Breaking the Fourth Wall:
Performance Spaces as Catalyst for Community Revitalization

by

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For Gen, without your loving patience and support, this dream would have never have become a reality. You will always be the greatest star on my stage.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how "performance" can enhance the urban fabric of Dartmouth NS, and assist in the revitalization of the area, creating a "new community image". In past decades Dartmouth has struggled to maintain its identity separate from Halifax in the social imagination of its inhabitants. Dartmouth has succumbed to urban sprawl, an aging population, and A lack of renewal in the downtown core, having fallen under the shadow of neighboring Halifax, as a destination for habitation, business and entertainment. In recent years, an urban renaissance led by new downtown businesses has begun, but there are still a great deal of under utilized spaces and vacant lots within the urban fabric and the incentive for redevelopment is low. This thesis asks can notions of "performance", such as visual connections and focus be used to spatially and pragmatically activate under utilized areas within the urban core to foster revitalization and promote a positive social image, supporting Dartmouth in becoming a desired destination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Breaking the Fourth Wall

How can performances spaces help to revitalize a community and create identity?

View to Dartmouth,
Image by Ronnie Kinnie.

1.5%

11.8 %

Population growth of Halifax and Dartmouth over 7 years.

In the past decades Dartmouth, has struggled as a community to maintain it's individual identity. It has lost it's desirability even in the social imagination of its inhabitants. Two main events mark this; the construction of the harbour bridges, and the amalgamation of Dartmouth into the HRM (Halifax Regional Municipality) in 1996. In the past decades, urban sprawl, an aging population, and a lack of renewal has stagnated the vitality of Dartmouth, and it has fallen under the shadow of its neighboring city of Halifax as a prime destination for habitation, business, entertainment and travel. Over the last few years, a slow urban renaissance has been led by new downtown businesses such as the Two if By Sea Cafe, projects like the Community oven on the Dartmouth commons, and Tulipmania, in conjunction with a series of new developments including King's Wharf and the Greenvale School redevelopment project. Yet Dartmouth still continues to face a number of challenges. The population of Dartmouth has stalled, only growing by 1.5% in 5 years, compared to the 11.8% growth in Halifax (Flemming, 2012). While a small number of new businesses have opened in Dartmouth, there are still a great deal of vacant and

under utilized spaces and the incentive for redevelopment is low. To prevent this being a continuing trajectory, more initiative must be taken. This could be achieved by interpreting the city as a stage and the surrounding community as the audience, by breaking the "fourth wall" between the two a new catalyst for revitalization could be realized.

Within typical performance an imaginary "wall" at the front of the stage is created. Derived from the traditional three-walled box set in a proscenium theatre, this boundary is called the "Fourth Wall". Through this wall the audiences sees, but is separated from the action within the world of the performance. When an actor speaks directly to or otherwise interacts with the audience through this imaginary wall, it is referred to as "breaking the fourth wall".

Currently, Dartmouth lacks performance spaces that have a strong connection to or for the community. The spaces that do exist suffer from a lack of visual presence within community, or hold little physical appeal for the audience and performers alike. This is because many of these buildings were not originally built as performance spaces, but as churches or community halls. The "fourth wall" between the community and its performance spaces is very much intact.

A Performance Space in the context of this thesis, is defined as: A space to explore and experience forms of creativity, new ideas, and new contexts. A space where an event can occur in which a performer or group of performers can create a spectacle for an audience to view. The performance can range from,

Dartmouth,NS

Halifax, NS

Under-used sites.

dance, live plays, spoken word, art installations, or any other activity where the intent of "action" is to be viewed by an audience.

"Breaking the Fourth Wall" between "performance" and the surrounding community, means designing spaces in such a way that they create connections to the community that they are apart of rather than being something separate and distant. Locating the Performance venue in such a way that it can be supportive to the local businesses and economy and allowing public use and access promotes community ownership. Making the "audience" and "performance" interchangeable and transparent to each other creates a closer and stronger connection between the two bringing down the barrier between them. In these ways the "Fourth Wall" being broken brings the two groups, of audience and performance into a shared reality. This new relationship will allow for the flow of support between the two sides. Then the act of "performance" will uplift the surrounding community and in turn the community will support the performance space to continue to bring the benefits of cultural arts to the public at large.

Strategy

The design strategy will use existing under used sites to integrate aspects of performances into the urban fabric. They will be located, and designed so that they will work in conjunction with the existing infrastructure of restaurants, business and schools creating a network of support, growth and identity within the Dartmouth community.

CHAPTER 2: THE PERFORMING ARTS

Economic Benefit

Economic benefit.
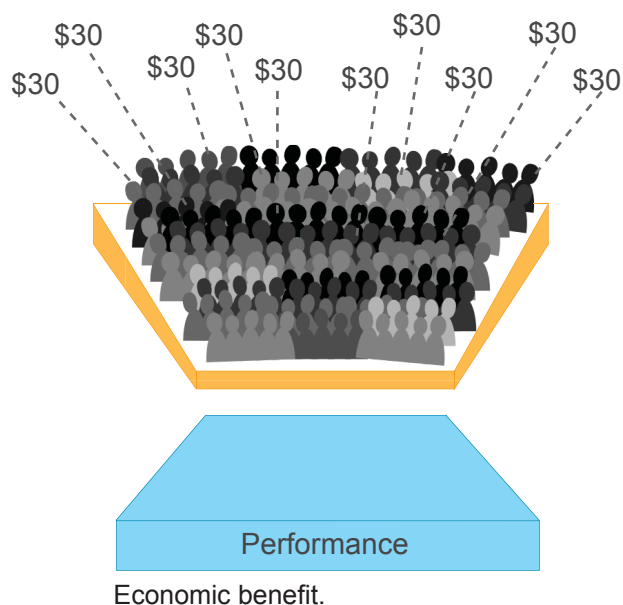
The performing arts can help to revitalize a community both economically, and socially. By attracting audiences to their events Performance Spaces increase cultural tourism. This in turn generates additional revenue for local businesses, such as restaurants, parking garages and retail stores. A study by "Americans for the Arts" found that the average show attendee spends an additional $30 (approx) outside of ticket costs at surrounding businesses. As an example: a quick calculation of an average of 75 show attendees, at 7 shows a week, would equal an additional $63000 a month being fed directly into the local economy. This additional revenue would allow more businesses the opportunities to open, advertise, expand, and weather financial crisis.

The quality of a communities cultural infrastructure also has direct impact on quality of life, therefore on the competitiveness of communities in attracting people and investment. (From Bronze to Gold 2006,17)

Social Benefit

Socially, the Arts have a direct impact on the well being of individuals and the community as a whole. A study conducted by the Ontario Arts Council has shown a connection between people who are involved in the arts and a general improved well being of life. Both direct involvement, as a performer or craftsman, or indirectly as an audience member or student, this study has shown these participants, on average:

Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent health (58% vs. 46%).

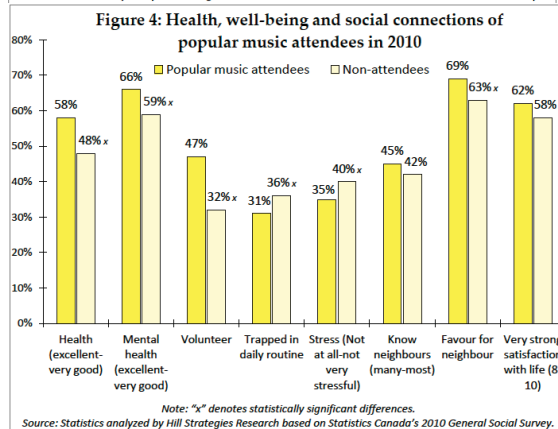Are much more likely to report that they have very good or excellent mental health (67% vs. 57%).
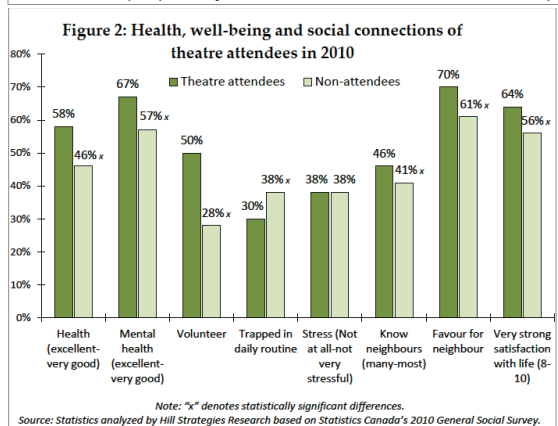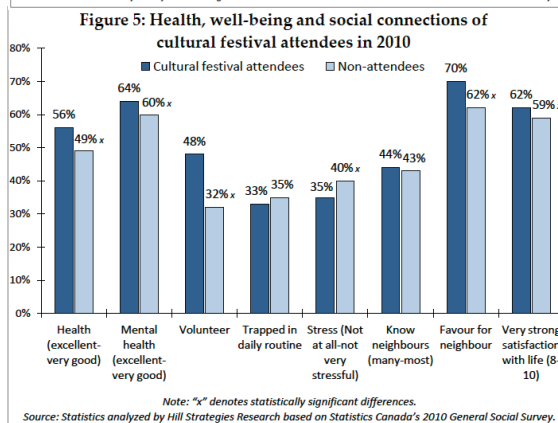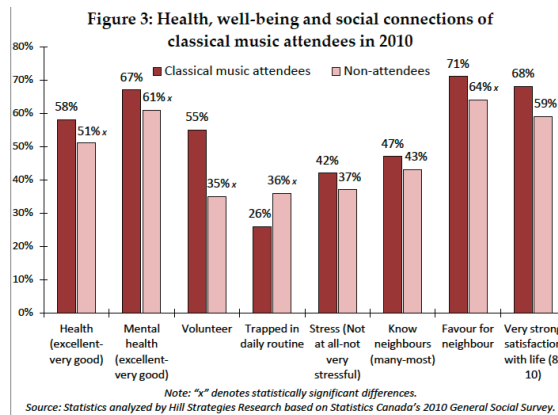
Are much more likely to volunteer (50% vs. 28%).

Are less likely to feel trapped in a daily routine (30% vs. 38%).

Are more likely to know many or most of their neighbors (46% vs. 41%).

Are more likely to have done a favour for a neighbor in the past month (70% vs. 61%).

Are more likely to report very strong satisfaction with life (64% vs. 56%)." (Hill 2013)

Figure 3: Health, well-being and social connections of classical music attendees in 2010

Note: "x" denotes statistically significant differences.
Source: Statistics analyzed by Hill Strategies Research based on Statistics Canada's 2010 General Social Survey.

Figure 5: Health, well-being and social connections of cultural festival attendees in 2010

Note: "x" denotes statistically significant differences.
Source: Statistics analyzed by Hill Strategies Research based on Statistics Canada's 2010 General Social Survey.

Figure 2: Health, well-being and social connections of theatre attendees in 2010

Note: "x" denotes statistically significant differences.
Source: Statistics analyzed by Hill Strategies Research based on Statistics Canada's 2010 General Social Survey.

Figure 4: Health, well-being and social connections of popular music attendees in 2010

Note: "x" denotes statistically significant differences.
Source: Statistics analyzed by Hill Strategies Research based on Statistics Canada's 2010 General Social Survey.

Benefits of the arts. (Hill 2013)

Additionally the arts play an essential role in social cohesion since they incite tourists to take the time to visit, and create a feeling of belonging and contribute to preserving the collective memory of the community. The Creative City Network of Canada identifies the three following impacts concerning local identity:

> Arts and culture can be used to brand a community and set it apart from others.
>
> The arts can help foster a sense of ownership, belonging and pride within a community.
>
> The arts help to preserve a collective memory and foster a continuing dialogue about the past. (Creative City Network of Canada 2005)

The benefits to the community as a whole has also been studied. In *Use and Ornament? The social Impact of Participation in the Arts* authored by Francois Matarasso, he identified eight potential benefits of participation in the arts:

> Develop pride in local traditions and cultures
>
> Help people feel a sense of belonging and involvement
>
> Create community traditions in new towns or neighbourhoods
>
> Involve residents in environmental improvements
>
> Provide reasons for people to develop community activities
>
> Improve perceptions of marginalized groups
>
> Help transform the image of public bodies
>
> Make people feel better about where they live.
>
> (Matarasso 1997, 58)

Local Performance Groups

Image by Dartmouth Players 2011.

Image by Eastern Front Theatre 2013.

Within the city of Dartmouth (and Halifax) a variety of performance and artist group exist that do not have their own dynamic or prime location for their performances or installations.

These groups use existing spaces that were not originally intended as performance spaces (such as the Dartmouth Players whos permanent venue has been the Crichton Avenue Community Centre since 1987) or rent venues in Halifax that are well established and visible to the public as Eastern Front does when it rents the studio Stage at Neptune theatre in Halifax. This means that the additional revenue created by the economic impact of the performance is being filtered into the economy of the community that is not the "home" of the group.

The "amateur" groups will use spaces within local schools, community centres and churches whos cost is much lower than the professionally established venues. The spaces within these buildings are secondary to the prime purpose of these buildings and do little to promote the spectacle and appeal of the performance to the larger community.

This does nothing to establish a repeating network relationship of the performance to the community. the community. The ownership and connection to the performance as a community is lost.

Local performance groups and rental venues.

Stage Typology

There are many types of performance and spaces where they can take place. They can and do exist in many locations and forms, from Skate boarding, or installation performance, to a long running Broadway show; on street corners, or physical buildings.

An analysis of different performance spaces, shows that no matter the type or location of the type of performance, the "performing space" always follows the elements of the three common stage typologies, that of: Proscenium Stage, Theatre in the Round and Thrust Stage.

Faela at Buskers Bern,
Image by Philipp Zinniker (Last 2011).

Seattle skate boarders,
Image by Joe Mabel, 2008.

Proscenium Stage

Proscenium or End stage: where the audience is in front of the stage all the visual focus is on the performance. The "proscenium" refers to he proscenium arch, which frame the focus of the audience.

An imaginary "wall" at the front of the stage, "The Fourth Wall" separates the imaginary world of the play and the reality of the world outside it.

Noor Eesti Scenery proscenium stage,
Image by Ott Kadarik (Arhitekid 2011).

Proscenium

Stage
Audience
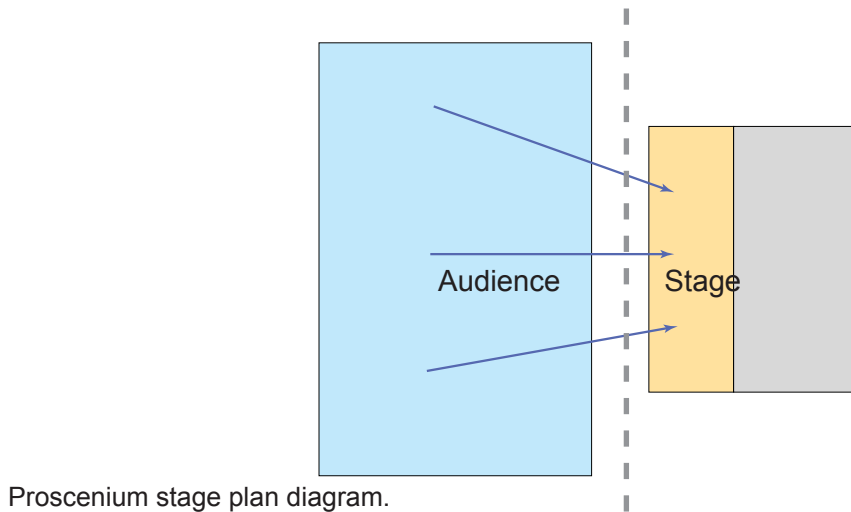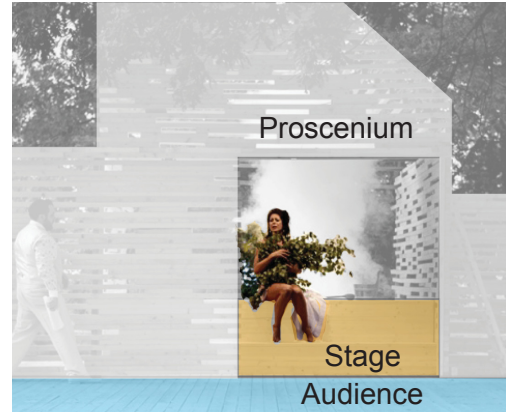
Audience   Stage

Proscenium stage plan diagram.

Fourth Wall

Proscenium
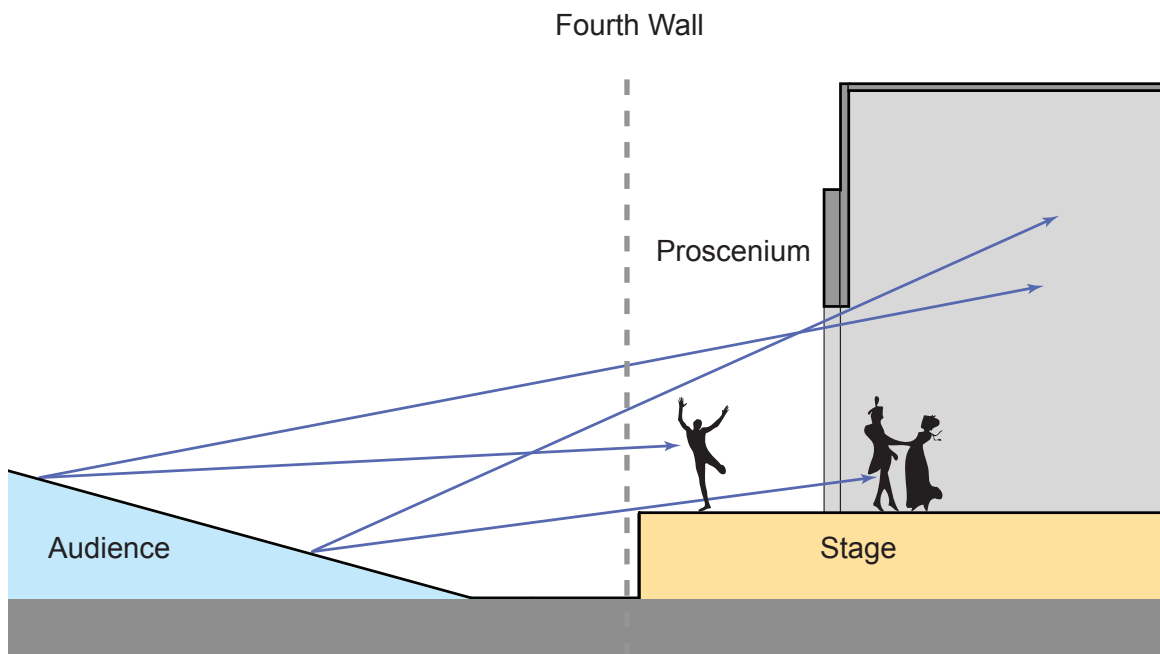
Audience   Stage

Proscenium stage section diagram.

Theatre in the Round

Theatre in the round or Arena stage: were the audience is on all side of the performance, there is a directional focus toward the performance, but the audience also has a visual connection to each other across the playing area

Westblaak Skate Park,
Image by westblaak 2013.

Faela at Buskers Bern,
Image by Philipp Zinniker (flickr 2011).

Stage
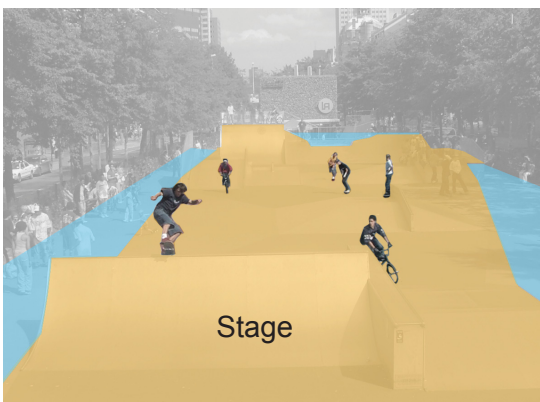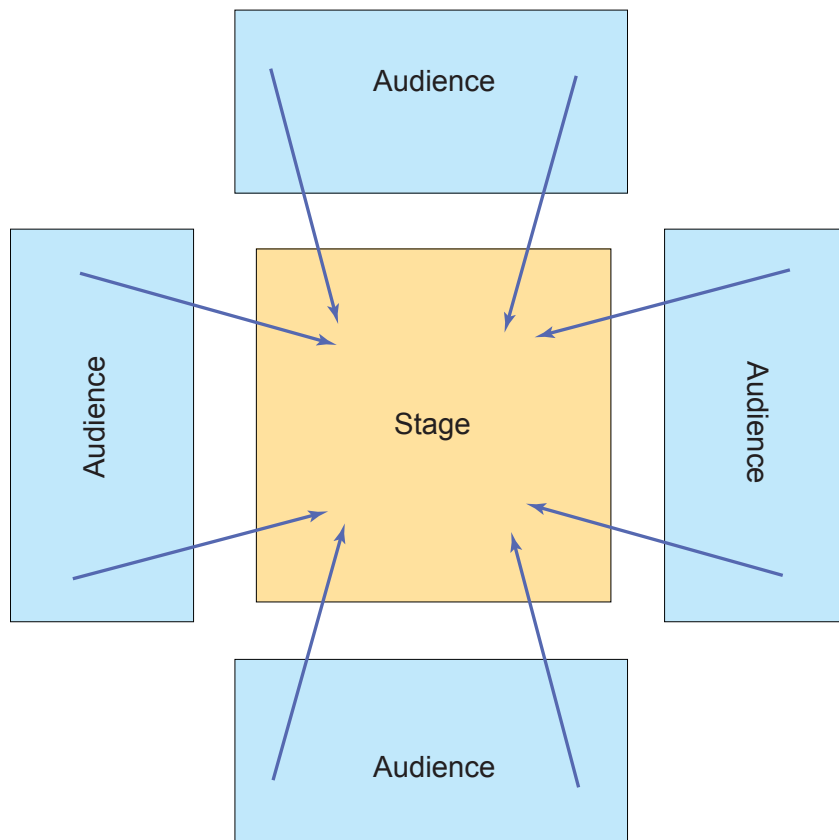
Stage
Audience

Theatre in the Round plan diagram.
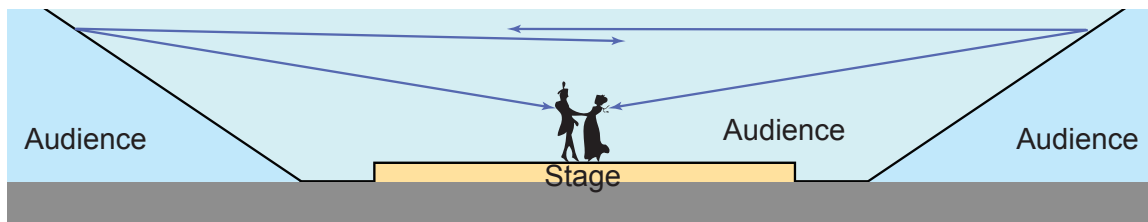
Theatre in the Round section diagram.

Thrust Stage

Thrust Stage: A blend of the Proscenium and Theatre in the Round. It has audience seating on three sides of the stage, as well as a Proscenium arch.

Allen Elizabethan stage Theatre in the Round
Image by BA Haller, 2012.
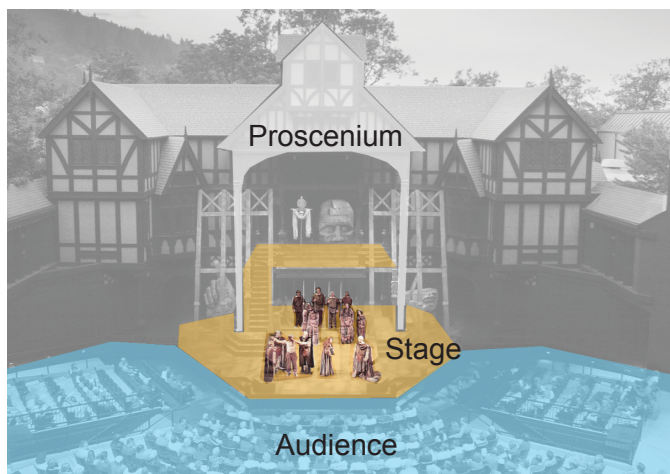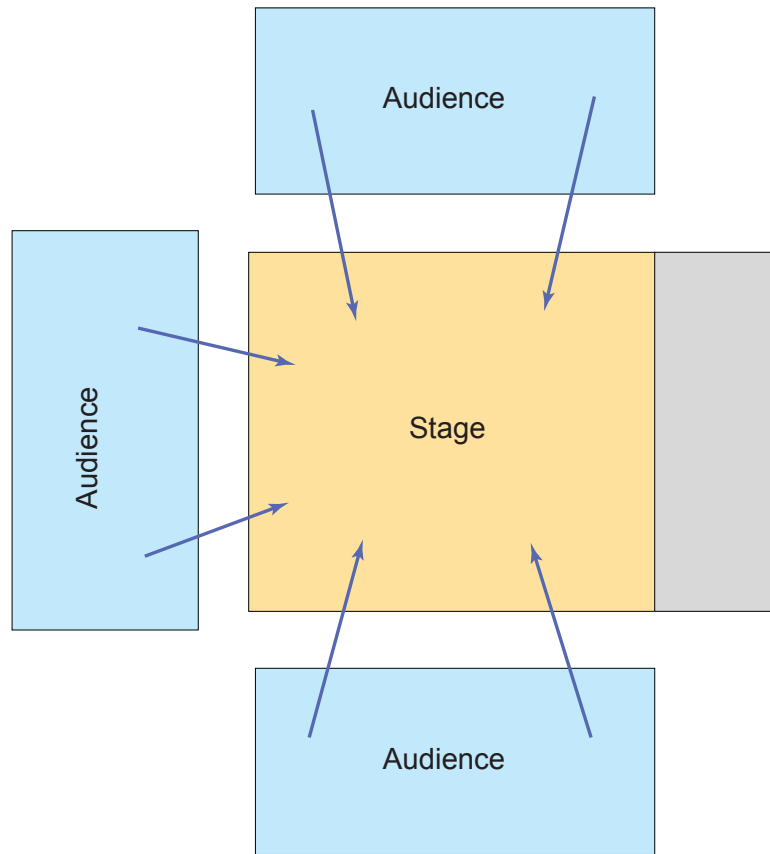
Thrust Stage plan diagram.
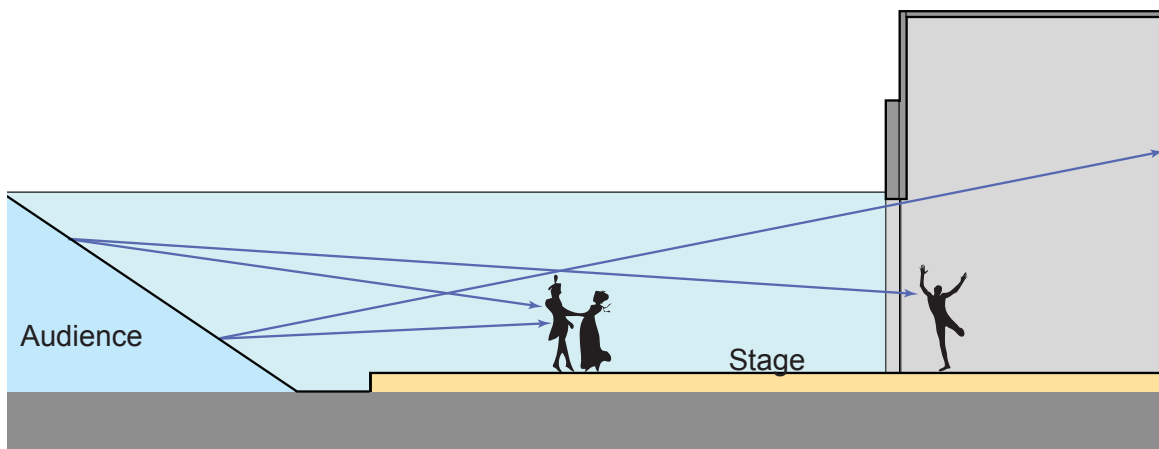
Thrust Stage section diagram.

CHAPTER 3: URBAN SITE ANALYSIS

Examining the existing underused sites in Dart-
mouth, four sites are located in close proximity to
existing business, schools and major transportation
routes. Focusing on these sites as potential location
for performance spaces would give the most poten-
tial to impact the community.

4 Sites in the Dartmouth urban core.

Site proximity to local schools, restaurants, hotels and bars.

To examine how these sites interact to each other and in the community on the human scale, a form of a derive, based on the work of Guy Debord was conducted.

> In a derive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. (Debord 1956, 62)
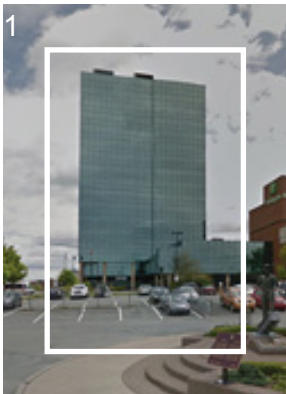
From this exercise it was found that each of the sites has a visual connect to 1 or more of 5 major landmarks in Dartmouth; 99 Wyse Rd, the MacDonald Bridge, Halifax Harbour, Alderney Gate, and Admiralty Place. But not one landmark is shared visually by all the sites. This suggested an opportunity for one of the four sites to become a Landmark site that could connect all the sites as a whole, as well as giving Dartmouth a new visual identity.

The four sites were then analysis as "stages within the city". By mapping the views to the sites from each other, to the landmarks, and to the sites from the public realm (or audience) the sites were analyzed through the typology of the different stage types. This resulted in mapping on each of the sites the preferred locations on each of the for performance. This "performance area" on the site can refer to an actual stage or performance area, or as the building itself as a performance on the site for the surrounding community audience.
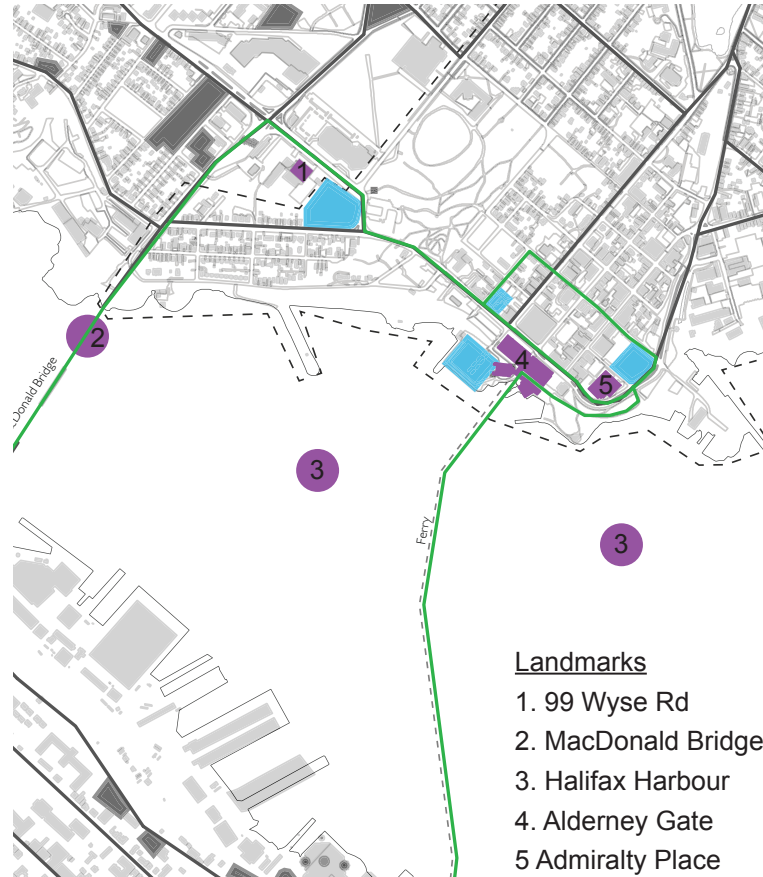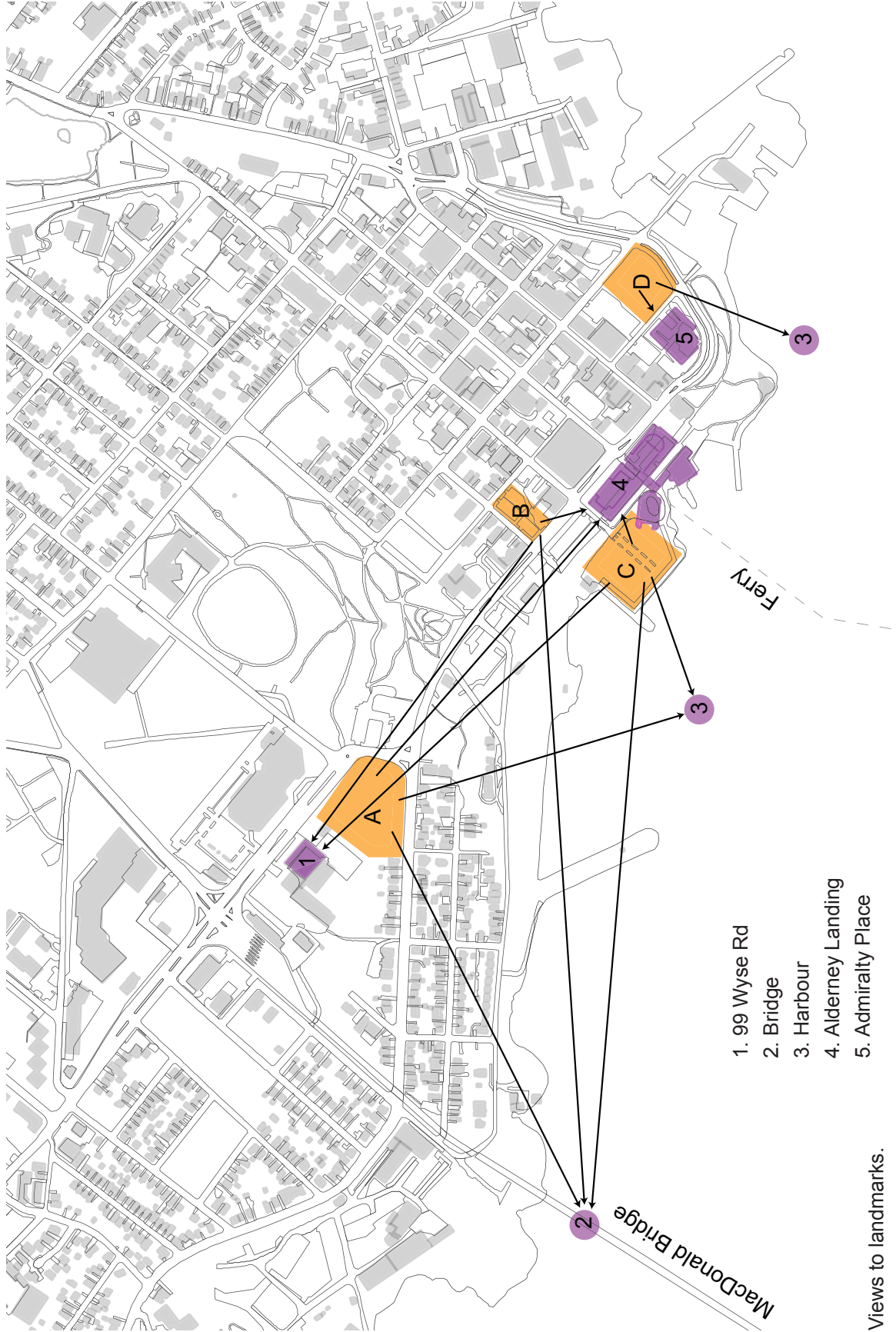
Landmarks
1. 99 Wyse Rd
2. MacDonald Bridge
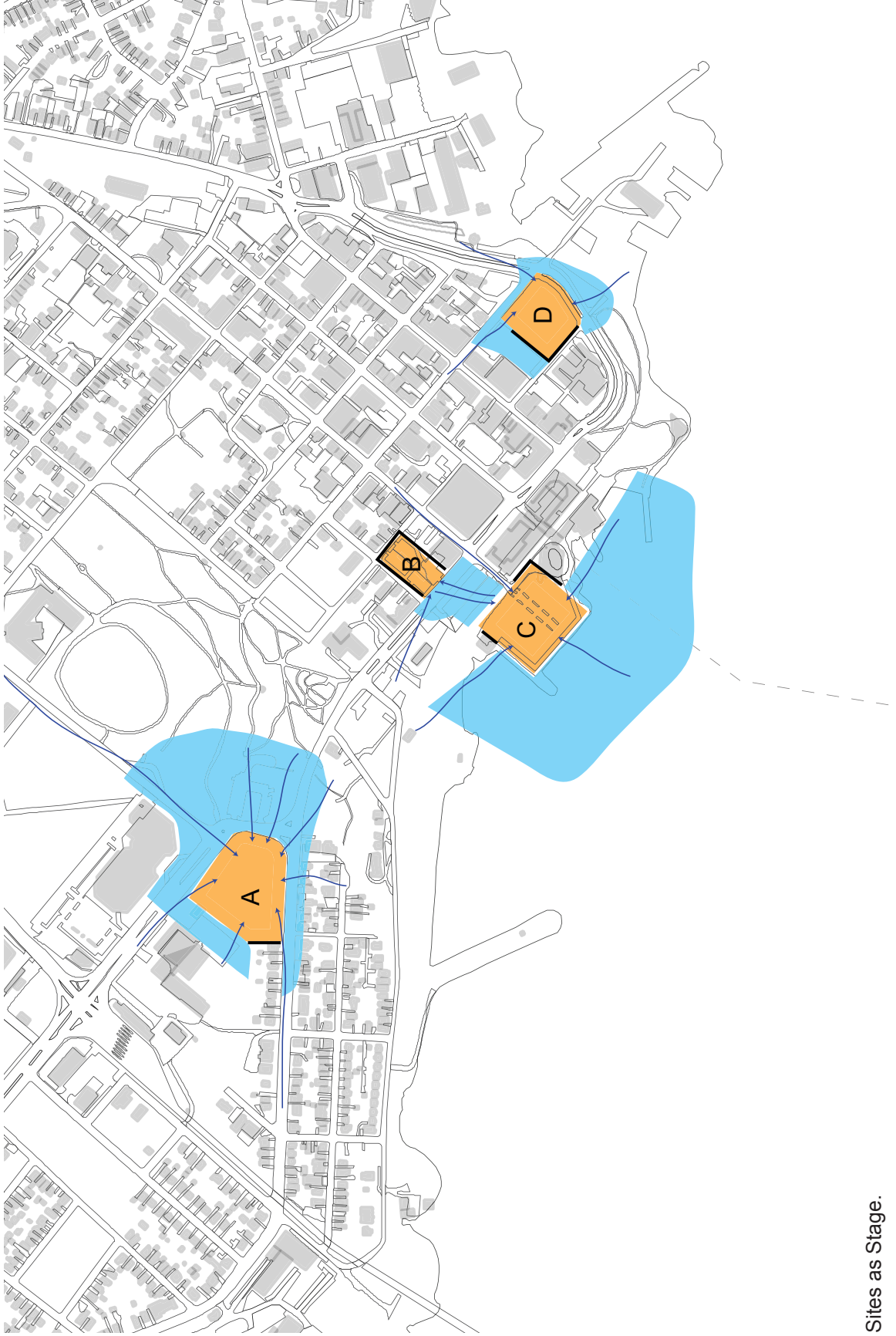3. Halifax Harbour
4. Alderney Gate
5 Admiralty Place
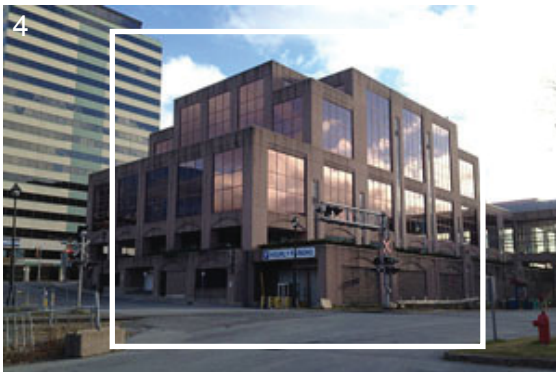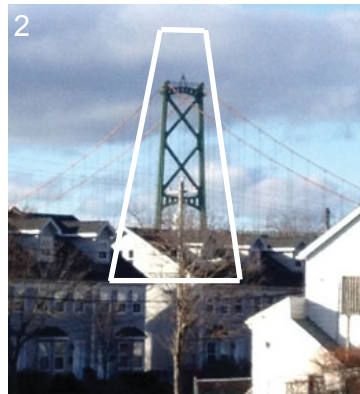
Derive path and prominent Dartmouth landmarks.

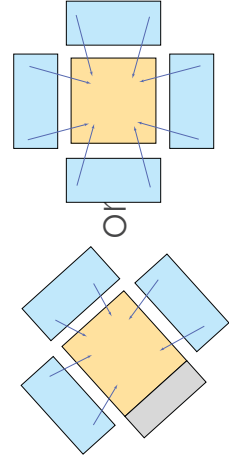Views between Sites.
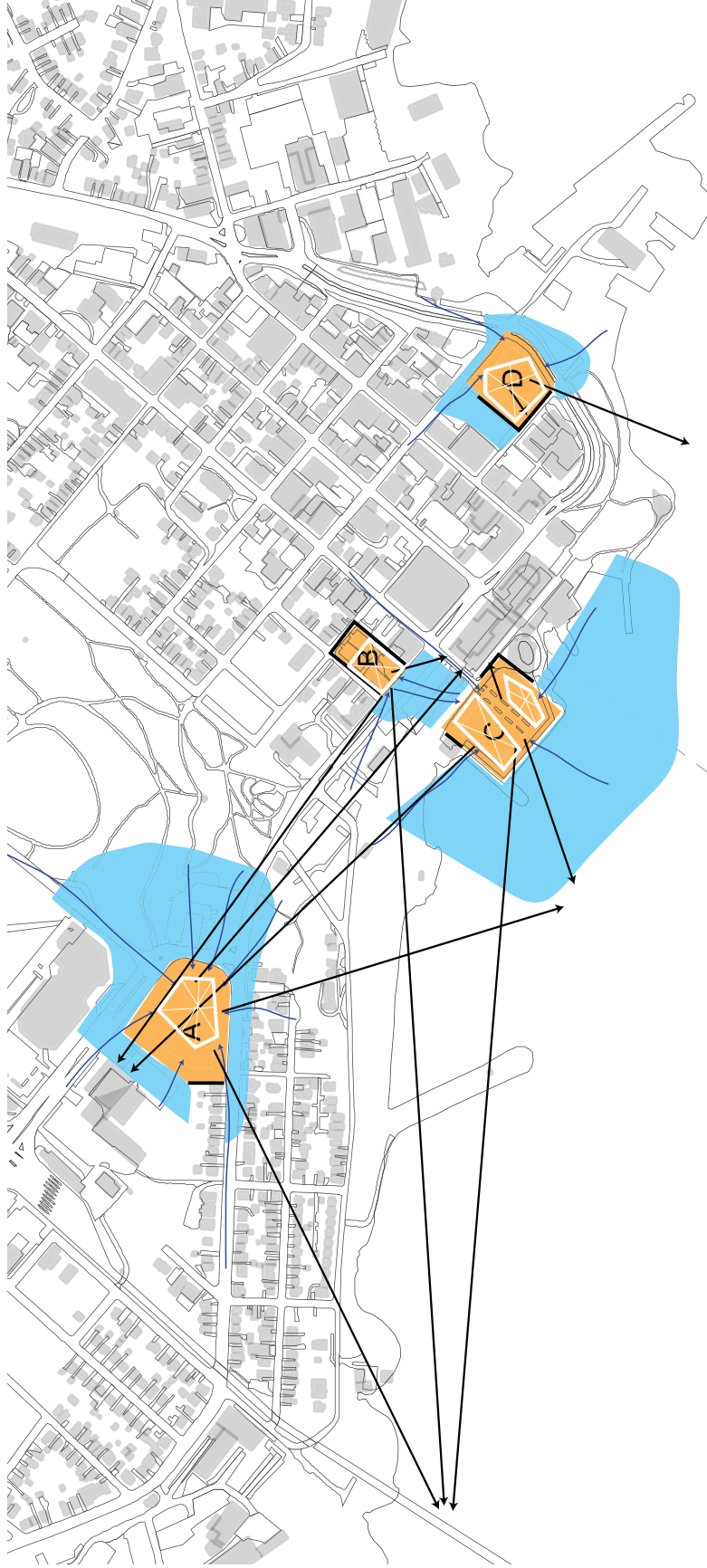
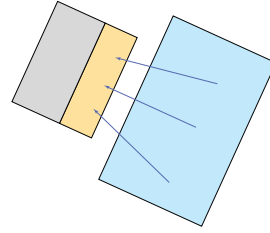Views to landmarks.

1. 99 Wyse Rd
2. Bridge
3. Harbour
4. Alderney Landing
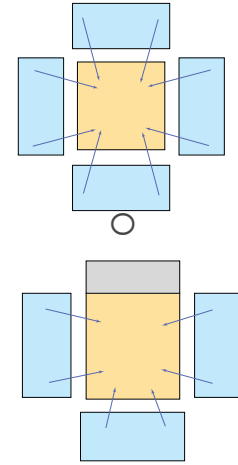5. Admiralty Place
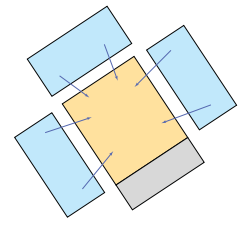
MacDonald Bridge

Ferry

Sites as Stage.

Site A
Characteristics of a Thrust Stage
or Theatre in the Round.

Site B
Characteristics of
Proscenium Stage.

Site C
Characteristics of a Thrust Stage
or Theatre in the Round.

Site D
Characteristics of
a Thrust Stage.

This analysis concluded that each of the four sites had potential of being places of performance within the fabric of the Dartmouth Core having visual connections to the surrounding community. But A,B,and C were the strongest in this regard. Sites A, D had the most adaptable performance characteristics having two Stage typologies each. While sites B and D lend themselves to a more rigid program of only one stage typology on site.

Site Selection

From the analysis of the four site, one site; Site C was selected as the preferred site for the location of a "performance "space. Site C the largest of the sites is located within close proximity of local infrastructure (restaurants, bars, schools, hotels and parking lots). It also sits at a prominent axis in Dartmouth, at the intersection of Alderney Drive and Ochterloney Street. It has prime visibility within Dartmouth and has the opportunity to have views to the prime landmarks. There is frequent foot traffic from the local area and the nearby ferry terminal and sits on a main transportation access. The goal of this thesis is to create a space of performance which will help to draw more people and therefore revenue into the downtown core of Dartmouth increasing the attractiveness and potential for revitalization in the area. This location due to its above mentions qualities along with the "sites as stage" analysis shows that it has the most variety in "performance" space potential proved it to be the preferred location for intervention.

CHAPTER 4: DESIGN

Site Exploration

Existing Conditions

Site C is located in the core of Downtown Dartmouth the waterfront and consists of approximately 10500m^2 of empty unappealing parking lot, bisected by a non-passenger train line. Additionally on the site is the Alderney Landing building. Currently this building has an open, ground floor plan that holds the small Craig Art Gallery, a NSLC liquor store, a cafeteria style restaurant and 3 small retail boutique food stores. On weekends the remaining open ground floor space houses the Dartmouth Farmers Market. Throughout the rest of the week this space is primary vacant and is used as a circulation through the building as one of multiple access routes to the Alderney Ferry Terminal.

The second floor of this building houses the Alderney Theater. This live performance theatre can seat 285 people and was once the permanent home for the Eastern Front Theatre group. Unfortunately this theatres awkward location, as the only presence on the second floor of the building makes it hard to find without guidance (of which there is very little). Additionally the theatre has other issues that has made it less than memorable in the minds of the public. Although the theater offers technical support there are no supporting production shops for this theatre to produce its own sets, costumes or props. When producing their own plays they

Aerial View of existing Site C. (Google Earth, 2011).

would have to farm out the production of theses to other groups, primarily Neptune Theatre in Halifax (who has fully functioning carpentry, Wardrobe, props,lighting and rigging shops.) This added a considerable amount of cost to each self produced production if they wish their shows to compete with the professional shows taking place in Halifax.

> In 2009 Eastern Front Theatre embarked on a relocation strategy from Dartmouth, instead presenting work at both traditional and non-traditional performance venues on the Halifax peninsula.....By relinquishing the responsibilities and limitations that came with our former venue we are better able to concentrate on the development of our region's theatre artists and their work. (Eastern Front Theatre, 2013)

Since the exodus of Eastern Front Theatre the Alderney Theatre has stayed open as a rental venue

for performance, wedding and conferences, but it lacks being strong presence mentally or visually within the community.

Occasionally through the year the main entrance of the whole building is transformed into a large out-door stage, for music and cultural events. Although these events are very successful they are infrequent and the stage is temporary giving the general public no access to use of this stage at any time. Its lack of permanence and public use means that he "fourth wall" between this performance space and the public is very present.

Outdoor stage, Image by Alderney Landing Limited, 2010.

Although Site C is located at a strong Dartmouth Axis of Ochterloney St and Alderney Dr the current Alder-ney landing building has failed to take advantage of the prime location of the street and of its community presence on the north of the site. Instead the build-ing is tucked behind the large over bearing Alderney Gate, blocking it from view from the community of Dartmouth for whom it is supposed to serve. Rather, this building seems more concerned with how it is viewed by the inhabitants of the Halifax water front.

Dartmouth Commons

Ochterloney St

Alderney Dr

Alderney Gate

Ferry

Terminal Park

Train Tracks

C

0

100m

N
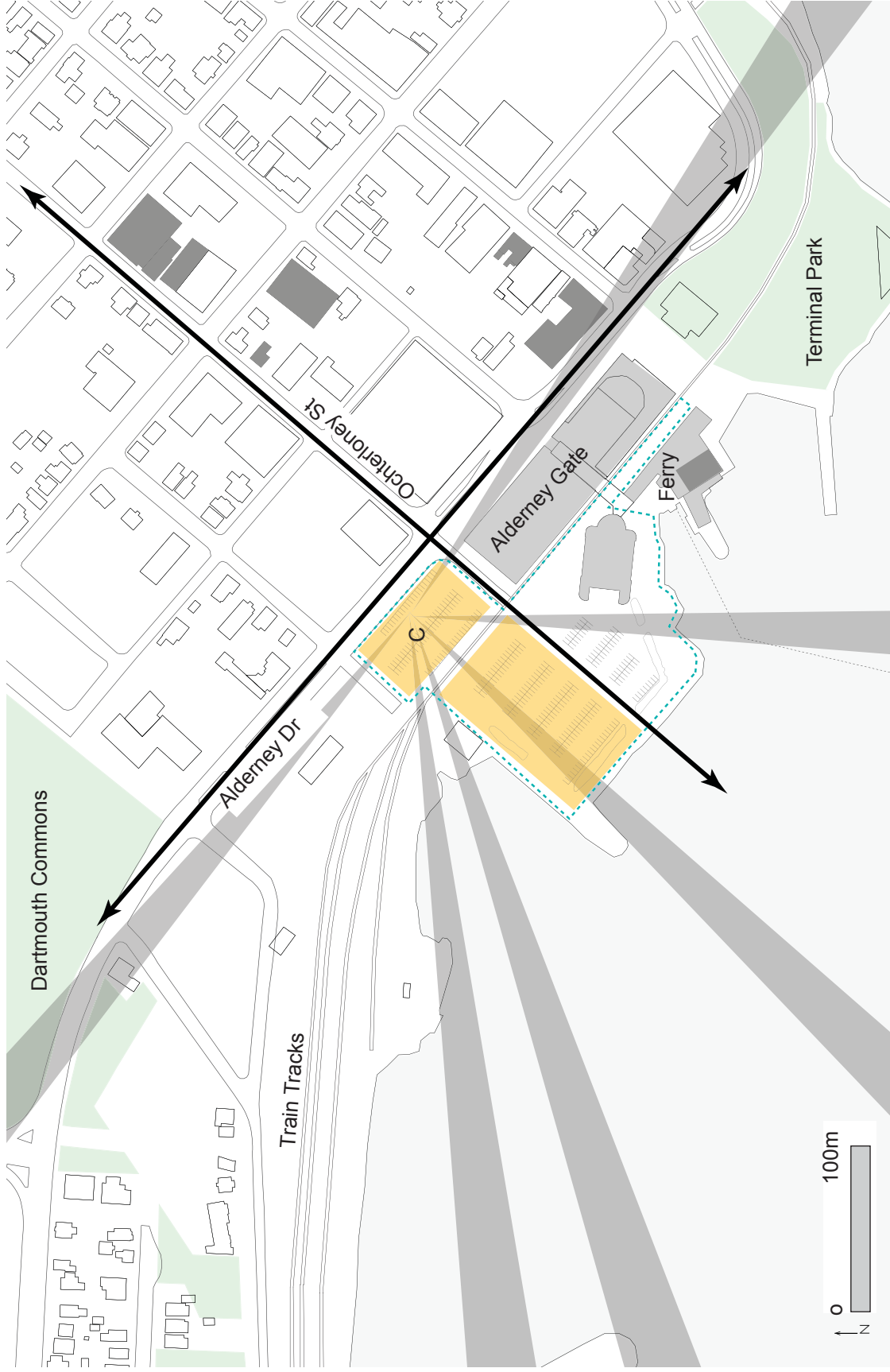
Site C: Existing Site C is located on a prime axis close to transportation routes and local business, with views to the prominent landmarks.

Train Tracks

0   100m

N
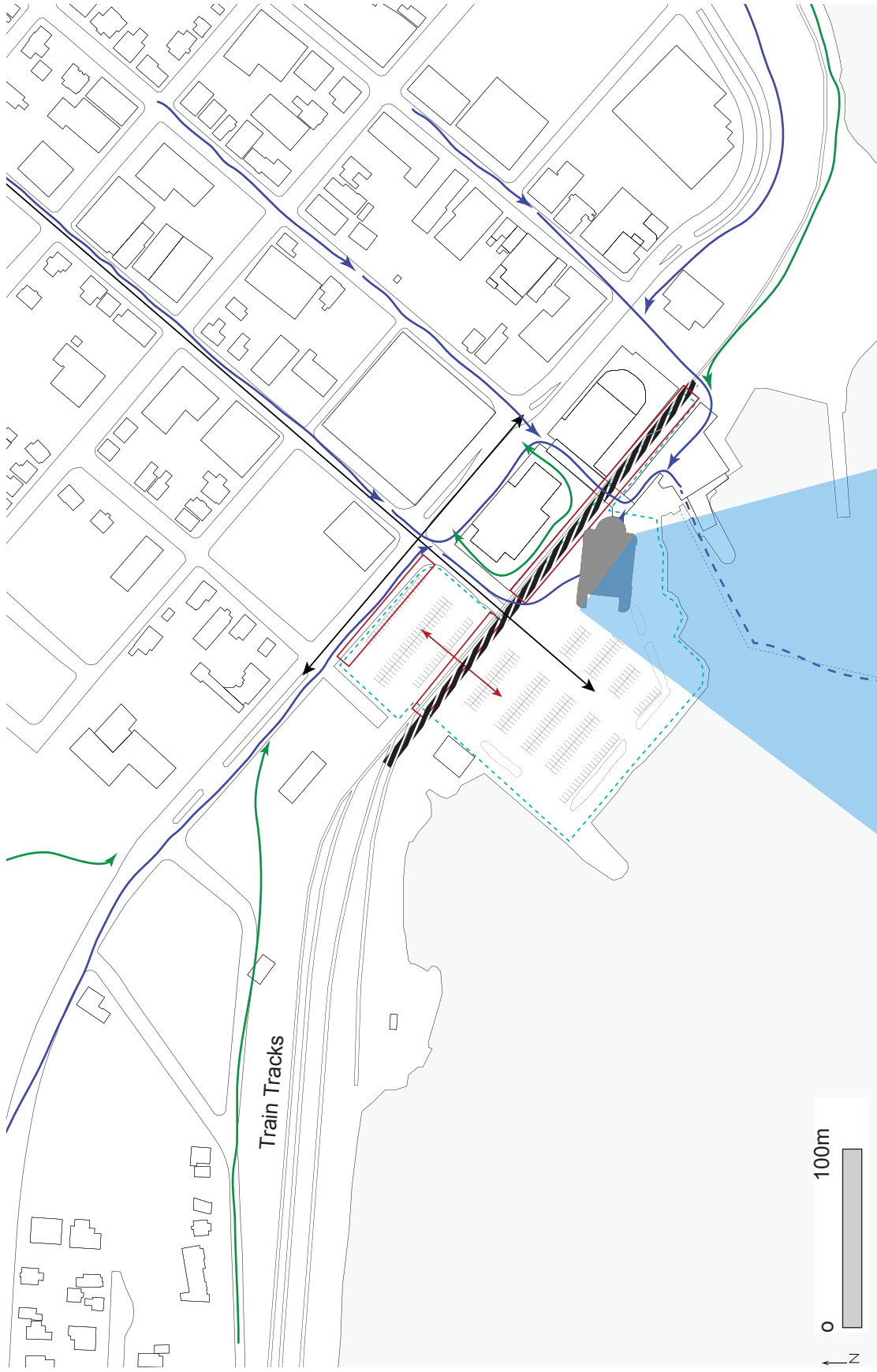
Site C: Existing Site Analysis.

On the perimeter of the site to the North West and to the South East are two popular public green spaces in Dartmouth; The Dartmouth Commons and the Ferry Terminal Park. Both site are frequented and used often by the public and are within a 5 minute walk of each other. Unfortunately due to existing conditions of the train tracks and the location of the Ferry Terminal and Alderney Gate buildings there is a physical and mental disconnect between these two green spaces.
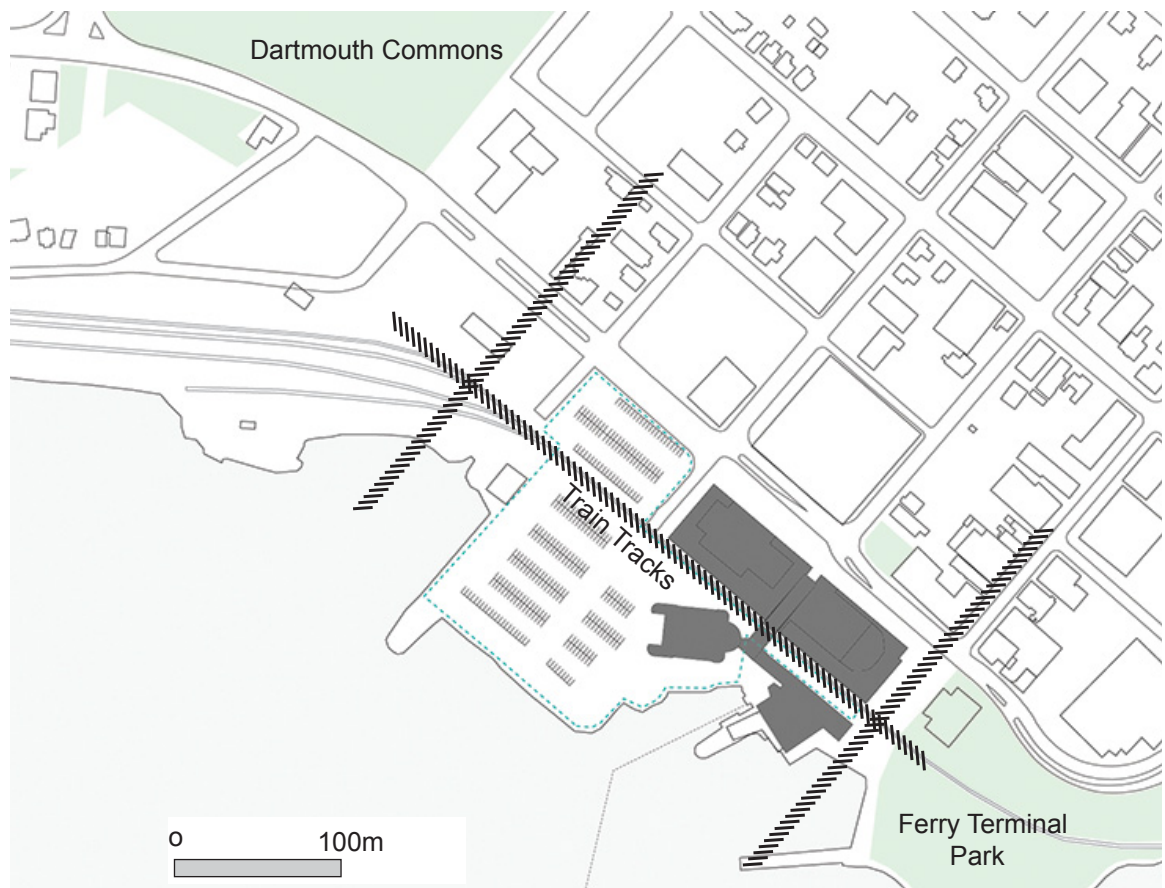
Existing broken green spaces, the hatch line show the barriers between the two green spaces.
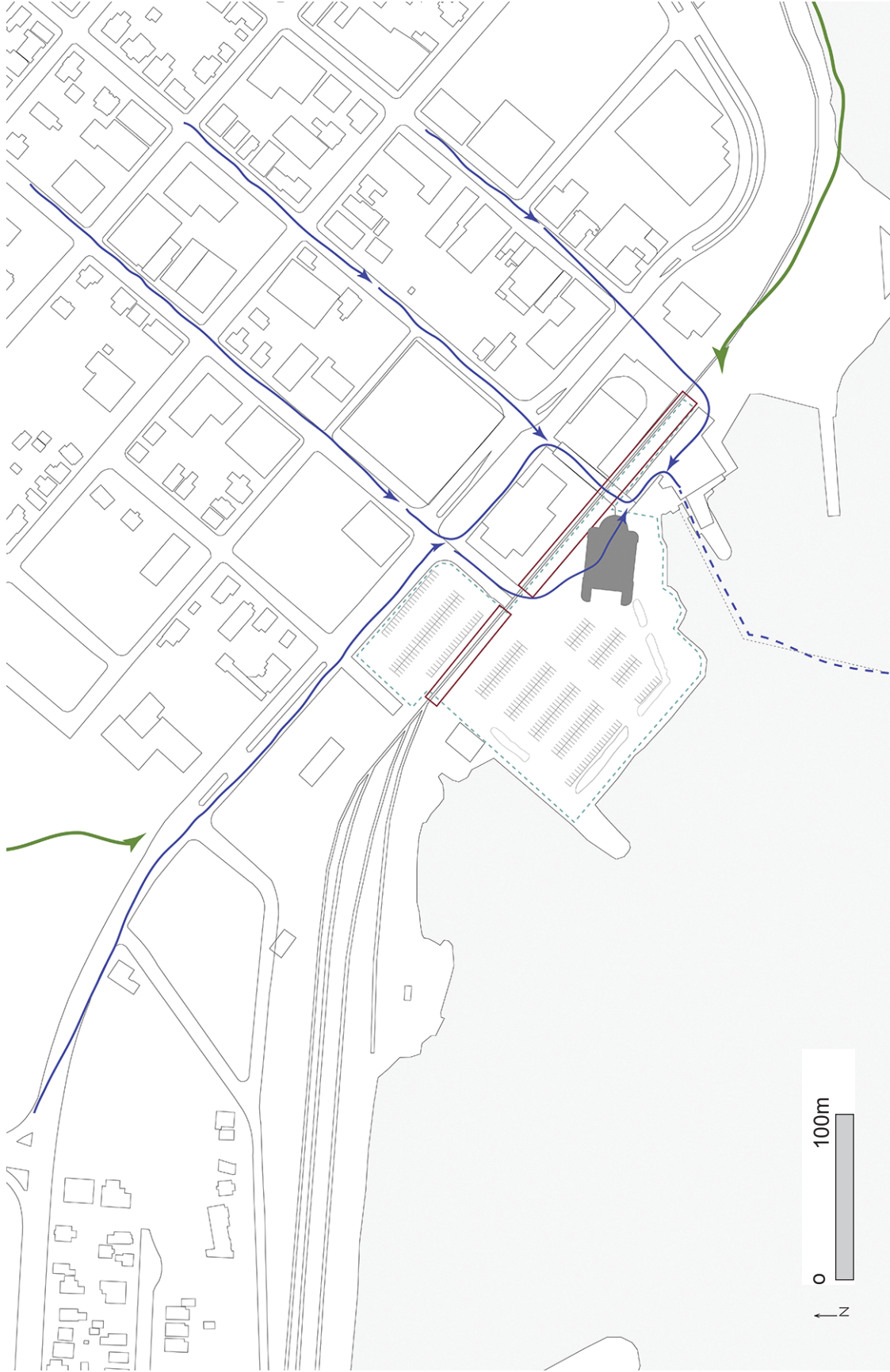
Existing pedestrian circulation paths. A route between the two green spaces is broken.

100m

0

N

An Additional challenge on the site is the commercial freight rail line that by-sects the site from North West to South East. This track disrupts the flow of public traffic through the site and between the two prominent green spaces. This track combined with the lack of a well defined, or attractive public path
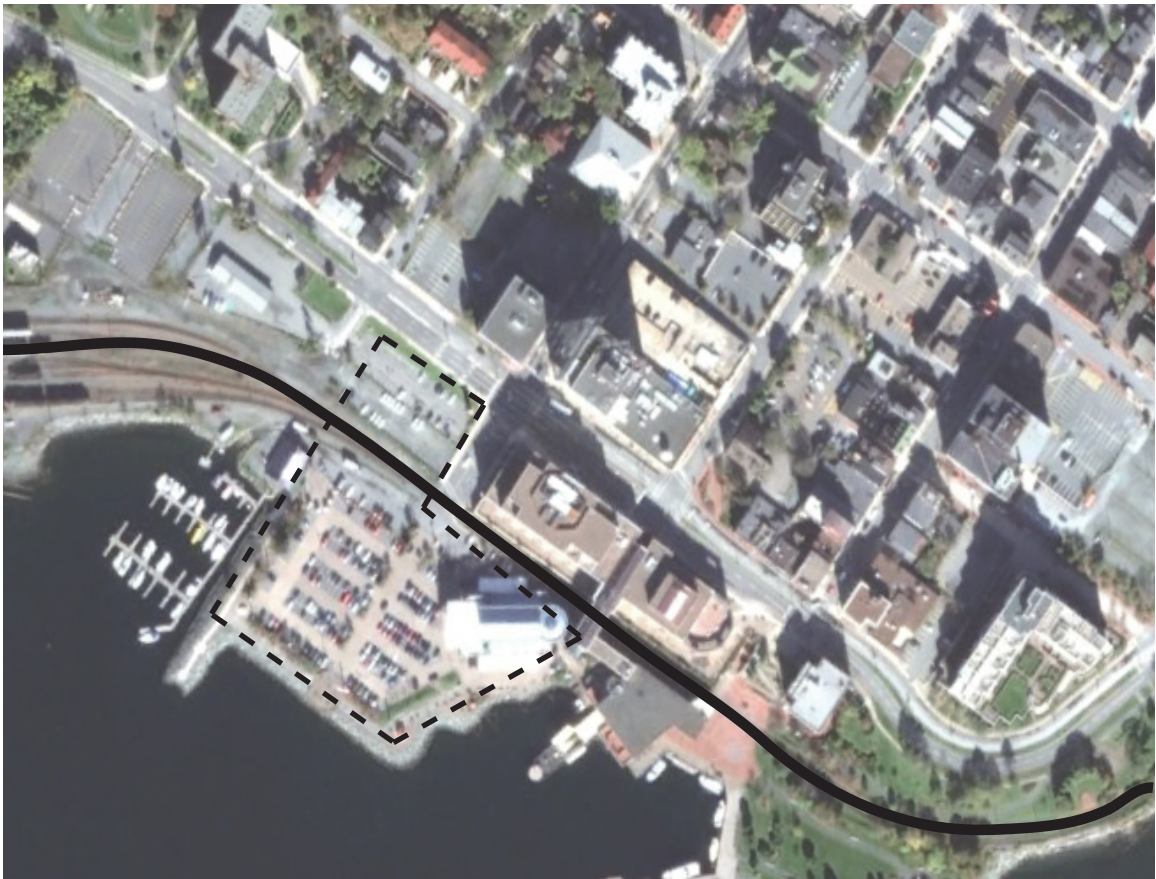
Train tracks interrupts the site. Base image by Google Earth, 2011.

through the site means that one of the most prominent and visible parts of the Dartmouth water front is under used and unattractive.

Design

Design Intent

The goal of the design is to re-allocate and reinvent the "Arts" program of the Alderney Landing to a more prominent, visible and successful location on the site. By taking advantage of the existing conditions, and views to and from this new location to the surrounding landmarks it would become a visual hub, linking and supporting the the surrounding neighbourhood. As a central player on the stage of downtown Dartmouth this building would break down the fourth wall within the community creating not only visible and viable performance program within a public building but also, through additional landscaping, would reconnecting the currently broken green spaces and pedestrian / bike path restoring connections between two parts of the city drawing the public in to a relationship with the build while at the same time giving new identity to the Dartmouth downtown water front and the downtown core as a whole.

Design Process

Through a series of paper models a study of various ways of navigating the train tracks and the reconnecting of the green spaces was explored.
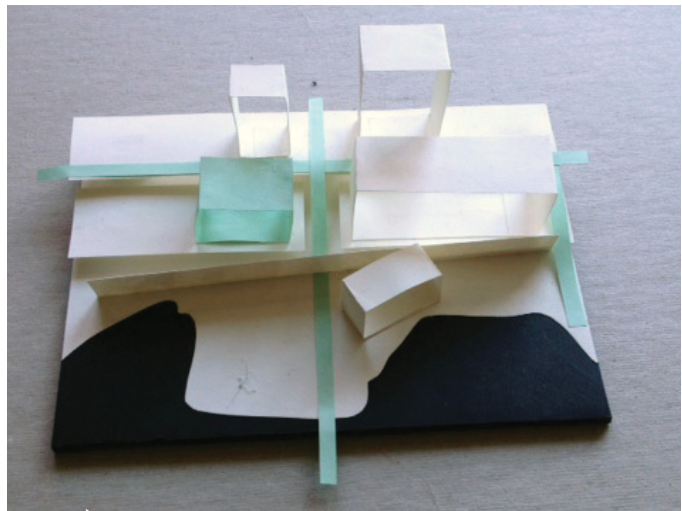
Study model: This first model showed that by adding in a building (green cube) and not changing the existing pedestrian conditions nothing would rectify the broken connection of the green space and the train remains a physical and mental barrier disconnecting the public street realm of the site with the major landmark feature of the harbour.
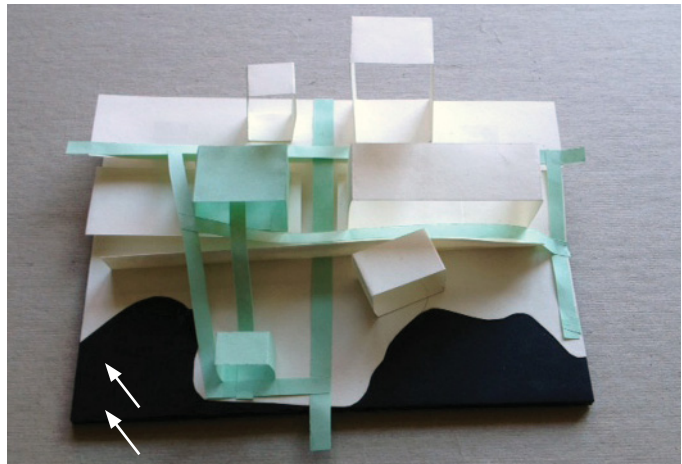

Study model: This final model showed that by navigating over the tracks and connecting into an existing underused pedestrian area in the rear of Alderney Gate that safe navigation, areas of observation and a reconnection between green spaces, and between the urban realm and the harbour views could be achieved.
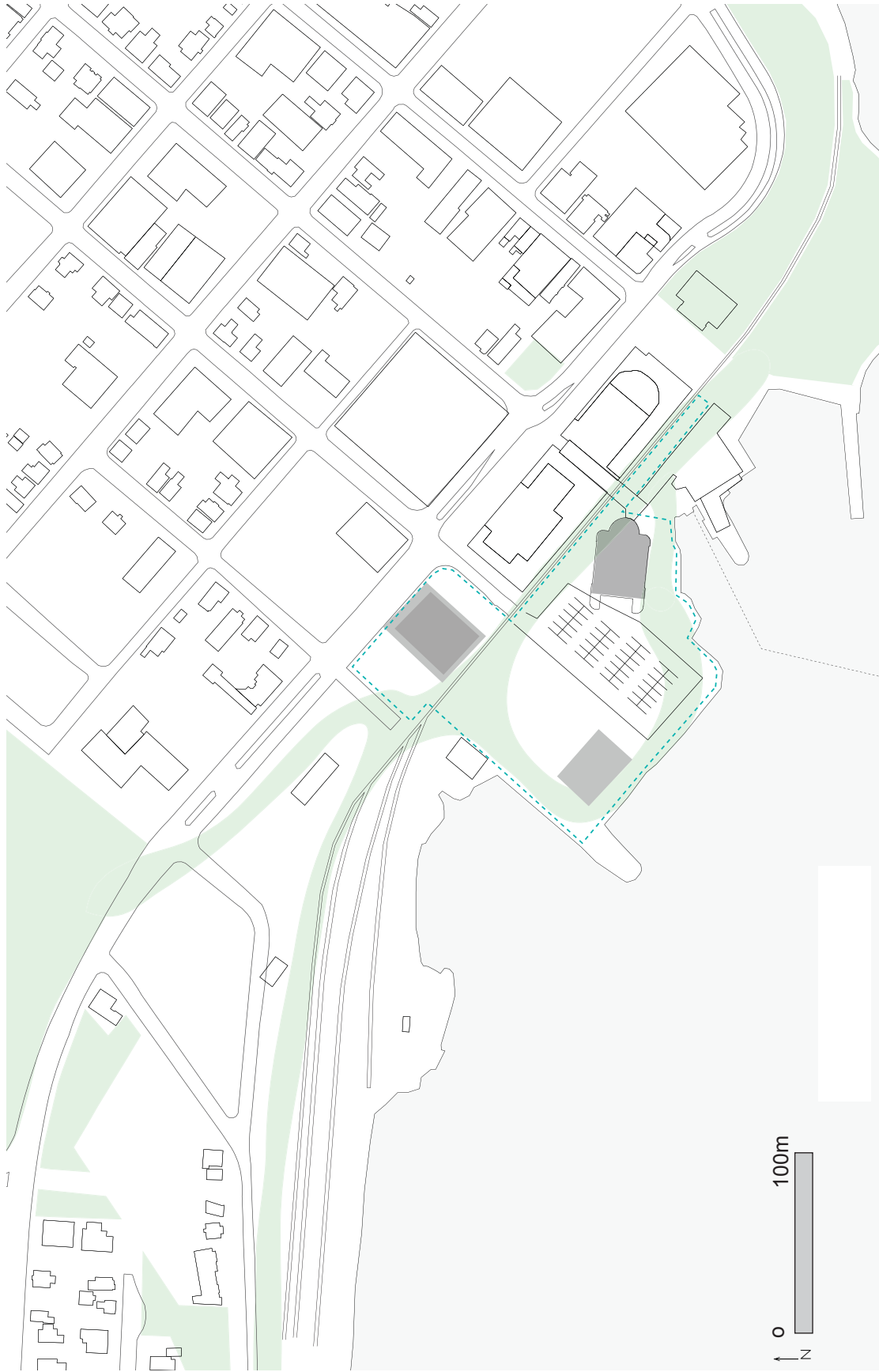
Proposed new green space connection.

Proposed New Circulation Routes. The "new" routes maintain a strong connection to the ferry and existing circulation while increasing the use of the new "green way". Together this creates more connection connections within the community.

100m

0

N
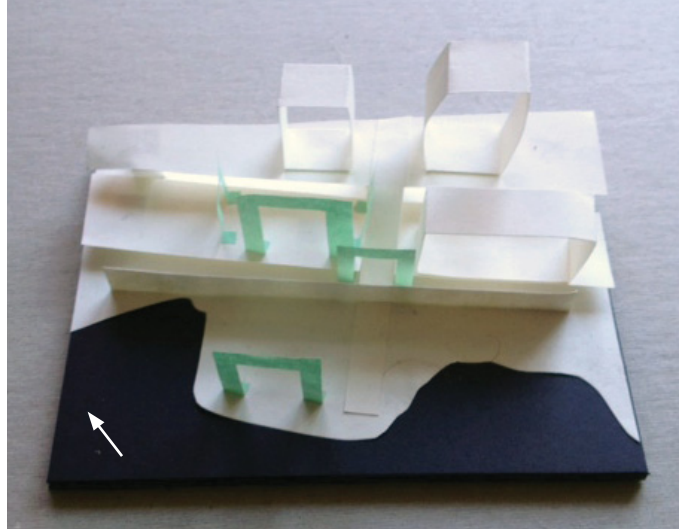
Study Model: A study of framed views of stage and "performance" as related to the existing and preferred condition for Site C this analogy would later guide the design in the placement of program, massing and permeability of the building.

Combining the study of site as performance and audience, framing of views and to connecting the prominent land marks of Dartmouth the site was studied for view framing potential for maximum connection for the community.

Viewing the train as a "performer" on the "stage" of the site rather than as an obstacle. This allows the building and its inhabitants to interact with the trains "performance" through viewing. The train tracks pass under, and through the building allowing for safe navigation over the tracks at anytime, while also giving the "audience" the opportunity to stay and observe the train passing by.
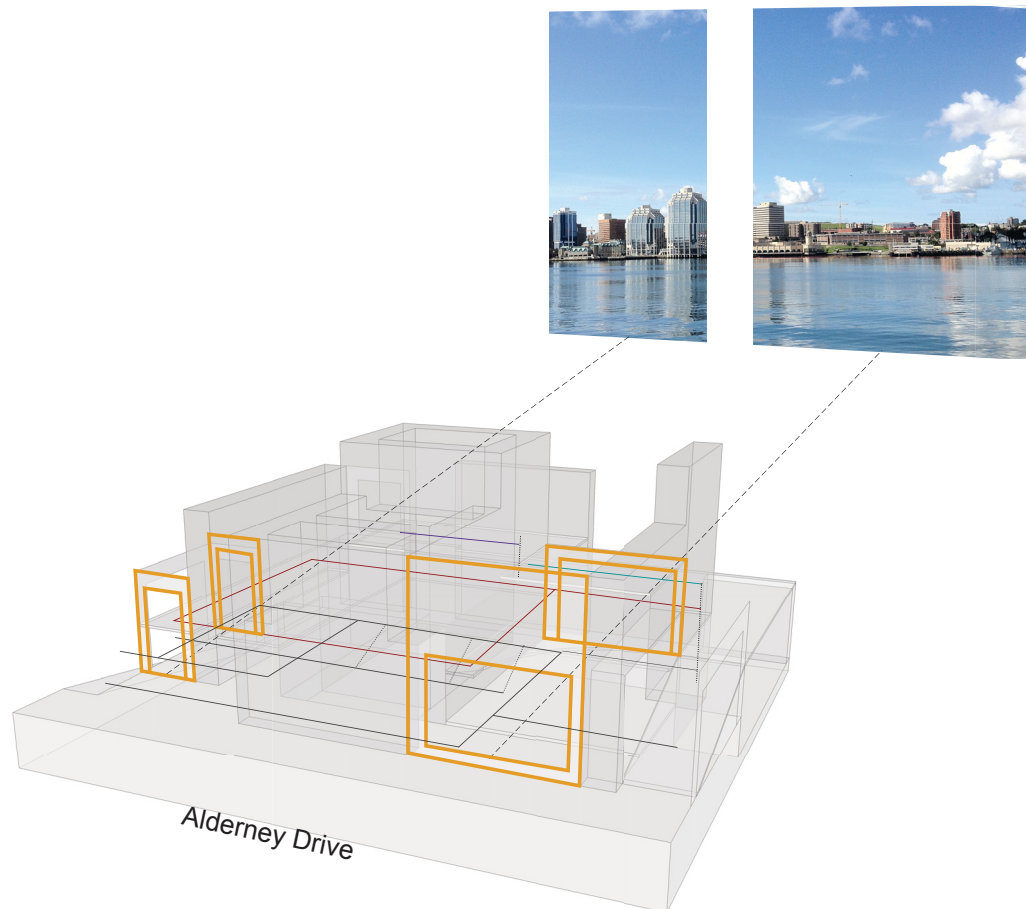
Alderney Drive
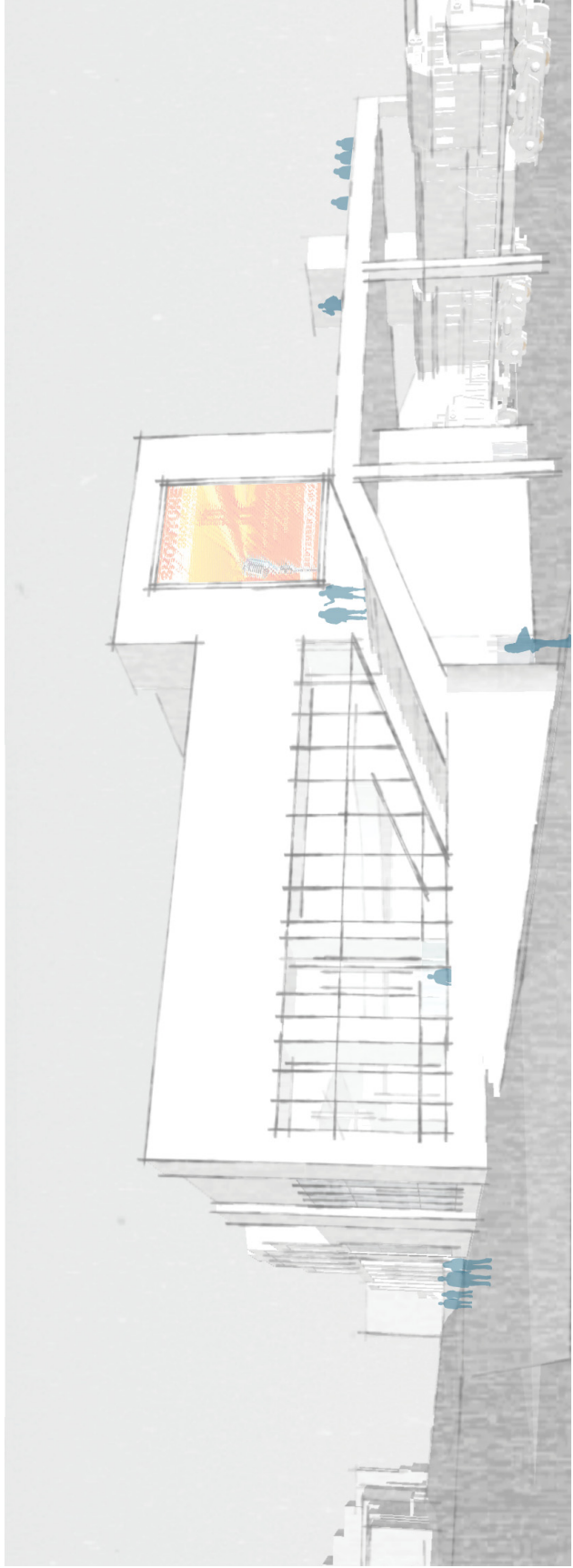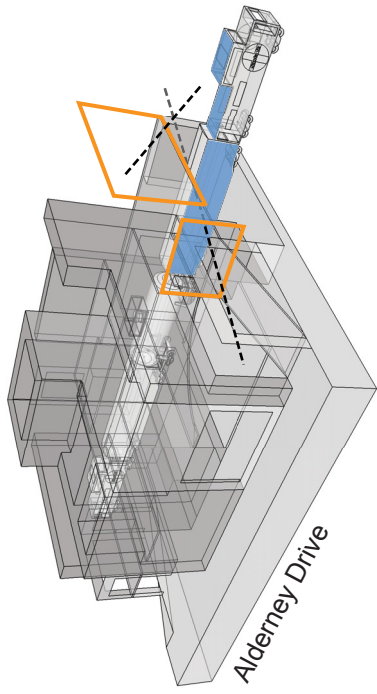
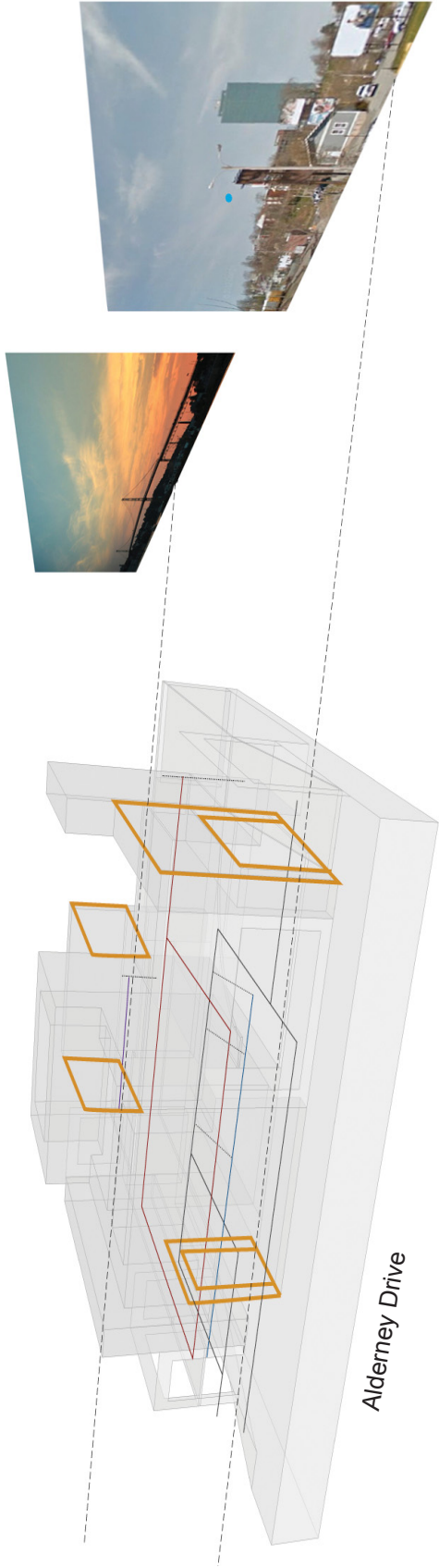Axonometric and perspective of trains passage through the building.

Performance and Views

From the use of the prime framing locations and the preferred location for performance on the site this led to the development and placement of various spaces of "performance" through out the proposed building and on the site. These performances ranged from the act of viewing the landmarks, out door concerts or events, the viewing of art, places for impromptu actives such as buskers or to the simple act of "people" watching both inside and out.
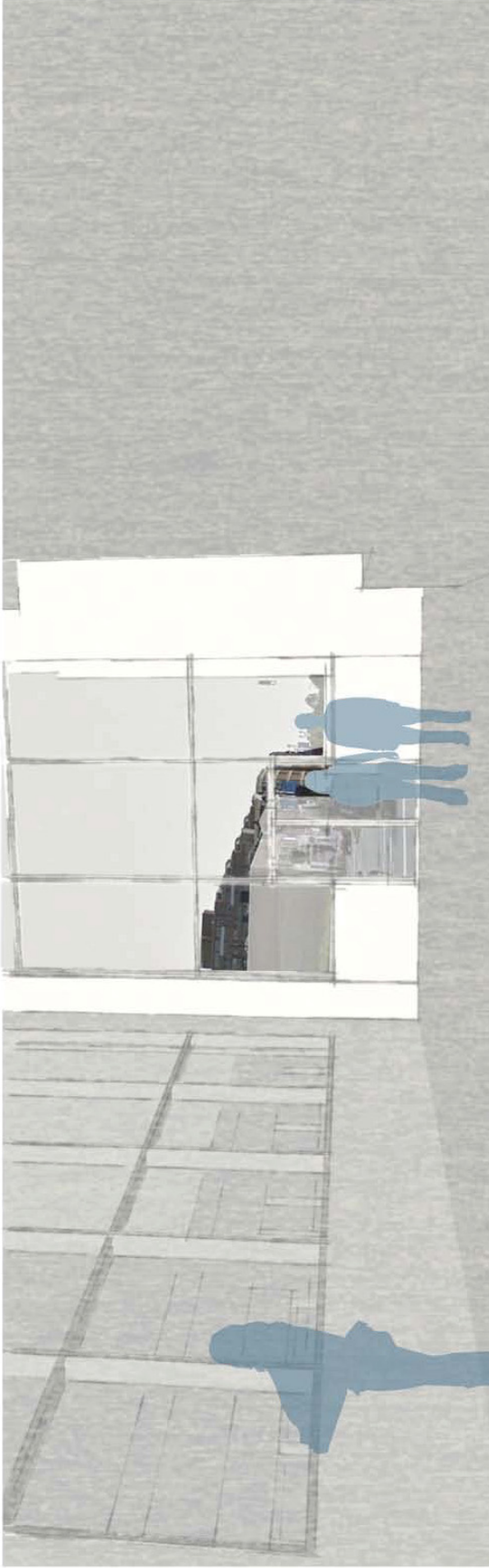
Landmark Views

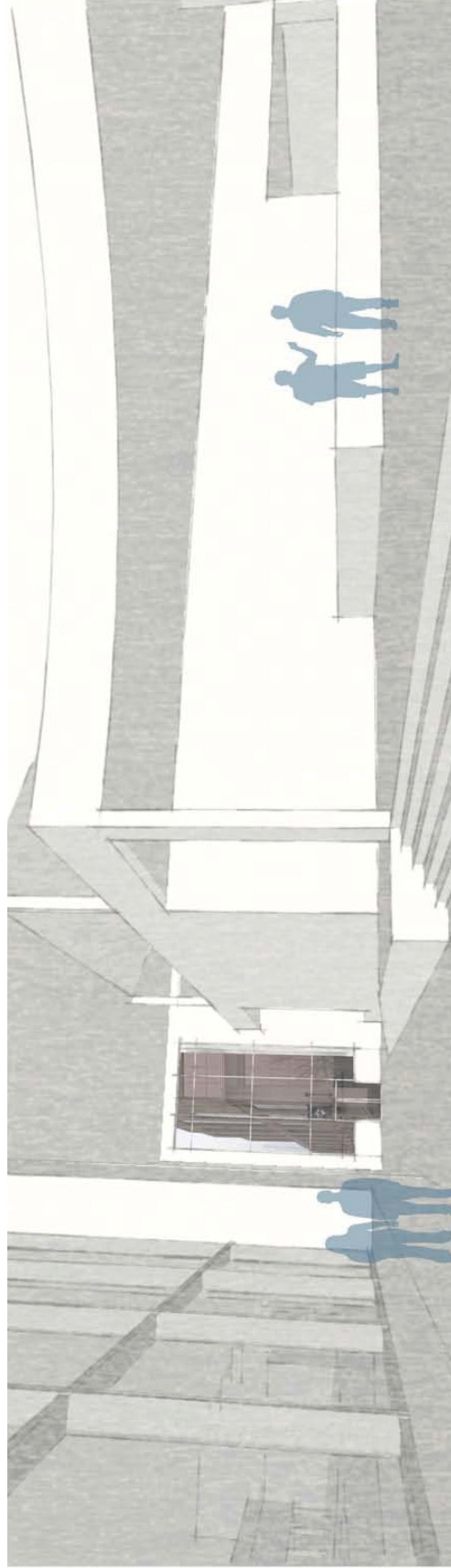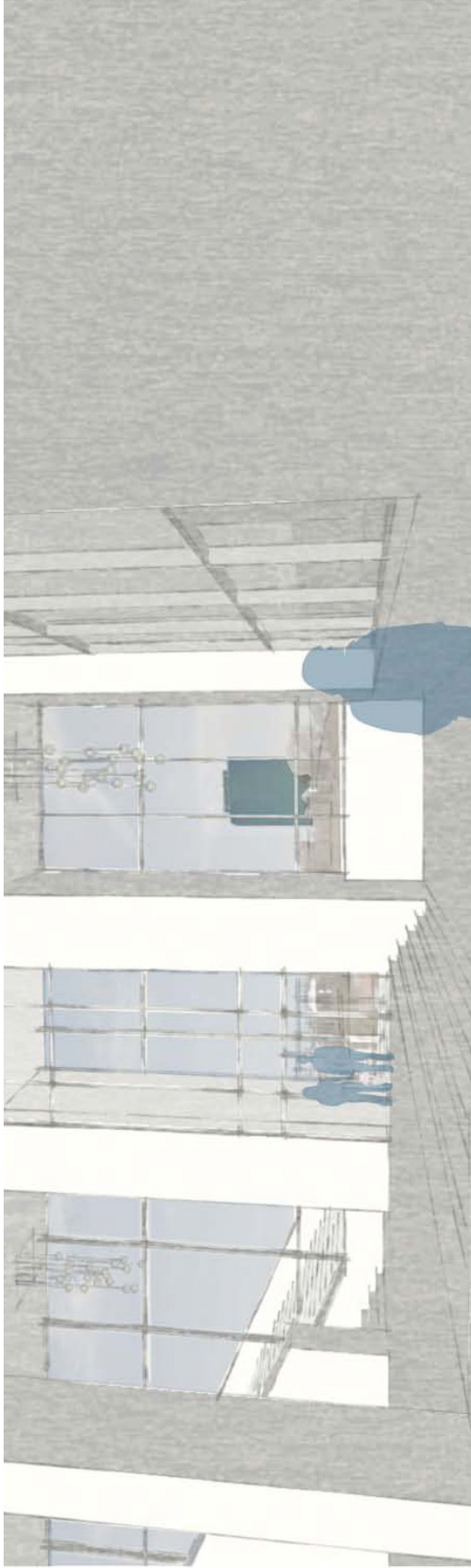Axonometric locations of views to the harbour.

Axonometric of locations of views to the bridge and 99 Wyse Rd.

Alderney Drive

Interior view to Admiralty Place from interior front Gallery Hall looking Northeast.

Interior view to Alderney Gate from Interior Gallery Hall Entrance looking Northeast.
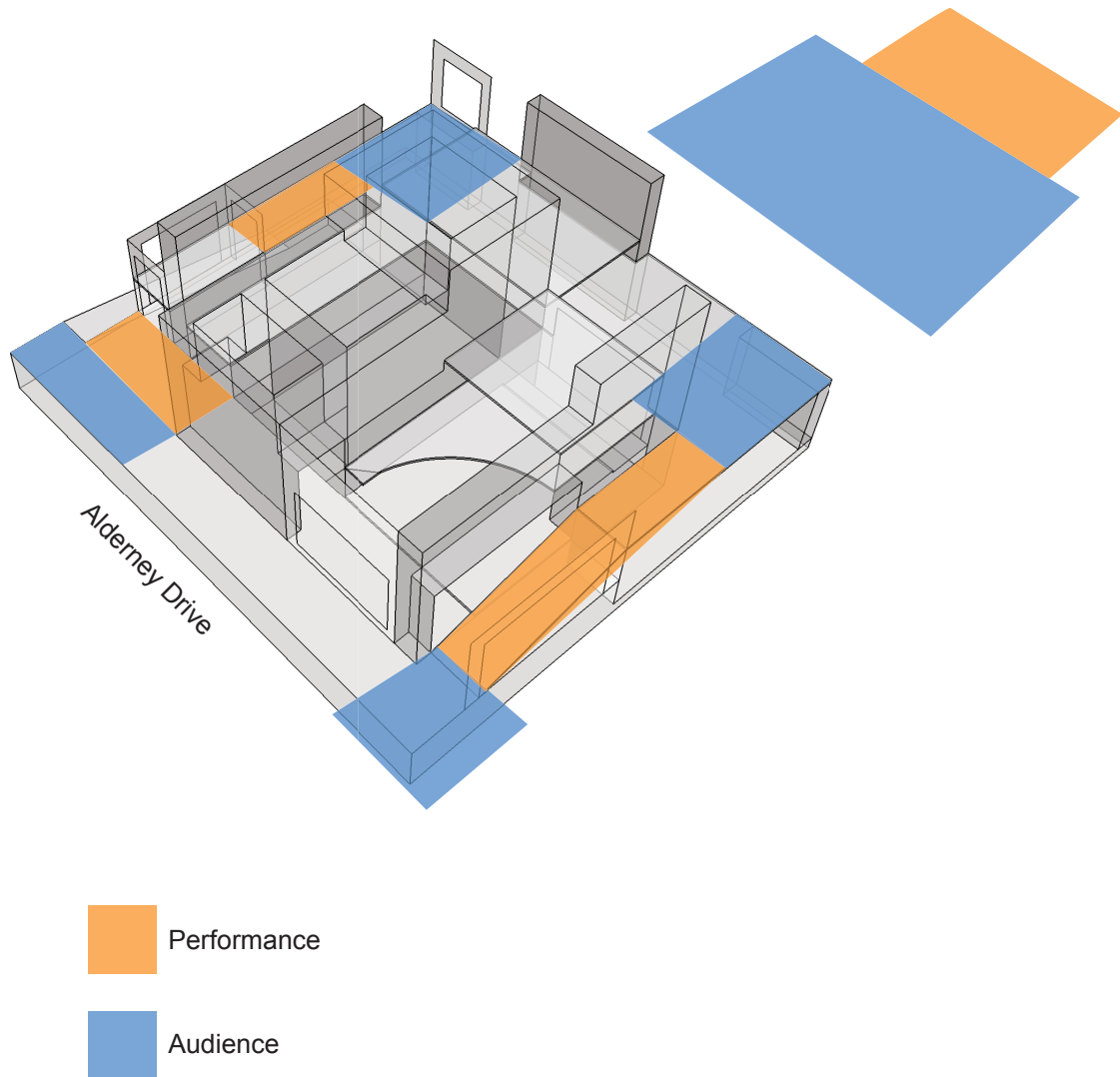
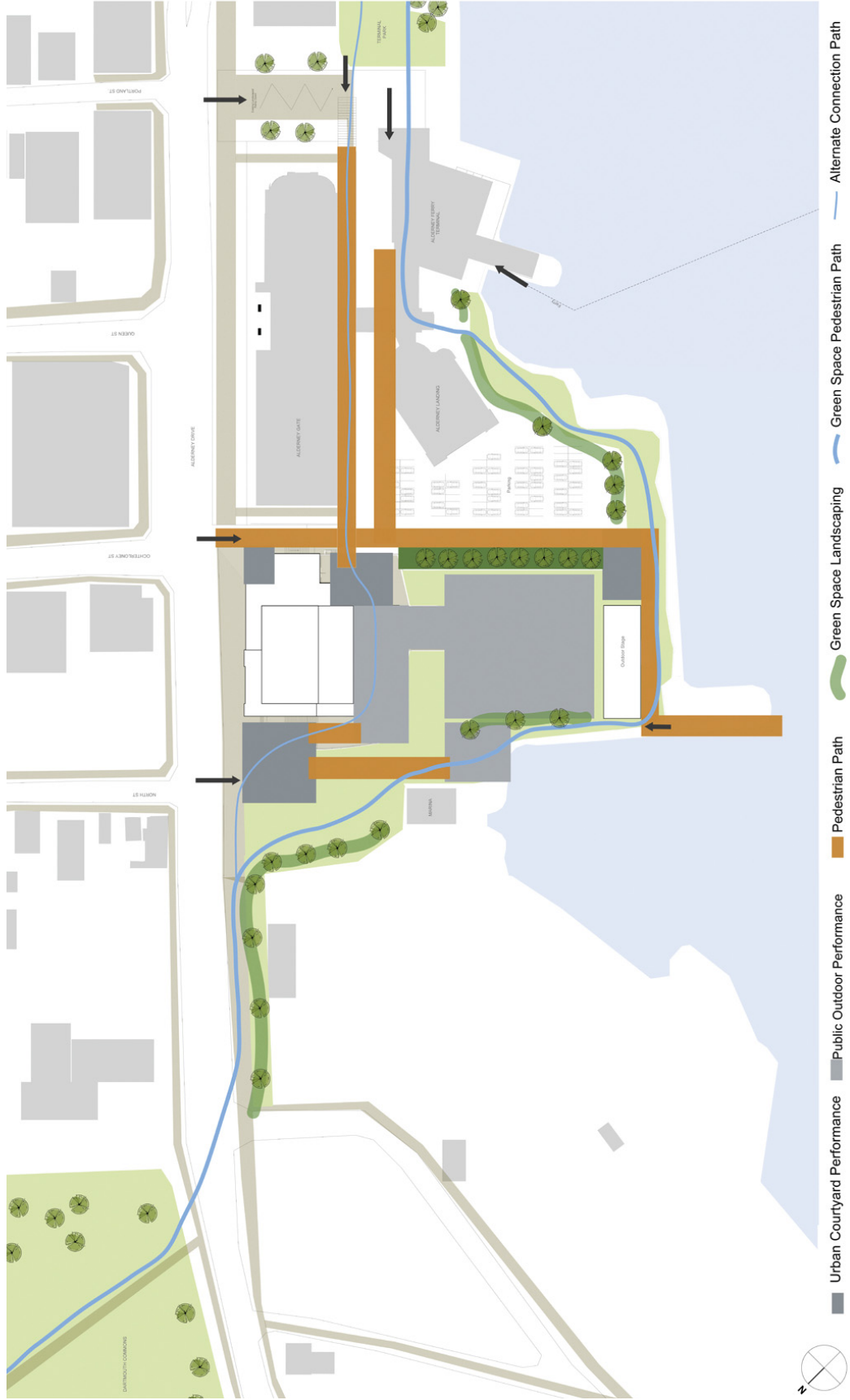Interior view to 99 Wyse Rd from Interior Gallery Hall / Lobby looking North.

Interior view to Halifax Harbour and the MacDonald Bridge from the upper lobby looking Northwest.

*Exterior Performance Spaces*

Alderney Drive

Performance

Audience

Exterior Places of Performance. In these spaces performance such as: out door concerts, festivals, buskers, train watching or people watching could take place.

Pedestrian Path   Green Space Landscaping   Green Space Pedestrian Path   Alternate Connection Path

The performance space create connections to the surrounding urban core and reconnect the existing green spaces.
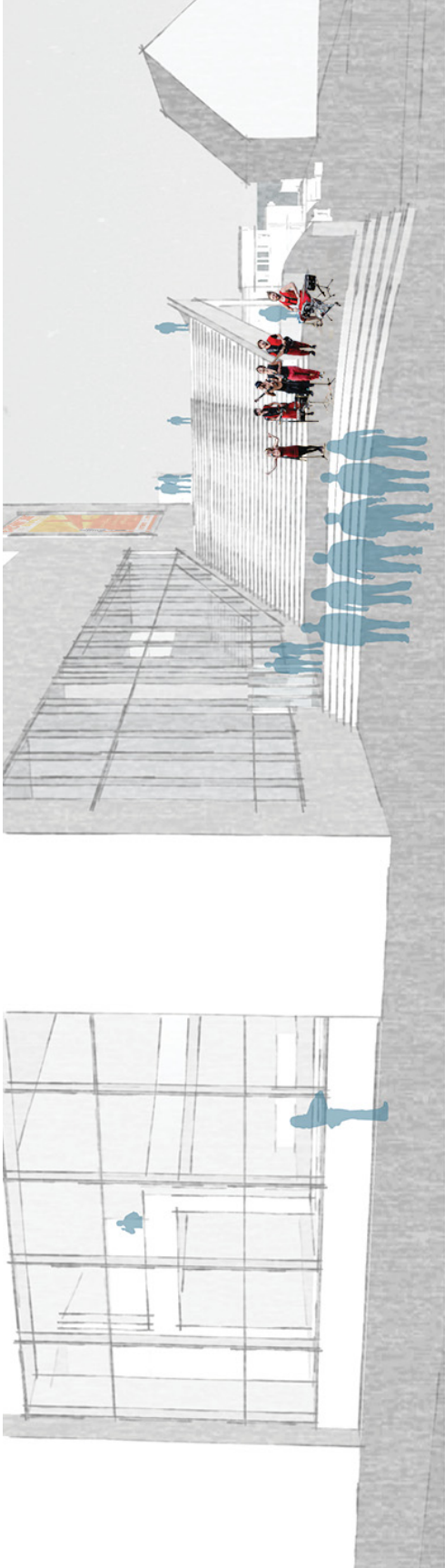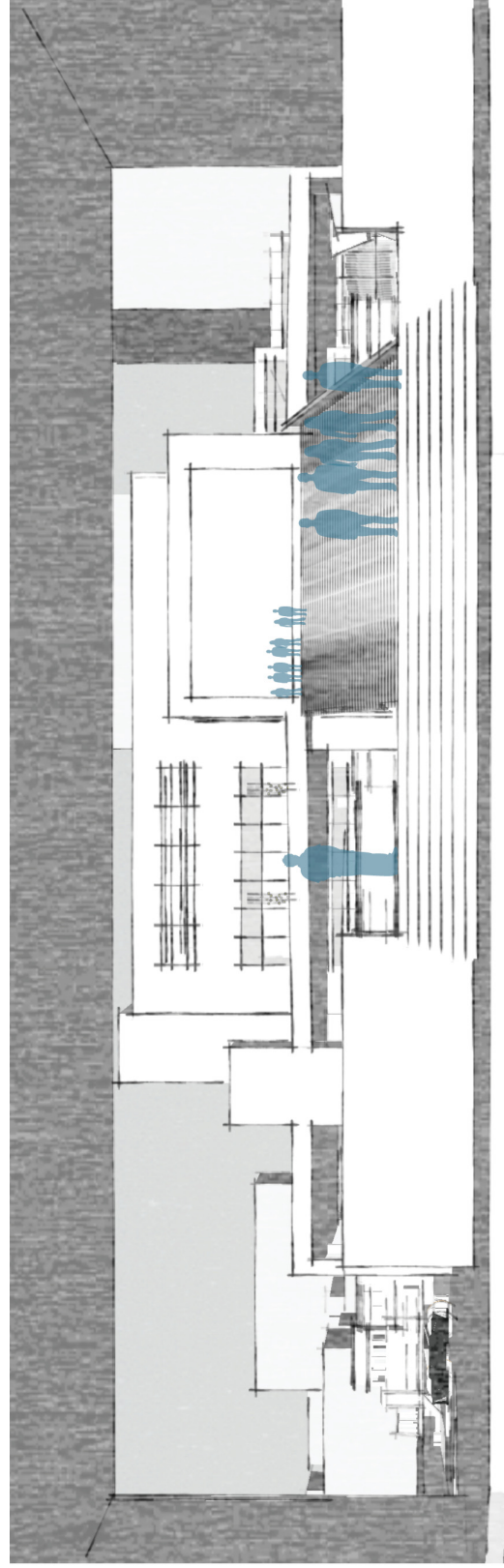
Exterior perspective of buskers on the Northwest exterior stair case
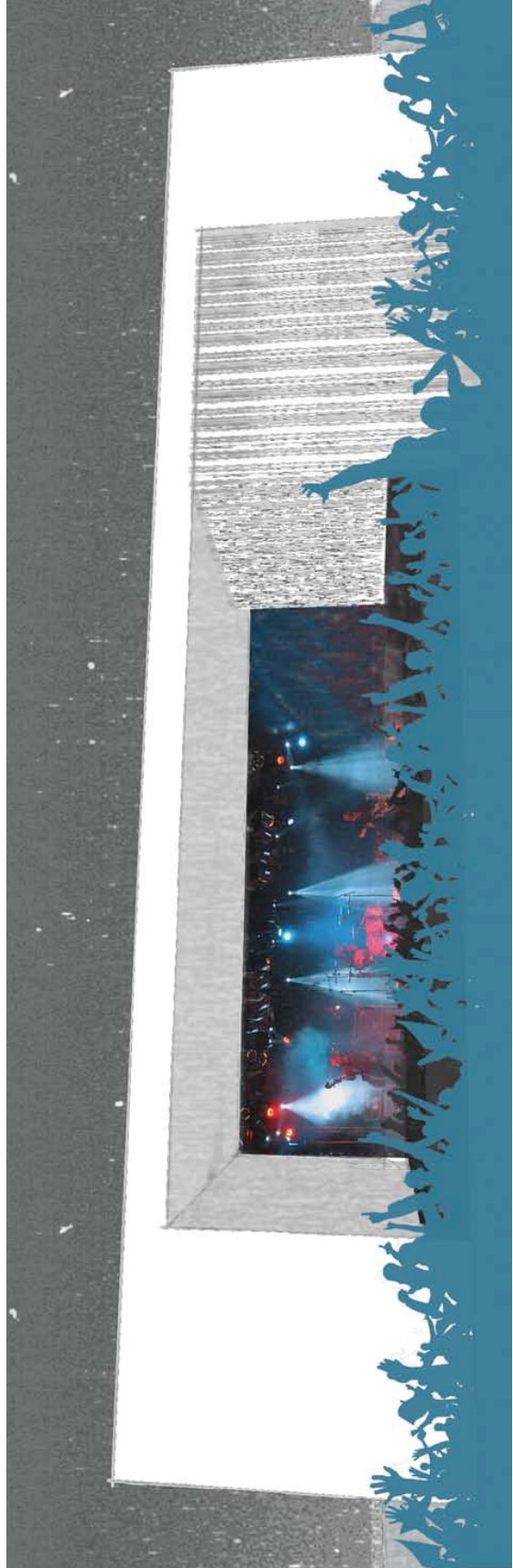
Exterior perspective of concert on the outdoor stage looking southwest to the Halifax harbour.
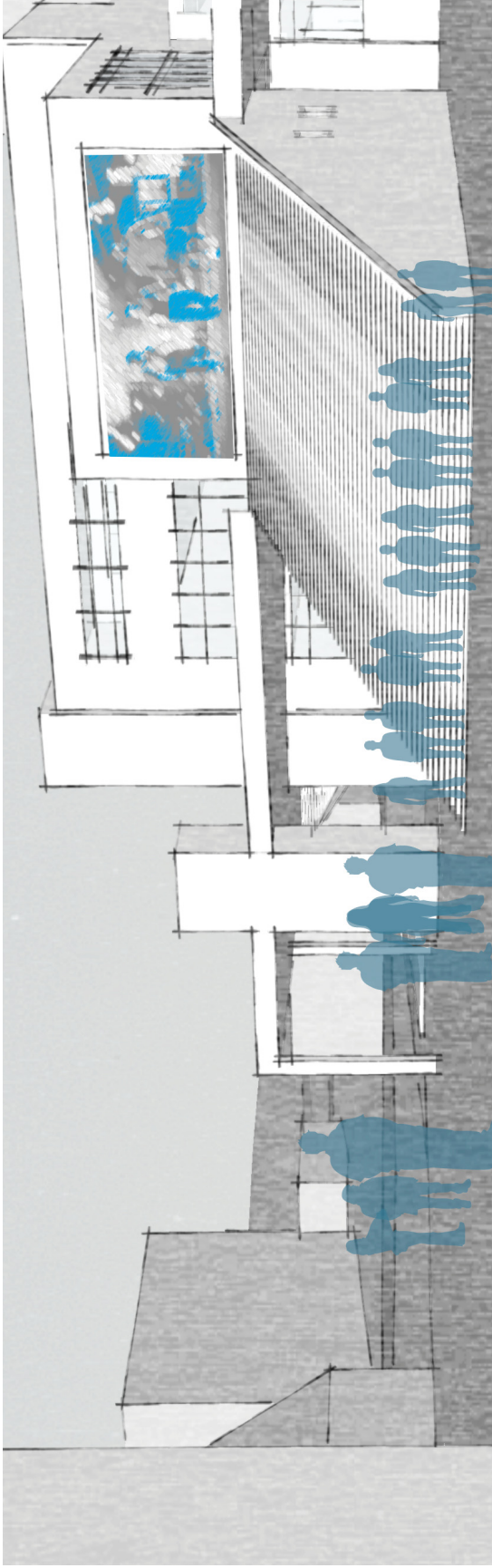
Exterior perspective of outdoor projection/movie wall

When viewed from the harbour through the outdoor stage the building itself appears to sit on the stage becoming a "performance" on the site.

A

Section locations
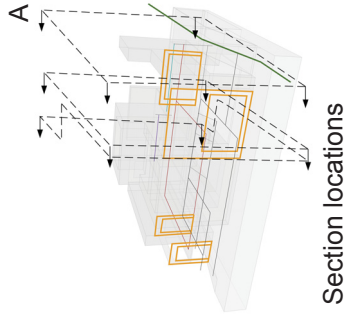
Section A
1:500

Section A cuts through the exterior public stair way and exterior patio. The exterior stairway to the front of the building acts not only as a a way to navigate up to the level that allows for assess over the train, but also as a impromptu audience seating area activating the Site B across the street, Also as platforms for impromptu public performance such as buskers or outside plays.

Interior Performance Spaces
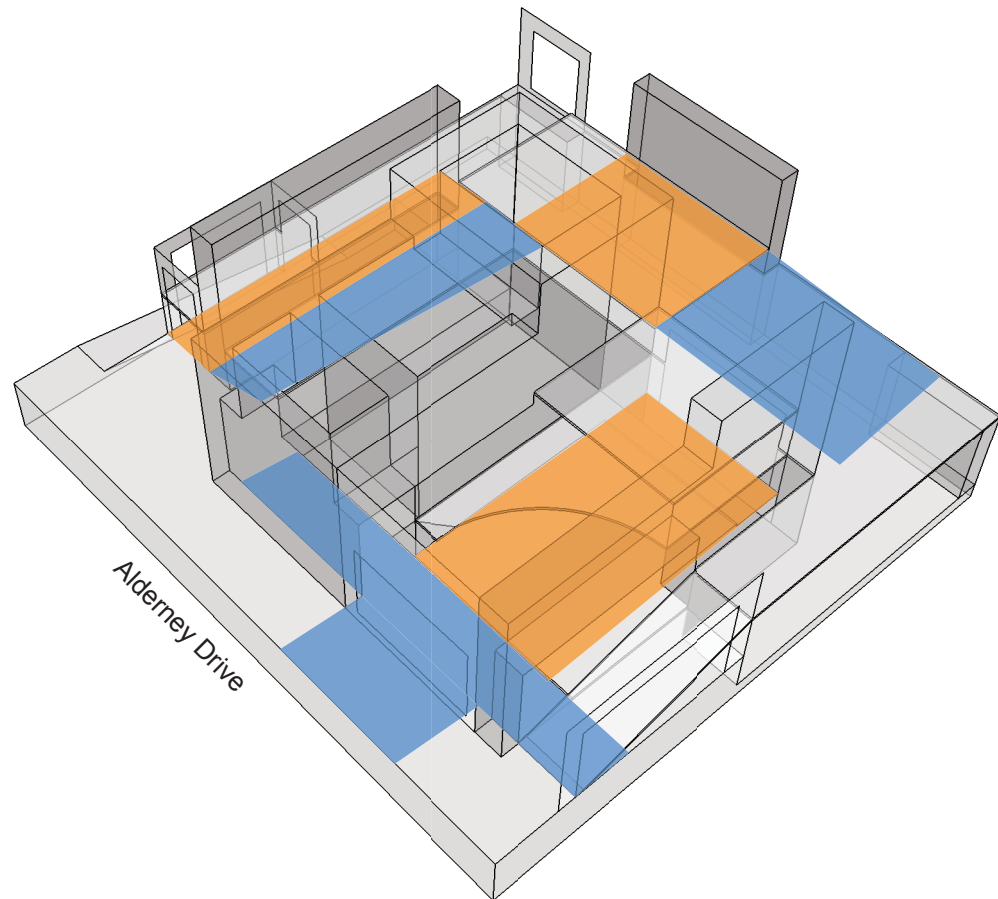
Performance

Audience

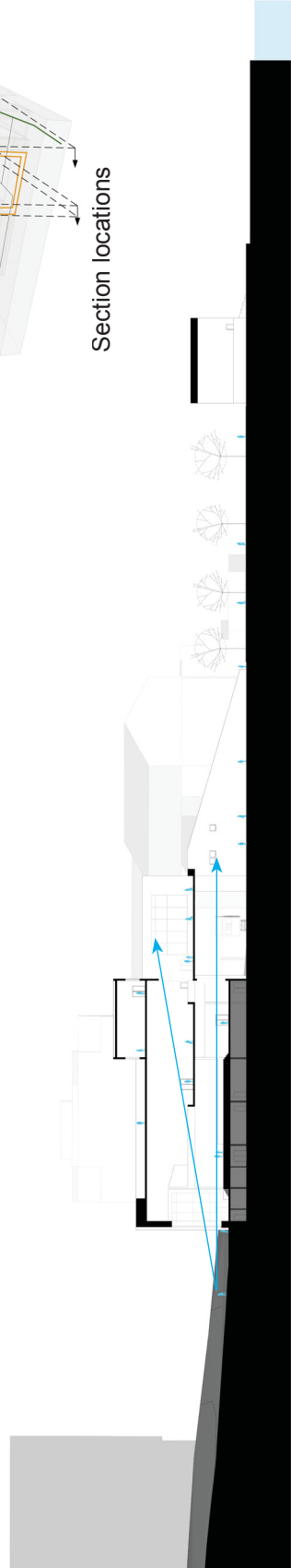Interior place of performance. In these space non traditional performance takes place such as; People watching, ceremonies, art exhibits or public gatherings.

Interior perspective of Art Gallery / Lobby.

Perspective of framed indoor activity as performance viewed from Alderney Drive.

C B

C

Section locations
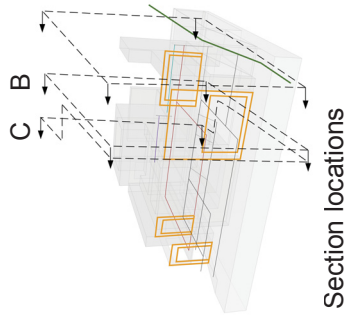
Section B

Section B cuts through the Lobbies/Art Gallery of the building. It show how the "frames" at either end of the building allow for views into and out of the building but also through the building allowing the public to maintain views of the harbour

Section C
1:500

Section C shows how the step building and the views through the building to the harbour side of the site activate the festival lawn and out door stage
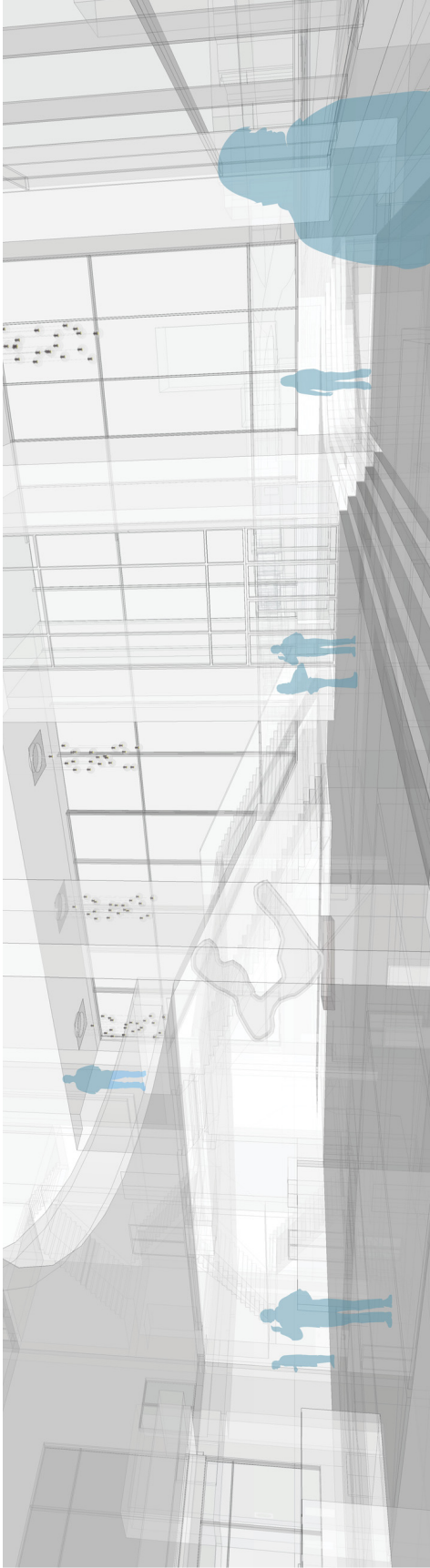
An abstracted Interior perspective of the Lobbies and Art Gallery emphasizing the "transparency" of the building

Additional Design Work
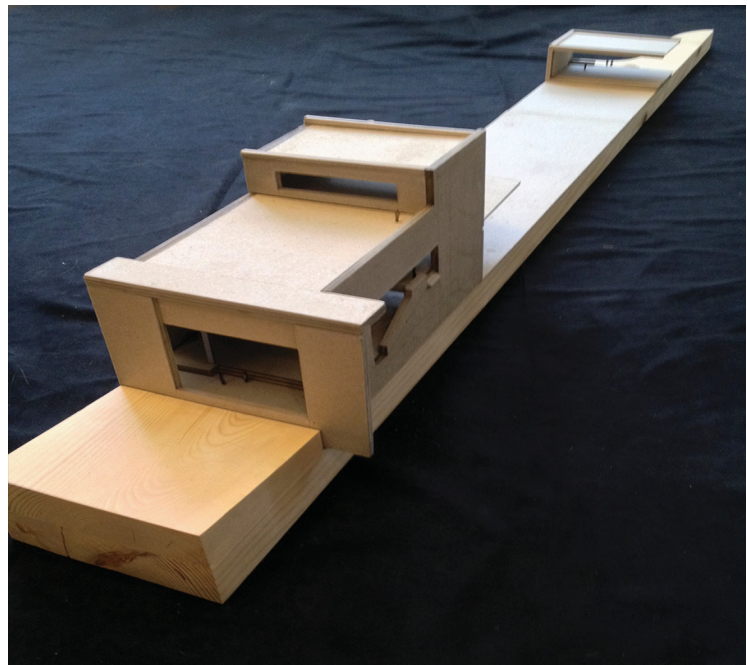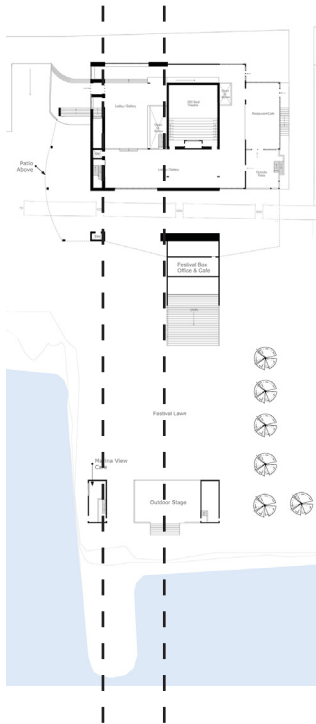
A sectional model was used to explore the view plane through the building.

View plane through Lobbies/Gallery of building.

Site model showing the placement and massing of the building and outdoor stage on the site.

ALDERNEY DRIVE

Lobby / Gallery

200 Seat
Theatre

Open
to
Below

Restaurant/Cafe

ALDERNEY GATE

Open
to
Below

Bar

Lobby / Gallery

Outside
Patio

Patio
Above

MARINA

Festival Box
Office & Cafe

ALDERNEY LANDING

Festival Lawn

Parking

Marina View
Cafe

Outdoor Stage

Street Level Plan.

ALDERNEY DRIVE

Open
To
Below

Open
To
Below

500 Seat
Theatre

Lobby Bar

Lobby / Gallery

Proscenium
Stage

Open
To
Below

Outdoor
Patio

Rehersal

Outdoor
Patio

ALDERNEY GATE

MARINA

ALDERNEY LANDING

Festival Lawn

Parking

Outdoor Stage

Second Floor Plan.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

"Breaking the Fourth Wall" has explored ideas of how "Performance Space" can be operative in re-activating an area through the use of spectacle, informal/formal stage and audience relationships and by connecting the public to the surrounding city through views to "performance". As well through engaging Dartmouth's inhabitants, the use of land-marks as "performers", not only allows the new building to connect with its surroundings, acting as a connective frame within its own urban performance; it orients the users within the city during the proces-sional act of 'going to the theatre', simultaneously connecting the building to the city. Informal linkages created by proximity are strengthened by pedestrian routes and green way links, which encourage the public to participate, as the audience for events or performances, and in turn connecting the audience to nearby local businesses. In this way additional revenue will filter into the community, giving more opportunity for the local success, and revitalization in the area. The project, then through both formal and informal relationships set up by urban and site strategies all strengthen the connection between the building and the surrounding community. Creating occasions where a simultaneity of roles, between performer and spectator: iconic view juxtaposed with pedestrians on the street, are created, "Performer" and "audience" become interchangeable, the defin-ing barrier between the two is lost, "Breaking the Fourth Wall".

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