

**DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION:
A New Civic Square in Windsor, Nova Scotia**

by

Luboslav Urda

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Architecture

at

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Thesis Question	4
Town Location	4
CHAPTER 2: TOWN ANALYSIS.....	7
History.....	8
Characteristics of the Study Area at Present	12
Pedestrian and Bike Movement	14
Vehicular Movement	15
Addressing the Need to Sit	16
The Elements of Study Area	17
CHAPTER 3: MAIN STREET ANALYSIS.....	21
Street's Typology.....	22
Mapping Critical Nodes of Movement.....	24
Existing Conditions vs. Street's Elements.....	26
Positive Features of Gerrish Street	26
CHAPTER 4: SPECIFIC SITE ANALYSIS.....	28
Strong Connection with History	31
CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY.....	33
Woodstock, NY, USA	33
Lessons Learned for Windsor Downtown Revitalization.....	33
CHAPTER 6: INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN.....	35
Public vs. Private Social Activity Relations	36
CHAPTER 7: DESIGN.....	37
Goals and Inspiration	37
The New Windsor Urban Square.....	40
Space Defining Elements.....	49
Urban Square Analysis.....	52
Surfaces	53
Trees vs. Plants and Grass.....	54
Edges	54

Overhangs	55
Annual Public Activities.....	56
Private vs. Public Social Activity	60
Perspective Views	63
Winter Season	63
Season on the Weekday Basis between May and October.....	66
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION.....	69
Functions of the New Town Square Design	69
Optional Perspective to the future of Downtown Revitalization.....	70
APPENDIX A: PATTERN OF WINDSOR URBAN EVOLUTION.....	71
REFERENCES.....	73

ABSTRACT

Urban sprawl with the advent of automobile commuting has led to the loss of a “sense of place” and the decline of informal public gathering in the urban core of Windsor, Nova Scotia. Building an integrated sense of community is the thesis objective. An interactive relationship between the town’s history and landmarks, and elements such as edges, paths, and districts, is established in the physical form of a new downtown civic square located at the intersection of the traditional main street (Gerrish) and Grey Street. The civic square enables new, year-round civic activities including a library, market, art gallery, and skating rink, enhanced by informal gathering spaces. The square revives Windsor’s “sense of place,” providing an anchor of public space and activity for citizens a ten-minute walk from surrounding residential neighbourhoods, and offers the opportunity for informal meetings and the element of surprise within the journeys of daily life.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The trend to decentralization in North American towns since the 1960s has tipped the balance in terms of the soul of “place.” The result is the elimination of informal public gatherings in the centre of the community. Since the advent of the automobile, cities have sprawled over the countryside, giving people individual space but destroying the sense of community. Technology makes life easier in many ways but causes isolation. Change happens so fast that people have no time to realize how much it affects the quality of individual lives.

Heidegger characterizes the socio-economic conditions as a picture-frame, offering “space” for use but missing existential meaning in relation to “place,” “the fundamental importance of concept of gathering” (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 6).

Once individualism dissolves its notion of self, and self relaxes into a communal feeling beyond bounding, you can’t possibly die alone, because there is no alone. (Hillman 1993, 68)

Public space is a place of communicating... Many different views come to light, cultural, political and commercial in addition to the silent voices of many people who come to be seen. (Gehl 2006, 54)

Alfred Alder, the well-known psychologist, together with Freud and Jung before him, believed that the most important goal in achieving a good quality of life is by feeling a sense of belonging to a community. According to the *Boston Globe*, 15 million Americans today attend 500,000 recovery group meetings (psychotherapy) every week across the nation (Hillman 1993, 137). These people believe they are alone (Hillman 1993, 83). It is important to remind people living in their present space, of the importance of their connections with their cultural and historical heritage. Heritage is unique to each place and local people relate easily to it, using it as a foundation for present attitudes. Professor Howard Davis from the School of Architecture, University of Oregon, says:

Buildings that are rooted in culture and place, acting not as isolated objects in the world but as ways of making a larger physical, social, or natural order... are ...more connected and whole. (Davis 1999, 269)

This thesis proposes a way to make the town of Windsor, Nova Scotia an attractive place in which to live, visit and work by addressing the need for a sense of “community

belonging". The essence of success is that Windsor's historical and cultural heritage be related to the interaction of the community. The thesis proposes a new community gathering place, an urban square design, functioning on a daily basis through the four seasons. The foci as for the design of a civic square is the people, and consequently the interrelation between public and private domain.

Designing a single institutional building would only increase the separation of the town and community. The concept of creating an interactive relationship in the Windsor community is revealed in the physical image of a civic square addressing the public interrelationship between its elements: activities, edges, paths, districts, and landmarks. The civic square relates informal outdoor public activities with the indoor activities of a public library, public art gallery, library, bakery, the Mermaid Theatre, and public washrooms.

The site is located in the downtown, at the intersection of Gerrish Street (the traditional "main street") with Grey Street. The square creates a relationship between the densest residential town districts and the downtown, while connecting with the historical, recreational and religious landmarks. The main street location provides a link between the town's main commercial district, the light industrial district, and the waterfront.



17th c. Fort Edward

Commercial/Light Industrial District

HWY 101

Church Zone (5xs)

Thesis Site

Study Area

19th c. Neighbourhood

Memorial Park, Playground

Halliburton's Museum

18th c. First Canadian Private School (KES)

WaterFront

Grey Street

Gerrish Street

Scale 1:20,000

Thesis site location addressing site's interrelation with all Windsor historical landmarks

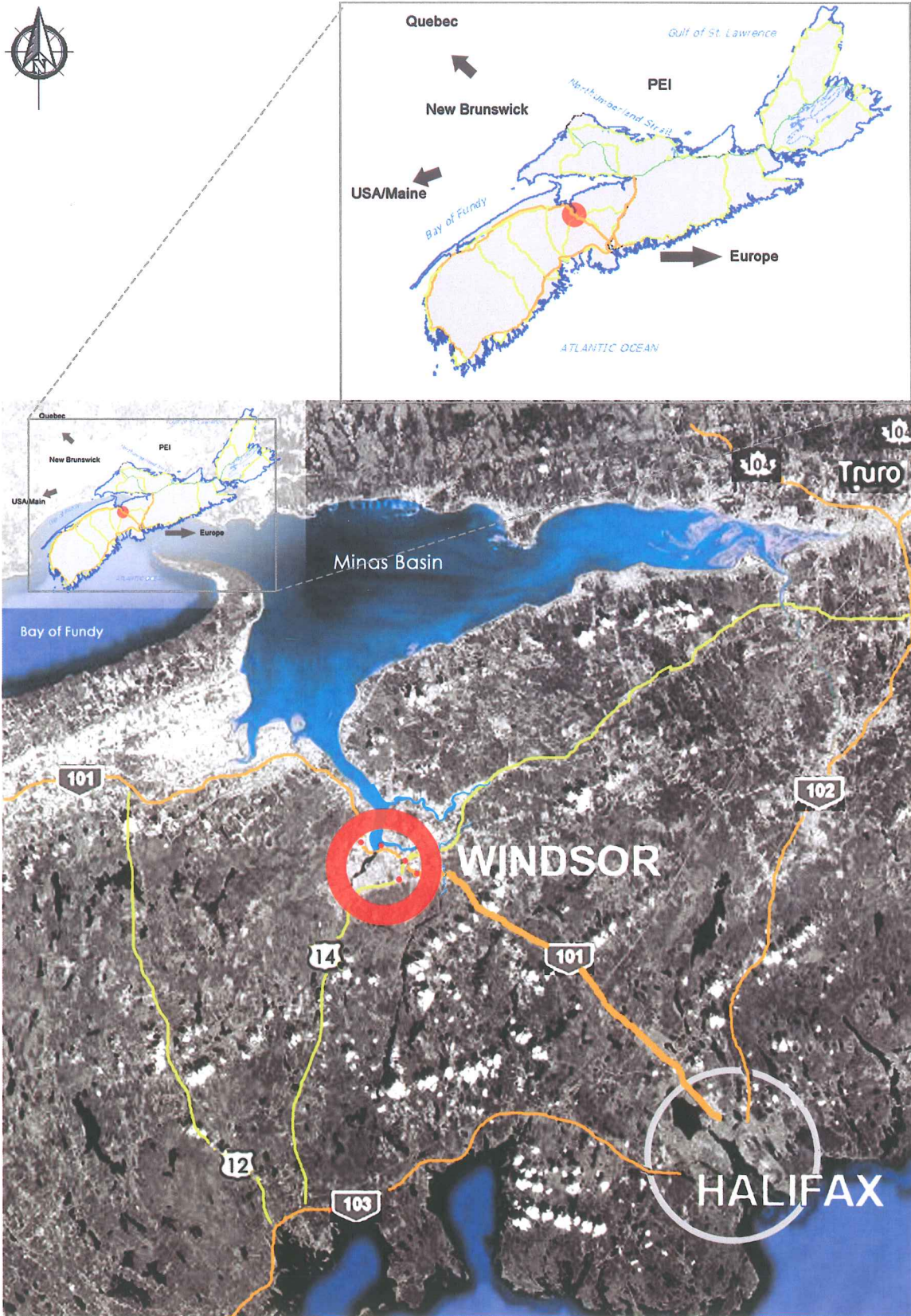
Thesis Question

How can architecture create an attractive public centre to foster a balance and integrate the community in the town of Windsor, Nova Scotia, Canada? How can the design of a civic square strengthen the relationship between the historical and cultural heritage of the town and fulfill the need for a place for public gatherings, while encouraging the interrelationship of indoor and outdoor activities year-round?

Town Location

The Town of Windsor is located forty-five minutes by car from downtown Halifax and thus serves Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) businesses and industry as a so-called bedroom community. Windsor is on an important intersection of Highway 101 (historically connecting Halifax with the fertile soils of the Annapolis Valley), and Route 1 (connecting South Shore communities with the gateway town of Truro).

The town is known as having the world's highest tides (30 to 60 feet) which, in the past, served as a great natural fertilizer through flooding (like the annual fertilization of ancient Egypt by the Nile), and as a source of gypsum rock. The ground on which the town stands is comprised of gypsum deposits and outcrops of hard limestone (Erskine 1947, 276). Topographically, Windsor sits at the junction of two rivers, the Avon and the St. Croix, which flow into the Minas Basin of the Bay of Fundy. The town is surrounded by residential districts to the south, southwest and to some extent the north, and by five hills protecting it from prevailing winds. Two hills protect the downtown from the southwest and two others from the south winds. The historical site of Fort Edward, the cornerstone of Windsor urbanization, is built on the town's highest hill, to the north and overlooking Minas Basin. All five hills have one thing in common – at their summits are the most important historical landmarks in the town.



Site Location in Nova Scotia - Important transportation arteries intersect in Windsor

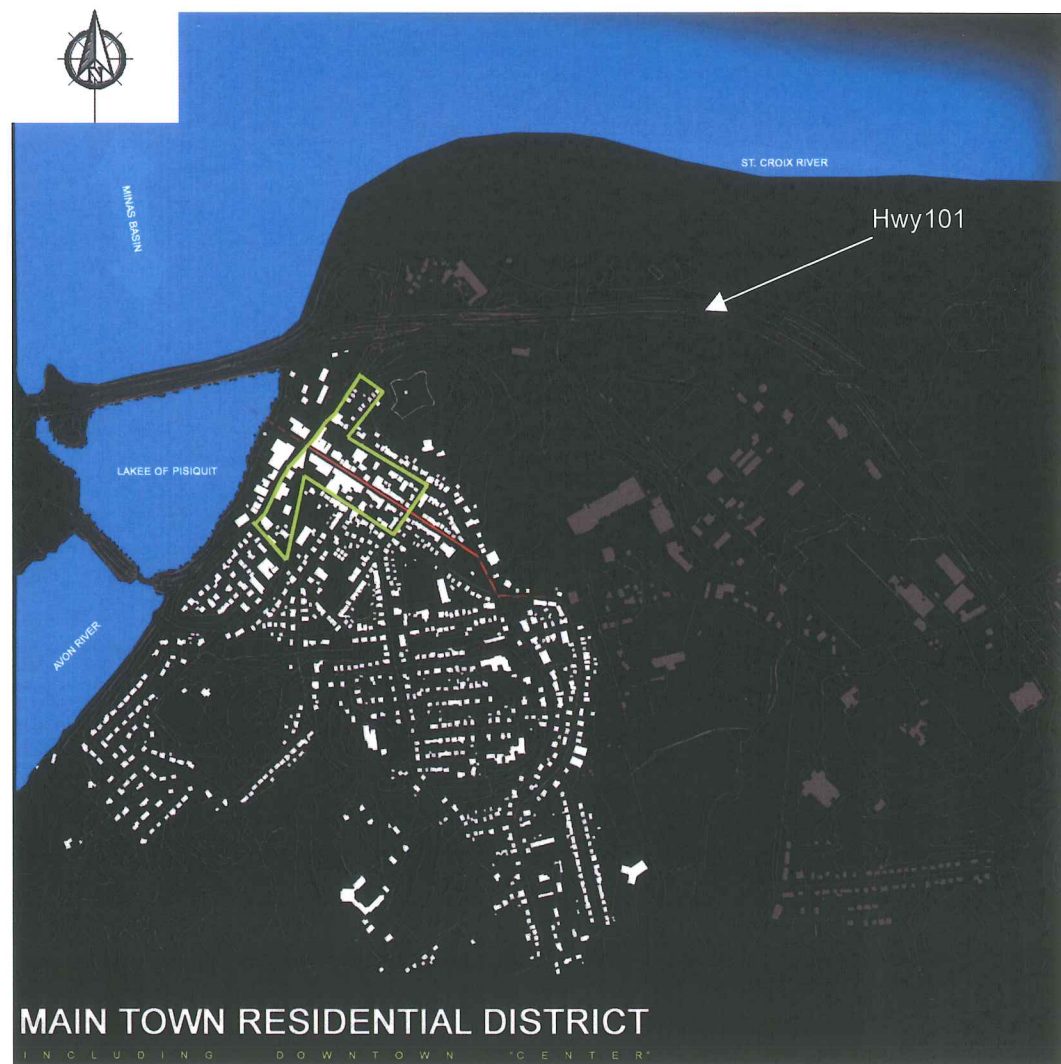
Climate vs. Life

Life in Windsor follows the rhythm of the four seasons. Windsor is in the sunniest area in the province (Pearson 1978, 11) with mostly light and short-lived rain. When there is a place sheltered from the wind, people enjoy the sun while gathering around the barbeque or going for a walk. Outdoor activity (walking, biking, skateboarding, jogging) in the urban space is an interesting phenomenon on many sunny days. The sunny side of the streets are mostly used for walking in the spring and fall. The summer is very hot and humid; people look for cooling breezes and shade. In the winter the streets are empty, with some life downtown in a few indoor spaces such as the pubs and restaurant. These observations lead to the conclusion that local people might like to use the urban space for community gathering at any time of the day, but the sun and wind affect life on the streets.

When sheltered from the wind and placed on a site exposed to the sun, a civic square would attract people to stay outside longer because of the comfortable temperature (Gehl 2006, 38). Considering these factors and the Windsor microclimate, the design of a civic square has great potential to encourage social activities such as talking, playing a game, doing physical exercise, reading or barbequing. The variety of activities helps to extend the use of a civic square. In addition, it is useful to consider the common occurrence of brief light rain in the design of a civic square, providing a simple indoor vs. outdoor short-stay shelter.

CHAPTER 2: TOWN ANALYSIS

The development of the retail district along Highway 101, far from the historical centre, drew the heart of the community away from the downtown core. This change has resulted in the community's physical disconnection with history and its urban disintegration. Downtown businesses are failing. To build a strong sense of belonging while reconnecting residents with their heritage through social gatherings, it is necessary to return attention and activity to the centre. The study area, where the town's historical character waits to be revealed, is in the downtown (shown on the drawing below in the green zone), surrounded by the Main Windsor Residential District (the highlighted white zone).



A map outlining the area of the town analysis; the railway tracks is a boarder between the main town's residential (highlighted) and the main commercial district (to the right)

History

The story of urban Windsor began almost 400 years ago. Its development was based on the strength of a sustainable and vital community until the second half of the 20th century. This summer resort had become fashionable with the Halifax elite in the 19th century. Windsor settlement included many nations (German, Dutch, Irish, etc.) but three nationalities had a major influence on its history: Mi'kmaq, Acadian, and British.

Mi'kmaqs:

The native nation owned the Pisiquid land (later named Windsor by the British) before the French arrival (Loomer 1996, 23-24). Socially, Mi'kmaqs were a “great tribe of gathering” (Loomer 1996, 23). Settlements were developed to reflect this need. Community decisions happened around the fire.

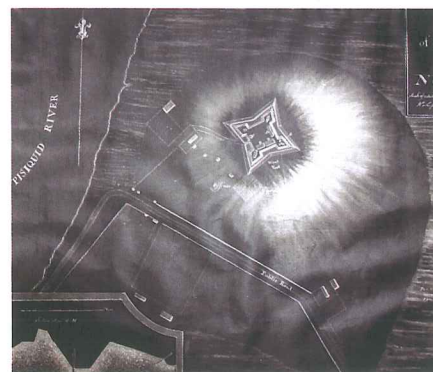
Acadians:

The French arrived in the area in the late 17th century. The Acadians were farmers; they merged with the natives. Unlike the Mi'kmaq, they did not create cluster village settlements. Instead, the church was the social centre of community gatherings (Loomer 1996, 31) so all roads led to the church.

Three main elements are typical of Acadian settlements: (a) the seasonally flooded marshland, a stretch of low upland, (b) the terrace overlooking the river, and (c) houses located at the edge of the terrace “accommodating a protection from the north wind.” Roads were patterned to reconnect farms with the church, the public nucleus.

British:

The British arrived in the early 1700s. Before the expulsion of the Acadians in 1755, Fort Edward, overlooking the Main Basin, was erected (1750) to protect the now British settlement. This is the cornerstone of Windsor urbanization. British troops typically located strategic sub-defence points at each town block corner, called the square houses.

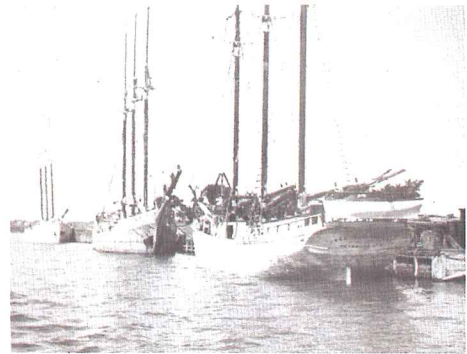


Plan of Fort Edward (1729). From Windsor Heritage Society Museum

At this point (1764), Windsor became a focal point of social activity in the region (Post 1978, 3) and a weekly market was opened on the same hill as Fort Edward.

Windsor became the central distribution point for the food supply between the Annapolis Valley and Halifax, and New England because the land near Halifax is not fertile. It became the “residential suburb for the businessmen of Halifax” (Pearson 1966, 8). So many wealthy businessmen moved to Windsor that nine churches were built. The churches have had a lasting effect on Windsor’s history, together with King’s College, which was built in 1802.

In the late 19th century, Windsor was the wealthiest town in the province. Steam machines were developed for industry including lumber, textiles, furniture, street light company, etc., as well as for transportation. Shipping played a major role in the economy (Smith 1978, 53). The railway between Halifax and Windsor was built in 1857.



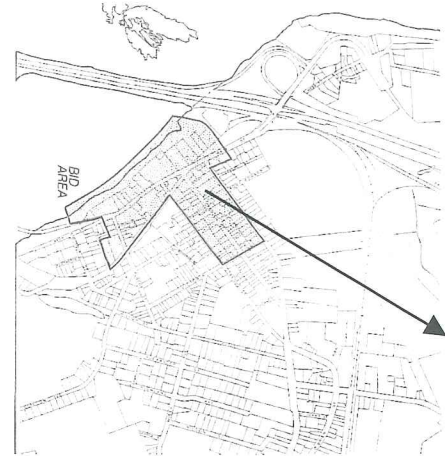
Windsor Port (19th century). Photograph from Windsor Heritage Society Museum

As Windsor’s industry flourished in the 19th century, it became known as a welcoming fashionable summer resort (Smith 1978, 88). Summer was the time for the King’s College *Encaenia*, which the Governor and his staff from Halifax attended on an annual basis. There were gymnastic exhibitions, cricket matches, romantic midnight cruises sailing on the Rotundas to Summerville, and so on. Winter was dedicated to attending balls. There were many clubs established for social gatherings.

In 1897, however, the Big Fire burned down two-thirds of the downtown; a second fire followed in 1924. The community lost hope and since then there has been no major growth in the economy. The period between the two World Wars was a time of recession.

Windsor’s urban space began to follow the needs of cars in the last half of the 20th century. The main road connecting Halifax with the rest of the Annapolis Valley ran

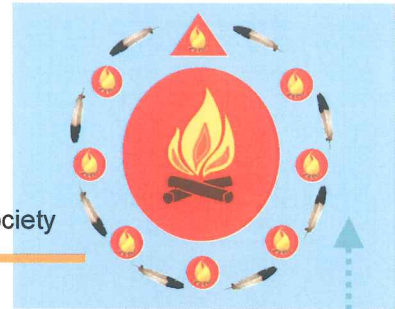
through Windsor until 1972 when the causeway was constructed over the Avon River. This changed the urban character of Windsor. The town became unwelcoming and decentralized.



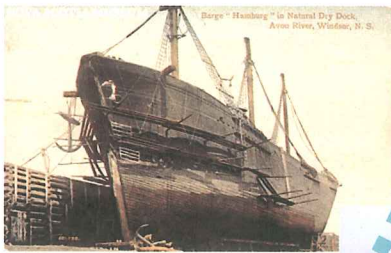
Urban development moved out from residential area and the historical town centre to the Highway 101
(Edited Map of Windsor. Photograph from *Present Time*, UMA Group)



Mi'kmaq Society



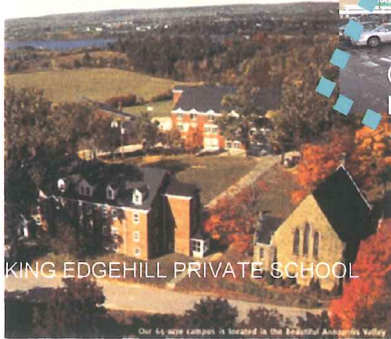
Acadians



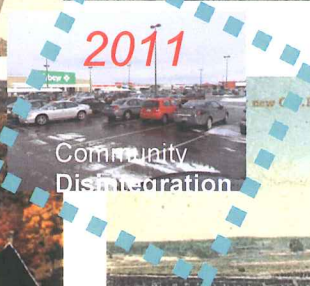
Barge "Hamborg" in Natural Dry Dock, Avon River, Windsor, N.S.



British



KING EDGEHILL PRIVATE SCHOOL



New C.R. Bridge, Avon River



Civic Building Windsor, N.S.



NOVA SCOTIA MUSEUM



U.S.S. Station, Windsor, N.S.



THE CRADLE OF HOCKEY LONG POND WINDSOR, NOVA SCOTIA



Market Street, Windsor, N.S.

Collage of Windsor historical path. From Vaughan, Paul, Spearing, Town of Windsor, Our Kids, Nova Scotia Museum website

Characteristics of the Study Area at Present

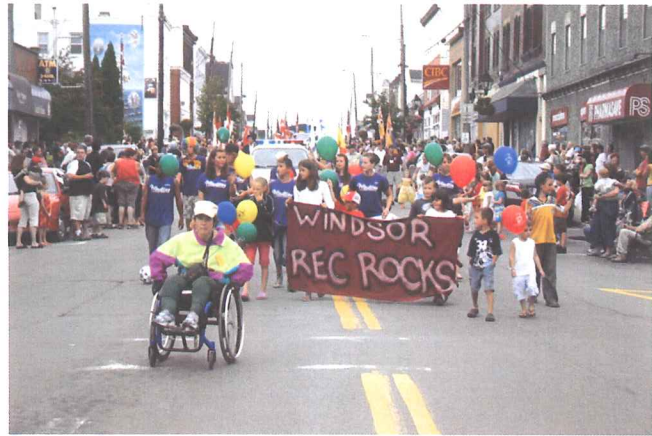
Cars annoy pedestrians with emissions, dust, and noise. A place with a pleasant atmosphere to stop and sit for a while is lacking. Walkways are tiny and are used mostly as a quick “pass-through zones” between the car and the door of the bank, pharmacy, or post office. People choose to drive to this area because it appears to be an unsafe, hostile, and unhealthy environment.

Because of low taxes in the town and the proximity to Halifax and jobs, a number of intellectual and professional residents have moved to Windsor. In the last five years, downtown businesses, which included small retail outlets, have added several cafés, three pubs, a special restaurant and the offices of lawyers, a politician, doctors, a dentist, a hearing clinic, a physiotherapy centre and an eye doctor.

The downtown consists of low-income housing surrounded by high-income residences in the north (starting from the nodal intersection between Grey and King Streets towards the church zone on King Street), and middle-income neighbourhoods spreading from the south to the west. Interestingly, a second high-income residential neighbourhood is located behind the middle-income one to the west, overlooking the Avon River.

The recent growth in the downtown business area suggests a need for a sense of belonging and cultural public interaction. Windsor lacks an area where people can enjoy conversation and coffee, go for a stroll, and let their children play. Street life is vital in maintaining a sense of community and safety, and needs to be encouraged.

The citizens of Windsor present themselves to one another and to the world in several ways by murals of the town’s history on the main street, and a number of civic events through the year. Informal civic activities provide opportunities for interaction among citizens. Pedestrian activity and active recreation includes kids’ triathlon, a 5km circuit run, skating, clay art, and curling. Vehicle traffic tends to inhibit rather than separate civic interactions.



Windsor has strong culture of events. From Town of Windsor, Nova Scotia Family Vacations, Mefeedia

Pedestrian and Bike Movement

Alan Munro states that walking, standing and sitting (especially) are important in encouraging gathering (Munro 2011, 13-15). Windsorians like to spend the sunny days outdoors but they do not stay in their backyards. Pedestrian and bicycle movement occurs during the late spring, early fall and throughout the summer. Residents living further from the downtown park their cars near Lake Pisiquid where they go for a walk or bike. In winter it is more difficult to enjoy walking but it is possible on sunny days. Sidewalks are present in this area. The sunny side of the street is the most enjoyed. Interestingly, new sidewalks were renewed two years ago along Grey Street, helping pedestrians to reconnect the residential districts with the downtown.



Typical movement on the main street from May to October

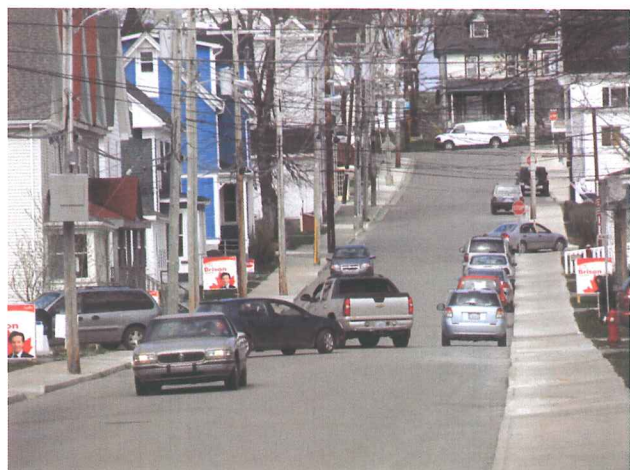
Vehicular Movement

The most obvious movement is by car or motorbike. Those who no longer drive, such as seniors, and live within walking distance of the downtown, visit the area only from necessity for the post office, pharmacy and the banks. To create a more enjoyable atmosphere in the downtown, it is necessary to reduce the space dedicated to traffic and parking.

A new civic square should introduce the colour of trees, changing seasonally, flowers, and the sound of running water to bring a more natural character and to absorb the noise of the town.



Traffic movement on the main street



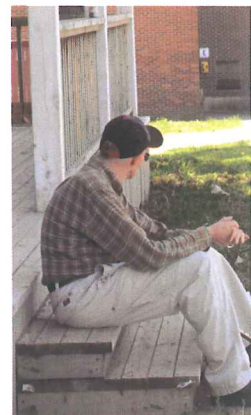
Grey Street facing the north - high income residential edge

Addressing the Need to Sit

Despite the fact that this is the sunniest region in the province, the reality of grey clouds and nowhere to sit and rest for a while in the open urban space is depressing. The only place residents choose to meet outside is the parking lot of the local Tim Horton's on the windy waterfront. People mostly sit there in or on their car or on the concrete dirty walkway drop-off. People have no choice but to sit with their children along the road, trying to ignore the environment, which is unhealthy physically and psychologically. A new civic square offers the community a place to socialize while enjoying sitting in the sunshine.



The hostile character of the main street points to creating a more attractive place to rest within



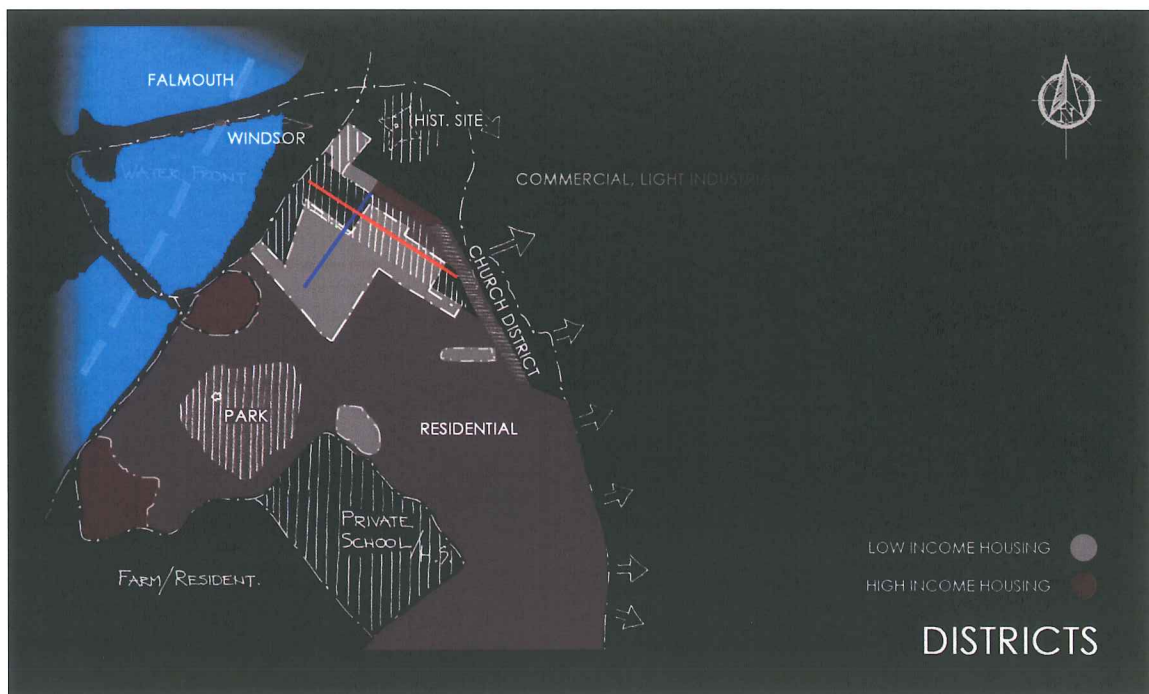
People love meeting and sharing in the urban public space but have no place to enjoy it

The Elements of Study Area

In *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch suggests that the five city elements, edges, districts, paths, nodes and landmarks are necessary and shall not exist in isolation, but in relation to one another (Lynch 1960, 49). Using this approach to study the current structure of Windsor, we can understand the qualities required in the design of a new civic square. While existing social activities occur sporadically in different locations in the town, the civic square should address the need to overlap these activities and encourage a strong sense of community.

District Characteristics:

The 'introverted' character of the district has little relevance to the rest of the town (Lynch 1960, 70). It is a self sufficient area enclosed unto itself. To create a real community, Windsor needs an 'extroverted' character to enable the civic square to radiate its influence to the rest of the town.

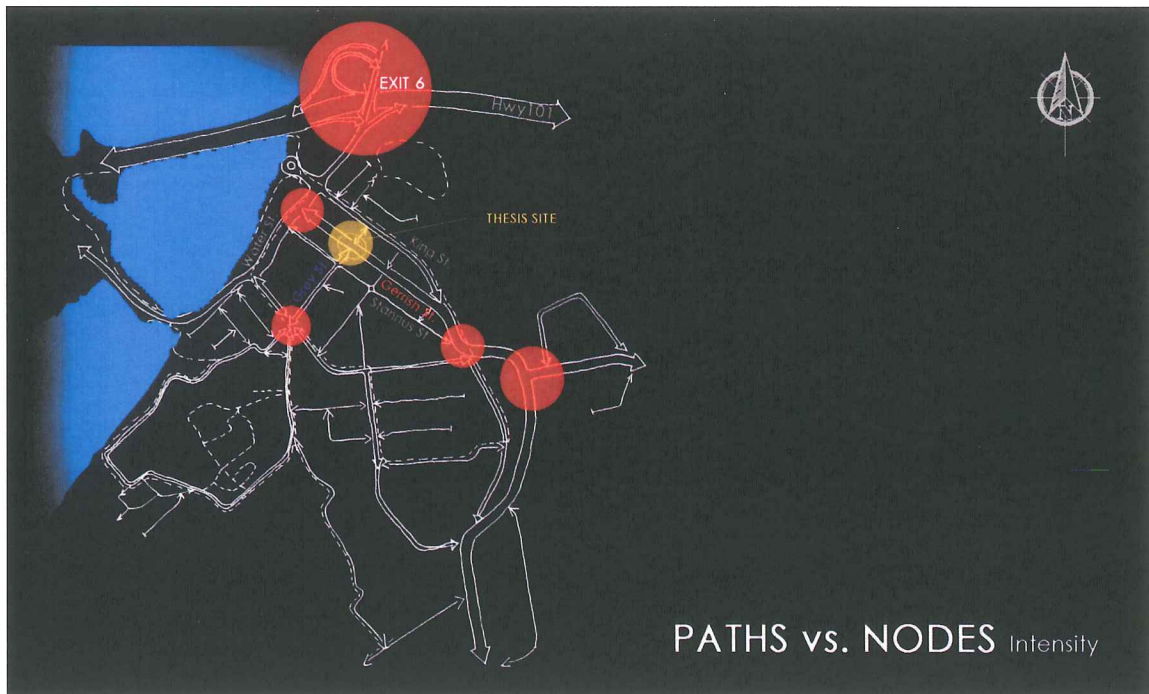


Map of neighbouring districts

Path vs. Node Characteristics:

Paths are predominant for pedestrians (Lynch 1960, 48). Their interrelation brings social interaction. “Events” enhance a journey and, in combination with turning, rising or falling, a sense of motion is created (Lynch 1960, 50, 97). The identity of a path is defined by its destination character, a landmark (Lynch 1960, 50). Difficulty occurs when the path’s identity and direction is lost, confusing the order of the city (Lynch 1960, 52). People like to know where it starts and ends.

In the case of Windsor, the strongest path is along Gerrish Street, connecting the waterfront with the main commercial district. The street with a church at its northeast end confuses this order. It suggests strong enclosure. It fails to differentiate that there are other important layers of the town.

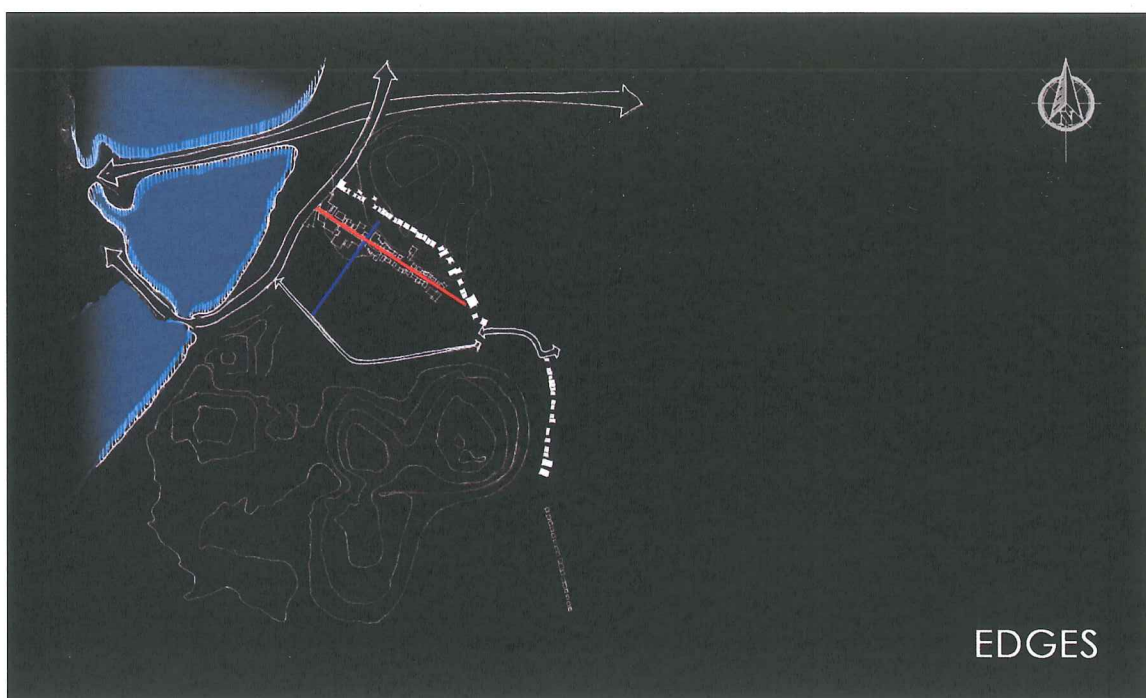


Intensity of use / Path relation of the thesis site to all critical intersections

The nodes reveal a sense of arrival, a break point (Lynch 1960, 73). They are the “Foci” of radiating ways in which to travel (Lynch 1960, 47, 48). The character may be thematic such as cultural or business, or a junction. A strong physical character is not necessary (Lynch 1960, 76). A node may create a strong district (Lynch 1960, 77). The yellow node in Paths vs. Nodes (the site of the proposed civic centre) integrates the community and can be seen from all the critical traffic-gathering nodes.

Edge Characteristics:

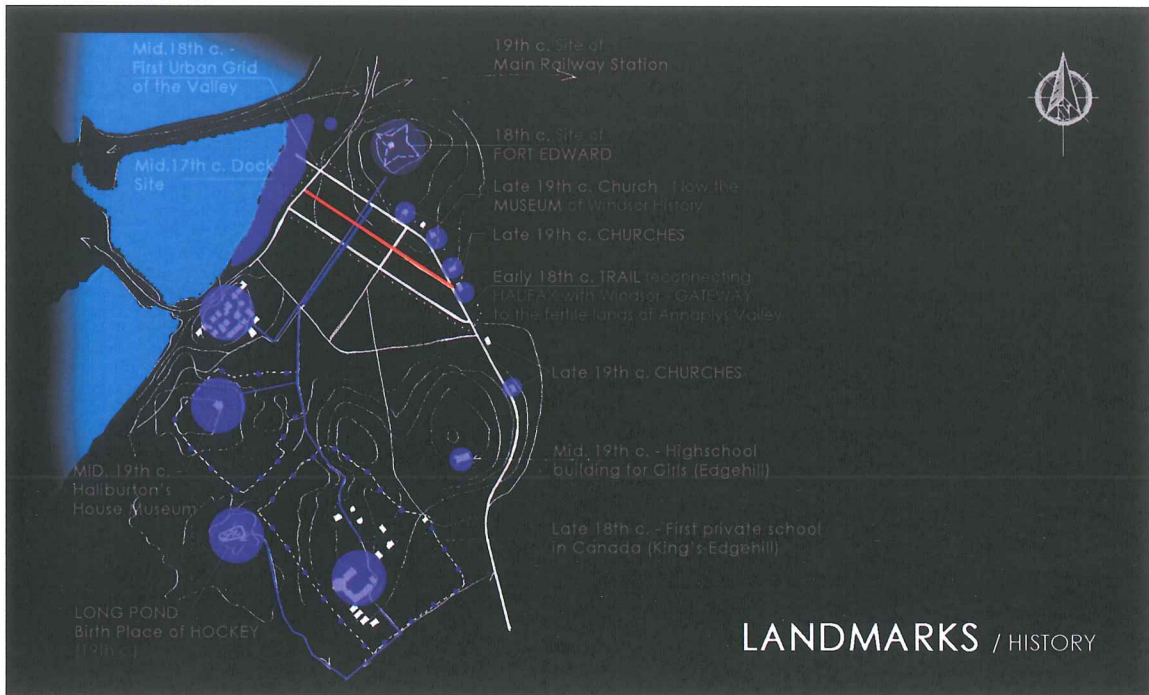
Edges are usually, but not always, visible and continuous boundaries between areas. According to Lynch, when covered by many structures, edges lose their strength and their continuity is broken when the elevation is lowered. It is important to think of edges in relation to each other as well as their surroundings. Lynch calls attention to an unpleasant edge that becomes a mentally erased space avoided by people (Lynch 1960, 63-65). In these terms, Gerrish Street is too long and monotonous, and the traffic interrupts the interrelationship between the two edges.



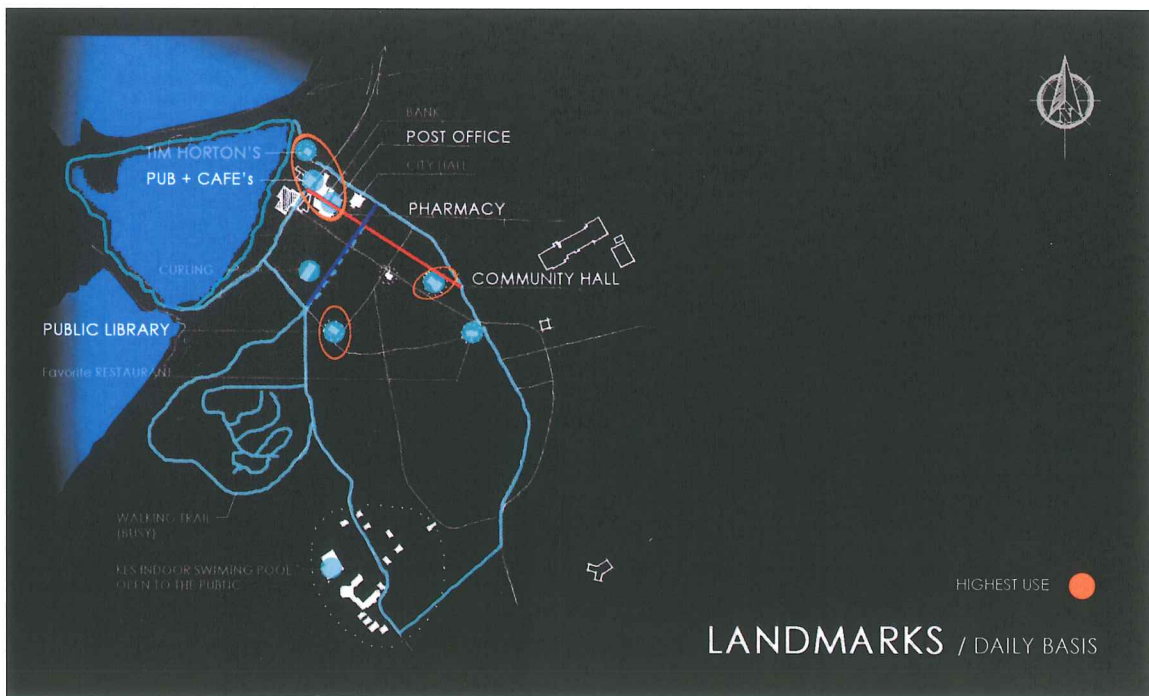
Landscape, traffic and strong urban wall edges

Landmarks:

A landmark on an intimate scale is noticeable, for example, in comparison to a wide open space. Landmarks contrast with their background in terms of height, a setback, or their materiality. Landmarks may symbolize direction and so become a guide to the town's layout. A clear and simple form makes a landmark memorable. Associations with history or an event strengthen the landmark's identity (Lynch 1960, 81) In the case of Windsor, all landmarks of the town's history are present in the main residential district (study area) and easily accessible from the site. This is where a strong civic or "cultural" landmark may be placed as a core guide in the disordered image of the downtown.



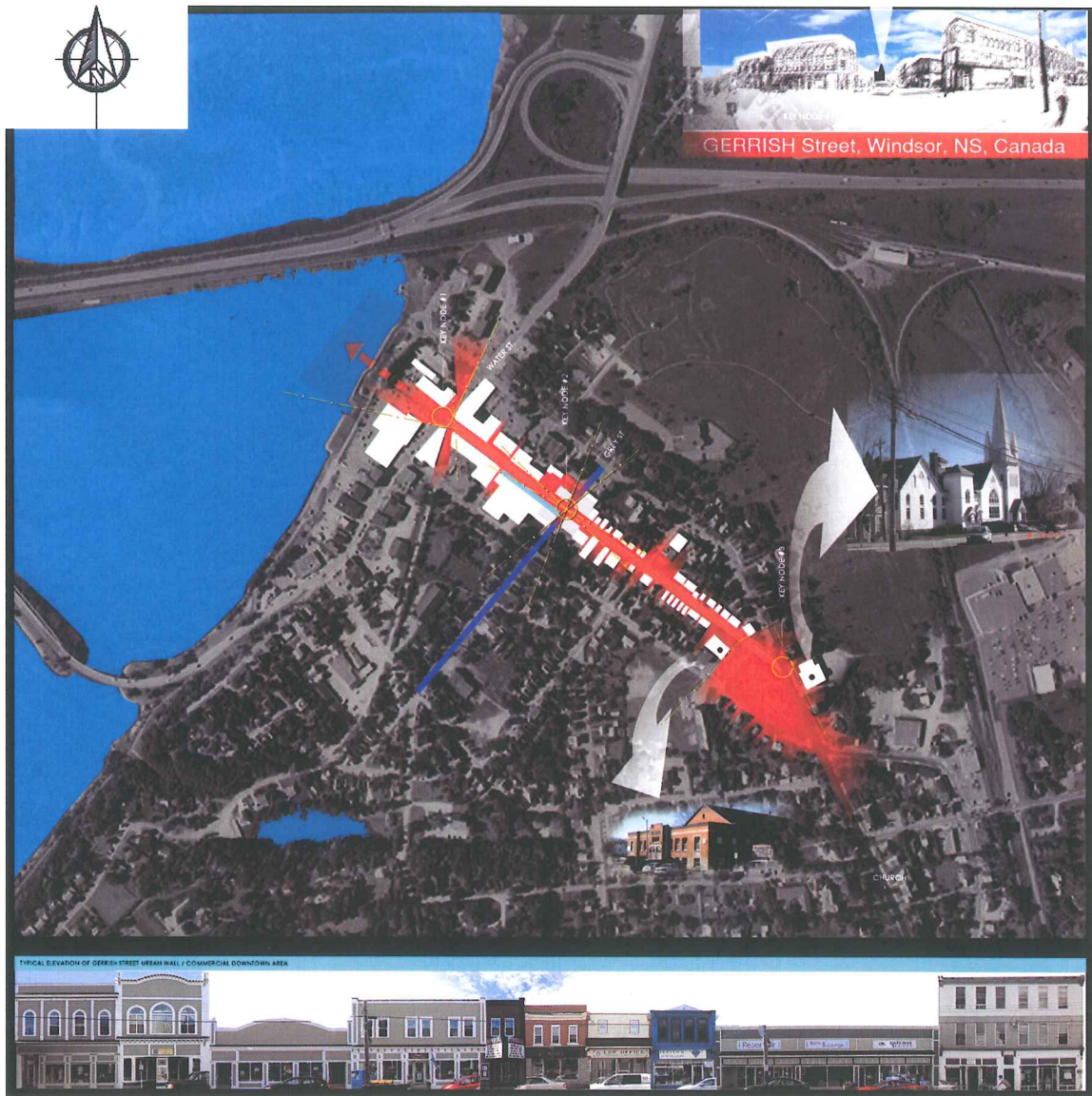
The proposed civic square site connects the visitor with all historical landmarks at once



In Windsor, it is best to bring popular social activity landmarks into close interaction

CHAPTER 3: MAIN STREET ANALYSIS

Gerrish Street is the street with the most potential to reconnect the town's history and community. Gerrish Street is the founding main street of the Windsor settlement grid, and remains the main cultural / commercial urban hub of the town, though its former welcoming atmosphere no longer exists. Protected from prevailing winds, the Gerrish Street urban realm has the highest potential to enable public gatherings on a daily basis. The basic cultural elements are present: the Mermaid Theatre, a local newspaper, a music store and a newly opened bakery, interspersed between small retail stores, parking and banks.



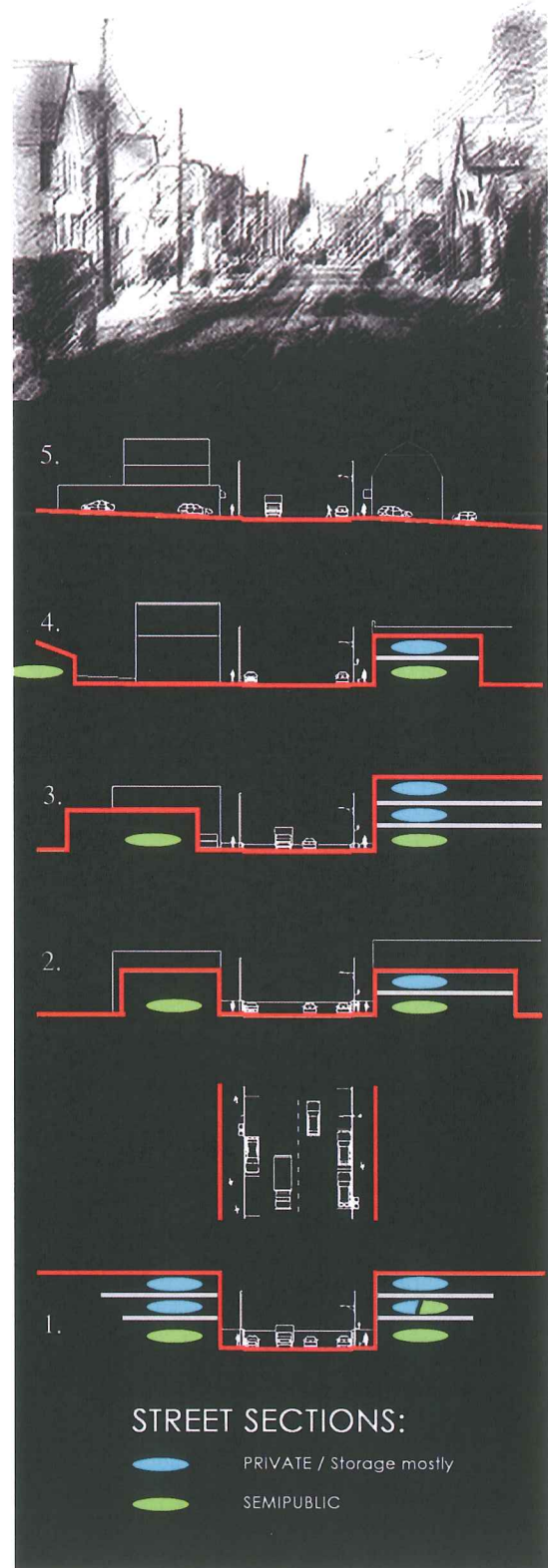
Gerrish Street / Historical grid; massing density; spatial quality of street's enclosure

Street's Typology

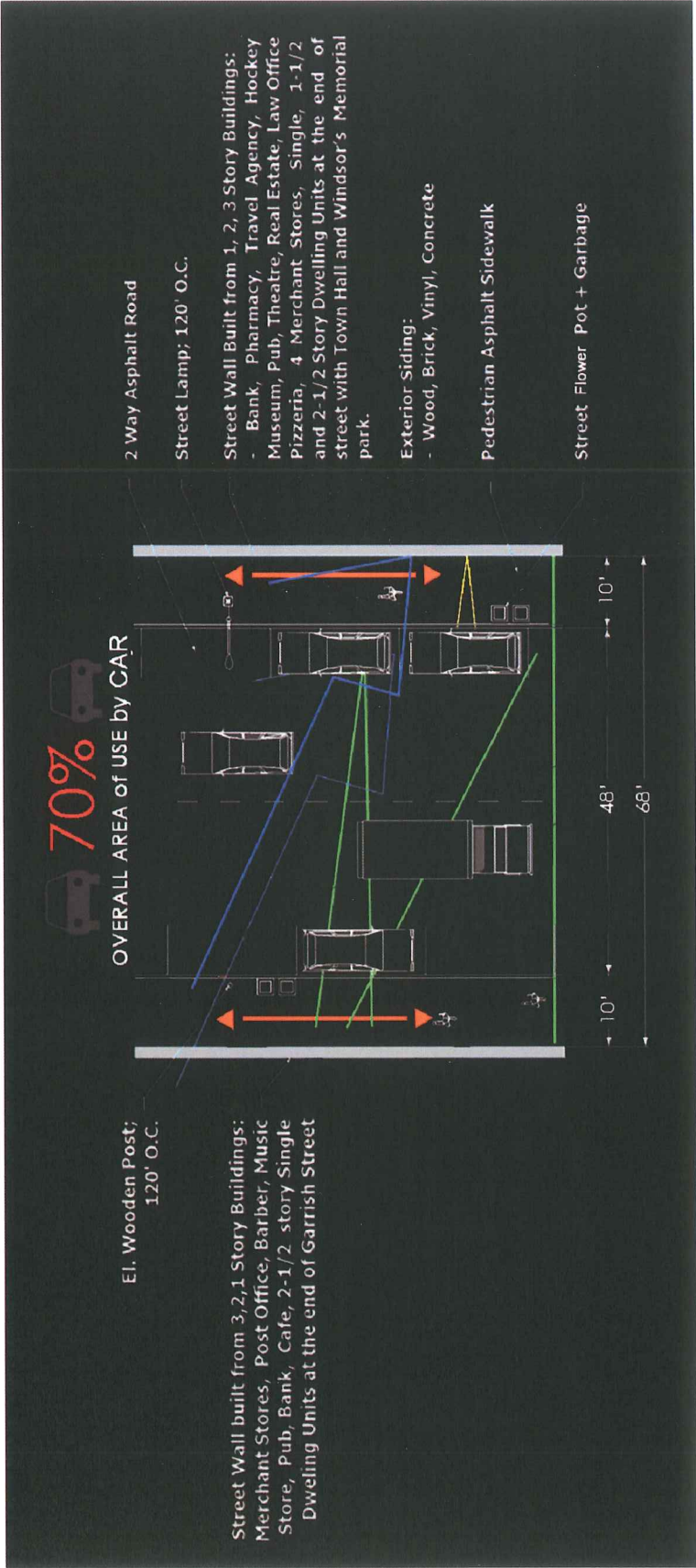
Gerrish Street at present offers an unsafe and unhealthy feeling because:

- The only element separating the busy road from the walkway is the 6-inch-high curb.
- Wooden electricity poles along the urban wall narrow the street, creating the appearance of a long tunnel.
- The 68-foot-wide street allows for parking on each side.
- The narrow 10-foot walkways on each side of the street are not wide enough for couples or families to pass each other.

Gerrish Street feels monotonous because of its straight and tunnel-like appearance, ending with a church. To make the street attractive to visit, it needs some contrast in the sense of creating an adventurous journey offering dramatic and memorable scenes.



Urban sections of Gerrish Street starting at the intersection with Water Street, up to the intersection with Grey Street (thesis site), facing the south-east end



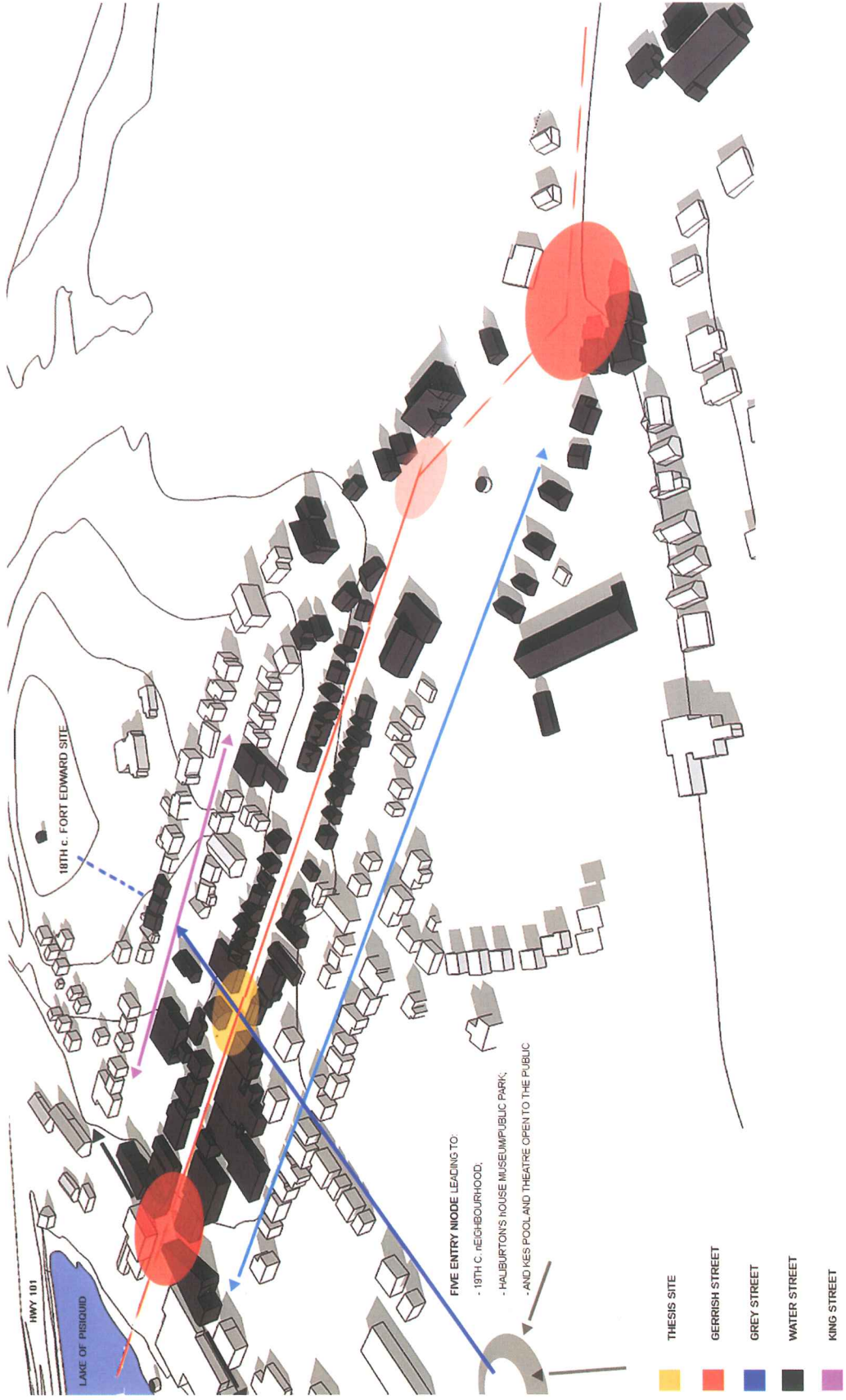
Gerrish Street plan view showing the use and an unsafe pedestrian trespassing across the busy road. It also points to the need for a bigger, interactive space

Mapping Critical Nodes of Movement

Gerrish Street consists of key circulation nodes at both ends as well as at its intersection with Grey Street. The intersection of Gerrish with Water Street lies at the northwest end and reconnects with the waterfront. The view is hidden behind the trees but they serve as a windbreak. Travellers coming from Highway 101 may decide at this point to continue to their house or turn up Gerrish Street, which rises to the intersection with Grey Street.

This second nodal intersection with Grey Street (the site of the proposed Civic square) connects two important districts: the downtown and the residential districts. It is a five-entry nodal intersection placed at the southwest end of Grey Street. Those using the node are visually connected to the downtown district. It also links the waterfront with Memorial Park, which is mostly vacant.

The southeast end combines two nodes, the largest of which brings busy traffic to the downtown from the main commercial and light industrial districts. It directs the traffic towards the post office, banks or waterfront, or in the opposite direction, which leads to the strongest institutional hub comprised of churches and the community hall.



The intensity of the critical nodes the thesis site positions into the relationship 25

Existing Conditions vs. Street's Elements

Positive Features of Gerrish Street

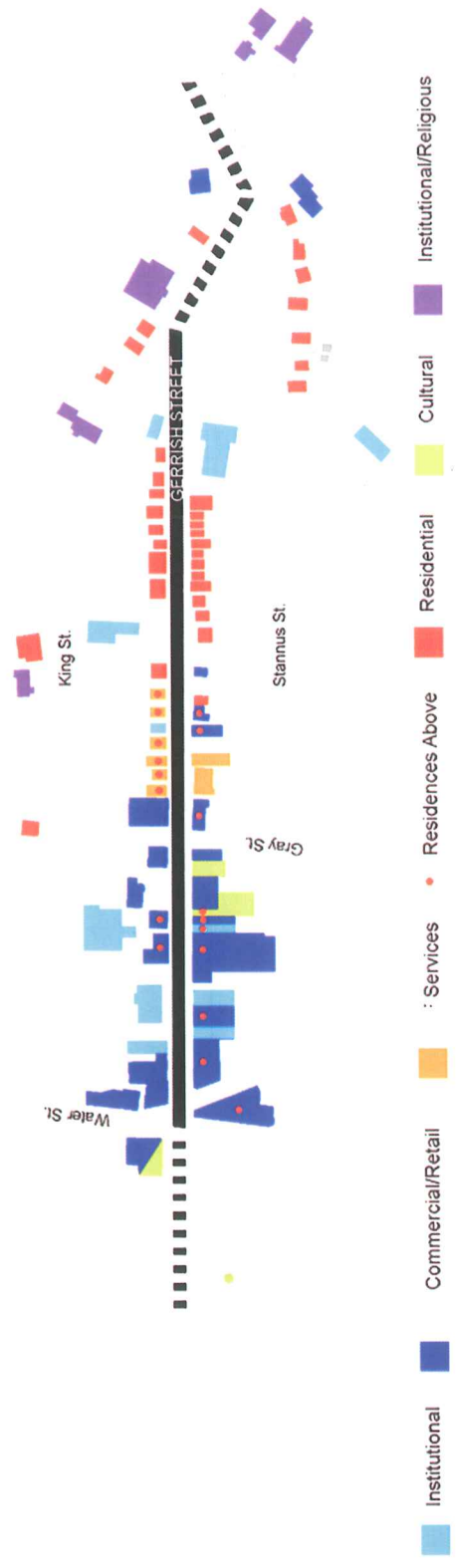
Gerrish Street's east-west orientation, together with the urban fabric and hilly topography, protect the inhabitants from cold winds. This advantage adds substantially to the quality of the public space because it offers a comfortable temperature on sunny warm days. It could be an outdoor street for barbecuing, skating, skateboarding, street floor-painting, street picnics, or outdoor restaurant eating.

A Victorian wood-framed church encloses the view at the end of the street, reminding the community to value history and culture at the end of the journey. In addition, the sunset is a powerful feature creating an attractive warm atmosphere, contrasting with the grey monotony of the street.

In his book, "*New City Life*," Gehl brings attention to the importance of creating good public space with regard to a healthy city policy. Good-quality public space design should recognize the changing visual experience and provide comfort and shade for pedestrians while incorporating expressions of time, place, history and culture (Gehl 2006, 70).



Edges / Lost connection between an inhabitant along street's long (monotones) path and the greenery spread too far from each other



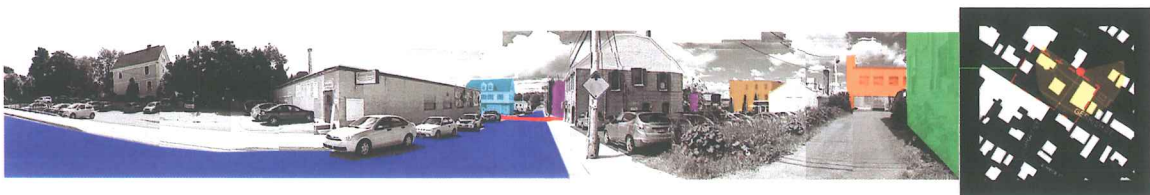
Existing urban program along the main street

CHAPTER 4: SPECIFIC SITE ANALYSIS

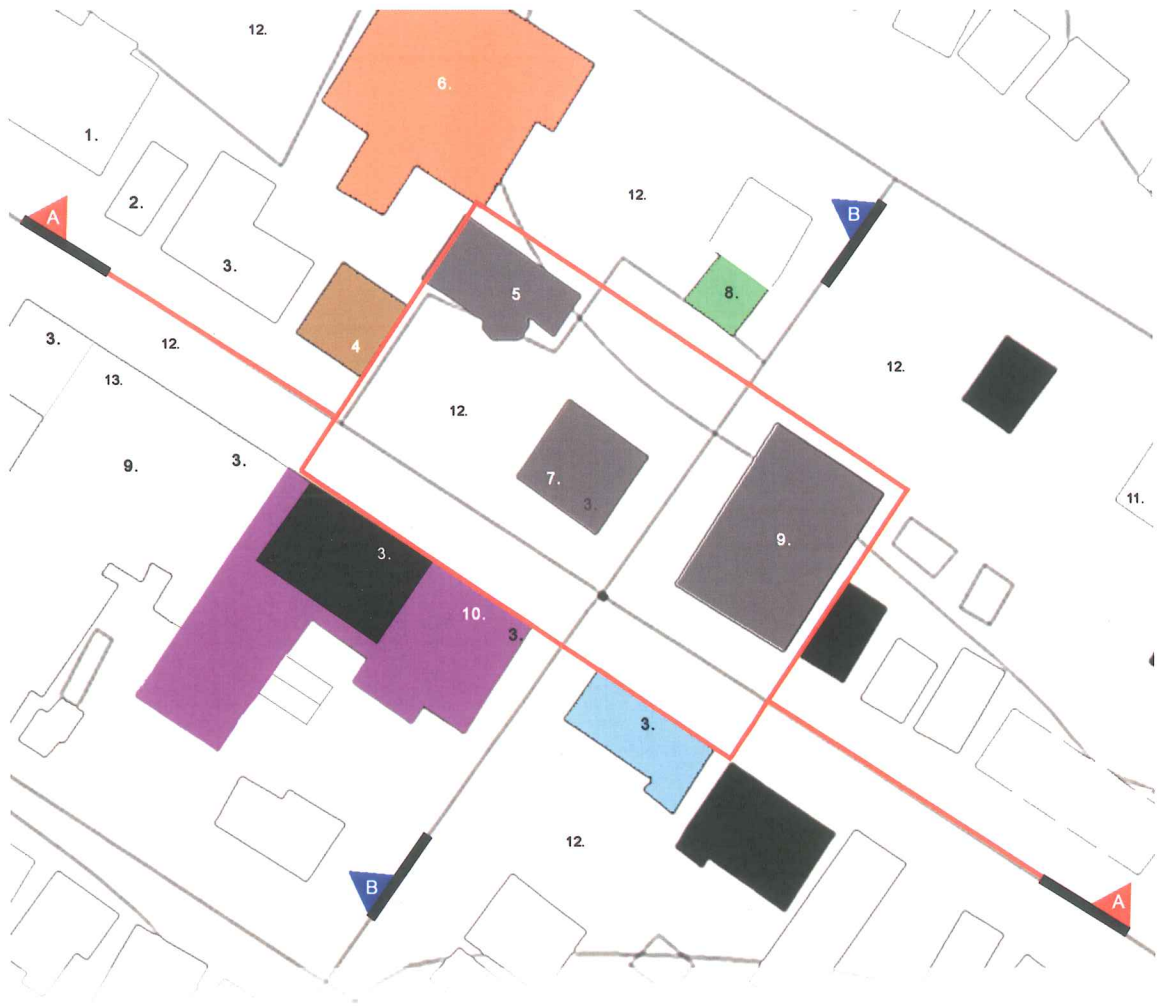
The civic square will reconnect all the historical landmarks in order to restore a sense of belonging to the community. Three other sites were studied along the main street axis (Memorial Park and two at the water front). The thesis site was the most interesting for its integrated urban quality of wind-sheltered space. It is also the central visual connection to the highway, the waterfront, the main residential districts, and Memorial Park. Its strength is that it unites the downtown with the main residential district and all the landmarks in Windsor.

An ordered environment can do more ... it may serve as a broad frame of reference, an organizer of activity or belief or knowledge (Lynch 1960, 4).

The site has the advantage of being at the highest elevation of Gerrish Street, overlooking and connecting with places with a strong destination character.



Panoramic views of the site

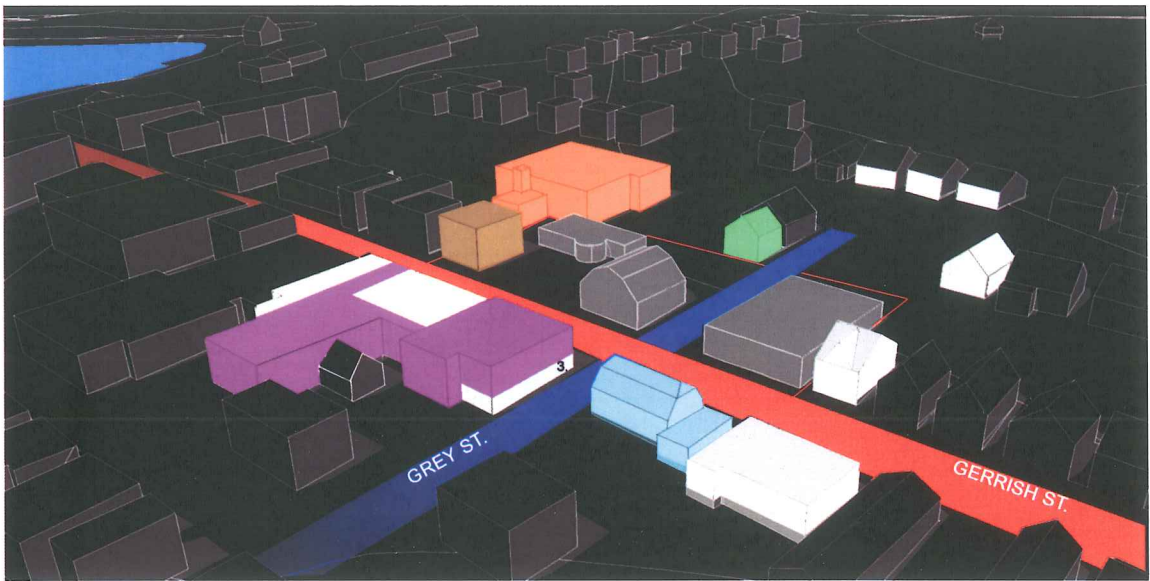


LEGEND:

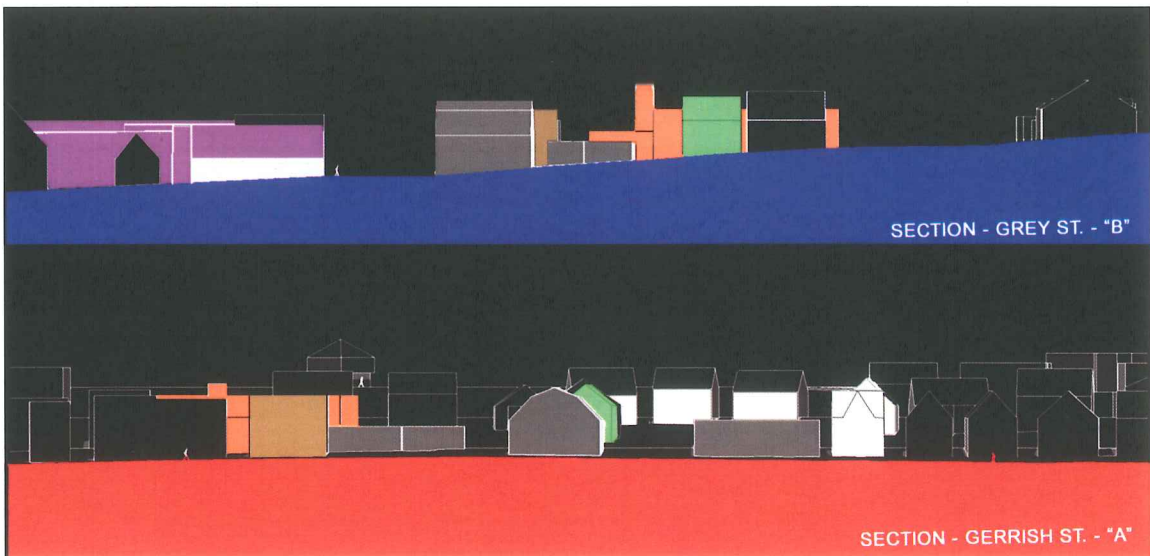
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. POST OFFICE | 5. C fe' & Bakery | 9. Pub (mostly vacant) |
| 2. The Hants Journal NEWSPAPER (1867) | 6. Town Hall, RCMP, Fire Department | 10. Mermaid THEATRE |
| 3. Retail on the Main Floor | 7. Music Store | 11. Funeral Home |
| 4. Retail and Barber Shop | 8. SPA | 12. Parking Area |
| | | 13. Travel Agency |



Existing programmatic site plan



Perspective View



Urban sections along Gerrish and Grey Streets

Strong Connection with History

Without a living knowledge of history, how can we build the future? The chosen site is the best location in the town's urban fabric to reconnect, visually and physically, the historical landmarks. It is a compelling site, unifying the Windsor downtown with the waterfront, the historical site of Fort Edward, the historical site of the 19th century southwest neighbourhood, the main residential districts surrounding the downtown, the historical site of Haliburton's House Museum and its public park, the historical site of King's-Edgehill School, the historical churches on King Street (of which the middle church is the Victorian church located at the southeast end of Gerrish Street), the inland Memorial Park with an indoor community centre, Outdoor Aqua Centre and kids' playground next to it.



Fort Edward Site (mid 18th c.)



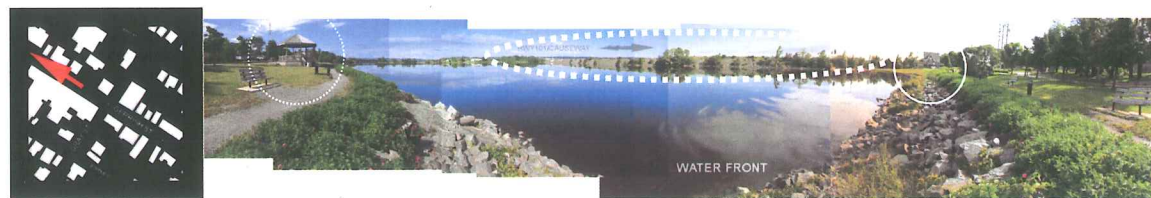
Memorial Park includes: Outdoor Aqua Center, Community Hall, kids Playground, Churches



Haliburton's House Museum / Public Park(19th century) – used for country-skiing, walk, tea party



King's - Edgehill School (1788) - Summer exclusive campground, Public swimming and Theatre



Water Front / Narrow Green Strip, backed by a large parking area, with music entertainment place (left); same Green Strip leading towards the Canoe Club (right).

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY

Woodstock, NY, USA

The Town of Woodstock, a population of 6,000, is located one hundred miles to the north of New York City. Its historical development was similar to many other small communities. The initial appeal of the town was "the scenic beauty, cultural vitality, and choice of schools." (Woodstock Comprehensive Planning Committee 2003, 4)

Like Windsor, the two highways meet in the town where people generally gather. However, there are questions of noise, traffic safety, and the availability of social activities to influence the nature of the node's welcome.

The influence of the natural world surrounding the town of Woodstock by mountaintops, like Windsor, and the open space of the New York State Forest Preserve, provides the town with an attractive character.

Lessons Learned for Windsor Downtown Revitalization

Location:

- a. Dynamic cultural and arts institutions;
- b. Close connections to the New York Metropolitan Area;
- c. A hamlet that serves as the cultural, civic, and ceremonial nexus for all region;
- e. Opportunities for solitude amid a beautiful natural environment (Comprehensive Woodstock Planning Committee 2003, 6).

Woodstock's location is not very different from Windsor's, except for the arts and cultural institutions. The question arises as to how Windsor can distinguish itself from the surrounding towns and enhance daily life for its residents. The existing community hall is insufficient to serve as the only community gathering. It is a cultural nexus offering limited time for activities.

Uniqueness:

Windsor needs something special to show its rich historical and cultural value. Windsor as a town, can only be successful if it is rebuilt with a strong sense of community belonging. Citizens are attracted to reading (Library), music, hockey, skating, farming

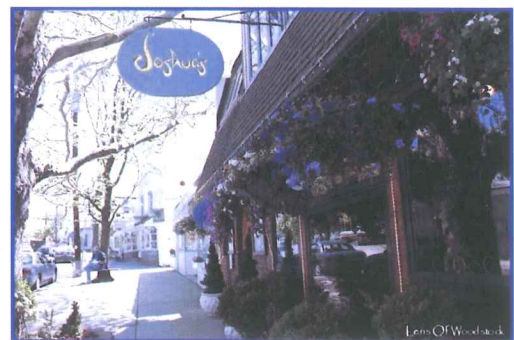
and theatre. These activities should be overlapping if we want to address a rebuilding of the community.

Being an Attractive Cultural Choice:

Windsor is a scenic town that has some strong advantages. It has a great selection of respected public and private schools and a regional hospital. What is missing is a cultural vitality in everyday life which has to be relearned. Windsor is an attractive destination for events such the Pumpkin Regatta, the Agricultural Exhibition, a tradition since the 18th century, the Outdoor Music Saga at the waterfront, and the Summer Fest. However, the three theatre performance societies face rental problems in the downtown theatre. The small public performances can take place outdoors because it is free and increase the receptiveness to culture.

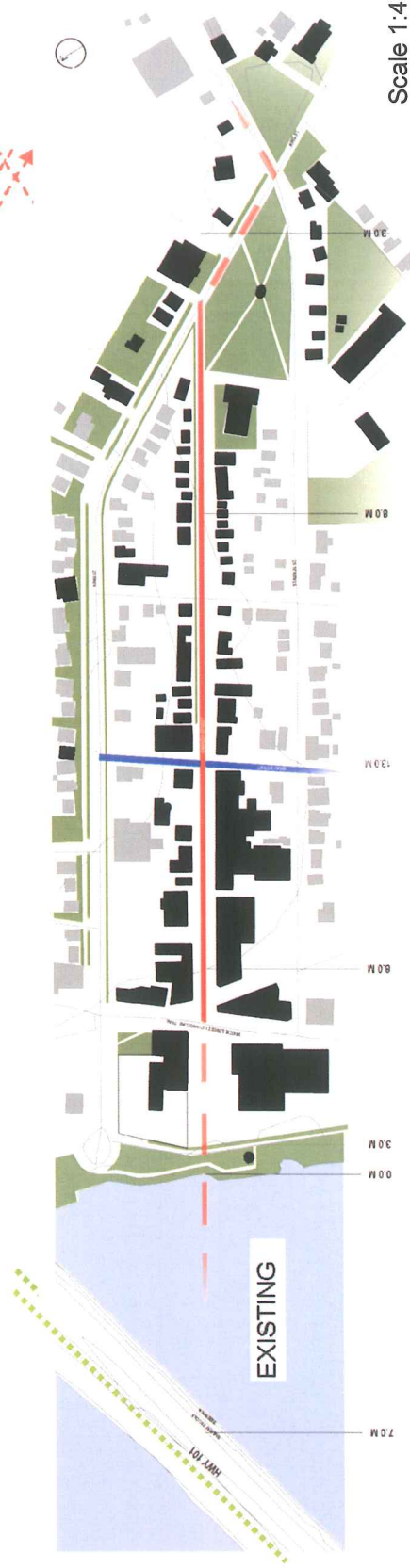
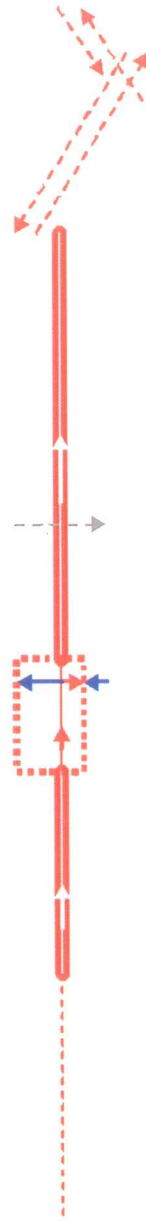


The sound of the leaves and the natural stone floor bring organic vitality to the place people like to gather around. Plants and trees also absorb noise of street traffic.
(Fools On'a Move)



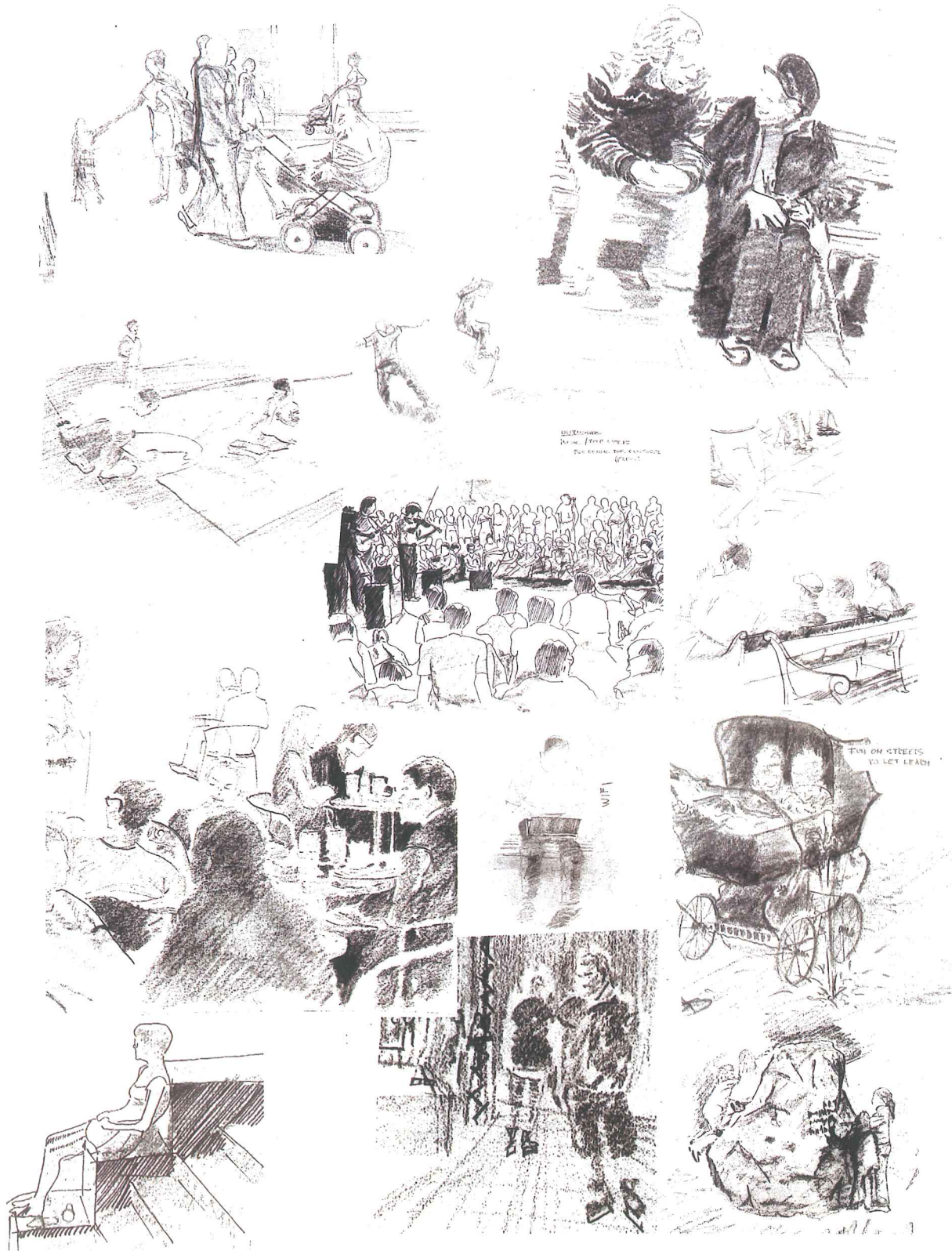
Trees and plants add a welcoming colour change to the uniformity of the street
(Lens of Woodstock Studio)

CHAPTER 6: INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN



Gerrish Street revitalization strategy; Road narrows within the civic square offering a pass through zone for cars and bicycles

Public vs. Private Social Activity Relations



The study of Public social relations supporting community gatherings

CHAPTER 7: DESIGN

Goals and Inspiration

The Windsor community needs an inspiring place where people can gather around music, participate in skating or the theatre, eat, and sit, without being affected by the hours of opening or lack of programs to attend.

The essence of the civic square design is to address the importance of public social gathering for the Windsor community, to enable the residents to reconnect with each other on a daily basis and at the same time to build a strong sense of community belonging based on the cultural history of the place. The design will reflect the history of the area in a wider sense. In terms of the Mi'kmaq, where the hearth was the centre of life, the town square will welcome visitors by offering a place to sit while facing the public domain activity. Like the Acadian settlements, where roads led to and from the church, the modern roads will lead to the town square and centre of community gatherings. In the British tradition, where square houses were placed at the corners of blocks for strategic reasons, a square of glassed brick floor (lightening the evening sky) will echo this historic element.

A weekly market will be encouraged, supporting the local farmers, helping the community to meet visitors from the city and other regions. It is essential to reveal the intent of community gathering in the design through the interactive relationship between the architectural elements.

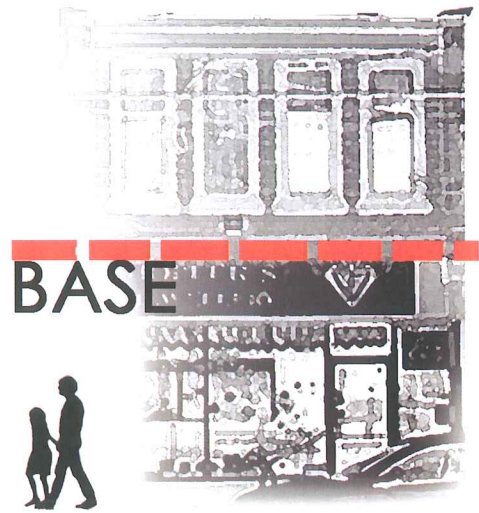
Urban Design:

- Create an interactive interface between the public realm and the private domain;
- Bring residents together through public social activities reflecting the culture of Windsor;
- Bring guidance to the downtown through the civic square to reconnect with all landmarks;
- Slow down the traffic and make it less dense;
- Adopt a human scale in the design;
- Create a sense of arrival and revelation on the journey along Gerrish Street;

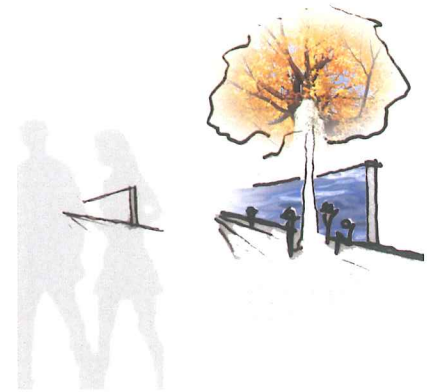
- Create a civic square radiating the influence of Windsor culture to other parts of the town;
- Address cosmopolitan culture to support the vitality of the place throughout the year;
- Bring in the natural elements to help to relax the senses and absorb traffic noise
- Transform the nodal intersection of Gerrish street with Grey street into strong civic cultural district

Architecture of the Town Centre:

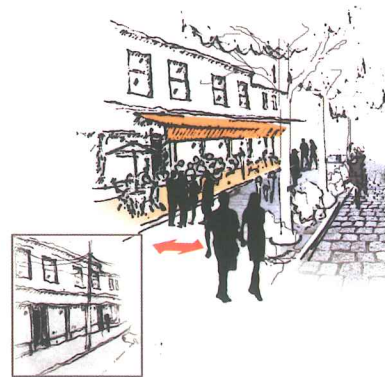
- Design the Public Square for all four seasons;
- Spatial organization of the new civic square activities should address a simple transition from summer to winter.
- Apply the idea of interactive edges, districts and landmarks to the site;
- Bring a prominence to the journey through addressing the need for a variety of social activities along the path of motion character (allowing people to rise and “fall” while walking).
- Create the order within the new open urban space through floor patterns
- The exiting theatre needs to be supported by other activities to enhance its role in the new, local community gathering, civic square;
- Think of smell, touch and hearing senses along with the visual;
- Create the places for public activities the citizens of Windsor like to gather around
- Make the place memorable through interesting variations in the floor material relating to rich shingle patterns seen on the building facades in Windsor and a typical stone pattern used in the foundation walls in the 18th and 19th centuries in Windsor.
- Use the variation of patterns to distinguish traffic from pedestrian friendly areas and private vs. public zones in the way to keep the new civic space united



Addressing the human scale in the perimeter of the square



Edge of no threshold character becomes mentally avoided; the attraction evokes when enriched by natural elements



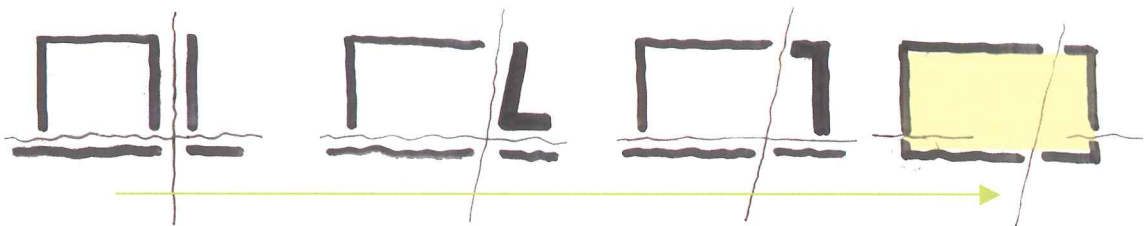
Affecting the social activity along the mentally empty urban fabric stretch

The New Windsor Urban Square

Typology of existing civic squares relating to the site:



Form evolution of Windsor square:

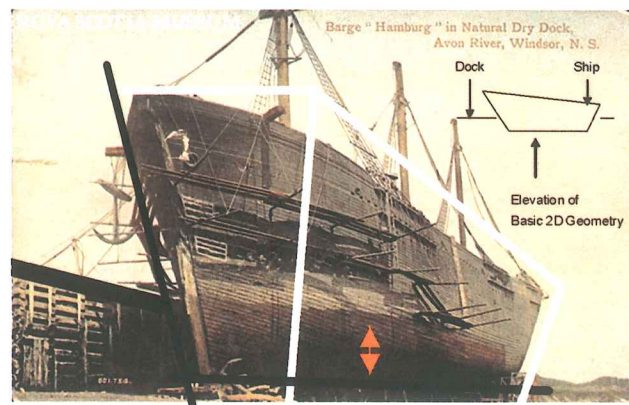


A new civic space, created at the crossroads of Gerrish Street and Grey Street, embodies the existing cultural elements of Windsor, and reconnects the traditional “main street” to the major historic and cultural landmarks. A new civic square accommodates new, year-round civic activities (a public library, market, art gallery/bakery/library, informal gathering place), reviving the town’s sense of place.

The new civic square is based on the interrelationship of the three main indoor public programs: the new public library, the renovated bakery/public art gallery, and exiting the Mermaid Theatre. The intent is to avoid a middle space yawning of emptiness (used only for big events). The design puts the indoor public activities in active interaction with the outdoor ones. The outdoor activities strengthen the informal public community gatherings for the summer season (May - October). These include music and theatre performances overlapping with outdoor eating, barbecuing, playing family games (horse-shoe, chess), spending leisure time around the fountain or the water fall along the north

edge or resting on the grass (under the tree close by the running water). The winter season offers public skating, with the possibility warming up drinking hot chocolate or coffee around the heat lamps set around the new Windsor rink. The spatial organization of the new civic outdoor space is carefully considered to make an easy transitions from season to season but most specifically from summer activities to winter skating rinks.

The public library is one of the key indoor program elements in the design. The building, set along Grey Street's northeast side, is designed to become the landmark of the square, with a strong welcoming character. One can sit in or around it. The hospitable character of the Library is addressed with a staircase that follows the perimeter of the Library in-between the two entries (at the square level) and the glazed façade which incorporates shading devices in the upper level. The façade facing the civic square is designed to reopen through the set of large "window doors" which offer a unique spatial interface between outdoor and indoor activity (it is also a brief rain shelter on a warm summer day). The roof is designed to point towards the landmarks of Windsor's cultural heritage, reinforcing the strength of local community belonging. The building is designed to be entered from all streets surrounding it. The entrance to the underground public washrooms is located at the entry to the library facing the square. The elevated north entry from King Street creates an 'extroverted' character, enabling the new civic square to radiate its influence to the rest of the town (helps also in creating a passive cooling ventilation for its indoor spaces). The spatial indoor organization is set to allow for varying activities (chatting while drinking coffee, reading, studying, attending town meetings, lectures or watching a movie or sports event). The interior of the building also offers private space with divided or semi enclosed areas. These are protected from the surrounding public realm by the pattern of the bookshelves or addressing varying programs by the ability to modify and experiment with raised or lowered platforms.



Borrowing from the history of ship building and transportation in Windsor; the elevation of the bottom changes (tides). Edited photograph from Vaughan

While reflecting the history of the area, the essential element of the design is to incorporate all of the observed public space areas needed by the citizens of the town. The public art gallery/bakery program activity is offered in the volume of the existing building. The bakery “kiosk” is located on the main floor, while the actual underground bakery is located below the washrooms of the main floor. The upper floor façade area is designed to incorporate cinema screen to allow for evening events such as movie night or the NHL games while skating.

In the existing situation, the entrance to the Mermaid Theatre is not clearly addressed. The new civic square design frames the entrance by the arch set on the opposite side of the street, offering the contrast of “indoor” sitting along the road and potentially busy boulevard on the main street. The arch, entered in the opposite direction (from the theatre), becomes the gateway to the outdoor activities in the square.

Trees and water areas on the square calm the senses. They also help to change the former empty image of the existing urban stretch. The trees now become the gateway in the Windsor urban fabric, as well as maintaining a three dimensional usage of the space. These natural elements, around which people traditionally like to gather in an outside venue, penetrate through the edges inside the Library and Art gallery/bakery, unifying the whole square. In addition, the unity of the square is strengthened by the urban floor patterns of stone of varying textures. The inspiration for the patterns comes from the heritage of Windsor façade shingles seen on existing houses in many variations. The old stone pattern, used for building foundation walls in the 19th century, was used to indicate the main boulevard path crossing through the square and reconnecting it with the rest of the main street. The idea to bring the order to the downtown is also reflected in the uniting paving pattern oriented towards the cardinal directions. Pattern language is used to create a gentle but visible deviation between the road, the bike trail and pedestrian areas. It also indicates the social activity landmarks within the pedestrian friendly square zone.

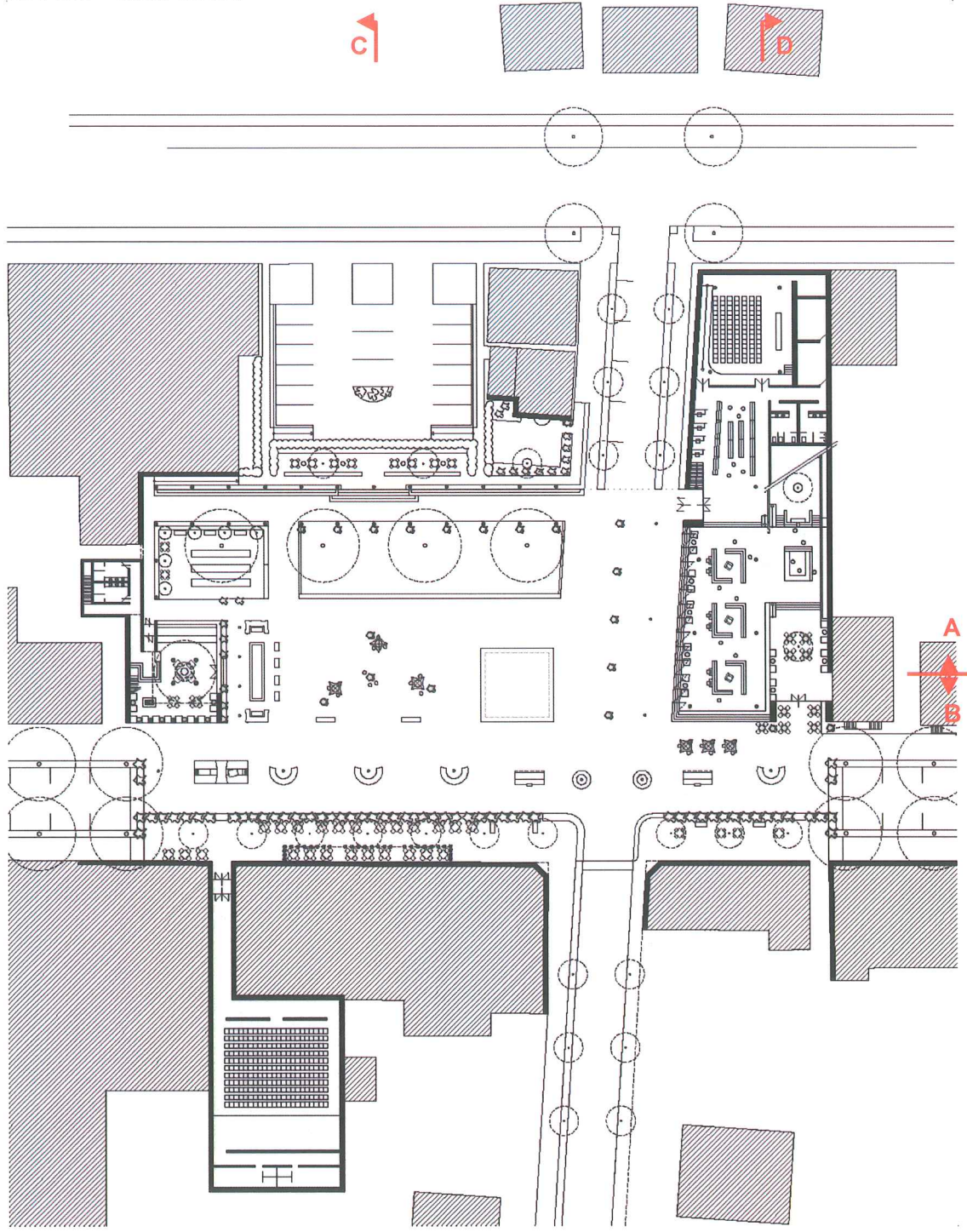
Shrubs of low wall character are incorporated to create gentle natural boundaries between the private domain spaces and the open public space of the square. The design of the civic centre is influenced by Kevin Lynch’s five basic elements, in particular interrelating paths which elicit social interaction. If one can design “Events” within the

paths, the journey is enhanced. The whole square platform elevation and the building patterns show a turning, rising and falling, offering a sense of motion that encourages the beginning and end of a journey. The raised seating along the south edge of the lawn (conforming to the draining slope of the square floor) is placed to create a mental barrier from what is the public realm. To make the experience more enjoyable, moveable furniture may be added (flower pots, see page 44) in the open area between the raised south edge seating area and the boulevard path that reconnects with Gerrish Street. This would maintain the existing idea of the main street walkway. The flower pots (900 x 900 mm) create a strong edge which acts as a magnet to the public space.

The culture of “drive through” is present therefore the idea of kiosk, along the road, is incorporated to the design. Parked cars are removed from the street, hidden behind the north edge where existing parking already exists, removing the disturbance of noise and dust which cars create. In a possible future development, housing could be addressed to be build around the square in this area.

The street lighting reflects the nature of the tree trunks common for Windsor. The square glazed platform dedicated to free outdoor performances creates a relation to the forming surface plane with the rest of patterned stone paving of the square.

Site Plan – Main Level:

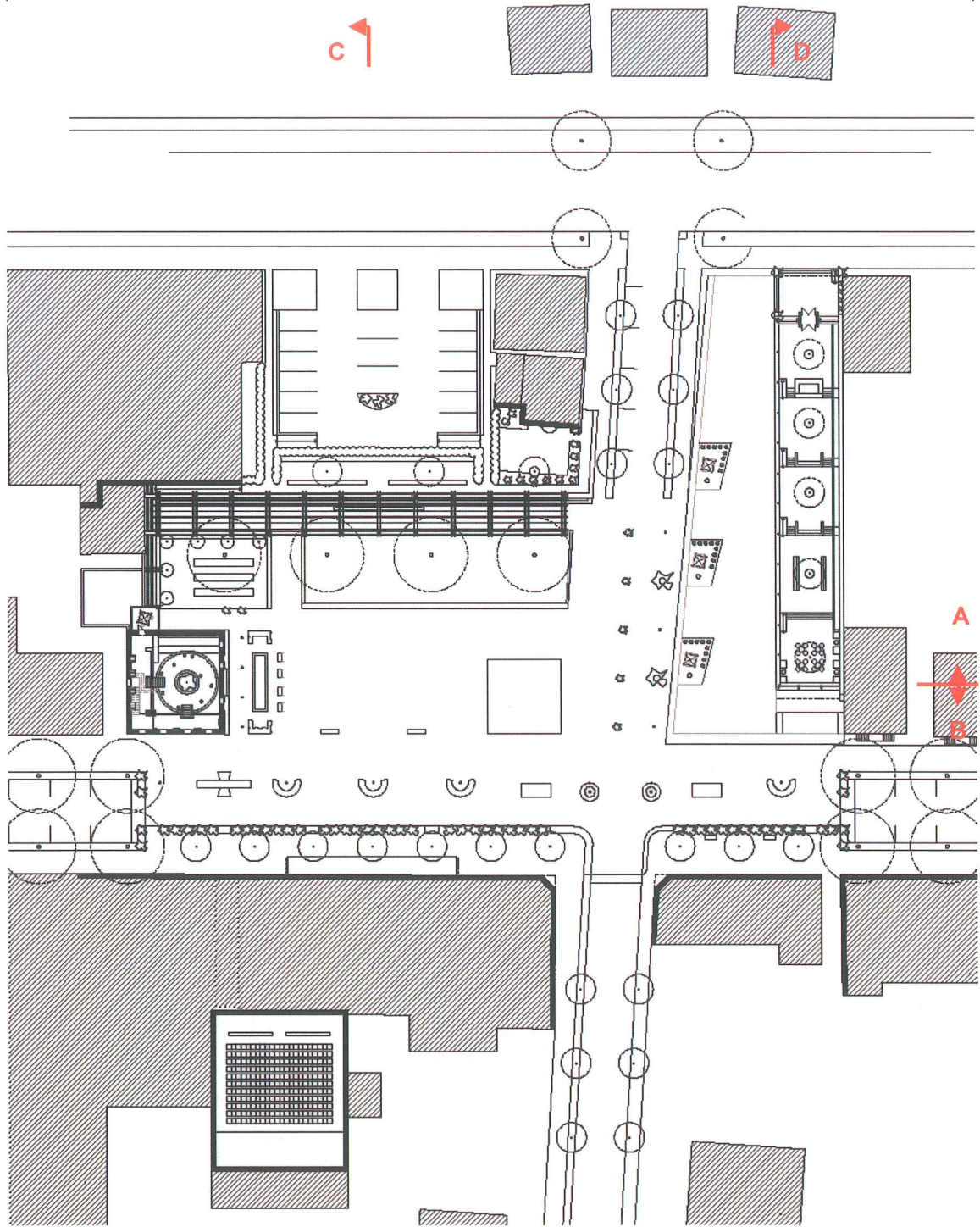


- Public Library
- Renovation – New Public Art Gallery / Bakery
- Split Entry to Underground Public Washrooms
- Existing Mermaid Theatre

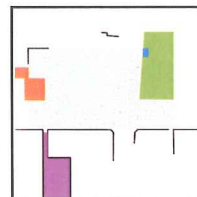


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Site Plan – Upper Level:



- Public Library
- Renovation – New Public Art Gallery / Bakery
- Split Entry to Underground Public Washrooms
- Existing Mermaid Theatre



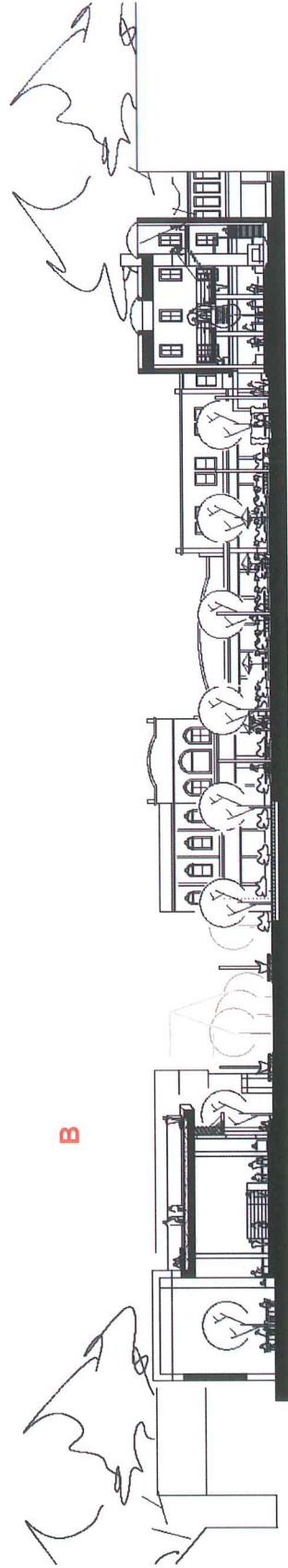
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Sections A and B:

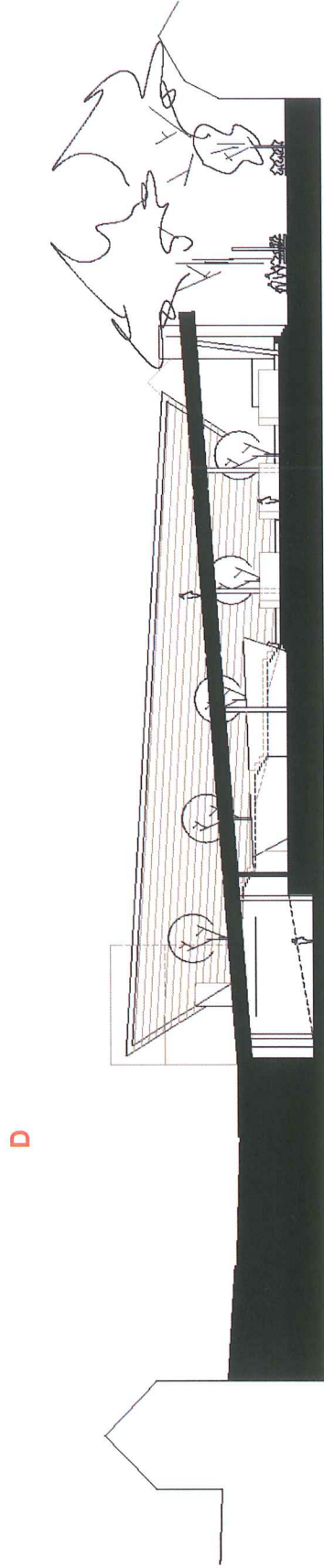
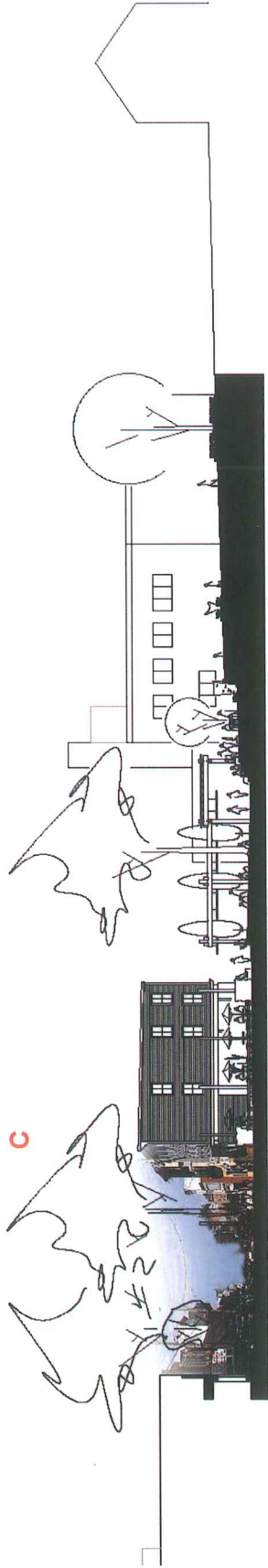
A

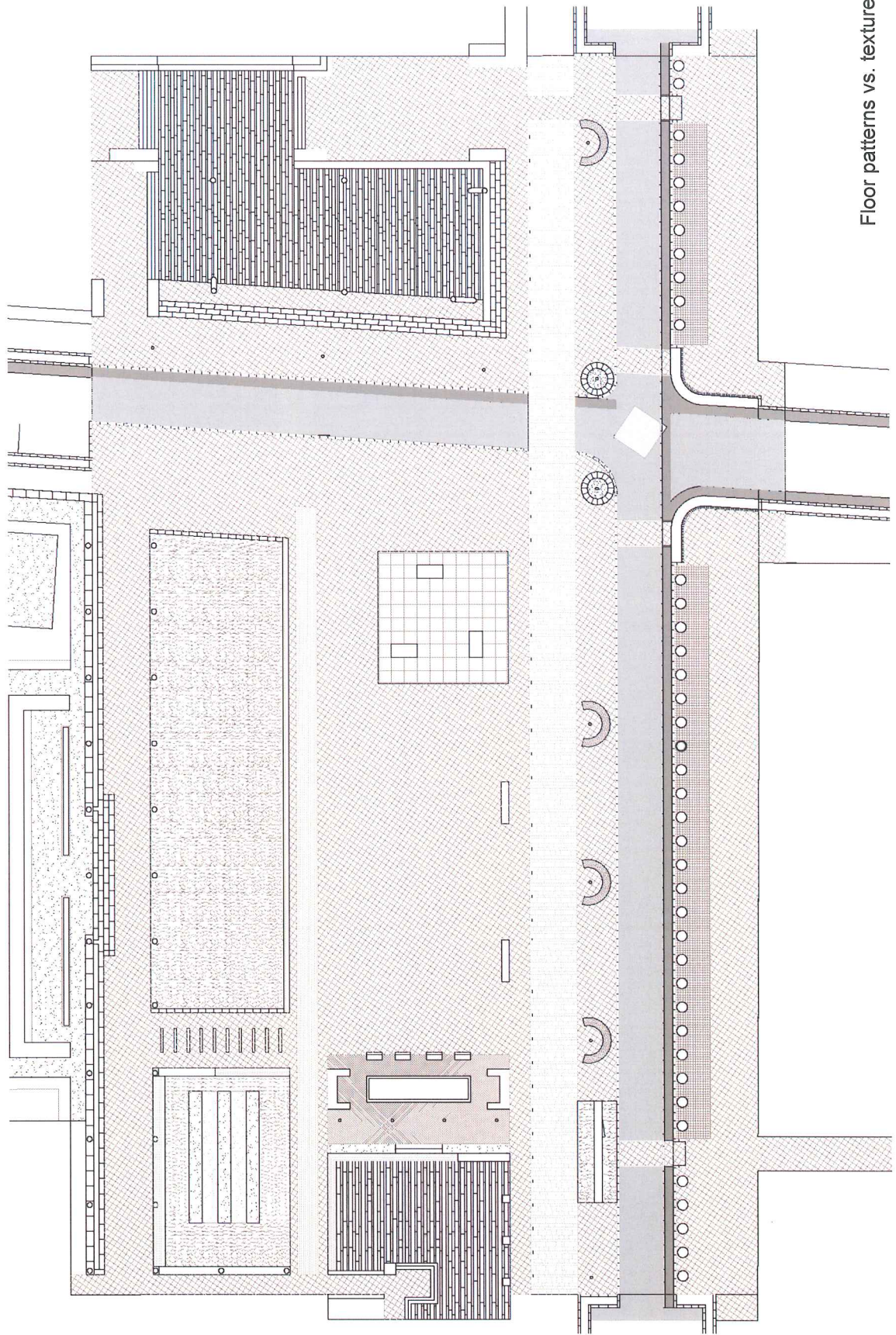


B

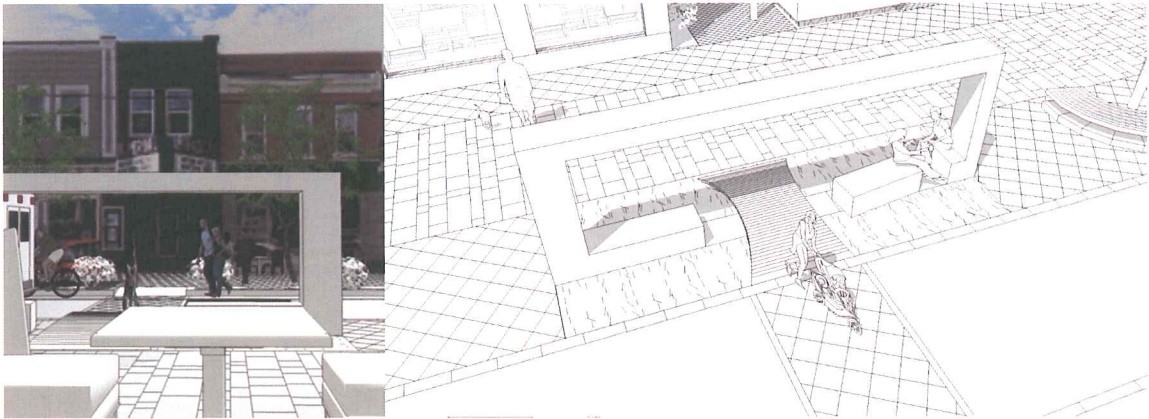


Sections C and D:

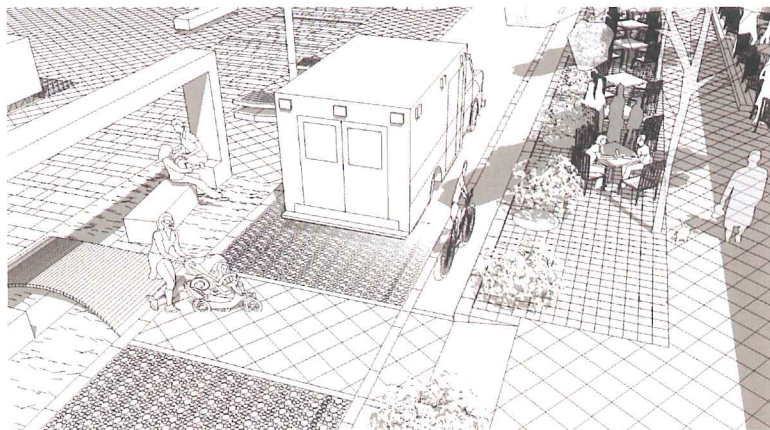




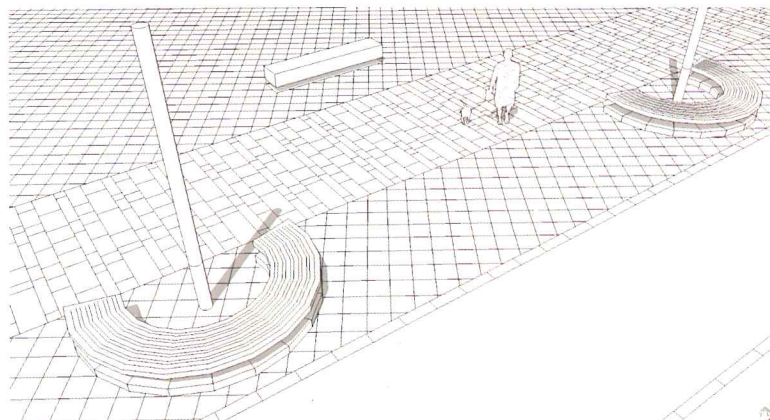
Space Defining Elements



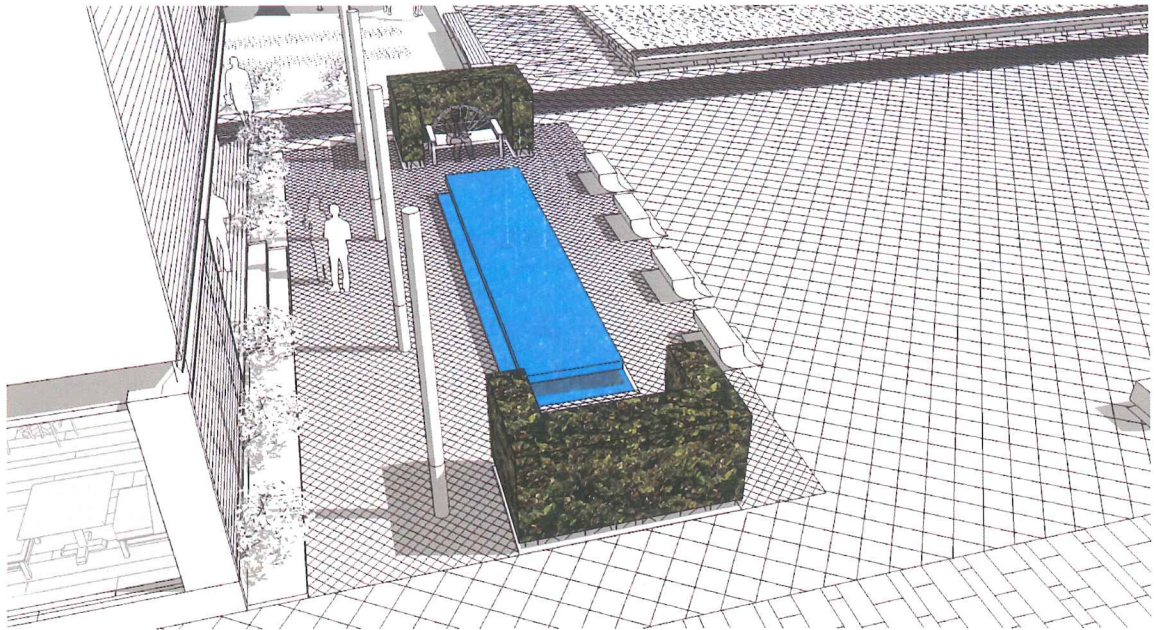
The dynamics of the interior domain help to push away the public realm, framing the gateway to the theatre or civic square activity and addressing the motion of the path



The paving pattern and defining activities, reflects the façade of shingle patterns which is Windsor's heritage



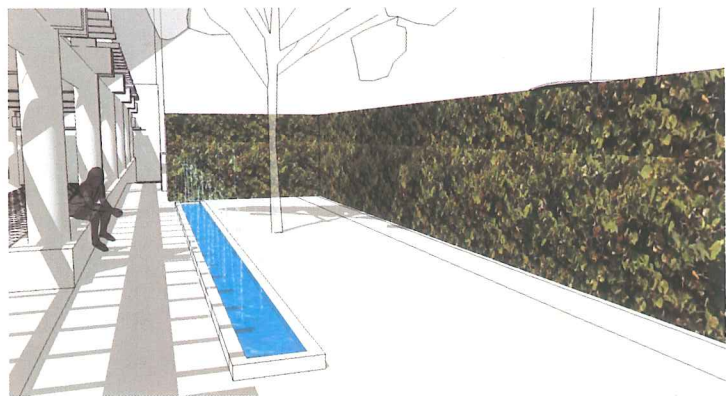
The seating design along the road relates to the Mik'maq tradition of socializing around the fire (in this case, the street light): The idea of dispersed light relates to the base pattern below the wooden seating



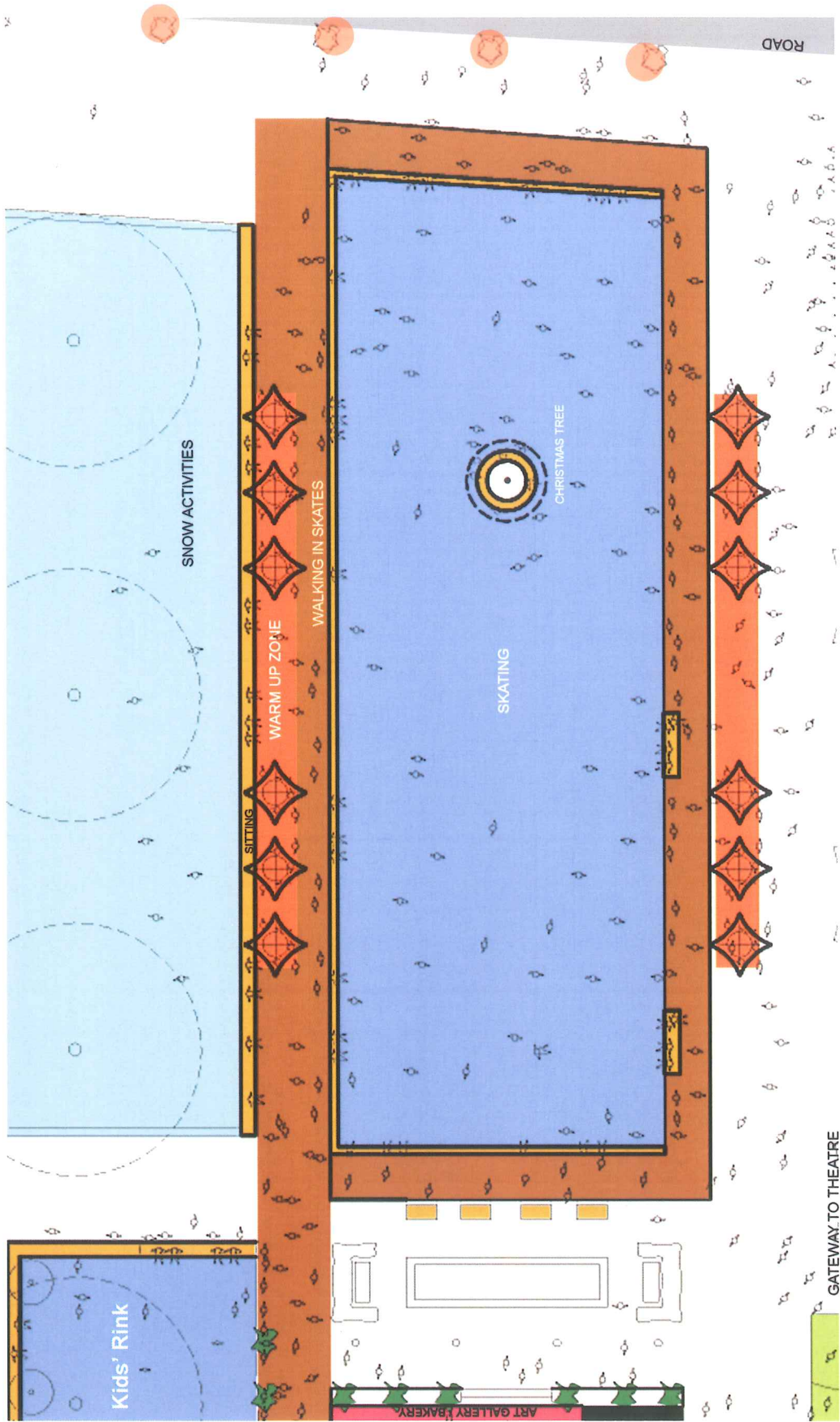
The sitting at the right edge - uncovering the past (the urban floor at present)



Raising the platforms to uncover the heritage of foundation wall building in Windsor (from concrete and the stone)

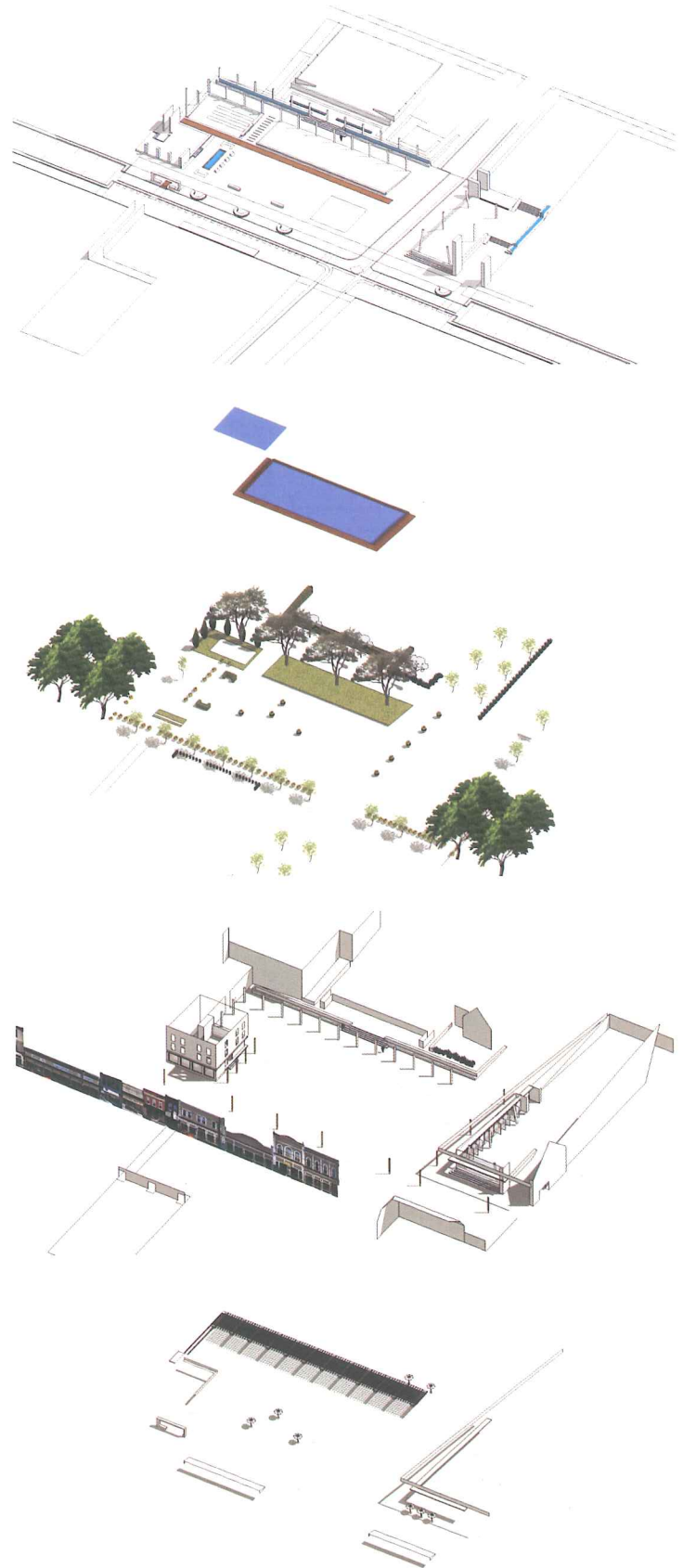


Interrelation character of the edges, helping a variety of activities to communicate (barbequing vs. walking, sitting, playing music)

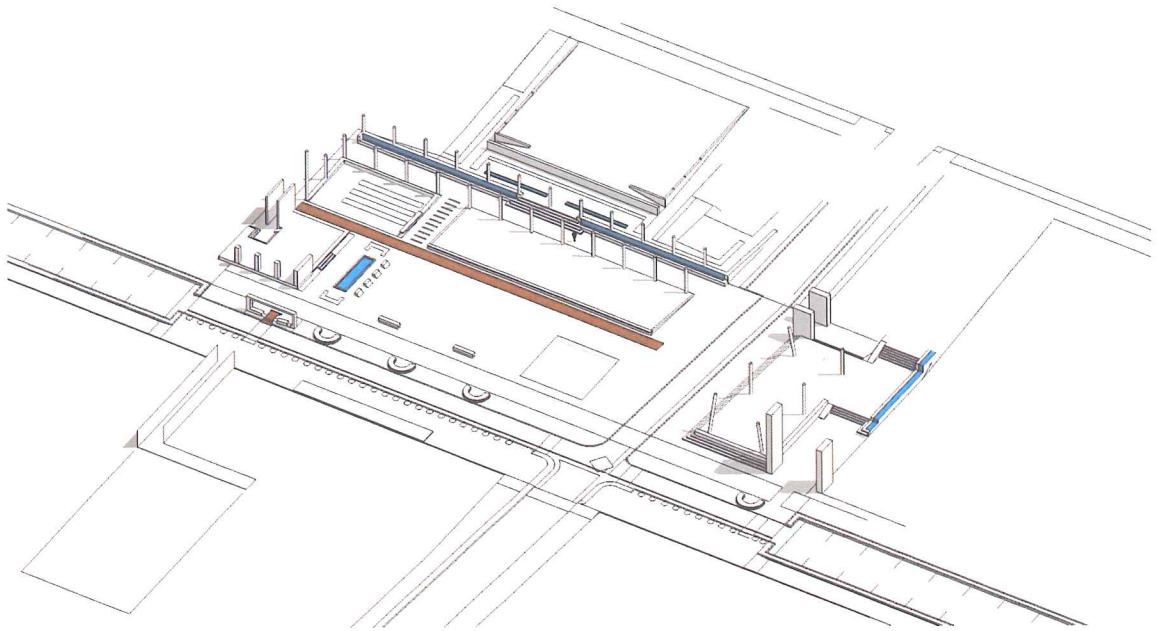


Winter season; space definition through the areas for sitting and the path of reconnecting character (walking in skates from one rink to the other while passing activities along the both sides)

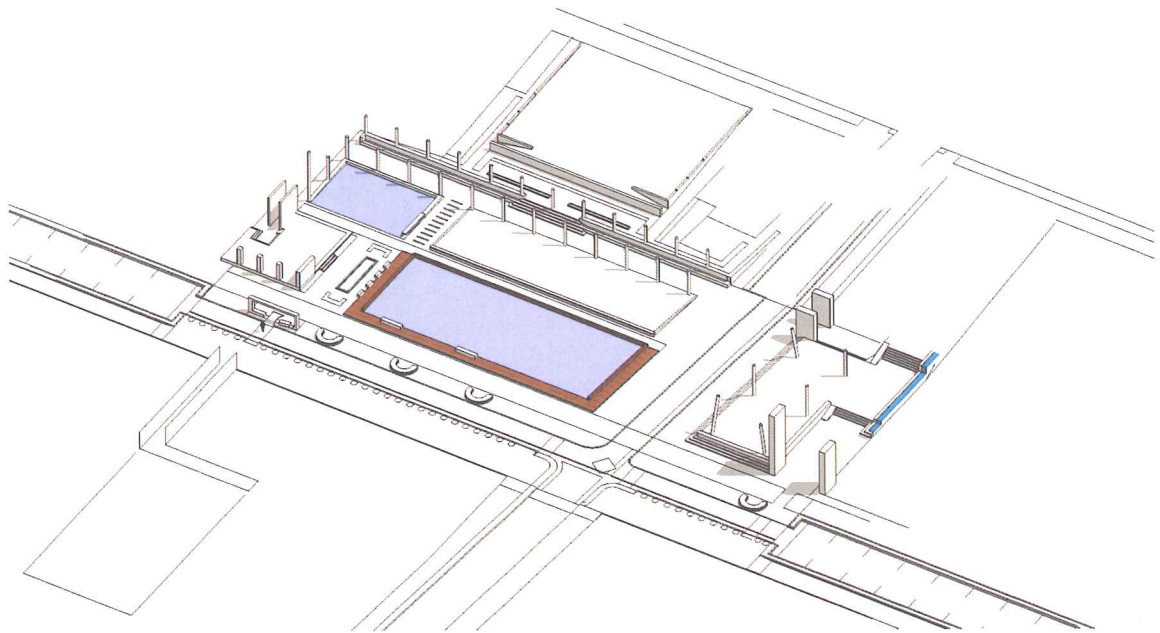
Urban Square Analysis



Surfaces



Spring, summer, autumn season



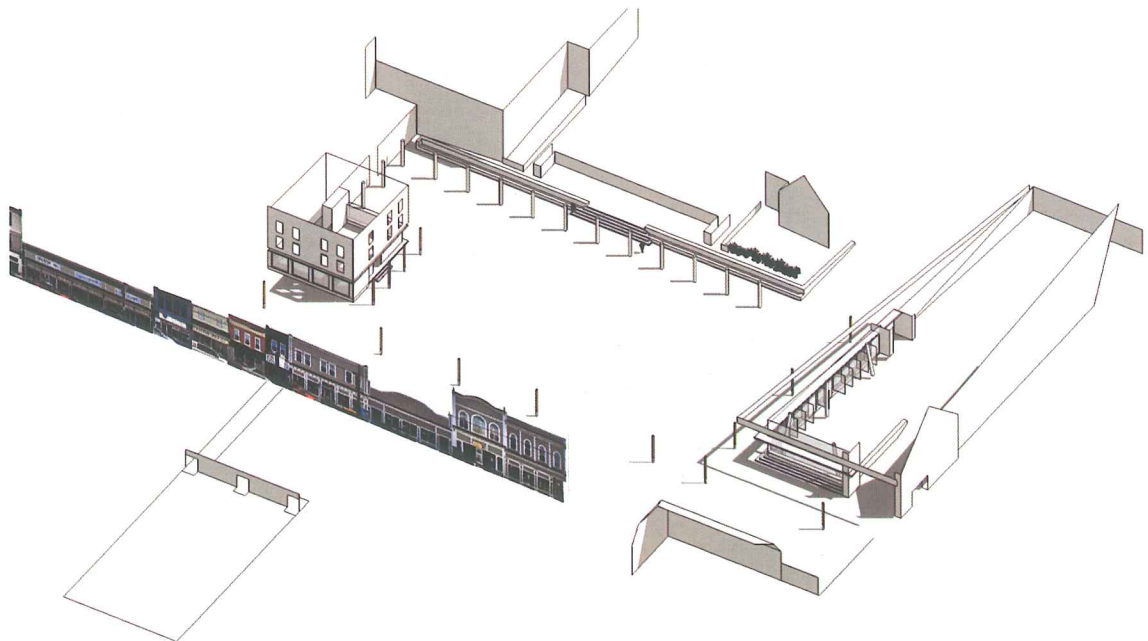
Winter season – the only elements to be added are the wooden platform with the low wall built-in to sit on, enclosing the skating rink from the three sides

Trees vs. Plants and Grass



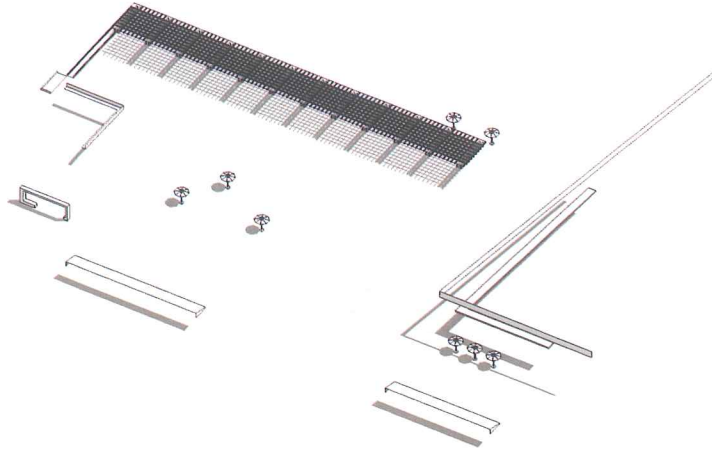
Spring, summer, autumn season

Edges



Thresholds facing the square create attractive unity to the community social interaction

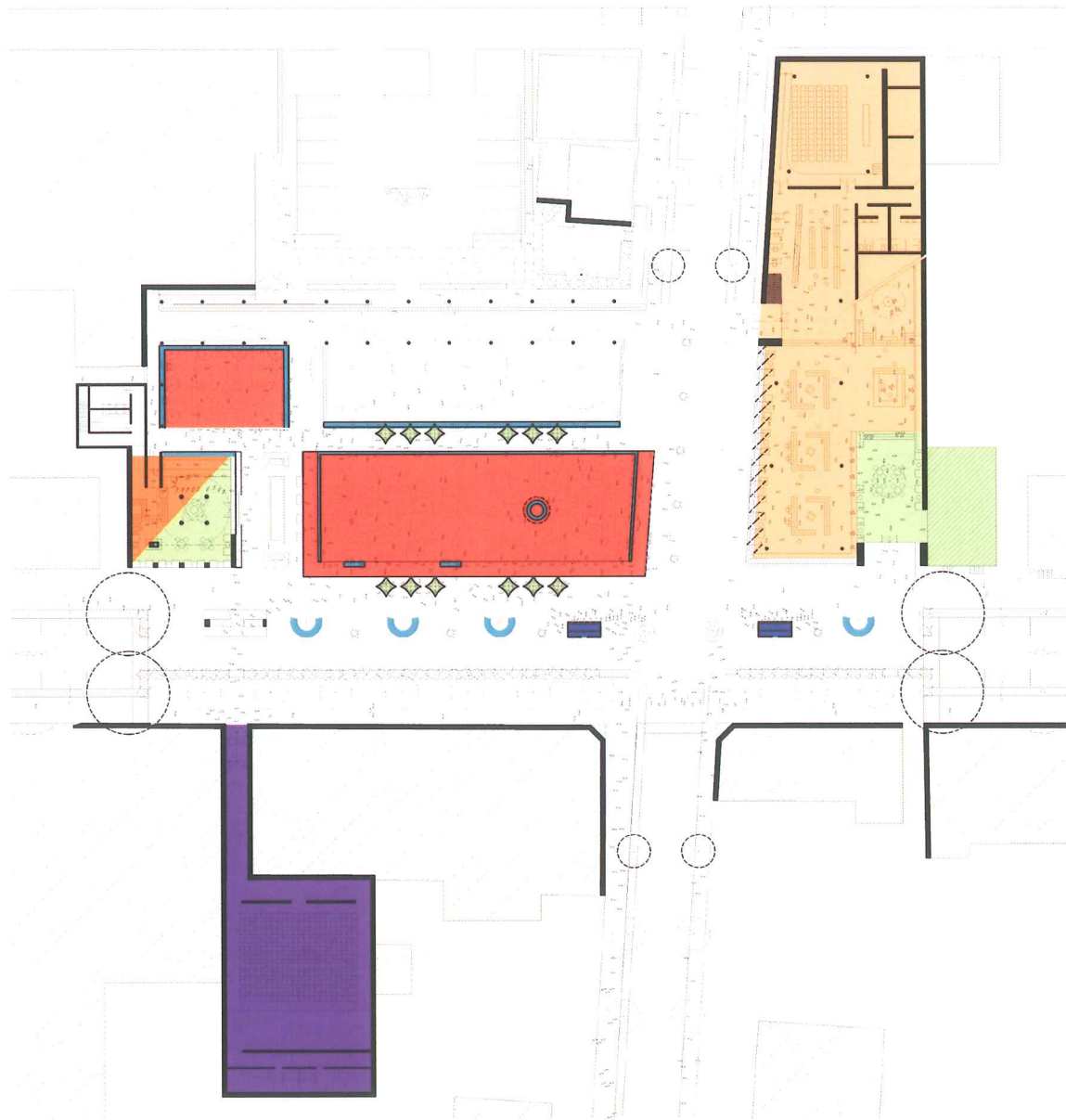
Overhangs



Overhangs are designed at the elevation corresponding to the existing urban wall cornice line to create strong edge continuity reflecting the human scale of the civic square. Overhangs, serving as well as shelters during light rainy days, include: the pergola, canopies, roof and shading devices

Annual Public Activities

Winter:



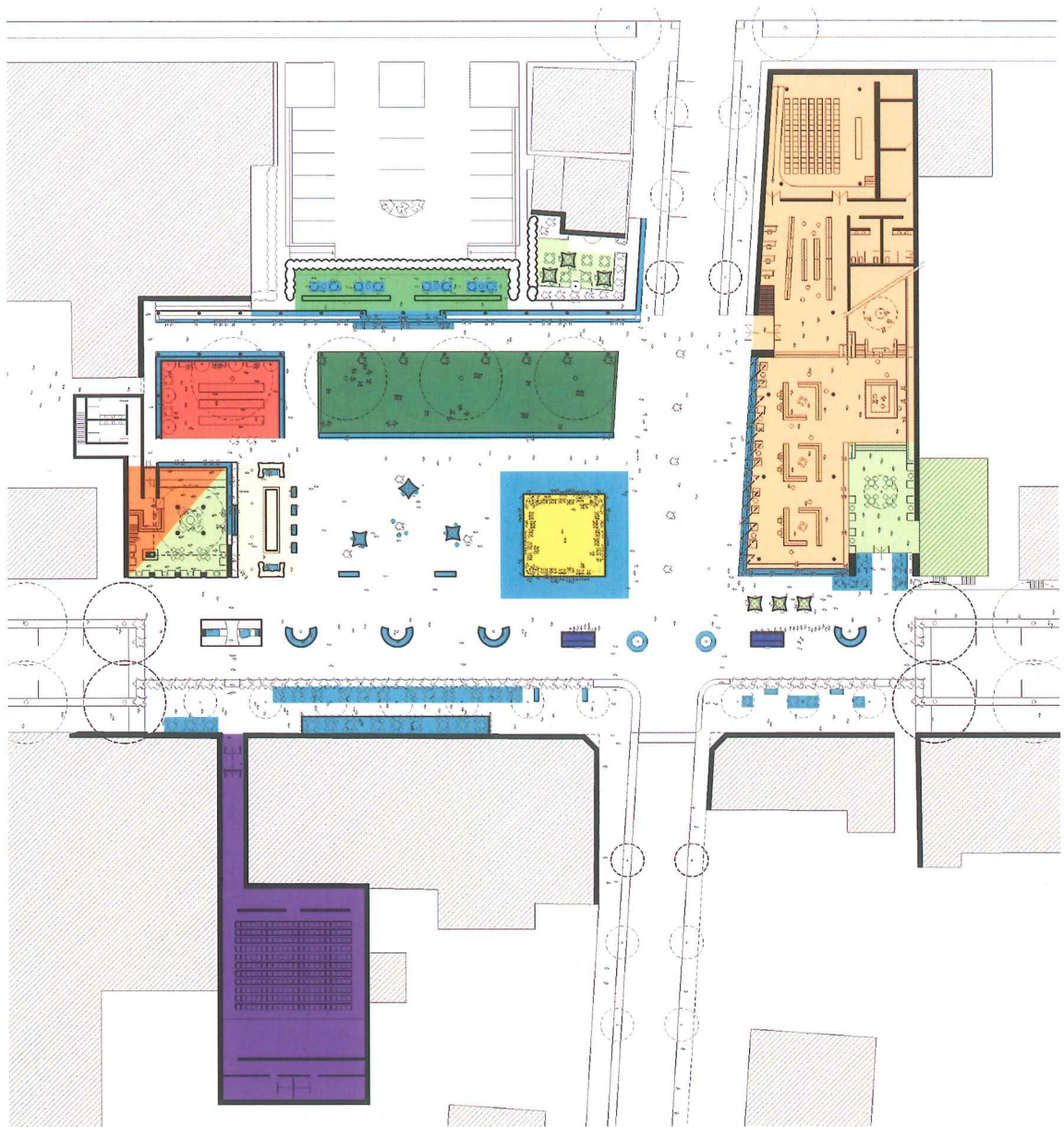
- Art Gallery with possibility to read books and to study
- Kiosks
- Eating while meeting others (seeing the art, in the bakery/art gallery/ pub. librar,
- Public sitting (changing skating benches)
- Public skating and kids' hockey ring
- Research, reading, writing, lectures, movies



Scale 1:865

Social Activity Diagram vs. Community Public Response Study

Spring:



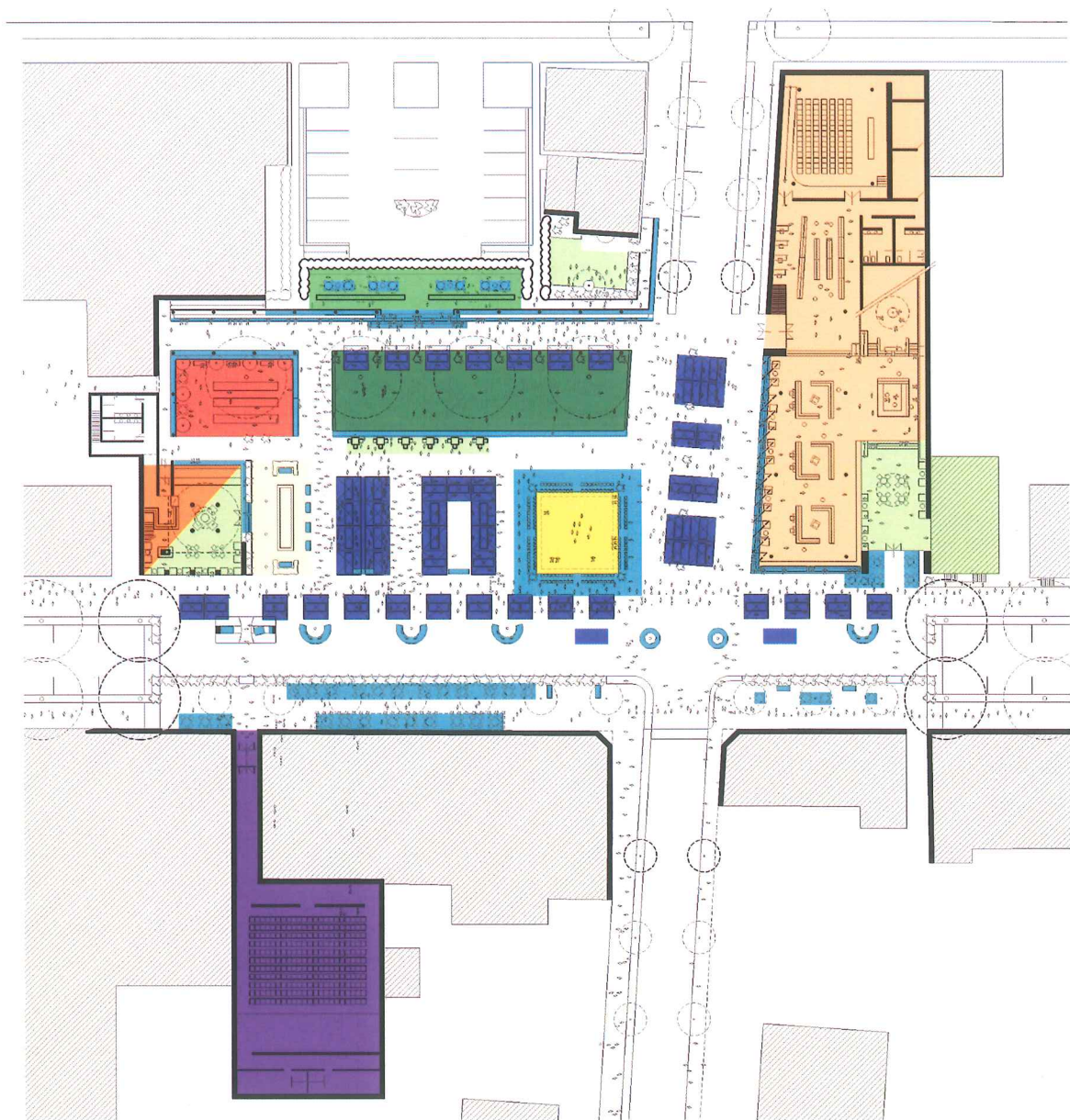
- Art Gallery with possibility to read books and to study
- Leisure on grass
- Outdoor art performance
- Eating while meeting others (seeing the art, reading in bakery)
- Private and semiprivate public sitting
- Family game area (horseshoe)
- Research, reading, writing, lectures, movies
- Barbequing; Kiosk



Scale 1:865

Activity for weekday basis (May - October) vs. Community public response study

Summer:



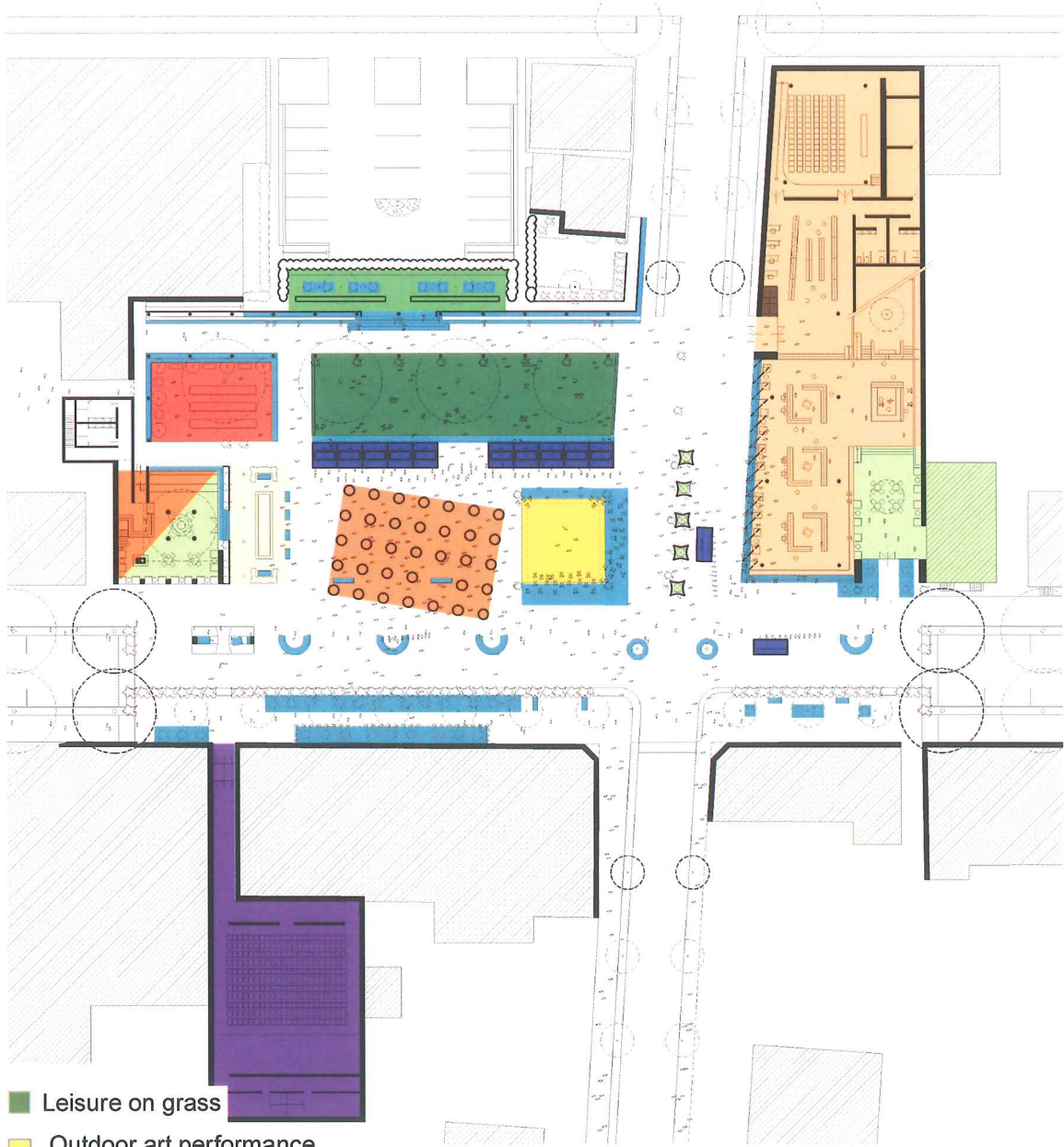
- Leisure on grass
- Art Gallery with possibility to read books and to study
- Outdoor art performance
- Eating while meeting others (seeing the art, reading in bakery)
- Private and semiprivate public sitting
- Family game area (horseshoe)
- Research, reading, writing, lectures, movies
- Barbequing; ■ Kiosks, farmers' market stalls



Scale 1:865

Social activity diagram vs. Community public response study

Autumn:



- Leisure on grass
- Outdoor art performance
- Eating while meeting others (seeing the art, reading in bakery)
- Private and semiprivate public sitting
- Family game area (horseshoe)
- Pumpkin regatta event exposition
- Research, reading, writing, lectures, movies
- Barbequing; ■ Kiosk, small farmers' market

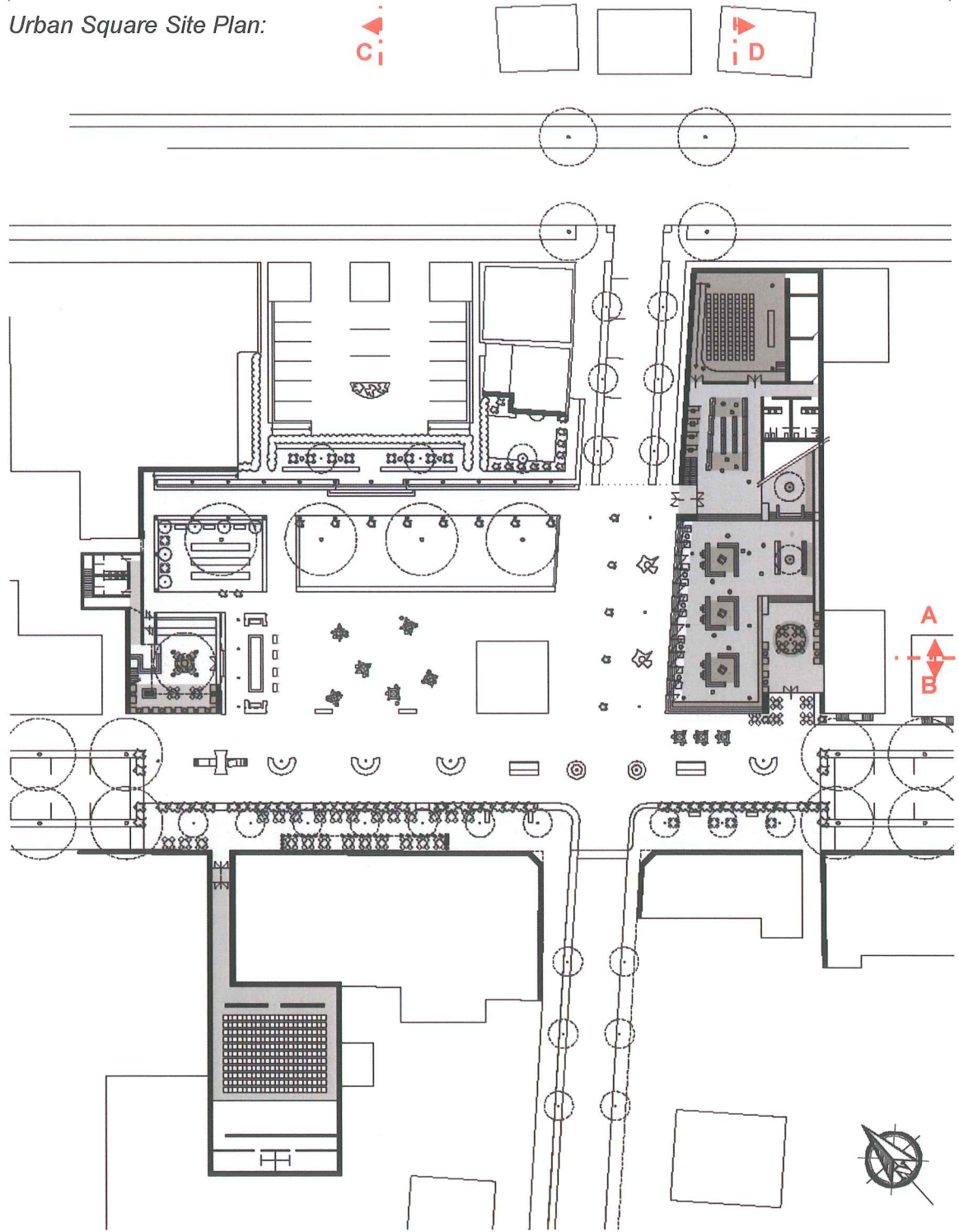


Scale 1:865

Social activity diagram vs. Community public response study

Private vs. Public Social Activity

Urban Square Site Plan:

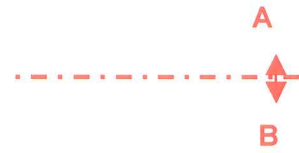
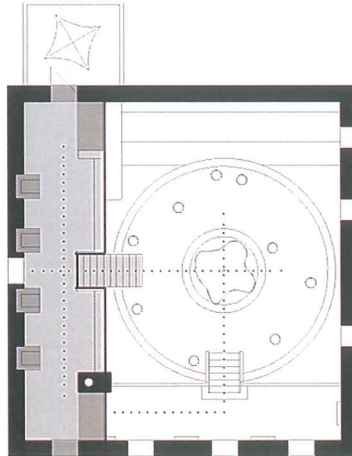


- Private Indoor Domains
- Public Indoor Realm
- Shaded Outdoor Spaces

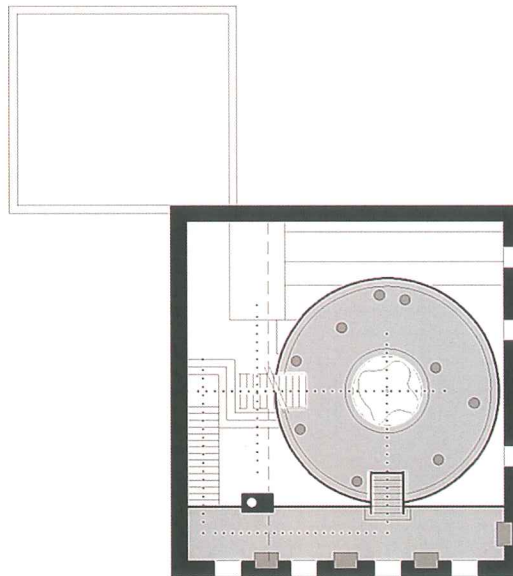
Scale 1:865

Public Art Gallery/Bakery:

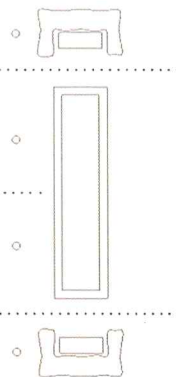
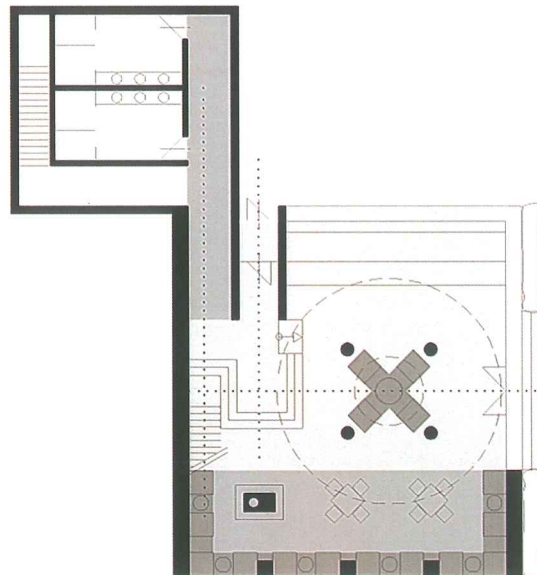
Third Level



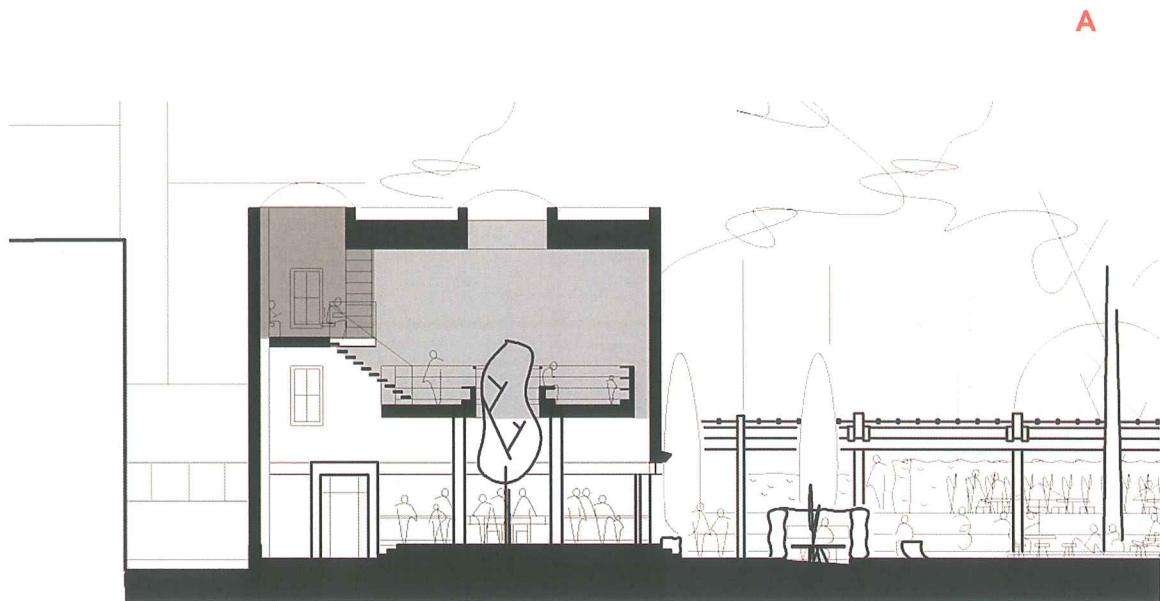
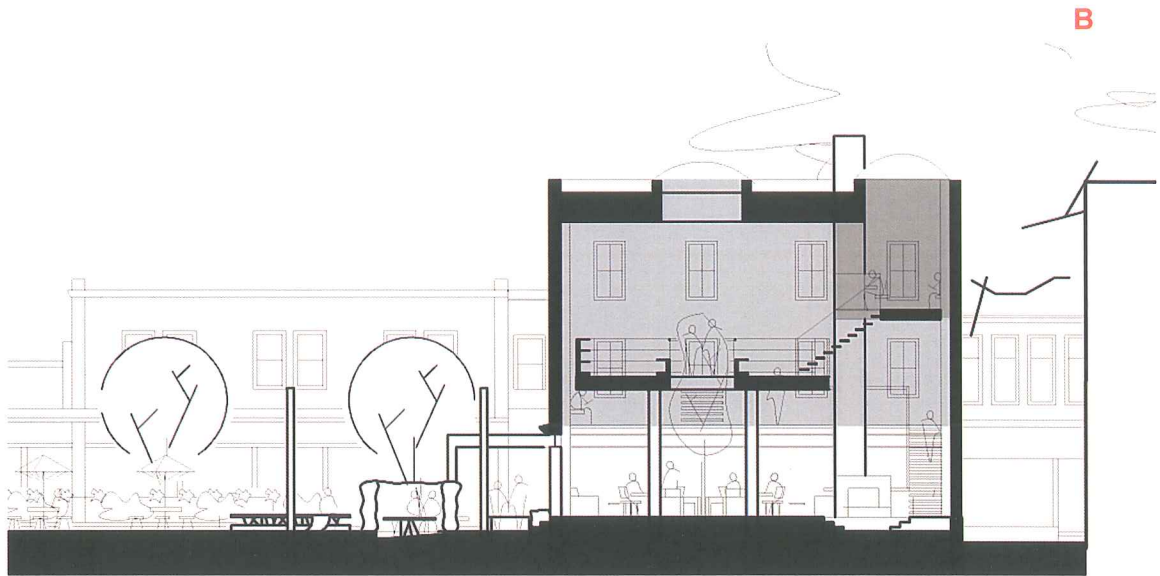
Upper Level



Main Level



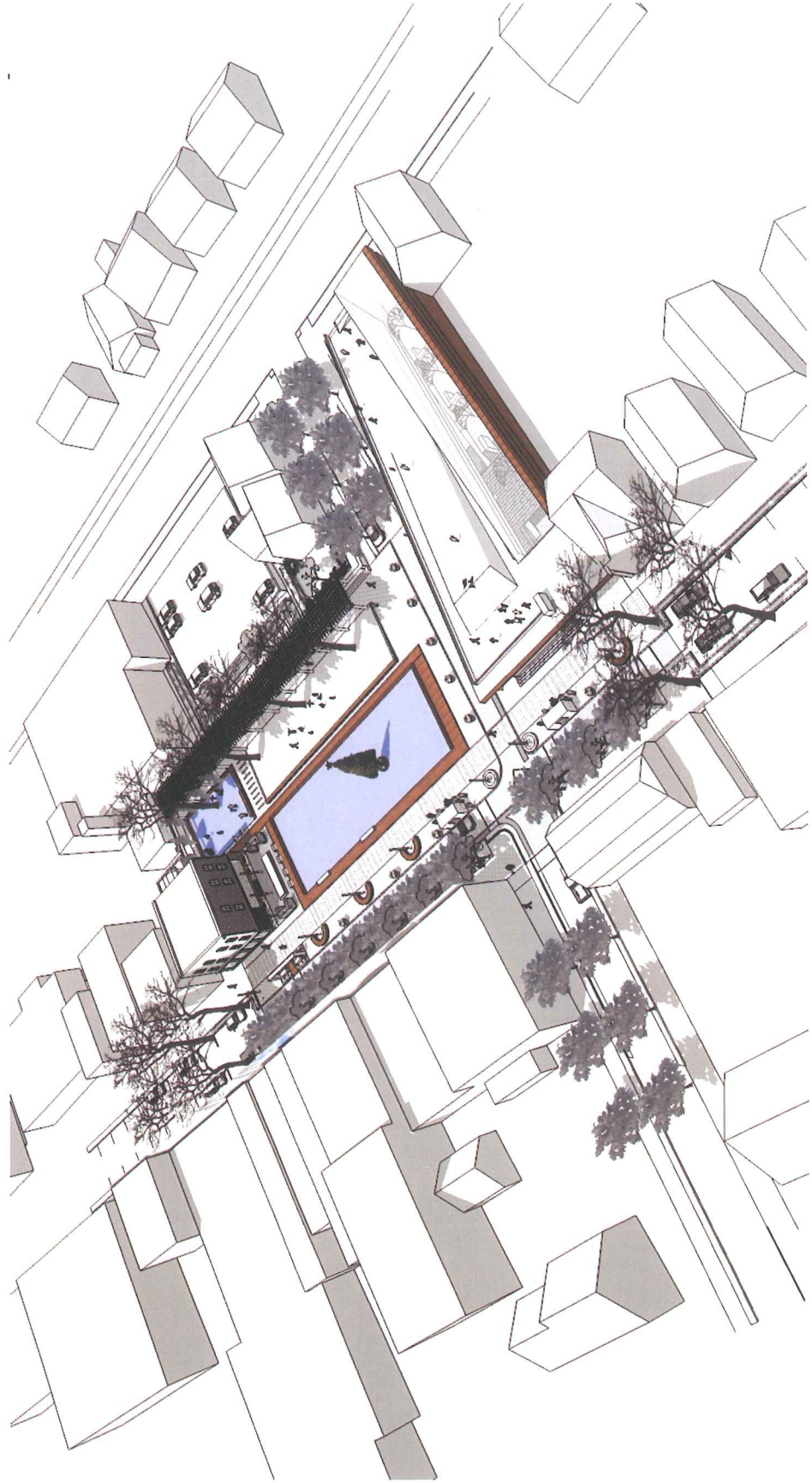
Scale 1:300



Scale 1:250
Cross sections

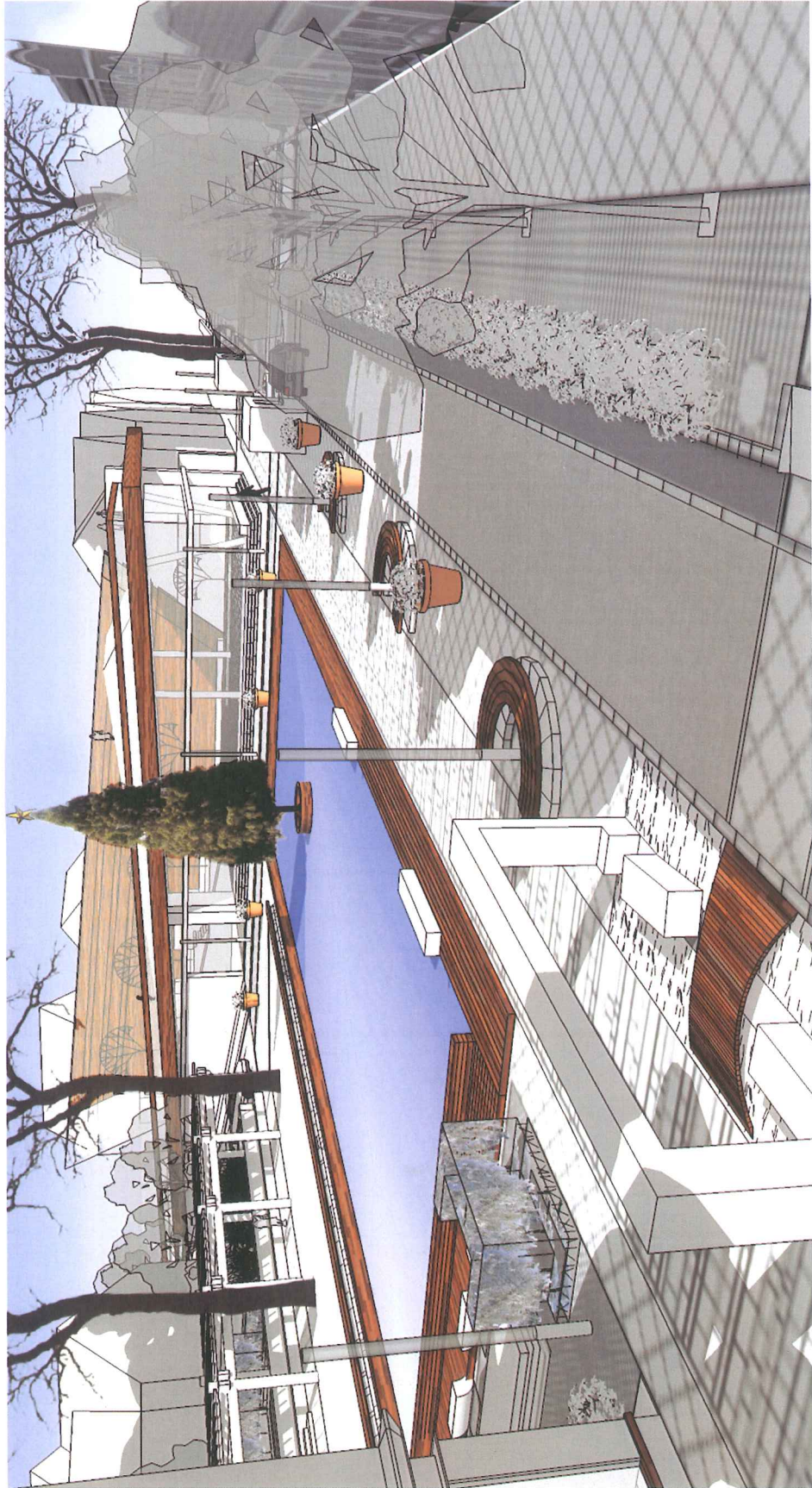
Perspective Views

Winter Season





View from the "green" roof of the Public library towards the southwest urban wall of Gerrish Street (the heat lamps incorporated)



View from Gerrish Street towards the Public library with strong welcoming and directional character

Season on the Weekday Basis between May and October



Weekday activity



View from Gerrish Street towards the Public library; social activity; paths of the space defining character supporting the interrelation of public vs. private places



View from the roof of the Public library; the cultural glazed square offers the view on the building foundations (the existing building at present)

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The design of the new civic square will stimulate a sense of community and spread its influence to other parts of Windsor. The square embodies the idea of a multifunctional realm for year-round social activities. It has a strong potential to attract the community to socialize there on a daily basis, and allows citizens the residents to take ownership of their town. This is the key to the quality of urban living, and will have a lasting effect on Windsor's sustainability.

Functions of the New Town Square Design

The new town square provides an anchor for residents in terms of function, interaction, activity and relationship. Its accessibility means that users have a sense of ownership and from that ownership; from this ownership comes investment in the community, socially, culturally, and economically.

The new town square allows year round social interaction, and accommodates a variety of uses. From the square, people can see and easily reconnect with all the landmarks of the town and develop a sense of place. It performs the function of a hub, like an agora, village green, or plaza. It allows visitors and residents to "read" the city hierarchy and re-establishes Gerrish Street as the main street.

The square is a warm, safe place, yet remains an outdoor space, interacting with the seasons. The space invites surprise, shelter, and a sense of journey or progression. Some areas are more private, while others are open and available for plays, music, or community events.

This thesis carefully considers the nature of the town, the elements of the landscape, the historical landmarks, the social and cultural use of the town, and the changes that have occurred over time. It offers the new civic square as a public centre which integrates and strengthens the community of Windsor and encourages indoor and outdoor activities year round.

Optional Perspective to the future of Downtown Revitalization



Town Center / Edges vs. Gateways vs. Thresholds Showing the Intensity study of Entries

Scale 1:4000

The urban square strategic position has great potential to become the core of missing order uniting the whole town instead of only two: the water front with the main commercial district

APPENDIX A: PATTERN OF WINDSOR URBAN EVOLUTION

The Urbanization began by incorporating the urban grid to the settlement right after the Fort Edward erection in the 1750. The following information was analysed from the original maps at the West Hants Historical Society, Windsor, Nova Scotia.



1750; Paths of directional character vs. objects along the path



1760; Paths of directional character; the beginning of Windsor urbanization - laying the grid

The road connecting Halifax with Windsor was built in the early 18th century. Windsor became the strategic trade center, “food bank”, for Halifax (1749) the capital of new British colony.



1820; Paths of directional character vs. creation of the urban fabric enclosure; the Fort is present



1871; Paths of directional character vs. urban fabric (railway in use)

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