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Roosevelt County Courthouse Square Improvements

Jeremy Scott Alford

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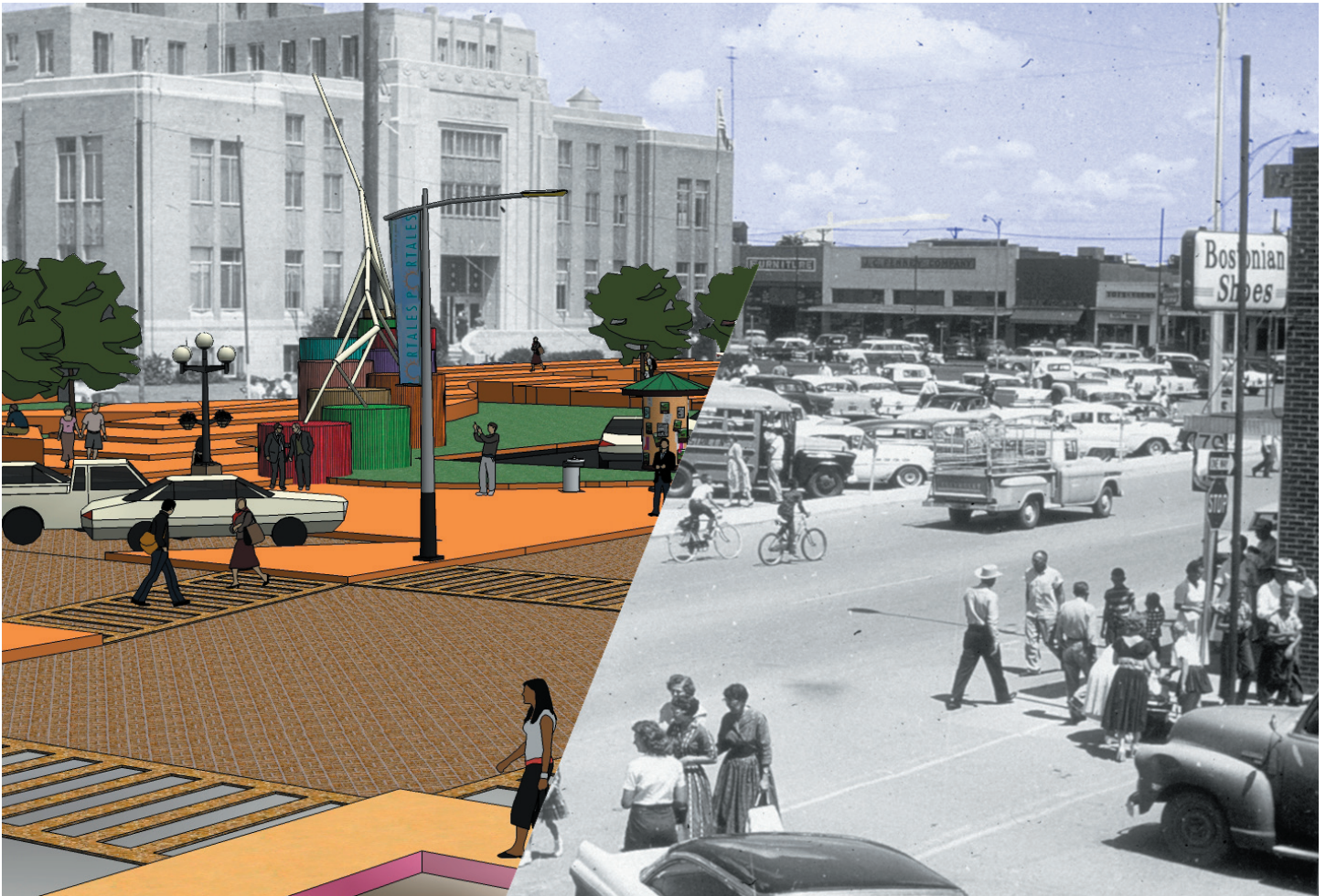
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Roosevelt County Courthouse Square Improvements



Courtesy of Eastern New Mexico University

Created by Jeremy Scott Alford
Through the Design Planning and Assistance Center at the University of
New Mexico, under the direction of Mark Childs.
Undertaken at the request of the City of Portales.
Spring semester 2006

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Players

City of Portales

Main Street

Roosevelt County Courthouse

University of New Mexico – Design Planning and Assistance Center

The design process started with a review of what a previous DPAC design studio had created, and a trip to Portales for a meeting with Jeremy Strum and Danny Woodward. Photographs were taken and a conversation began with advisor Mark Childs. This conversation has continued throughout the process.



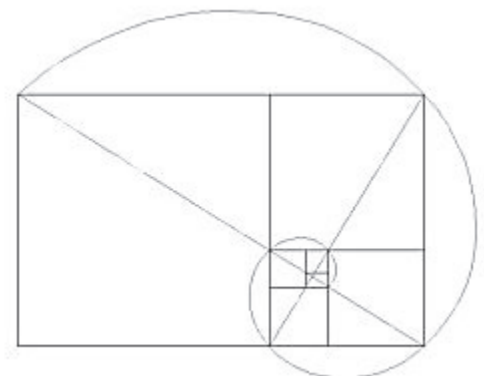
Foreword

The goal of this process was to provide as much knowledge and insight as possible to the city of Portales with the intention that they would use this knowledge and this booklet as a tool to write an RFP that would get them the type of end product they want. While shifting from design issues to RFP issues it quickly became apparent that the RFP written for this project would need to be written better than what the current standard of RFP is in the state. This led me on a search for an RFP suited for this project. I found many advanced RFP around the country in cities that are getting very high levels of work done. A key component of these cities however, was a defined official policy on how their city is looking at projects covered by an RFP in addition to how the city does business as a whole.

Therefore this booklet is indeed an attempt to shed light on the important issues that surround the Roosevelt county courthouse and in turn the city of Portales. In addition to this booklet, an RFP will be included that will give its users a clear understanding and direction from which to move forward. Lastly I have assembled a policy agenda that will support the issues set out in this report.

Sustainability – A holistic approach to design priorities that deal with the long-term health of a project

1. To keep in existence; maintain.
2. To supply with necessities or nourishment; provide for.
3. To support from below; keep from falling or sinking.
4. To support the spirits, vitality, or resolution of; encourage.
5. To bear up under; withstand.
6. To affirm the validity of.



Current Situation

The City of Portales is looking to improve and revitalize the current condition of the square.



Downtown Portales Nolli Map
(Green solids are built structures)

Average day in Portales



Baseline Information

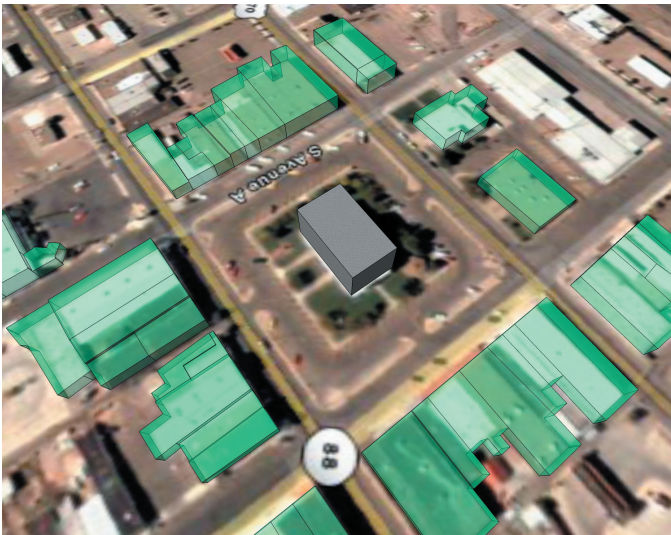
The research began with the studying of public design precedents and recent research on the subject of public spaces. **Topics** such as public art, water collection, and multi-use spaces came about.

Next, the research focused on the identification and analysis of the spaces around the courthouse. Physical adjacencies and uses were mapped. Uses were evaluated and considered for design problems and opportunities. **Issues** that came up were parking, walkability, and how to add civic amenities.

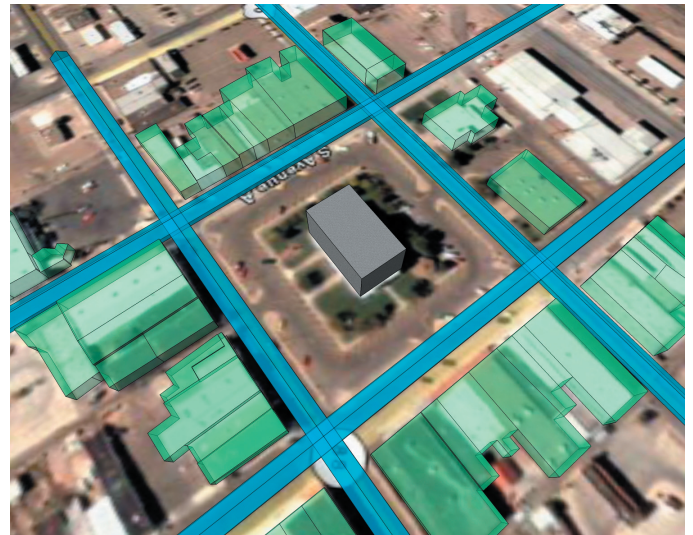
After the initial inventory of issues came the creation of goals. The main goal of this effort was to create an area that makes full use of the physical space between the buildings that compose the square. This space is the front porch of Portales and should be addressed as such when making design decisions. In accordance with that goal, any forthcoming projects should increase the safety and comfort of the squares inhabitants. Future master planning should also build upon the forthcoming project(s).

After constructing a foundation, **designs** emerged. From these possible solutions came design patterns and zones of intent. The following pages elaborate on the possibilities.

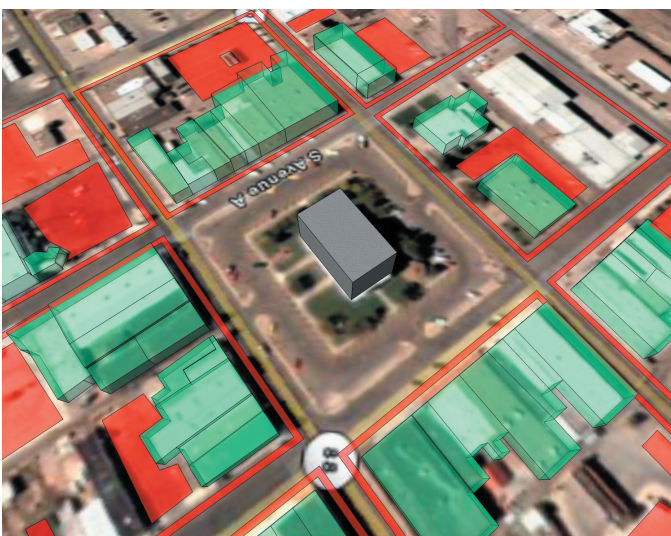
Conditions immediately surrounding the courthouse square



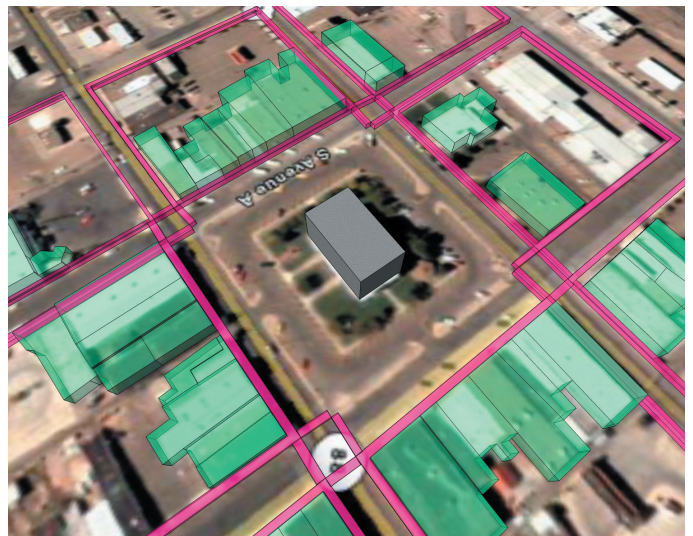
Existing Buildings



Major Traffic

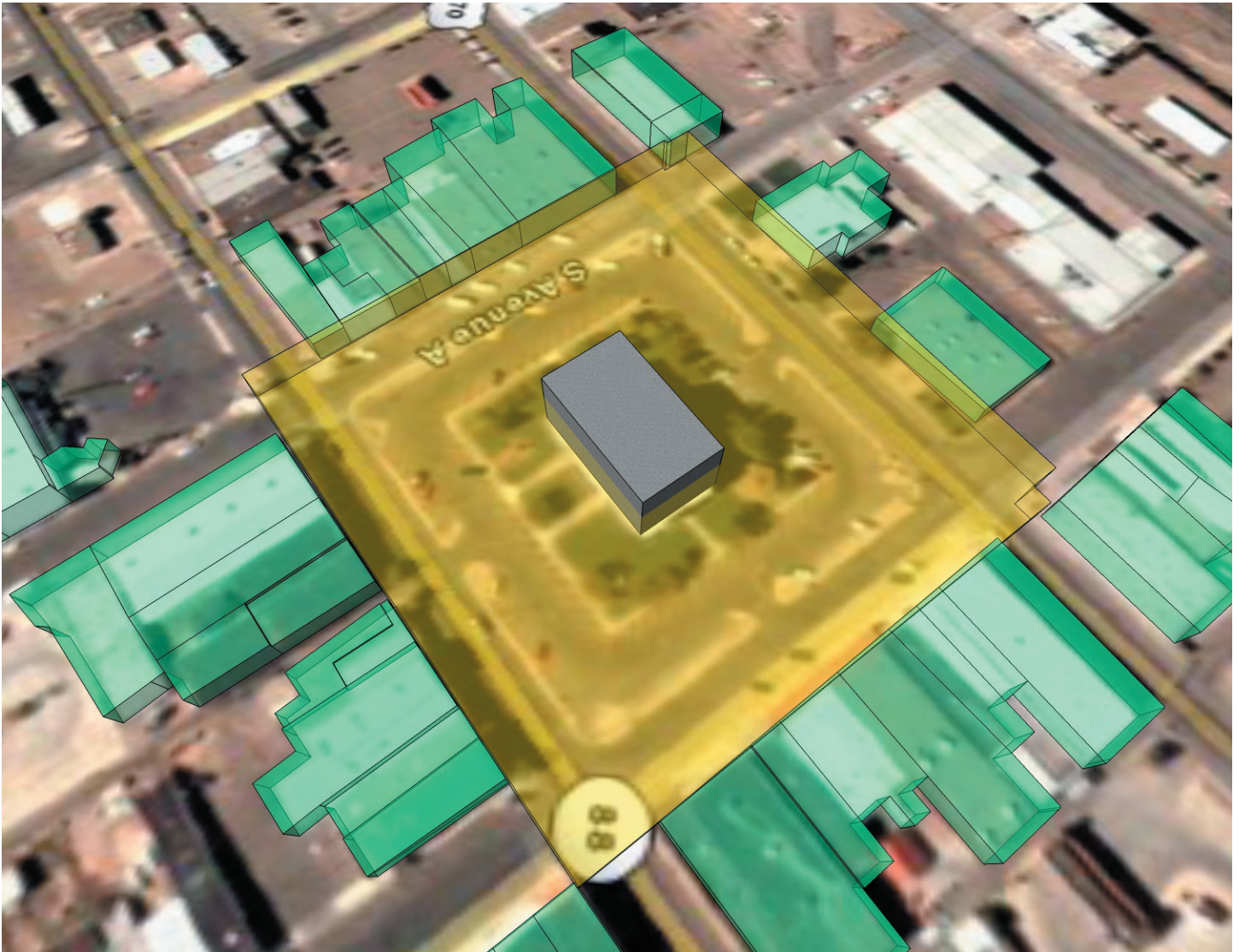


Existing Parking



Pedestrian Zones

Define the Square



The courthouse square extends to the facades of the surrounding buildings. It extends into the ground and infrastructure under your feet and up to the sun and stars in the sky. The square is much more than the image above. The square has an effect on all the senses.

Sight – Visual perceptions, Building massing (solid/void/transparent), Materials (textures, reflectivity), Traffic, People watching, Lighting (day, night)

Sound – Aural perceptions. Highway (automobile), Birds, Festivals (sound systems, public announcement systems), Water (rain, fountain), Wind

Smell/Taste – Odor and flavor perception. Exhaust, Agriculture, Food

Touch – The physiological sense by which external objects or forces are perceived through contact with the body. Textures for hands (railings, buttons, armrests) feet (pavings, vegetation, water) seats walls.

The square is a living breathing piece of Portales. It changes from morning to night and from season to season. Any design should make a conscious effort to address all of these issues.

An example is night sky pollution. Lighting is essential to the mood of the space as well as the safety of the space. However, overlighting not only wastes energy it can pollute the night sky and reduce the ability to see the stars.

Design intentions

These are ideas that are part of many successful public spaces both locally and abroad. Each idea is followed by a definition and explanation.

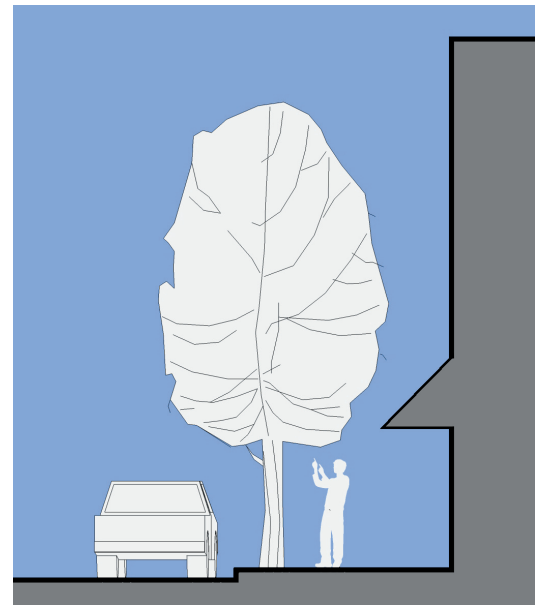
Regionalism - The use of regional features that are characteristic of a geographic area. Examples are history, existing buildings, and local resources. In Portales this may be personified by the railroad, agricultural buildings and process, highways, public figures, local products, etc. What is Portales about? What are its assets? These assets should be inventoried and highlighted when requesting design services.

Scale - Proper proportion. A progressive classification, as of size, amount, importance. In design the relationship between people, buildings, cars, etc. Spaces are often accentuated or limited by their proportions. Do they feel open or intimate? Do they make the user feel safe and welcome, or do they feel cold and vulnerable?

Economics - The social science that deals with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Some of the main draws to the courthouse square are shopping, the movie theatre, and the post office. The schemes and ideas presented here all represent an investment into the future of Portales. As such, when implemented it should be done so with the utmost quality of design and construction. Understandably there will be a phased scheme to balance funding and functionality of the square over the years it takes to bring this square to its full potential.



Important pieces of regionalism need to be included for authenticity and creditability.

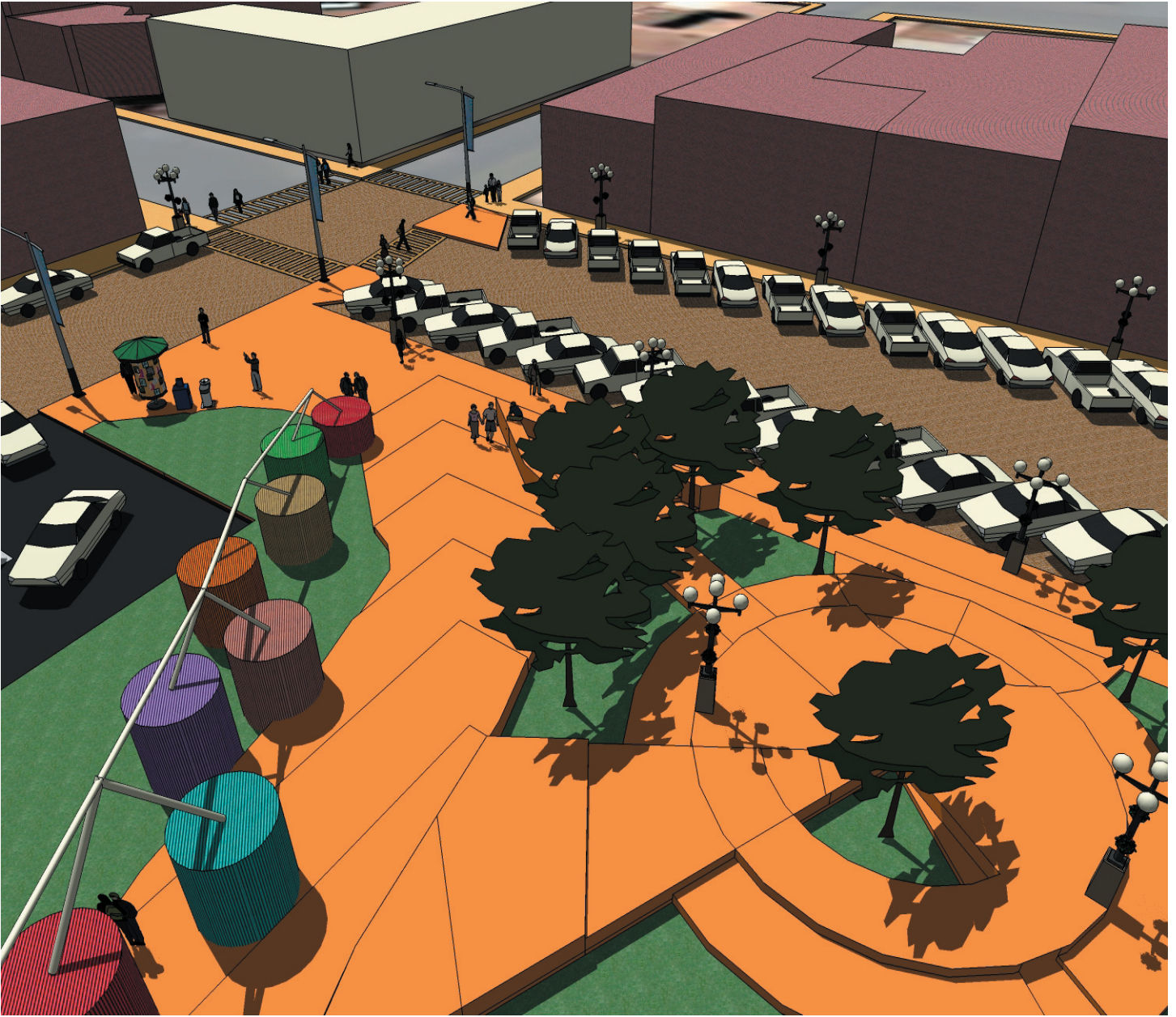


Designs should be looked at not only in plan and elevation, but in sections so as to understand more fully how people will utilize and enjoy the space.



Mine all the local resources for pieces of Portales' history. There may yet be hidden gems with which to design.

Civics



When people band together to form a city, state, or nation they do so because united we can do more than we can alone. The citizens of Portales can probably all agree that having a great courthouse square would be beneficial to the city. The main problem with spending tax payers money however, is inclusion. When the money is spent without garnering or even asking for input from the citizens. If they are left out of the process they have a hard time supporting the official's decisions. A successful design will engage as many local entities as it can in order to gather support financially, politically, and emotionally.

Studies show that children who have interactions with nature and community are better adjusted as adults. The court house square can provide a space for both business and pleasure for every community member.

Civics – the collective entity both physical and perceived of the citizenry.

Icon – civic pride, advertising

Civic Synergy – Public schools, University, Organizations (farmers, 4H, PTA, AARP, etc.)

Attitude – Peace of mind, respect, pride

Quality – materials, construction technique

Inclusive – appeals to broad range of users

Communication – This is the key in any good relationship. This can be applied to the design, the construction, maintenance, and most importantly between the citizens and their government.

To start the process there needs to be an openness and inclusionary approach coming from Main Street Members, City Officials, Ownership on square, and the Courthouse officials. Important symbolic milestones in the process should also be advertised and celebrated. For instance the placing of historical markers on important sites, or statues, or the planting of the trees, or dedication of artwork. These are important steps that the city should be making together as a community.

What ultimately takes place and is built will be important on many levels. The process of design and construction will teach people how the city works. The actual workings and maintenance of the facilities can, if set up correctly, inform the daily users about how it functions, how it impacts their daily lives, and how their fellow citizens use it. Newly elected officials will use what happens and the legacy it leaves as a precedent for how they will conduct business. There is a pedagogy involved with all aspects of what decisions happen on this project. History will be made, the question is how much of an impact will it have on the city, state, country, etc. This project has the potential to showcase the systems involved, from the physical systems and technology to the local politics and infrastructure, to the economics and regional influences of the city and county. This building and its maintenance have the power to improve the quality of future citizenry.



Bulletin Boards are a way to communicate and increase traffic to an area.

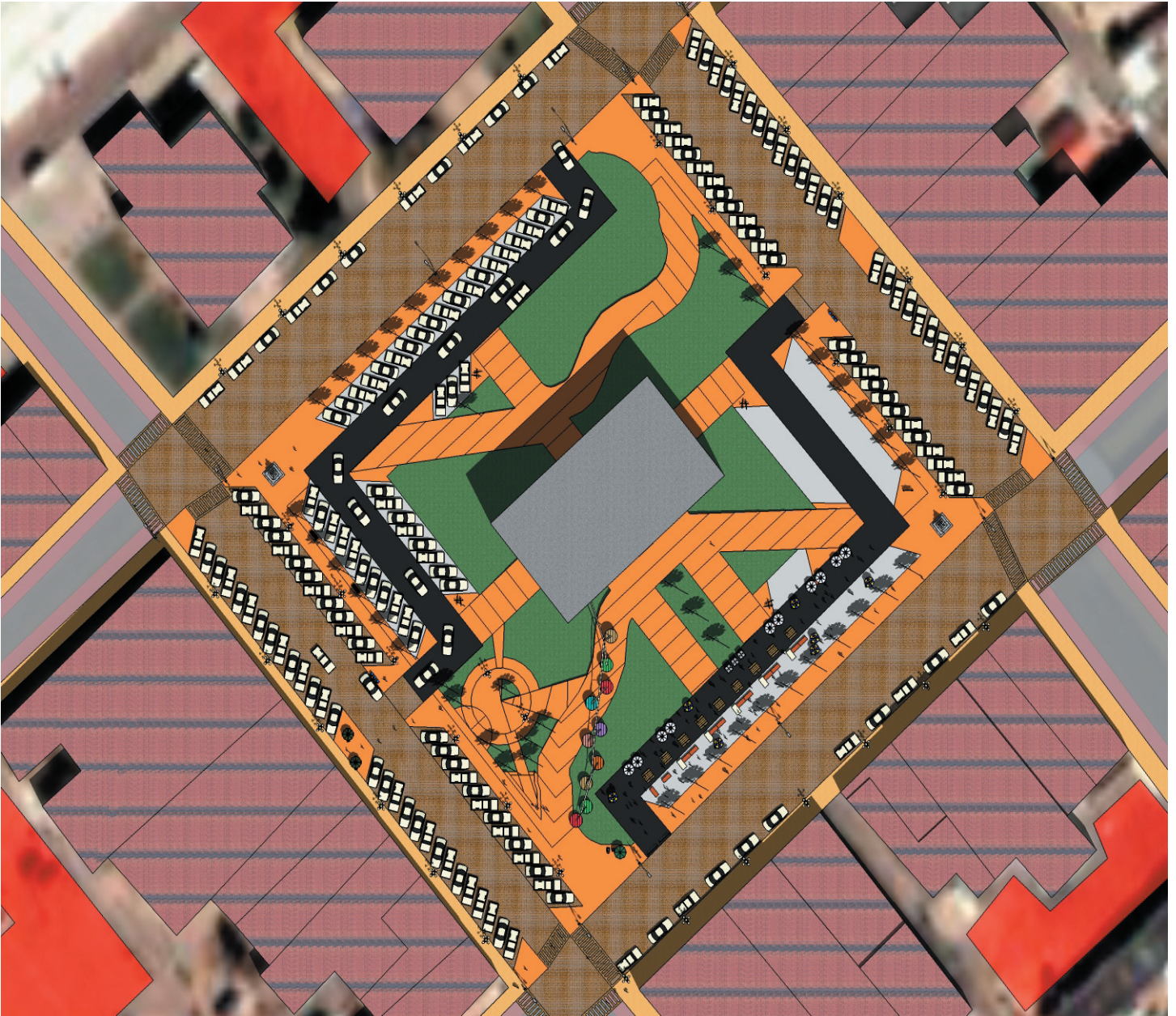


Buster Simpson - Beckoning Cistern



Grand Junction, Colorado - Farmers Market on Main Street

Parking



Automobile Parking

There are currently about 180 spots in the square. The parking layout above holds at least that many spots. The question is how many spots will make this square work the best? Should there be more? If the square becomes more desirable, or if the population using this part of town increase should there be more parking? Should it stay the same? Does the current amount of parking get used efficiently, ie. are most spots filled on most days? Would a decrease negatively impact the retailers in the area? Based on the amount of available parking within two blocks of the square one could even argue that parking immediately adjacent to the courthouse should be done away with entirely. What use is most valuable? Does the city need parking or parkland? These decisions do not have to be an either/or. There are many innovative ways to use the land for multiple functions, from putting in underground/overground parking to simply closing off overflow parking except when necessary. In the meantime, using the land as a public forum, market, or general open space.

Parking is beneficial to everyone.

Businesses-access for customers

Courthouse-access for public, judges

Public Space-access for all

The real question is how many, is when?

Business-Daily, seasonal

Courthouse-Daily, Juries

Public Space-Daily, seasonal

Another question is where? How close does a space need to be from its destination, or conversely how far from the destination do the people who manipulate the square want people to park?

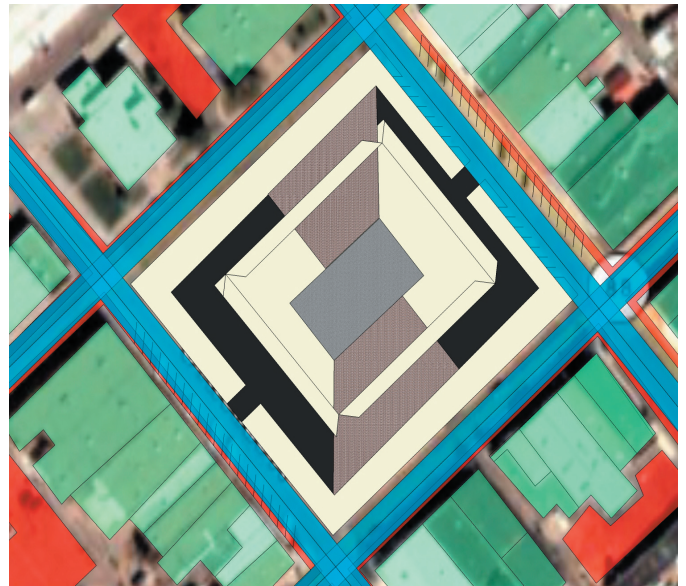
Business-Balance convenience with increased foot traffic; foot traffic from people walking to and from their destinations

Courthouse-Safety, Necessity

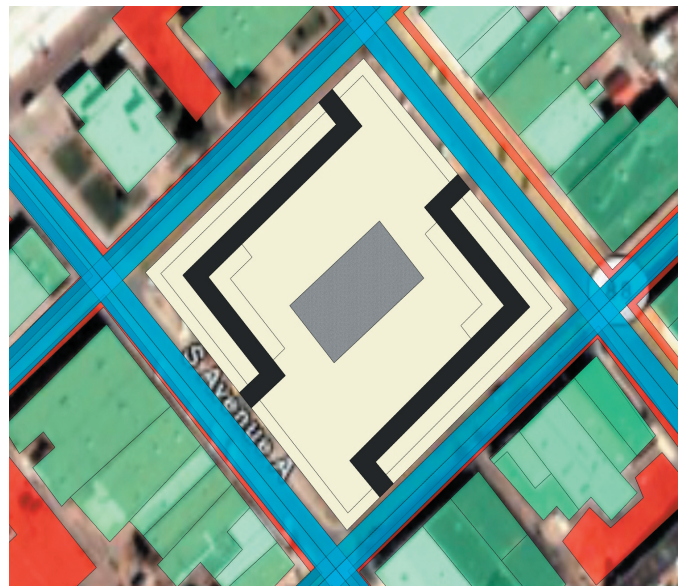
Public Space-Sense of activity with people coming and going. Formal or informal promenades can be created by controlling routes between parking and destinations. People like to see other groups of busy people because it gives them a sense of a vibrant community - a place to see and be seen.

There are also different types of parking to consider in addition to when, where, and how many. Cars can be parked on the street or in a lot. They can be parked off of the square or within. They can also be on public or private land.

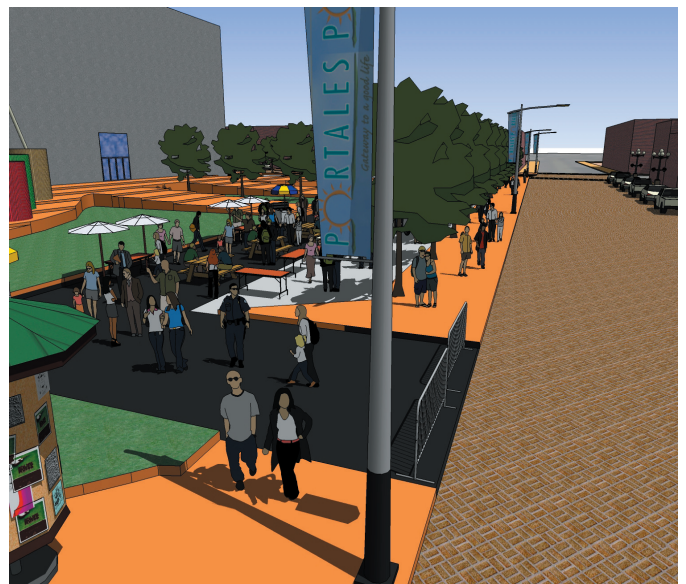
Parking lots and other schemes are not just for cars. Once parked, cars turn into pedestrians. What about alternate transportation? Bicycles and scooters are becoming more popular as people become more aware of their health and rising gas prices. Where do they park in these schemes? Also, pedagogically and environmentally speaking, parking schemes and materials can inform people about water cycles through stormwater drainage, water purification, ecoswales and alternate pavings.



Above: Parking scheme similar to current, with zones of tidal parking. Below: Alternate Scheme.



Parking lots can take on different roles at different times



Public Art



Public art

What is public art? Is it the sculpture that is funded through legislative add-ons to a project cost? Sure it can be. But it can also be the playful cisterns that recycle rain water. It could be the sculptural benches and seating elements that people sit on and speak from. It could be in the form of beautifully maintained gardens.

What about the concrete sidewalk around the square? What art value can be instilled in them? A sidewalk that is beautifully crafted is smooth, level, and crack free. A poorly crafted sidewalk has scuffs and blemishes. It cracks after the freeze/thaw cycle and requires patching. This small detail can make a very big difference in how people see their public spaces. Is it respectfully crafted and maintained, or is cheap and dilapidated?

What about public performance as art? Are not farmers markets and seasonal fairs something people come to view? How about the act of public participation in events such as cleaning and landscaping like an adopt a trail or highway, but instead adopt a public space. Or what if the town turned out to decorate the square for Christmas? Imagine groups of citizens turning out to work together. Both the toilers and the highway passerby would get a strong sense of what the community was about. Therefore strengthening the community in both body and spirit.

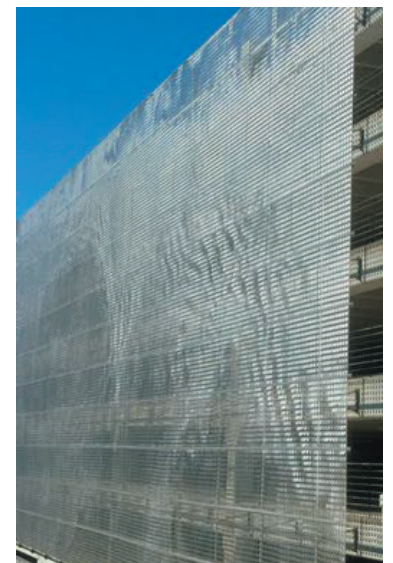
Inclusion of an area for temporary art can be beneficial in a couple of ways. One is it adds another layer of complexity and change to the square through an ever rotating event of people and art coming and going. Second it adds another level of inclusion within the town's populace - more participants in the art work, means more friends and family will show up thus, generating community pride.



Jim Hirschfield - Ring of Fire -
Bellvue Community College

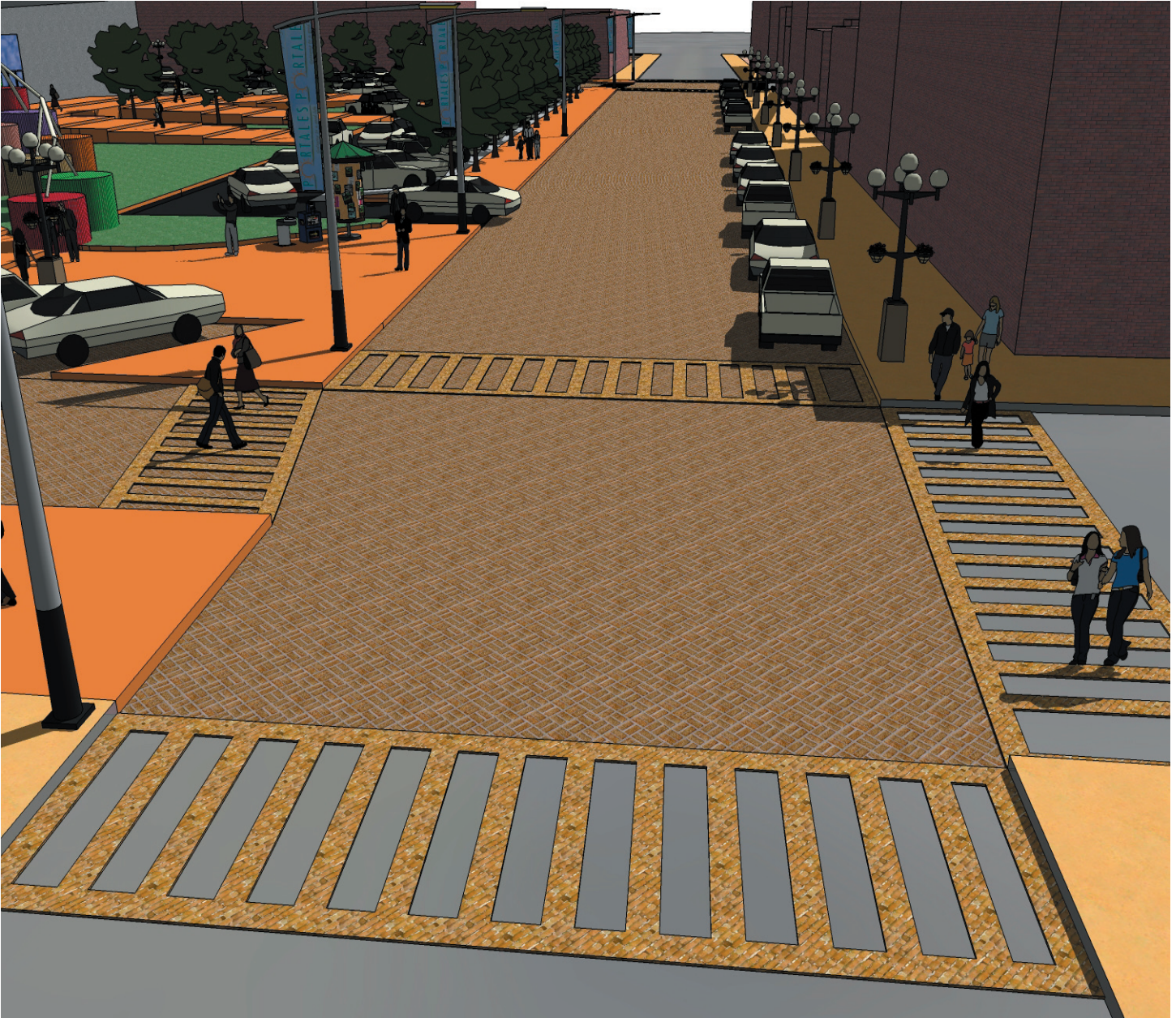


Randall Wilson - Bike Rack



Ned Kahn - Wind Veil

Non-Car Traffic



Walkability

People walk - it is our main form of transportation. While the highways are full of cars, and the average user of the square also arrives via car, if they come to the square or are enticed to stop to eat or shop they are transformed into pedestrians and walk. To get pedestrians into the square people have to be able to see and sense from their cars that there is a place for them as pedestrians. Not just a place, but safe access to it as well. Walking is something to be encouraged. It is cheap, healthy, and humane.

Widening sidewalks and painting some new crosswalks however, is not a solution. Desirable patterns of transit need to be laid out for traffic, parking, walking and biking. Within these patterns, zones will emerge that are either just for cars or people, or bikes. There will be many more zones of interaction like crosswalks, bike racks, and parking lots. There needs to be a balance and an understanding between these groups as to who has dominance over a particular area. For instance, pedestrians know they are king when upon the courthouse steps, but once they cross the street they need to look both ways and be polite to bikes and cars.

Pedestrian paths and sidewalks are not just for transit of people, they are spaces where social interaction takes place. Individuals window shop, drink coffee, and people-watch. Sidewalks around the square have the ability both to support their local users and allow for larger events to happen.

Crosswalks and pavings are important factors in how all of the other pieces are tied together. Changing patterns and materials when entering and leaving the square and at important junctures between spaces and users will help identify them to the users.

Streets & sidewalks (movement)

Comfortable and safe

Cars-safety, to code, Handicap access

Bicycles-safety, designated space, shared space

Pedestrians-safety

Alternate transportation – mass transit, bicycles, horses, Segways, and anything else that pops up in the future as fuel and personal transportation evolve.

Mixed use plaza surrounding the courthouse in Boulder, Colorado

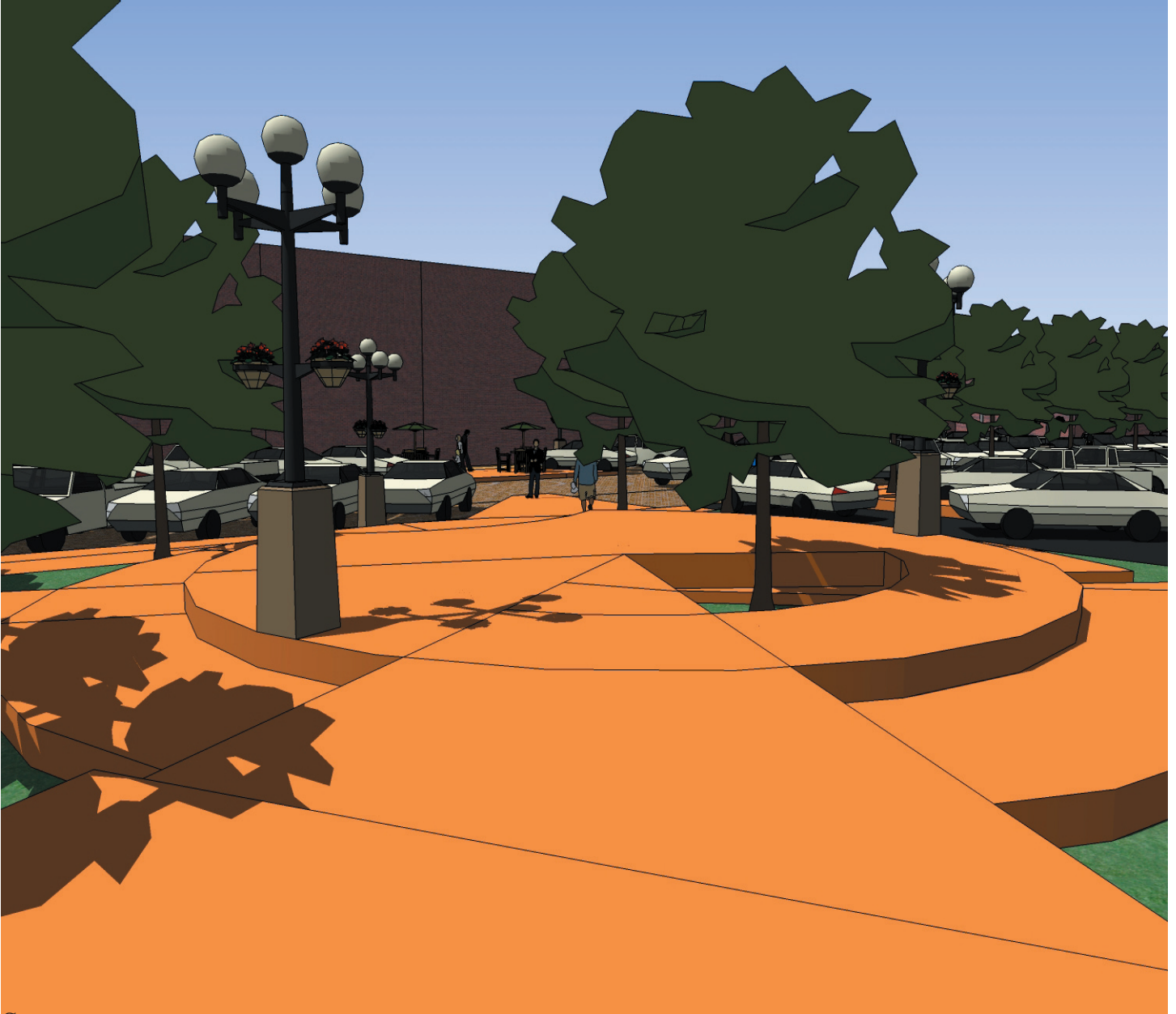


Courthouse plaza in Boulder, Colorado

View showing how the streets and sidewalks converge at certain points. Mixing postal service, cafe, parking, street, and sidewalk into a safe and friendly space where people can interact without fear.



Spaces



Spaces

While the courthouse square is an entity to be designed holistically it is not a homogenous block. There are many different spaces that exist and will be created. What a good design will do is maximize the spaces that were thought about and designed while minimizing forgotten spaces. The designers should also be aware of whether the spaces are strictly for a single use, like the main stairs into the courthouse, or if they are a more elastic design, like a cubby used for lunches and meetings during the week, but utilized as a vendors booth on the weekends. Usage of space may change depending on the season. A group that meets in a sunny location on the south in the winter months may opt for a shady spot on the north side or under trees or canopies in the summer months.

Each space should ask of itself some questions:

Seating - Is the space to have primary seating like benches or chairs. Will it have secondary seating like steps and walls.

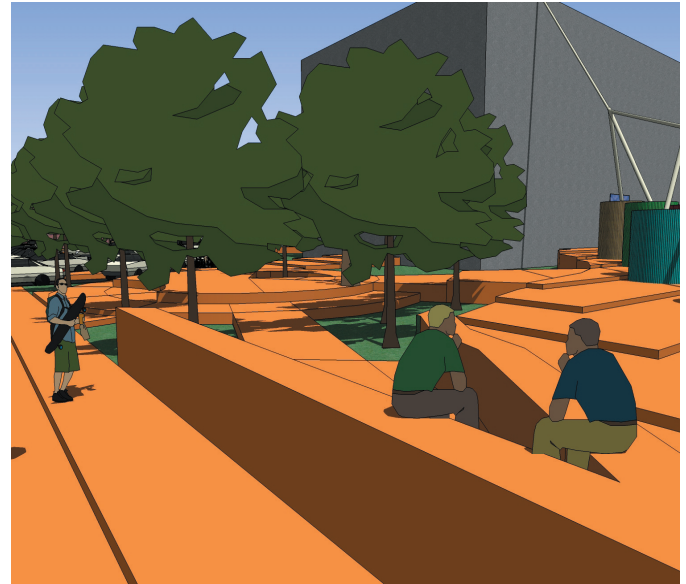
Shading - Does it need or want shading? Is it permanent, temporary, or adjustable?

Micro climate - materials and proximity to vegetation make a big difference. Concrete in the summer is cool in the shade. However, in the winter concrete holds the sun's heat as the sun fades. Gravel is well drained, but dry. Trees and grasses give off moisture through their natural processes. Trees and transparent shading will allow diffuse light into a space. Building shadows and opaque shading will make a more decisive change in lighting and temperature.

Group sizes

- 1 - Alone, meditative, waiting
- 2 - Intimate, private, relaxed
- 3-5 - Family or office group
- 6-10 - Study group, church group
- 11-20 - Field trip, tourists, sports teams
- 20+ - Public rallies, parades

Flexibility is key to providing spaces for different constituents. Adaptability over time is also crucial to the success of a phased approach, where each piece will need to work with what is available and with what's to come.



View of seating area that creates various zones of space for different user groups



Map showing zones of buffering (dark green) and zones of mixed use (orange)

Public rallies and parades can be encouraged or discouraged depending on how the spaces are designed







Resources

“Squares” by Mark Childs

AIA

APA

City of Portland, Oregon

City of Seattle, Washington

City of Austin, Texas

Planetizen

Project of Public Spaces

Hanover Principles

New Urbanism

<http://www.darksky.org/>

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/design.htm>

<http://www.sandiego.gov/planning/pdf/peddesign.pdf>