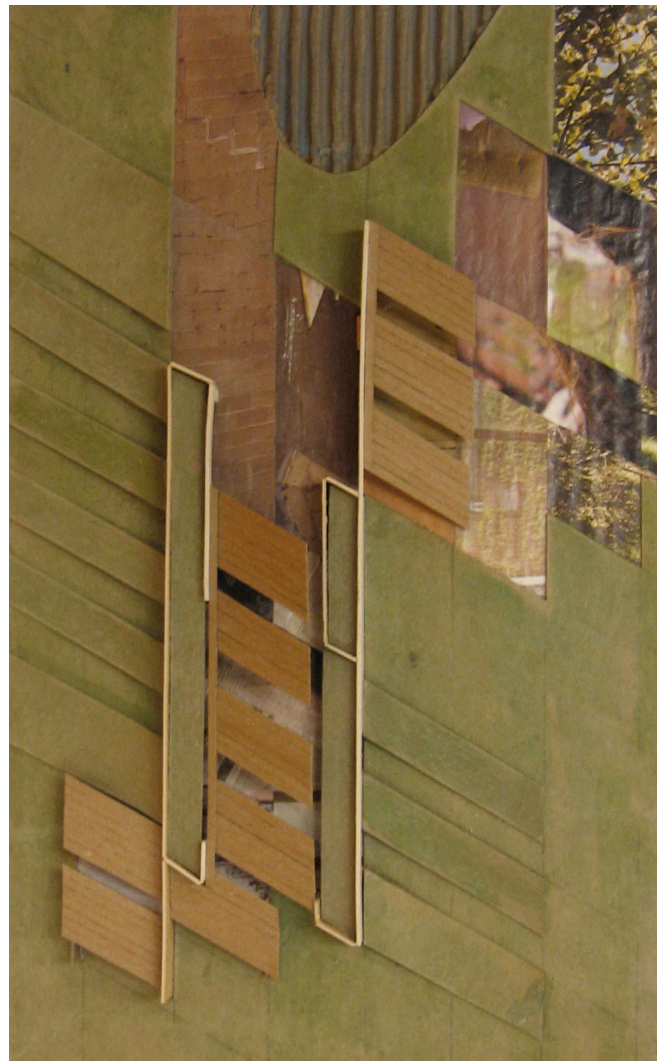
market tents



The downtown market tents are a series of indoor/outdoor public spaces accommodating and enlivening existing activities that lack a proper home. The first structure is the permanent beer tent, evolving the many temporary beer tents that sprout up during summer festivals. The second structure would house the farmers market that currently operates just outside of the downtown. These structures mediate between Muskegon's urban center and natural waterfront. The landscape shapes the space and encourages a variety of evolving uses throughout the seasons. These city tents are would evoke liveliness on the downtown waterfront to spiritually feed the city.



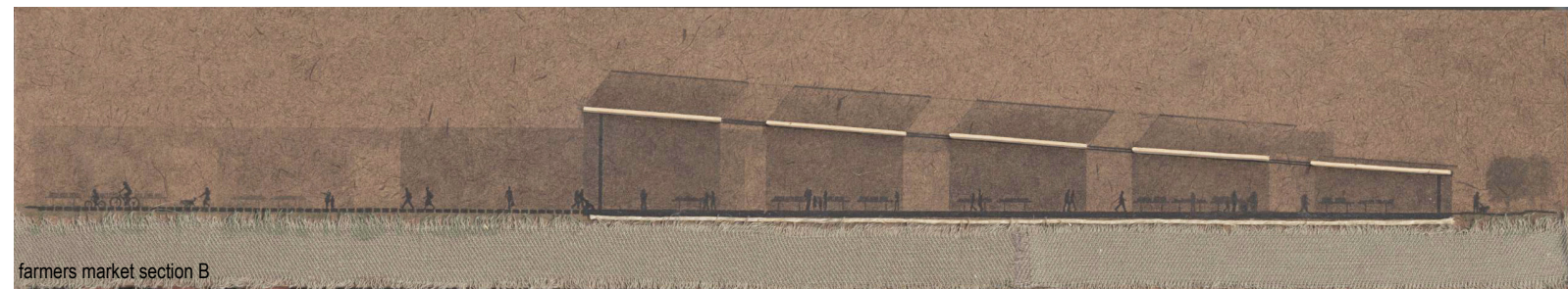




beer tent section B



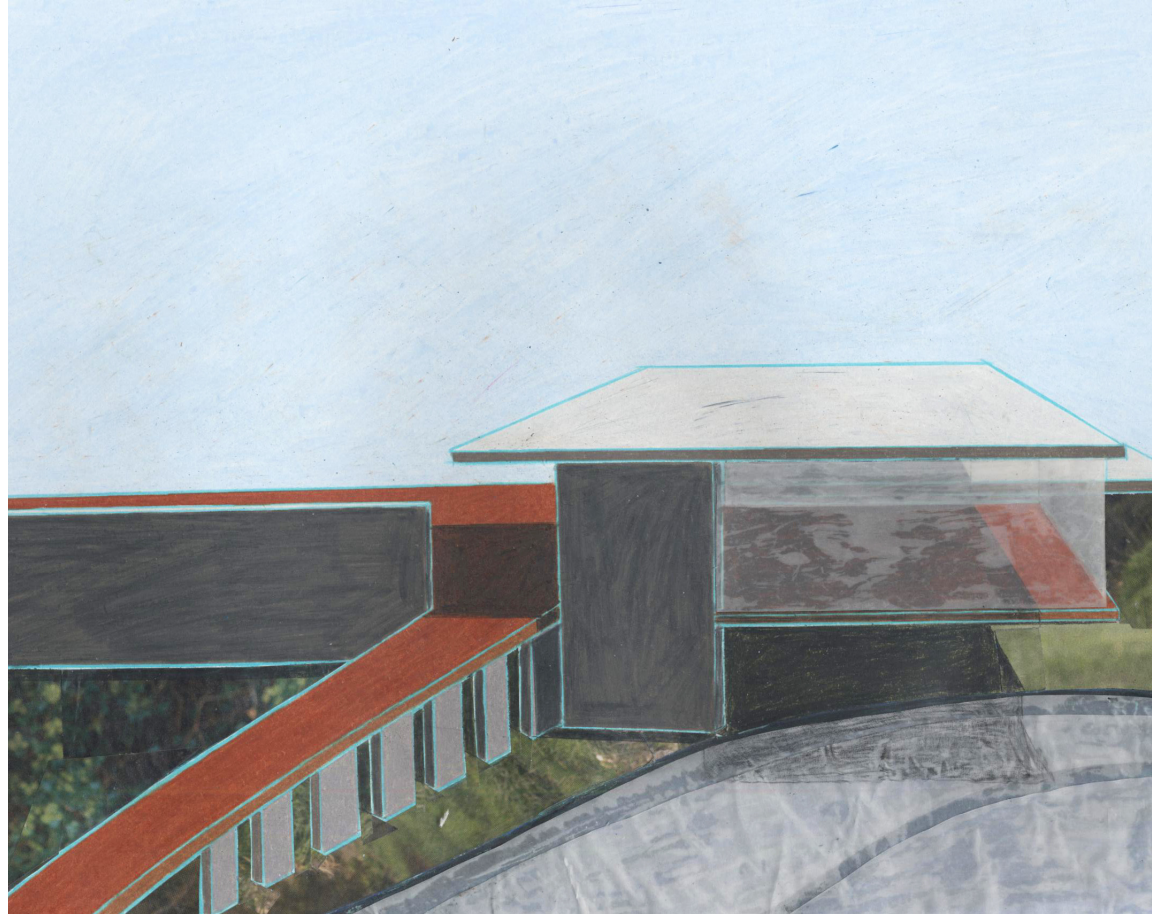
farmers market section A



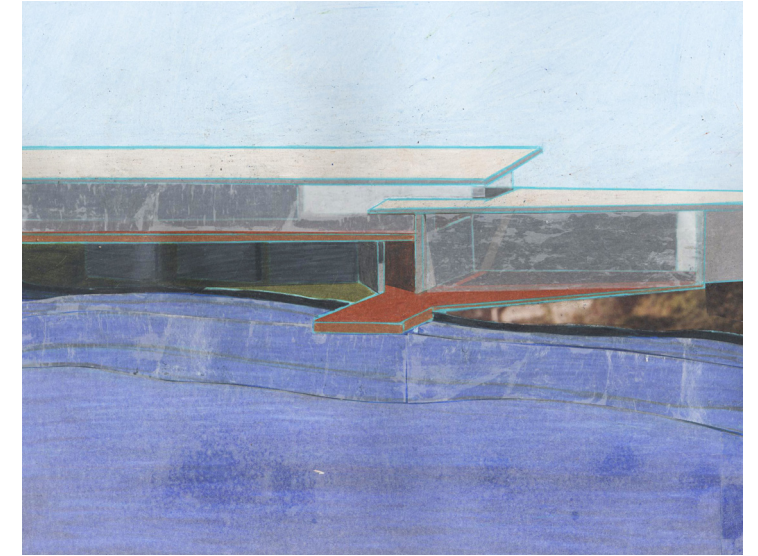
farmers market section B

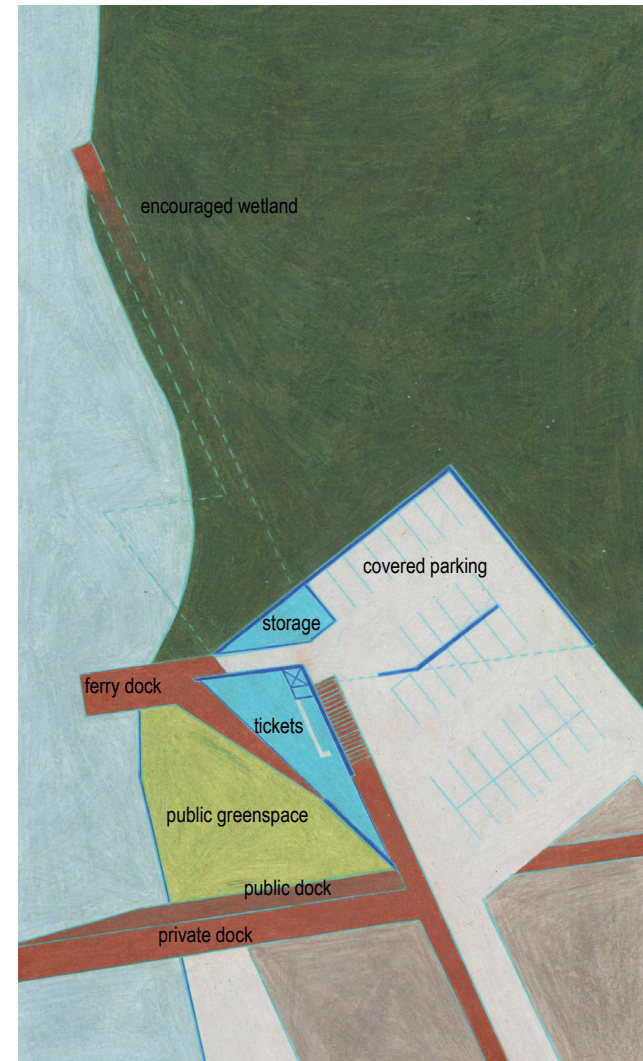
lakeside project proposal

docks



The lakeside docks connect the visiting people riding the ferry to and from Wisconsin to the neighborhood. It also breaks the divide between the neighborhood and the shoreline. The building has all the amenities that the ferry needs to operate along with a cafe, outdoor lounging space, a boardwalk to view encouraged wetlands, and connections to the mixed-use developments throughout lakeside.





lakeside docks
social sections

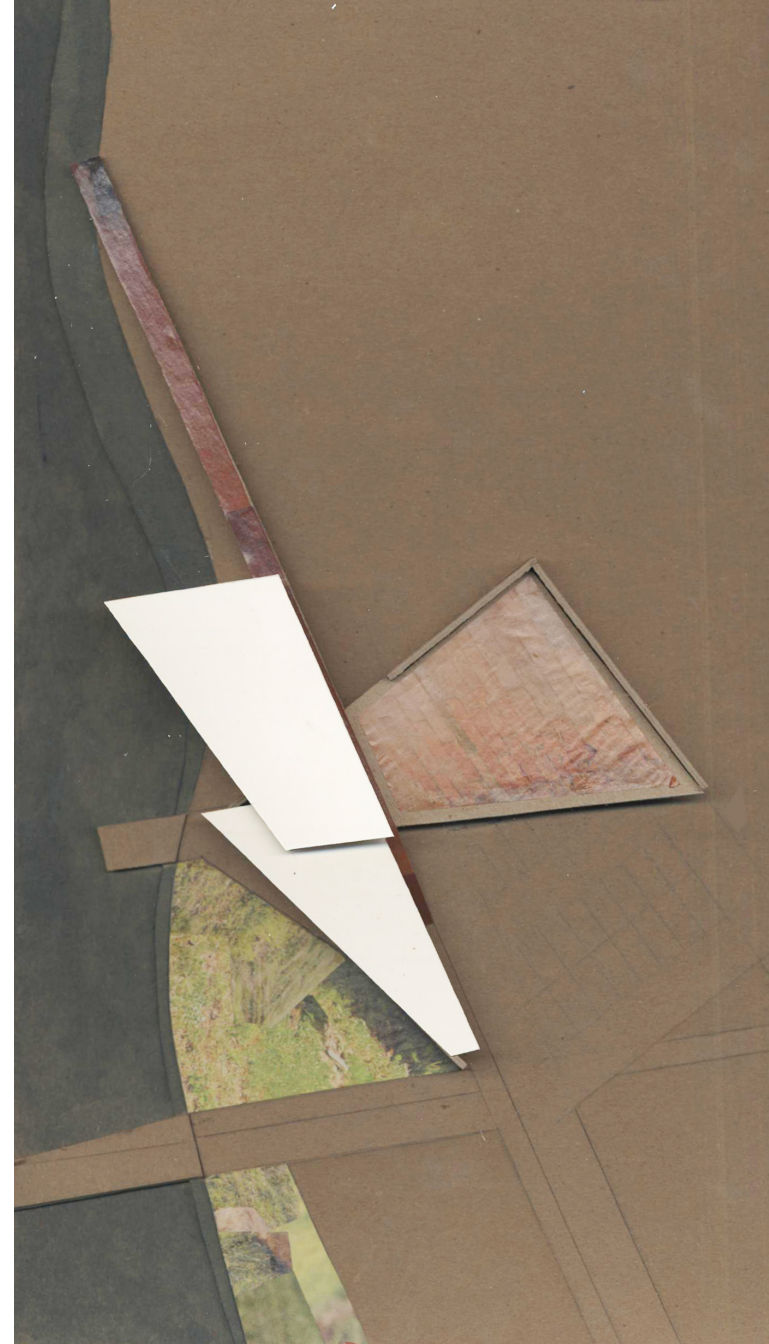


lakeside docks section A



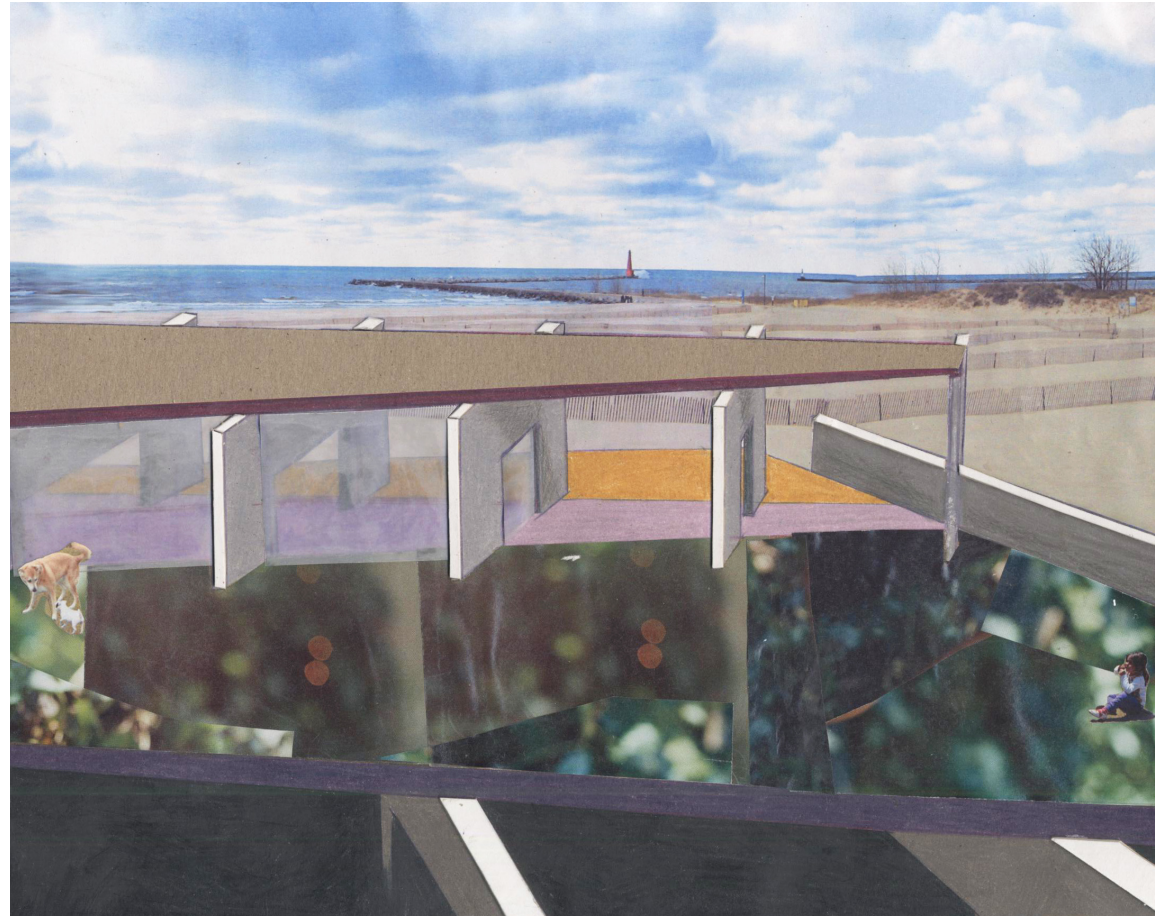
lakeside docks section B

lakeside docks
models



pere marquette project proposal

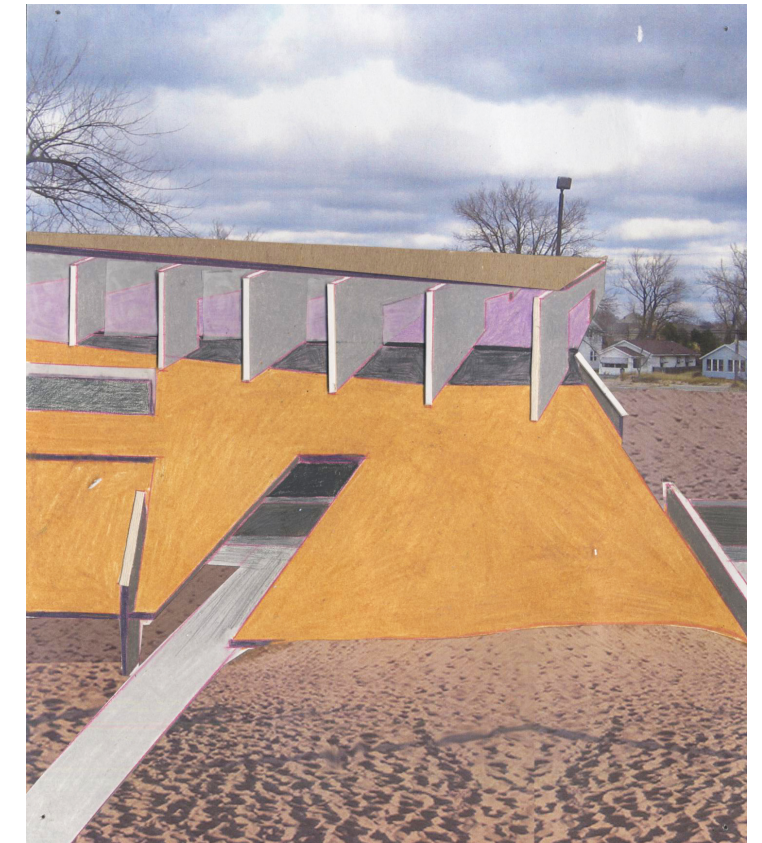
beach deck

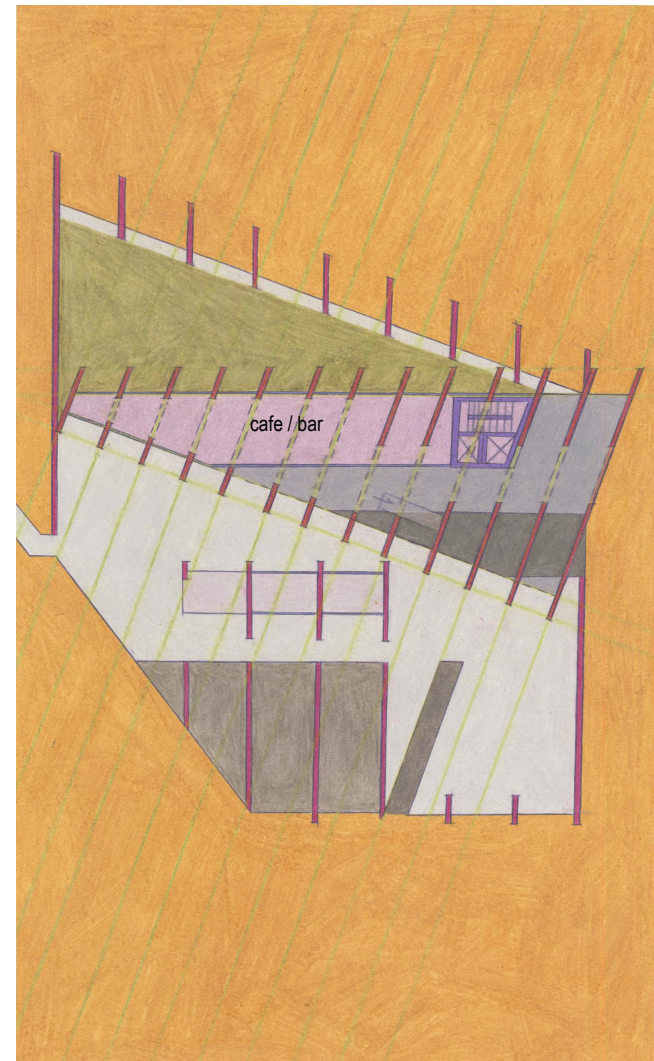
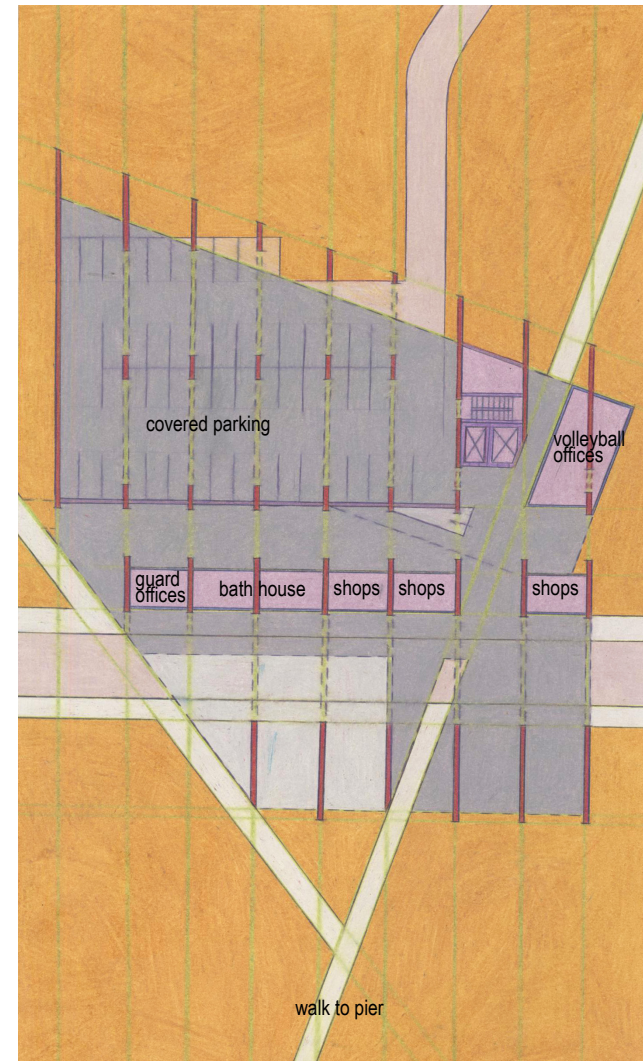


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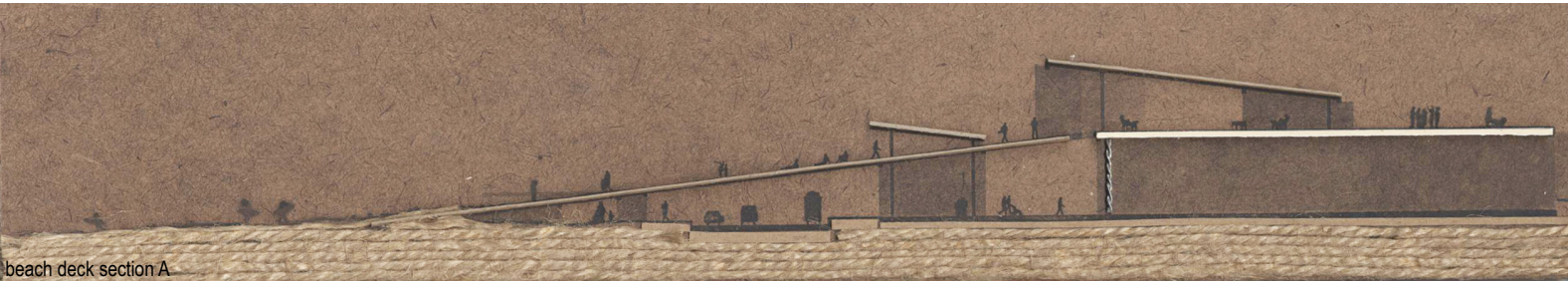
The beach decks are a year round relaxation and celebration spot for the city. The decks accept the already occurring activities of both the beach and the neighboring park, allowing a place for them to unite. Activities that currently lack proper architectural expression have a home within the city decks. The structure has a relationship with the ever-changing environment as the sand covers, reveals, and gathers around it. An already developing sand dune is encouraged beside the deck with a boardwalk above it, connecting the deck to the park.

91





beach deck
social sections



beach deck section A



beach deck section B



beach deck
models

muskegon lake shoreline project proposal

The three site manifestations serve as the immediate action to spark interest in the neighborhoods. Their individual characters are to be connected as part of an overall vision for the lakeshore. The historic trolley line would be reintroduced to the shoreline, looping the sites together. The main transportation hub for the shoreline trolley and other future light rail lines would be downtown across the street from the market tents. The pedestrian friendly shoreline bike path that currently connects the sites would be maintained and expanded. Public boat docks would be implemented along the entire shoreline to encourage boaters from all over West Michigan to explore Muskegon. An overall use scheme has been applied to the lakeshore including: spots for immediate urban development; areas of future adaptive reuse and urban expansion on abandoned industrial sites; encouraged wetlands along the lakeshore neighborhood; public downtown recreation space; encouraged dunes and natural habitats between Pere Marquette and Muskegon Lake; and a green technologies site for the expansion of Grand Valley State University's Muskegon Lake campus. The neighborhoods of Bluffton (Pere Marquette), Lakeside, and Downtown are the initial steps of an overall vision for the Muskegon shoreline.



concluding thoughts



Initially this project sought to physically unite Muskegon through a defined urban plan. As the project progressed, it was obvious that such a goal would be unsuccessful and just as dull as the city's current plans of growth. The mentality, character, and desires of the people are what ultimately shaped the outcome of this project. The project does not lay out a series of steps to "fix" Muskegon's issues. It doesn't because there is no way one person can do that. The uniting of Muskegon will be an act of its inhabitants and this projects aim was to show the people of Muskegon that they have the power to step up and make their home a place to be proud of. I think this project is very successful in understanding the vibe of Muskegon. The project gives the people of glimpse of how great Muskegon is and can be. It is now the people of Muskegon's turn to make something happen.

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