The INCLUSIVE Town Hall
The Macomb Town Hall, Macomb Township, Michigan

empowering those that are governed rather than those who govern
The INCLUSIVE Town Hall
The Macomb Town Hall, Macomb Township, Michigan

Stephen Karwan
Thesis Project, Spring 2002

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Bob Fisher - studio professor
Lohren Deeg - faculty advisor
Jeff Culp - studio advisor

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Ball State University
This thesis project is a culmination of months work of research, drawing, studying, building, discussing, exploring, of distractions, breaks, and nights out. I thank everybody for giving me kicks in the ass, or for the hints that I should give myself a kick in the ass. Its done.

Bob Fisher, my studio professor, has allowed me explore and design using my own free will, but always with a second opinion. And he hates my title.

Lohren Deeg, my thesis advisor, always offered necessary guidance. I'm not sure what he thinks of my title.

My parents brought me into this world; I'm thankful for that—I have to be. And my parents have forever supported my studies and all of my aspirations; I'm more thankful for that. And I'm the best son parents could ever ask for—they told me so.

And to Ball State, I thank you for charging three bucks a plot and four cents a sheet just to send a print—even if nothing ever comes out of the printer.
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**Total area: 55,000 sq. ft.**
Macomb Township, located in Macomb County, Michigan, approximately twenty miles northeast of downtown Detroit, is the metro-area’s fastest growing community and, with 50,000 people, is the second most populated township in the state. Its recent substantial growth, in both population and infrastructure, and its projected continual growth necessitate new facilities for the township offices. The new Macomb Town Hall will be the new home for the local government.
"Civic buildings should not make private citizens realize how unimportant they are, but instead should create a public architecture of intimacy, one that brings people together in an experience of confidence and trust."

-Daniel Patrick Moynihan, former United States Senator
The architecture of a house of government serves to reinforce democratic ideals of inclusion, openness and accessibility. By remaining modest, inviting and unintimidating, it encourages citizen participation and interaction. By allowing observation, and through exposure, it demands responsiveness and sense of accountability from the government. The architecture shall empower the citizen, offering a reminder that a government is subservient to its people.
The democratic government is a system "of the people, by the people and for the people." In turn, houses of government, and specifically, the Town Hall, are buildings of the people.

The democratic system is based on inclusion; citizens representatively rule themselves and hold the active voice within the government. The government is not separated from its citizens; they are intertwined. By projecting an image of accessibility and modesty, the Town Hall invokes a feeling of inclusion rather than separation and authority.

By being sociologically inclusive, it also implies a responsibility the government holds, and the responsiveness to its citizens that it must establish.

An intimidating authoritative symbolism is in direct conflict with this concept; in one's own building they feel not only welcomed, but also empowered. A house of government should establish this sense of welcome, and enhance ideas of inclusion, rather than threaten it, through sociological and physical accessibility.

The most common response to creating an accessible government is to continue the theme as a metaphor, creating a physically open and accessible building.

The theme of accessibility stretches beyond the physical and sociological. Visual accessibility into the Town Hall implies that the citizens are observing and scrutinizing the government. Often, transparency is used as a metaphor for visual accessibility. It implies that the citizens hold the power over the government. This concept establishes the idea that the people hold the government accountable.

A careful balance must be struck between the monumentality that this prominent building typology deserves and the unimposing humbleness that it should afford its citizens.
"If liberty and equality, as is thought by some are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost."

-Aristotle, Politics

The building typology of the Town Hall is well established. Through its development it has acquired identifiable characteristics and accepted standards. As a symbol of the enduring strength of the democratic system, these historical precedents should not be ignored.

Established elements of civic buildings and houses of government have evolved throughout history. A formal ordering has come to symbolize the strength of the government or the state. Often, a vertical element or a monumental vocabulary designates the community’s prominence. The form of the building often includes a central dome, and smaller flanking massings; an example of this form is this country’s Capitol Building. It has become an unmistakable dominating symbol of democracy. Sometimes, inappropriate symbols of overwhelming authority, of separation rather than inclusion, have changed meanings, and are accepted as a symbol of the endurance of the democracy. All of these characteristics establish a civic presence.

Just as the Town Hall must acknowledge antecedents in this typology, it must also acknowledge the community’s history. It cannot erase the memory of a community. While in younger communities the issue becomes less important, it still cannot be ignored. The Town Hall must respond, if not accept, an established identity.

The town or city is the most democratic level of government. The representation is most direct; hence, the sociological proximity of the government is closest. The government at this level is most attuned to its citizens. Ideally, the Town Hall relates this proximity through the portrayal of local ideals and values.

Responding to the community is often accomplished by the recognition of a vernacular architecture. In this way, the community’s government is most familiar, and most in touch with its citizens.

By appropriately conveying its significance, by relating to historical precedents, by relating to the physical, sociological, and historical identity of the community, and by acknowledging the unique role of those being governed, and by expressing accessibility, the Town Hall becomes more approachable. Then, the citizen is encouraged to become more active, and the democracy becomes stronger.
Ideals of modesty and connection of a house of government to its citizens are best exemplified in Alvar Aalto's design of the Saynatsalo Town Hall.

In the design for the new Seattle City Hall, an importance was placed on transparency and accessibility so that a citizen felt respected, and encouraged to participate in the government.

Antoine Predock's Austin City Hall is designed to reflect the community's relaxed character. A grand public plaza at the entrance to the building, allows to building to reach out to its citizens.

The Richmond City Hall (British Columbia), places importance on accessibility to its citizens. A prominent first floor area allows citizens to interact with every department from a singe space.
BALANCING

tradition and change
modesty and formality

lincolnshire, illinois, town hall

Norman Foster's design of the Reichstag, Germany's parliament building balances new and old through a new transparent dome, breaking through the existing renovated shell of the old building. The design allows citizens to transverse through the dome while scrutinizing the legislature below.

The village of Lincolnshire is similar to Macomb Township in size and context. Located in suburban Chicago, it is a growing community searching for an identity. In a modern interpretation, a Richardsonian Romanesque style brings comfort to the conservative community by alluding to a familiar, traditional style in its Town Hall.

precedent studies
Macomb Township is located in the center of Macomb County, Michigan, part of the tri-county metro-Detroit region. The township is located approximately twenty-three miles north of downtown Detroit. While the southern part of the county has been fully developed for decades, recent sprawl has contributed to a surge in growth in central Macomb County.

Surveyed and split into six-mile by six-mile townships, the Northwest Territory divided the upper Midwest. Macomb Township's boundaries have kept the original boundaries, as no municipalities have been incorporated within; it remains thirty-six square miles in area. In the original survey, as part of the Northwest Territory, the township was divided into thirty-six one-mile by one-mile sections. These sections remain, and the main roads of today demarcate these, forming essentially a square township with an organized grid of main roads.

The southernmost boundary of Macomb Township has been developed into one of metro-Detroit's premier commercial corridors, serving the northeastern suburbs. Hall Road (M-59) is home to Lakeside Mall and numerous department stores. An infinite amount of commercial development extends approximately fifteen miles, from I-94 (running northeast from downtown Detroit) at the east, and into the fully developed Oakland County to the west.

North of Hall Road, at the southern half of the township, agricultural lands are continuously being rezoned to accommodate new residential subdivisions. Any commercial development is limited, as it has yet to follow the infant residential developments.
The southern part of Macomb Township been the site of recent sprawl and has just been recently transformed from an agricultural landscape, to a thriving residential and commercial area. The northern half of the township, at the edge of the metro-Detroit sprawl, is zoned almost entirely as agricultural, and remains farmland or undeveloped. The master plan allows for balanced growth while maintaining the agricultural roots of the community.
The site for the civic campus, of which the Town Hall is a part, is close to the center of the township. It is one plot of land measuring approximately one-quarter of a mile east to west, and one-eighth of a mile north to south. The North Drain of the Clinton River runs from the northwest corner of the site to the southeast corner of the site. The creek is shallow and narrow and a dense growth of trees and vegetation lines the banks, particularly at the northeast bank. Because of the creek’s proximity, part of the site lies in the one-hundred-year flood plain. The remainder of the site is essentially flat and without vegetation.

The Town Hall is located in the center of the civic node, overlooking the creek. The location of other buildings within the civic campus allows for views of the Town Hall and of its important spaces from the main roads.

The location of the Town Hall is set back far enough from the creek to mitigate issues of flooding.
The selected site for the Town Hall and the civic campus is in the undeveloped northern half of the township. It is at the southeast corner of two main roads, Foss Road and 25 Mile Road.
the conceptual design included early explorations of the separation of the functions of the building, of transparency, of keeping a modest appearance, and of prominently displaying public spaces.
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EXPLORATIONS
The Town Hall is essentially an office building. The majority of decision-making and the majority of the government's activities take place in the departments of the Town Hall within normal business hours.

However, unique to the Town Hall is the Council Chambers. It is the most celebrated space within the Town Hall and functions as the gathering space where a more formal interaction between citizens and elected officials takes place.

Other spaces include offices for elected officials, and can be compared to executive offices of a company. Other spaces allow for expansion and a variety of uses, such as a nursery and a computer network room.

Also included in the program of the Town Hall are different community rooms and conference rooms, available for use by the groups of the community, i.e. the Chamber of Commerce, Lion's Club, and board meetings for various groups. The intent of these spaces' inclusion to the facility is to activate the Town Hall to its fullest potential. The Town Hall will see increased usage through these spaces.
The final design embodies the concepts studied and explored. Specifically, the departmental wing and the Council Chambers (the places of interaction between the public and the government) were explored furthest. Those spaces offered the clearest opportunity to empower and engage the citizen.
council chambers

main entry

civic plaza
council chambers

'executive' offices

community rooms
To showcase the point of public and government interaction, the public corridors are pushed to the exterior of the space; in effect, the departments are sandwiched between two single loaded corridors. Each projection provides sub-spaces at each departmental counter along the length of the corridor. Each projection correlates to a department within, and more specifically to the public counter for a particular department. During daytime hours, the activity of the spaces will be showcased to those passing by the civic campus; during the evenings, the projections will be lit, creating a defining icon for the township.

The projections provide a metaphorical pattern on two facades. By keeping departmental activity between two transparent projections, a greater metaphorical scrutiny can take place. On the west façade, parallel to one of the two main crossroads, the projections cut through the strong limestone wall, seeming to redefine the Town as a new civic space, establishing, and embedding the community's identity. On the opposite side, adjacent to the plaza, the projections are intersected by the civic plaza. From this perspective, the main public spaces are along the west façade, and sub-areas, counters along the east façade, the juxtaposing inset/outset projections allow for appropriate subspaces along the corridors.
Highlighting the Town Hall is a series of framed projections along the east and west facades, offering views to the interaction of the government and the citizens at the public counter of each department within. The public counter is the exact point of interaction between those governing and those being governed; it is the place of greatest contact and communication between the government and its citizens. For this reason, these locations of interaction are highlighted.
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second floor plan

SCALE: 1"=16'-0"

1. OPEN to Council Chambers
2. EXHIBIT
3. BUILDING DEPARTMENT
4. PLANNING DEPARTMENT
5. EXPANSION
6. CONFERENCE ROOMS
7. BALCONY
8. NURSERY
typical wall section
(through curtainwall projection)
scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0"
The structural system of the building consists of repeating masonry cores and a concrete column/waffle slab system along the department wing, a Council Chambers supported by four concrete piers, and a conventional steel framed support massing.

The structure of the Town Hall serves to reinforce the design concepts of the building.

Repetitive cores provide vertical emphasis amidst a distinctly horizontal façade. The vertical pieces allude to the distinguished vertical element of a traditional town hall.

The theme of exposure is reinforced through the use of concrete waffle slabs, that, together with the systems are left exposed on the interior.

typical wall section (through limestone veneer wall)
scale: 3/16"=1'-0"
Essentially, the Town Hall maintains a conservative façade with traditional materials, but projecting bays of sleeker materials provide the contrast, and the balance, between tradition and change.
The transparent bays of the public corridor and of the Council Chambers highlight the points of public/government interaction.
as a metaphor of an open government
CIVIC facade
Each modular department includes open-office space and adaptable specialized supplemental spaces.

Departments are sandwiched between two single-loaded corridors along the exterior of the building.

The design of the building also reacts to the nature of democracy. The democratic system offers an opportunity for a continuum of change and development. Similarly, the design of the Town Hall enables the facility to expand and change, reacting to the needs of the growing community. Each repetitive bay within the departmental wing consists of open office space and a core of subsidiary spaces. The open-office concept allows for a flexibility of the function of the space. The supplementary spaces within each core can accommodate a variety of uses that pertain directly to a specific department, and can change depending on the needs for the space. Departments can easily expand or contract into nearby spaces, allowing for the size of a specific department to relate more closely to current needs. Conceivably, additional expansion of the Town Hall may occur through the addition of another bay to the north, or by doubling the bays into the parking lot to the west.
democracy: change
CONTEXTUAL RESPONSE

The design of the Town Hall responds contextually to the fabric of the township, not by replicating or reinterpreting the existing architecture, but by responding to the conservative nature of the township.

This design principle was integral to the thesis objective, as a "contextually-appropriate" building form promotes and suggests greater responsiveness to the citizens. An expression of the freedoms of democracy in an uncontrolled, demonstrative form would not be appropriate for the setting. Instead, a restrained and conservative design, focusing on the relationships and interaction between the public and the government, was established. The established palette of civic forms was enhanced rather than ignored.

The long, low building squats close to the ground, much like the conservative architecture of the township, and does not unnecessarily call attention to itself. Its horizontal emphasis allows it to comfortably sit on the flat landscape of the township. The materials of the building, a limestone and granite veneer, respond symbolically to government buildings of the past, providing a dignified presence.
Three sides of the Council Chambers are transparent allowing this formal space to visually connect with the surrounding township. On the fourth side citizens enter from behind the dais, seemingly scrutinizing the seated officials.

The conceptual design of the Council Chambers is modeled from the sanctuary of Frank Lloyds Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois. Besides being a preeminent communal space, Wright's space offers varying degrees of intimacy by spatially controlling its users.

The design of the Council Chambers culminates a study of the physical relationships between the common citizen and the elected official. The design purposefully allows for a more communal seating arrangement, as there will be no fixed seating, and diminishes an authoritative setting. No seat will be permanently fixed, so that the freedom of the seating arrangement can establish a democratic presence within the space. The chairs for the public will be exactly the same as those used at the dais for elected officials, so that equality between the two groups is clearly established. The citizens are allowed free movement through the space. A subtle formality is expressed through an axial entry, but the progression becomes less formal as citizens meander from behind the dais and formal backdrop and around to their seats. The arrangement, allowing citizens to remain behind the dais (at the entry, and at a second floor balcony peering into the space), develops a setting where the elected officials are subject to public scrutiny, and an atmosphere where the officials must be aware of, if not respond to, this scrutiny. A sunken seating space allows for a more intimate setting for small meetings, leaving the perimeter space for circulation. The perimeter of the space allows for increased seating, and even greater freedom with the seating arrangement; and being at a height higher than the dais, it further diminishes, physiologically, the authority of the elected officials.
Council Chambers

Highlighting the facility is the Town Council Chambers. This space is the most prominent feature of the building, as it is traditionally the most formal space of a town hall. Through its extensive transparency, the chambers allows the public to view the activities taking place inside.
The design of the dais also responds to the issues studied. It provides seating for the six elected officials of the township. Also integrated in design of the dais are public lecterns, "bookending" the dais between. The dual public lecterns encourage greater public interaction at the council meetings, and enhance the status of the group of citizens. There is no physical separation between the formal, focal piece for the elected officials and the informal, focal piece of the citizens.

The dais for the elected officials does not take visual or symbolic prominence over the public lectern; it instead provides an appropriate equality for the two groups as they are incorporated into one piece.
The Inclusive Town Hall

Council Chambers

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The planning of the civic campus further responds to the design objectives. It enriches the democracy by providing a destination point for the township’s citizens. A public plaza provides a place for community festivities and events and is visible and accessible from the main roads. Its location ties together the park-like design of the northeastern portion of the site and the more rigid, constructed atmosphere of the civic campus. By utilizing the Town Hall as a backdrop for events within the plaza, the interaction between the government and the public is enhanced. The civic site becomes a center of activity; its presence becomes less intimidating and the Town Hall becomes more approachable. The other public buildings of the site also border the civic plaza, providing a defined edge to the space.

The Town Hall is setback away from the main road, so as not to overpower the passerby. A long west façade of the building allows for the transparent projections to be viewed as one progresses down the main road.

The Council Chambers anchors a corner of buildings, giving it a dignified location and providing it with a subtle hierarchy. Parking radiates around it, and creates a dominant focus as one progresses towards the Town Hall. Approached by road from the south, two sides of the transparent chamber are viewed providing a dominant element on the landscape. Approached from the north, the transparent council chamber offers a slight contrast to that of the repetitive departmental wing massing.

The police and fire stations are located along northern edge of the site providing necessary access to the main road. The fire station also borders the civic plaza, enabling the on-duty firemen to associate with the public.

The library and recreation centers are purposefully situated deep in the site. Progression to these buildings passes the Town Hall, serving to further highlight interaction with this building. Their locations also allow for connection to the civic plaza, and connection to the park across the creek.
the civic campus

The locations of each of the civic buildings serve to highlight the Town Hall and to activate the civic plaza.
"We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us."
-Sir Winston Churchill

ARCHITECTURE CAN ONLY BE PLACED ALONG A CONTINUUM. THE DESIGN PROCESS KNOWS NO BEGINNING AND NO END. THIS THESIS PROJECT REPRESENTS ONLY ONE POINT ALONG THAT CONTINUUM, PRESENTING MY PROJECT IN 'FINAL' FORM. THIS PROJECT IS NOT COMPLETE, NOR WOULD IT HAVE BEEN IF CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS WERE FINISHED AND THE TOWN HALL WAS OPERABLE. THIS THESIS PROJECT CONDENSES A SHORT SEGMENT OF THAT CONTINUUM INTO AN EVEN SHORTER SEGMENT. THE EVOLUTION OF THIS PARTICULAR PROJECT BEGAN EARLIER THAN THE FIRST DAY OF THE SEMESTER AS I ASKED MYSELF "WHAT IS THE CORRELATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND ARCHITECTURE?" AND "HOW CAN ARCHITECTURE BEST REINFORCE THE IDEALS OF A GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM?", AND WILL CONTINUE YEARS FROM NOW, WHEN I INCORPORATE LESSONS LEARNED IN PRACTICE AND IN LIFE, AS I REPEAT THOSE QUESTIONS, AND ASK MYSELF "HOW COULD I HAVE BETTER ACCOMPLISHED THOSE GOALS?" THIS THESIS PROJECT HAS ONLY COMPILLED A FEW MONTHS OF A NEVER-ENDING BRAINSTORM INTO A FORTY-SIX PAGE BOOKLET.

REFLECTION
suggested readings

- [Book Title] by [Author], [Publisher], [Year]
- [Book Title] by [Author], [Publisher], [Year]
- [Article Title] in [Journal Name], Volume [Volume], Issue [Issue], Year [Year]
- [Conference Title]: [Proceedings], [Place of Conference], [Year]
- [Website Address]
- [Report Title], [Organization], [Year]
- [Email Address]
- [Phone Number]

Note: This is a list of suggested readings. Please check the most recent updates and sources for the most accurate information.