Designing for Community:  
A Community Center  
for Albany, Indiana  

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Designing for Community:
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an architectural thesis by

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This thesis project began with the question, "how can architecture, design, and the resulting built environment encourage 'community' and interpersonal interaction in a society of individuals, reality amidst virtuality, place amidst placelessness, a "local village" amidst the global village?"

In order to answer this question, I engaged in research, observation, and community meetings which are documented herein. From this background research, I selected a site which would allow me to explore what I had learned, engaged in "design play" ideation studies, and commenced to design a community center for Albany, Indiana.

In the design process, I often found myself torn by the opposing forces of program requirements, design concepts, and the genuine desire to encourage interaction. However, the strongest ideas of how to "encourage community," remained present in the final design: programming to include a variety of uses and users in one location/facility, provision of a central gathering space, and having residents interact with one another in the design process itself.

Above all, this thesis has become a part of my life. It is not finished, it has only begun. Like much of my architectural education, the most significant thing I have learned from this project is how to see. My awareness of community, interaction among people, and built environments which allow or encourage interaction has increased dramatically. I will continue to learn and observe people, groups, and places for people and groups, and I hope to be able to engage in design and community-building activities that will allow me to both utilize my knowledge and gain additional experience in this special arena.

This book is arranged in three parts. First, the theory and background research is presented. Second, a "Community Recipe Book," offers a summary of possibilities to consider when designing communities and community facilities. Finally, my design activities and final project are presented with accompanying notes explaining the influence of theory and design process on the finished product.
Thanks are due to those listed at right for insight, design consultation, conversations held after lectures, suggestions, support, and more. However, I would especially like to thank my thesis advisor Jim Segedy for taking an architecture student under his wing allowing me to dip into his treasure-store of wisdom. Thanks are due to Carlos Casuscelli for his interest in going above and beyond the call of duty to take an interest in the entire thesis class, and offer design consultation and encouragement to many, including myself. And I thank Dustin Hunter, a "mere" classmate who, more than anyone else, has taught me, encouraged me, and helped me to refine own ideas.

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- The residents of Sackett Street in Lynchburg, Virginia, where I first learned what a neighborhood community could be.

- Friends from Wesley Foundation, Gethsemane United Methodist Church, and Botsford/Swinford Hall.

- My roommates, Jamie Maxim, Matt Sfura, and Dan Stanley. Experiencing loving, encouraging relationships the "Jesus way" makes one realize that it is the only way and by far the best way!

The "Community" image used for the cover and numerous places throughout this document is from the New Song Community Church in Baltimore, Maryland. It is used by permission.
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Semester Process

- Reading and learning about "community"
  January
- Site selection
  February
- Meetings and interviews
  February
- Re-programming
  March
- Design investigations
  March
- Project design
  April
- Book production
  Lifetime
- Continuing development of community-building skills
Introduction
The Need for Community
Community seems to be emerging as quite a popular topic. It is discussed with regard to digital communities, global villages, new towns, and revival of interest in spirituality. Americans have discovered that in many cases, we do not have "community" any more, and many have discovered that they need it.

But what is community? What was it? What can it be as we move into a bold new future, unlike anything ever seen before? J.B. Jackson comments that, "It can be said that a landscape tradition a thousand years old in our Western world is yielding to a fluid organization of space that we do not entirely understand..." (Rybczynski, 233)

In this text, the term "community" is used primarily to denote a social entity, a group of people actively involved in one another's lives. In modern mobile society, this may differ significantly from the "community" commonly used to describe a geographic entity. Today, it is possible to have long distance relationships and employment, yet "geographic neighbors" who hardly know one another.

For this study of community, the end goal is to determine ways in which the built environment might encourage geographically local community by creating spaces that encourage people to interact with one another. Toward this end, the following have been studied and are included in this text:
- the psychological need for community and the yearning people have for genuine interaction
- the impact of various technologies which have caused and are causing changes to our definition of community
- the personal needs that "community" satisfies, and some ways in which the development of genuine community can be accomplished.

In observing current trends in American society, the following four points may be distilled:
• A society of individuals
• Need for reality amidst virtuality
• Need for place amidst placelessness
• Defining the "local village" within the global village

Our culture values individual freedom and self-centeredness to a rather dangerous level. Some have even referred to our behavior as "hostile individualism." (Segedy) Our culture not only breeds selfishness, self-centeredness, and greed, but also fear of one another. We have aspired to self-sufficiency with the pioneer spirit of our ancestors, yet forgotten that they often worked together. We have staked out our plots and built our forts. Our populations and places have grown to scales we are unfamiliar with. Now, we are afraid of one another, and we hoard our possessions and pets behind our fences and security systems, leaving only in our private tanks. We turn to our televisions, videos, video games, and interactive multimedia for recreation. In our efforts to fulfill our inborn human nature as social creatures, we long for the community we have lost, turning to the internet to find others like us. This in itself creates a sort of community perhaps, but offers questionable "real" interaction. How can these individuals interact with one another—those that are both similar and different—right around the corner?

Even as Americans have aspired to media portrayals of who we should be and what possessions we should own, we have seen media portrayals, especially those from the past, which cause us to yearn for a reality that is no longer available to us. We value community, neighborhoods, lemonade stands, swimming holes, and small problems which can be resolved happily in thirty minutes. In contrast, we HAVE dysfunctional communities; families which hardly communicate even with one another; few truly local gathering places; commuter churches; few community play places for all ages; few opportunities to interact with others; a culture which discourages any conflict, argument, or dirt; and a world which makes us afraid to take candy from others for fear of poison, and afraid to give candy away for fear of lawsuits.

Writer Judy Clark stumbled across a group of run-

"In our suburban neighborhoods, there is no local community because there are no local shops or public areas where we meet our immediate neighbors—only private houses and private yards, and the inhospitable streets."

(Corbett, 4)
aways she had the opportunity to talk with. She describes them in this way:

“They looked out for each other. If one got something, he shared it. One guy only ate half his food because he wanted to share the rest with a buddy who wasn't with us. They talked about watching each other’s backs. They were parents to each other. They really loved each other. They talked about being afraid, missing their moms, feeling abandoned, being hungry. They were living in a way I would never choose—but they had something that many clean, educated, “acceptable” people don’t.

“They had each other. They had real relationships. They were connected. That’s what we all want. We want real life. We don’t want to be like the hamster who runs through the Habitrail and spins on his wheel all day—alone and never getting anywhere. We want to relate. We want to connect. We want to be part of a community that takes care of each other.” (Clark)

Ms. Clark goes on to point out that even favorite television shows such as Cheers, Friends, Seinfeld, and Party of Five, follow the lives of people who appear to be connected. “And we desperately want that ourselves. We want and need good relationships.”

Dr. M. Scott Peck, author of The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace, points to many occasions which have allowed him, as a psychologist, to discover the deep inner need for connectedness and “community” that people experience. Peck has been so significantly impressed by the urgency of this need and the discovery of ways to fill it that he began, “the Foundation for Community Encouragement.”

One example Dr. Peck shares in The Different Drum is from what he expected to be a bland workshop about tribal healers. It turned out to reveal an intense hunger for community among healing, helping professionals.

“It turned out that virtually all the participants in this workshop were teachers, nurses, therapists, or ministers: Professional healers themselves. Living and working in urban Washington or its ‘bedroom communities,’ they felt profoundly isolated from their own society and those they served. The I Kung and the Fijian healers, as they were described in the article, lived with their patients in small, integrated rural groupings. As the members of the group spoke of the I Kung and Fijians, their eyes were filled

“We don’t want to be like the hamster who runs through the Habitrail and spins on his wheel all day—alone and never getting anywhere. We want to relate. We want to connect. We want to be part of a community that takes care of each other.” - Judy Clark

from New Song Community Church brochure, Baltimore, Maryland.
with yearning. The focus of the workshop quickly became their own shrieking loneliness." (Peck, 82)

Dr. Peck's definition of "community" is very much a social one, but there is also a yearning for the physical "community" that pervades the American collective conscious as an ideal.

While "community" can occur in any setting, the physical environment of a small town lends itself well to the need for social community of a manageable size. A 1989 Gallup poll revealed that 34% of Americans would prefer to live in small towns, a greater percentage than any other category. One of the most important features offered by a small town is that it is a "recognizable [geographic] community." (Rybczynski, 220)

Evidence of this desire for small-town living can be seen across the country as people retreat to smaller towns and cities and develop "new towns," or redevelop old ones following "traditional neighborhood development" strategies. Schaumburg, Illinois, is an one such existing city. Schaumburg is striving to create a small-town image by adding a clock tower and village center in the midst of a sprawling suburb. "Schaumburg wants a downtown, a village square, a place for folks to walk and talk, drink a cup of coffee, shop, or go to the library." (LeDuc)

Schaumburg is not alone in this pursuit of identity and places where community can grow and develop. Urban planners can point to dozens of similar situations across the country. Kennedy Smith, president of the Main Street Center at the National Trust for Historic Preservation says that "they're looking for places where a parade can happen." (LeDuc)

**History and future**

Attempts to create new "town centers" must be executed cautiously so as to be more than glorified shopping centers. The success of shopping centers and the mass consumption and stockpiling they encourage/permit are partly to blame for the collapse of "traditional downtowns." Shopping centers have, for the most part, replaced town centers. While providing a place from which to procure goods and services, a
shopping center lacks the diversity of a real town center. It denies possibilities to linger, work, live, eat, socialize, or play. It also fails because it is oriented to automobiles and tractor-trailers, not people. (Corbett, 111)

While the move from downtown and toward megastores and superhighways first caused the decline of downtowns and pedestrian-oriented interaction, the newest challenges to social and geographic communities are being brought about by technologies which increase the potential for mobility and isolation even more. Writing in Metropolis, Avial Ronell states that “virtual reality and cyberspace are inscriptions of a desire whose principal symptom can be seen as the absence of community.” (Metropolis, 50)

Perhaps this is a poetic interpretation of the facts. But the fact is that new technologies are allowing people to return to small-town life, but at the same time sequestering them from the possibilities of physical, live, interpersonal interaction. Thanks to opportunities for electronic work and play, people are retreating more and more to their homes. In fact more than 40 million people (1/3 of U.S. households) work at home regularly. (Herman Miller)

If these people are working in a neighborhood setting, then, one might expect them to interact with their neighbors. Researcher Penny Gurstein points out that designers often perceive the neighborhood as a physical place where residents engage in “face-to-face contact,” due simply to their proximity. She states, “my research has found, however, that urban North Americans do not live as envisioned by planners. They have limited contacts with neighbors. . .” (Angelli, 129) Hence, the need for places which encourage interaction and breed community.

Needs
What, then, is needed, for and through community, to create a healthier way of life? After the basic needs of food, water, and warmth, the psychologist Abraham Maslow listed security, social interaction, esteem, and self-actualization as urgent needs that must be met to achieve a full measure of satisfaction and happiness. (Corbett, 16) Relating these needs to community life,
Judy Corbett asserts that "a good neighborhood will offer security and privacy, and will aid a resident's feeling of identity, and will satisfy their needs for diversity and a sense of community." A neighborhood needs to be "one which allows us the opportunity to more easily satisfy our most basic social needs of identity, security and community, and which gives us the social experiences that help us to better relate to other individuals." (Corbett, 103)

With regard to built environments, contemporary urban areas and urban sprawl lack "form that serves as the stage and container for everyday life...[and] a continuous fabric or a coherent structure of buildings and landscapes." (Geddes, 9) These containers for life are lacking, yet Corbett asserts that "our state of mind, even our physical health, are profoundly affected by the social climate of our neighborhoods and environments." (Corbett, 104)

Can the constructed physical environment play a role in the development of healthy social environments and encouraging interaction among Americans? If so, how? Authors Carolyn Shaffer and Kristin Anundsen believe that "creating community anywhere," (the title of their book) is certainly possible. The line between "which came first," is a bit unclear however. They cite examples of citizens working together to create physical improvements to their environments, but the bonds that are formed in the mobilizing, meeting and working together play a significant role in the resulting spirit of "community."

Author Murray Bookchin also notes the importance of designing together for the creation of spaces that are relevant and unique to their creators. "Historically, the basis for a vital urban entity consisted not primarily of its design elements but of the nuclear relations between people that produced these elements. Human scale was more than a design on a drawing board; it emerged from intimate association provided by the clan, the guild, and the civic union of free, independent farmers and craftsmen...people created a city that formally and structurally sheltered their most essential and meaningful social relations." (Corbett, 18)

"People created a city that formally and structurally sheltered their most essential and meaningful social relations."

-Murray Bookchin

Designing for Community
So the first step to designing for community, then, is found in the design process itself. Dr. Peck asserts that (social) community-building must be an integral part of problem solving; he even states the rule, "community-building first, problem solving second." (Peck, 104) Taken in conjunction with the wisdom of the urban planners and theorists quoted above and an understanding of the design process, perhaps it is better stated that **problem solving can become an opportunity for community-building.**

Beyond working to build relationships and involve people in the design process, there are physical characteristics that make places more conducive to people and interaction. Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk contends that "design affects space, and space affects behavior." (Boles, 87)

On the pages that follow there are first a set of positive examples which portray environments which the author has observed to be especially conducive to community building. Following these examples is a "community recipe book," featuring lists of "ingredients," and a few "recipes," for designing for community. Finally, this book concludes with an architectural design project which attempted to take many of these ideas into consideration.
Observations of Good Examples

Inverted McGalliard
Judy Corbett, in her lecture at Ball State in the Spring of 1997, spoke of how public spaces should be created as outdoor rooms with solid edges. "Where would you have a picnic," she asked. On the green "moat" surrounding an office park, or in a park or plaza framed by dense urbanity? Her research indicates that people have a definite preference for the places which have some enclosure.

On a day my car was malfunctioning, I walked from the back of Gethsemane United Methodist Church to the back of Steak and Shake, facilities diagonal to one another on two of Muncie's busiest "strip" streets: McGalliard and Wheeling. In the process I crossed a small overgrown lot. Looking around from that vantage point, I realized that our urban sprawl is inverted. In Europe, this back lot would have been the public plaza facing a church, residences, shops, and restaurants. It felt pleasant. It was an enclosed area, protected from high-speed cars.

Botsford/Swinford Residence Hall, Ball State University
Dormitories and student centers can be excellent examples of places which encourage interaction through their programming and/or design. Campus living further encourages interaction by forcing students to travel on foot, thus limiting the distance they are from one another. Cafeterias and densely clustered, pedestrian oriented food services also increase the likelihood of casual meetings.

At Ball State, my observations are that there is one dormitory design that has a definite impact on the interaction of its residents. While some dormitories feature a common lounge, they allow direct access to student rooms without passing through that lounge. At Botsford/Swinford, students enter a hallway which wraps around the main lounge, which is separated only by a low wall and a few scattered screening panels. Students entering not only pass all others who are watching television, playing pool or cards, work-
ing on homework, or playing piano, they also pass a "desk" which provides services and has visual control of the lounge and those entering the residential area. The desk is staffed by residents of the complex.

At Botsford/Swinford, both the program and location/design of the common facilities encourage interaction. Students must interact to redefine the flexible seating and must develop systems of courtesy for conflicting activities such as watching television and playing the piano. Students have the opportunity to interact as they enter and pass the lounge, and as they pass the desk or stop to buy a stamp. The desk also maintains a nearby computer lab and weight room. In this arrangement, all students entering, leaving, recreating, or using services come in contact with each other. They have no choice.

Botsford/Swinford also feature a common "outdoor room" framed by the two halls and the lounge that joins them. This "V" as it is called, takes advantage of the "eyes on the street" principle suggested by many planners: residents keep and eye on and even interact with friends and neighbors visible out their window in the common area.

Botsford/Swinford Hall has been named "Hall of the Year" many times more than its fair share.

**Sackett Street, Lynchburg, VA**

At an early age, my mother pointed out the differences in the "community" where she grew up and the one in which we were living. Both were storybook settings relative to many other locations, but Sackett Street in Lynchburg, Virginia, was a special place when she was growing up, and was still when I visited years later. Parents and their grown children lived across the street, neighbors helped and respected one another, even if they did not agree on everything. They shared resources and swimming pools, and sipped iced tea together. The kids were raised almost communally, with all the neighbors looking out for each other.

I can find little profound physical evidence for the suc-
cess of this community. Perhaps it is a remnant from an older social structure, or perhaps a place smiled upon by luck. However, the neighbors live in close proximity and historically have had unfenced yards with large gardens. (In other words, they were outside a lot and had chances to see one another.) Further, the “community” present in this neighborhood is primarily limited to a one block area of a low-traffic street.

**The Plaza, Lynchburg, VA**

Another example from Lynchburg is the Plaza shopping complex. Rather than being built as a linear shopping center on “the strip” somewhere, the Plaza wraps itself around a fairly well-landscaped parking lot in the middle of a residential area. Over recent years, its periphery has seen the addition of a few unfortunate gas stations and restaurants, but as an idea it is still worthy of note. If living nearby, it is possible and not unpleasant to walk to the plaza and buy new clothes or household necessities, get an ice-cream cone, or watch a movie.

**Olean Y**

In the small, traditional town of Olean, New York, I observed interaction resulting from the use of one of the few recreational opportunities available to residents in the winter. During the lunch hour, many local businesspersons walk to the local YMCA for a swim. This is possible in Olean because homes and businesses are within (pedestrian-friendly) walking distance from recreational opportunities and shared amenities.

**German and Victorian Villages, Columbus, OH**

Each of these “villages” within the greater city of Columbus has its own specific character, and that is perhaps what makes them successful and popular places to live.

German Village is densely packed with small 1-3 story buildings all built around the same time, but with a great deal of diversity. It faces a park to the south,
and offers many small restaurants, some of which have outdoor seating. Streets are very narrow, but sidewalks are generous, and the street plantings and tiny gardens are beautifully maintained. The park hosts a variety of summer activities, including outdoor plays.

Victorian village basically wraps around a large park with an assortment of large Victorian houses and a few newer "Victorian" apartment buildings. One side of "Victorian Village" is also faces the "Short North" gallery/social district. The park occasionally hosts festivals or bands, and offers tennis courts.

Both offer a defined "village," close pedestrian proximity to basic goods and services, a variety of housing options, nearby parks, and front porches and/or public niches. Each also makes a programmatic effort to bring people together through special events.

Spandau, Germany
I confess, I don’t know much about Spandau, a suburb of Berlin, Germany. But what I observed in the afternoon I spent there was a hierarchy of vehicular circulation, mixed use of streets, mixed-use buildings, a defined urban edge, public plazas and greenspaces, and civic monuments/focal points.

Spandau offers standard city streets, but adjacent to the main street is a planted public plaza, and cobblestoned area butting up against shops and housing that are obviously oriented to pedestrians. The unique aspect is that what appears to be a cobblestone plaza and sidewalk is also a slow-speed, low-volume street. I can only speculate as to the interaction in Spandau, but with close living and shopping opportunities, beautiful public areas, and the opportunity to be a pedestrian and walk from place to place, I would speculate that this physical community encourages social community.
Hansaplatz, Berlin
Hansaplatz is essentially a subway station in the middle of the Hansa Quarter (Hansaviertel) in Berlin. This subway station sits in a parklike setting from which spring the giant apartment blocks designed by world renowned architects for the International Building Exhibition. This meager, one story (above ground) subway station provides not only transportation, but basic goods and services to residents of the apartments.

Much like other examples, it combines numerous amenities into a single convenient location. In addition to being a subway and bus stop, Hansaplatz features a library, grocery, drug store, gift and photo shop, bakery, florist, and public theater.

While I was residing in Berlin for three weeks, it was convenient to pick up a loaf of bread at the bakery in the morning, or to get groceries on the way home at night. The design of the station, a covered pavilion with individual shops underneath, afforded pleasant places to wait for friends or rest while waiting for the bus.

Hansaplatz in Berlin. Part of the subway station with its amenities can be seen in the foreground.
Village Homes, Davis, CA
In a post-occupancy evaluation of Village Homes, Thomas Lenz found that the most appreciated elements of the development were semi-public open spaces, the community center, and the opportunities that these afforded for children to play and for adults and children alike to interact with their neighbors. “Consequently, residents of Village Homes socialize much more that their counterparts in the control neighborhood and also know their neighbors better.”

When compared to other neighborhoods, Village Homes’ residents had more friends and more best friends in their community that others, and knew far more of their neighbors. (Lenz)

Among the reasons for the success at Village Homes are the self-governemtn and communal control of public space. “Residents are directly involved in the decision-making process, thus fostering interaction between neighbors.” (Center for Livable Communities)

The community also offers a supportive environment for Children where they “have the opportunity to develop social relationships among a broad spectrum of people. The daycare is a safe walk away for every child in the neighborhood.” (Center for Livable Communities)
“Imagine living in a town where you can do most of your errands on foot in five minutes, not counting the time you stop and talk to friends and shopkeepers. The tree-lined street you live on is narrow enough, and the buildings close enough to the street, that you can call across to your neighbor’s porch or balcony. Dwellings, set companionably close together, complement one another in style, but differ in size, cost and density. They include apartments, townhouses, single-family homes, and dwellings with “in-law” units occupied by elderly parents or college-aged kids. You can walk to nearby small office buildings as well as parks, playgrounds, health and entertainment complexes, and commercial and government centers. If you work at home, as people are increasingly doing these days, you need not fear isolation; people congregate daily at the main library and post office, which are also within walking distance, to read the bulletin boards and exchange information.”

(Shaffer and Anundsen, 104)
Psychology
Dr. M Scott Peck, in his book *A Different Drum*, explains social community building as a roughly four-step process. The descriptions below have been paraphrased and simplified, and anyone interested in learning about group behavior or community-building would be well advised to read the book.

1. **Pseudocommunity**, in which members of a group fake pleasantness and make small talk.

2. **Chaos**, what occurs when they stop being pleasant and get annoyed with one another. Also a phase in which members attempt to “heal and convert” one another.

3. **Emptiness**, a giving up of personal complaints and selfishness. A time of putting aside one’s own preconceptions, prejudices, expectations, ideology, desire to heal and convert, and need to control.

4. **Community**. Joy. People heal and convert themselves in the nurturing, supportive environment of “community.”

This psychological background can be useful in working with groups. Recognize what phase they are in. Recognize that chaos is progress toward community. Guide so that chaos does not slip into dreaded the “organization,” but makes it through emptiness to community.

(Peck, pp. 86-106)
Site Selection
When designing a community facility, a specific place which is to encourage interaction, a site might be con-
sidered which is already in close proximity to existing
amenities or convenient pedestrian access to residen-
tial and commercial areas.

Meetings and Interviews
Learn about group behavior and community interac-
tion and utilize that knowledge to help citizen groups
get acquainted and learn to work together. Consider
the meetings and interviews not only as an important
part of the design process, where residents can make
the project their own, but also conside them an impor-
tant step in the development of community.

A sampling of questions and ideas are listed below.
For more ideas and resources, see Planning to Stay,
Creating Community Anywhere, or City Comforts (pub-
lication information is in the Bibliography).

• What is it about this place that draws us here?
• What could we add to this place that will keep
us here?
• What is your relationship to CITY? How long
have you lived here, etc.
• CITY history.
• How would you describe CITY and the people
who live in and around it?
• Your lifestyle description, including interests,
where and how you spend your time.
• What are your favorite places in CITY?
• What are your least favorite places in CITY?
• What are your favorite places? Buildings?
(anywhere) Why?
• What is good in CITY?
• What is bad?
• What is there a need for in CITY?
• Where do you most frequently run into people
you know?
• Tell me about newcomers to town and how they
are received/assimilated
• What are CITY’s “community treasures?”
(Berkebile)
• To you, what would make the ideal commu-
nity?
• What are your goals for CITY?
Designing for Community Charrette

9:00 AM Welcome & Breakfast
Purpose of “charrette”
Explaining my project, how your input will be used
Brainstorming for community as a whole
Brainstorming for a community center
Process
We will attempt to become a community and practice good communication
Then we will attack the tasks at hand

9:30 AM  Phase One - Becoming a Community
Introductions
  Name, time lived in CITY
  Involvement in CITY
  Who are you? What do you like?
  Describe your lifestyle, where and how you spend your time
  What are your favorite places
  What is your vision for your community, ideally

10:30 Phase Two - Reflections and Personal Record-Keeping
What have you thought about so far? Write down preconceptions and your ideas to get them out of your system.

What have you disagreed with so far? Write down preconceptions and your ideas to get them out of your system.

What biases might you have - preconceived ideas, personal grudges, personal preferences? Write down preconceptions and your ideas to get them out of your system.

What do you appreciate about each person here?

11:00 A.M.  Phase Three - Teamwork
Community Treasures - people, places, ideals, history
What stands in the way?
What can we agree we want to have?
Drawing on maps, playing with blocks, other activities.
One last dream session - tell me a tale of CITY in 10 years

12:00 Departure
Engage in quick ideation, brainstorming. Don’t think too much. List the big issues and combinations thereof, then dream up solutions and imagery.

Here are relevant explorations from the Albany Community Center project.

- explore cyberpod-reality connection
- explore park/urban image and link
- nature edge/city edge
- explore integration spaces - intersections and paths
- creating an urban edge and identity, gateway
- technology
- spaces to fit human form and needs
- exiting home-fortresses to public areas
- civic image
Main Course
A community center, or community facility. A hub. A single facility or complex which might encourage interaction.

David Sucher, in City Comforts states that "the possibility of an accidental meeting is what makes the city a fertile place." (Sucher, 25) The goal of a community facility, aside from providing basic services and amenities, is to plan for accidental meetings and cause them to happen.

The "Main Course" could be any number of things. Herein are listed a variety of ideas and possible program items which might be combined into a coming-together place.

From the lists that follow and the research presented, earlier, the following seven basic principles may be distilled. It is suggested that these basic concepts for ways to encourage interaction be considered when selecting from the lists and ideas that follow.

Encourage Interaction:
- Through the design process! (Using community-building group exercises as described elsewhere in this text.)
- Grouping of shared resources
- Grouping of spaces that are used on an everyday basis
- Intersection of various uses
- Non-rigid organization - encourage interaction in the use of the space
- Incorporate a variety of uses and users
- Incorporate places to meet and linger

"The possibility of an accidental meeting is what makes the city a fertile place."

David Sucher
Design Considerations

"Use datums, axes, and grids. Public spaces are not just the residue of private development, but the dominant figures in the city." ("The New Urban Design", p. 79.)

Pedestrianized, mixed-use urban core with medium- and high-density housing." ("Burlington Urban Design Study", p 132)

Human scale
Height
Texture
Proximity
Shade
Regulation of vehicular dominance
Defined edges
Must not look like a shopping center, but does not need to look like an old-fashioned town, either
Build to the sidewalk
Permeable storefront - be able to see in and out
Do not put parking lots in front
An example building, so that others might take note
No excessive organization - allow some space definition/scheduling to be a community-building experience.
A safe place to be vulnerable
Individuality (places for, and a sense of)
Commitment
Ritual
A safe form, yet open enough to encourage inclusivity

Ingredients

"To function as the town center, the area should have shops, stores, businesses, restaurants, sidewalk cafes, theaters, schools, and professional and governmental offices. It should also have open spaces in the form of parks, plazas, bowling greens, horseshoe pits, and so on." (Corbett, 111)

Rail/bus station
Guest house
Public open space
Housing
Offices
A post office where residents PICK UP their mail
(Shaffer, 105)
Stamp and vending machines
Shops, but include more than trendy shopping
Health center/wellness center
Park
Entertainment - bowling, cinema, community stage,
Library
How-to books center
Tool center
ATM
Telecommuting center
"E-mail" post office
Coffee
Recreation (indoors and out)
Meeting/gathering/viewing area
Picnic areas, places for food vendors
Community bulletin board

By bringing most of the needs of daily living within walking distance, the elderly and the young gain independence of movement."

-Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (Boles, p. 87)

Bumping into people
Provide seats
Let people purchase food or drink
Offer a conversation piece
Build neighborhoods for the social stroll
Put public space in the sun
Public games tables
Build close to the sidewalk
Provide a place for music
People the parking lot
Build bus shelters with public services
Allow strangers to sit together
Create public spaces with seats
Let readers sip

(Sucher, 24)

San Francisco Barn-Raising
A San Francisco project awards grants to small community projects to encourage "21st century barn-raising," by involving local citizens in the design and implementation of the project. (Simon, A19)
Neighborhood, Village, Town
Ideas for the "big picture." Encouraging community and healthy living beyond the community center. Providing identity.

"Shared sense of place and history" (Tibbles)
Sense of identity and belonging
- public spaces
- schools used by the residents
- parks
- celebrate local/regional landscape, heritage, industry, schools.
Shared Resources (commercial and civic), including technology for all
Locally managed services
Variety of density
Variety of uses, users
Places to gather
Places to linger
Places to watch people
Extensive, pleasant sidewalk/pedestrian circulation
Trees and greenery
Regular street grid to disperse traffic, allow for growth,
Allow people to do together what they normally do individually, anyway (Forman)
Urban identity/edge
- curbs
- contained/framed plantings
- street furniture/fixtures
  benches
  lights
  grates/grills
  railings
  banners
  shelters/trellises
  transit stops

To accompany the main course.
Housing Concepts

Housing concepts could easily compose a volume, or even a library, of their own. Here is one developed from an intriguing grouping of houses in Columbus, Ohio. The premise is that the houses face a common front yard, which in turn faces the street. This shared front yard creates a semi-private shared space which might encourage residents to interact with one another. This arrangement could incorporate buildings of differing density within the block.

These houses on Fifth Avenue in Columbus, Ohio face a common courtyard. A similar approach could be used to provide pleasant mixed-density housing to encourage community. Private micro-gardens could be planted in front of the dwellings, and the area within the path is a common greenspace/garden.
Design Project

A community center for Albany, Indiana.
Early on, I realized that the selection of a particular site would have a dramatic affect on the thesis project. I began considering several different contexts. Among them were suburban neighborhoods/developments lacking identity and amenities, areas in need of revitalization in towns and cities, and "new towns."

After research and discussions with Dr. Segedy, I determined that the best place to design a community center might be a site which would allow me to explore an existing small town which is a satellite to a larger city.

Albany was selected because it has aspects of a number of features of interest to one studying communities. First, it is a small town with the personal relationships and "feel" that many persons in modern society are seeking out. Second, it is to a degree, and will continue to be a bedroom community of a larger city: Muncie. Many residents of Albany regularly commute 15 or more miles to Muncie for work, recreation, church, and basic goods and services. Third, as are many other small towns, it is struggling to discover its new identity in a modern mobile culture. Albany is a setting in which I was able to explore the revitalized downtown as a new social center for persons who commute elsewhere for work, the town center as a new suburban hub.

While I initially was enamored with a series of vacant lots adjacent to the railroad in the center of town (because of the future transit possibilities and the non-cartesian angle), I have selected a site across from the post office and next to a fairly nice park which is poorly connected to the "main street" it adjoins. It is hoped that my community facility can bridge the downtown and the park, and encourage interaction by relating to these existing, utilized amenities.
1. Adjacent to park, near school and nursing home.
3. Abandoned structure across from United Methodist Church.
4. License branch and adjacent lot across creek from park.
5. Adjacent to water plant and park, across from post office and police.
6. Spanning creek, adjacent to post office, potential shared parking with church, potential soccer field/greenspace.
Site map, 1/64" = 1'-0" (above)
Overview of park and site, n.i.s. (right)
Site Photos
(top to bottom)

1. View of the site looking southeast
2. View of the site looking west southwest
3. View of the site looking north
4. View of the site looking east.
Site Context

Albany License Branch, located across the street from the northeast corner of the site.

Downtown Albany, looking west toward the site.

Downtown Albany

Building across the street from the north side of the site.
Images from downtown Albany. Note the structural beams over the storefront, the slightly protruding structural piers, and the horizontal banding. These were inspirations for detailing schemes for the community center.
Site Analysis

These analyses were done early on. The illustration on the following page later proved to be especially important as the design process returned to the notion of a "hard" urban edge and a "soft" creek edge.
In order to better understand the social context of Albany, and in an effort to gain experience in conducting interviews and design meetings, I sought out Albany residents with whom I could meet.

First, I interviewed Mrs. Beverly Renner. I was later able to meet with the local Business Association over a pancake breakfast at the Lion’s club (which happens to be immediately south of the site.)

From these meetings, I gleaned much information about Albany and its spirit. (Documentation of Mrs Renner’s interview and a meeting outline from the breakfast meeting may be found in the appendix.) Items I learned which played a key role in my design are:

- The community library, staffed by volunteers, which may need a new home
- The annual parades and cooperative decoration of town
- The need for facilities for headstart
- A strong interest in a physical fitness center
- Plenty of activities and groups to warrant meeting rooms
- A liking for natural stone
- A quiet compassion for one another
- Yes, Albany is a commuter town!
- Telecommuting, indeed, is coming to Albany
- An interest in local history, and a need to showcase it
In light of the context of Albany and its needs, I redeveloped the program from its original, generic form (see appendix). In the process of rewriting the program, I also developed a fairly comprehensive and effective programming database. Unfortunately, I have yet to master exporting from the database, so included here is a “program summary,” with a bit of description and some estimated square footages. References used in programming include The Architect’s Studio Companion, and a program for the Larry Joe Harless Community Center, developed by SEM Partners, Architects, of Beckley, WV.

The program was developed carefully to incorporate a variety of spaces which would bring together persons of different ages for various purposes. Consideration was given to 16-hour/day usage and the types of uses that would occupy each space over the course of each weekday and weekend day.

**Multipurpose Spaces**

*Multipurpose Room, 120 occupants, 2000 s.f.*

A room or series of spaces that can accommodate groups of varying sizes, especially for meetings and gatherings. This space will host large group meetings, wedding receptions, luncheons, socials, continuing education seminars. May be used by head start. Could be used for indoor volleyball.

Must be adjacent to outdoor terraces, kitchen, perhaps the coffee station, perhaps the headstart rooms.

*Game Room, 900 s.f.*

A recreational gaming area designed with youth in mind. Featuring pool tables and electronic games. May be used by senior citizens or businesspersons during their lunch hour. Should be somewhat acoustically shielded. Should be near a gathering or multipurpose space and either the kitchen or coffee station.

*Kitchen, 400 s.f.*

Kitchen designed to accommodate in house preparation or catered foodservice. Should be adjacent to multipurpose area and offer an appropriate serving counter.
Information Center

*Information Center, 920 s.f.*
A place for the dissemination of information. Featuring video, book, and resource shelving, as well as computer stations for internet research, interlibrary loan, multimedia, and local e-mail service. Should include reading/sitting areas, and areas for community history exhibitions.

*Office/Circulation, 250 s.f.*
Including output devices for computer workstations.

*Video Conferencing Room, 180 s.f.*
A room from which local businesses could conduct videoconferences of in which televised/videoconferenced distance learning sessions could be held. May also be used for the showing of videos.

*Telecommuting Center, 200 s.f.*
Four small single-user "isolation booths," to be rented for use by persons needing to use high-end/extended duration computer resources or conduct web-conferences.

Fitness Center

*Fitness Center, 1800 s.f.*
A facility for weight training and aerobic exercise utilizing nautilus, stationary bicycle, starimaster, and similar equipment.

*Locker Rooms, 1400 s.f. (700 each)*
Locker rooms to serve the fitness center, nearby outdoor activities, and any future pool or athletic expansions.

Headstart

*Headstart Classrooms, 1000 s.f.*
Approximately two classrooms. Might be utilized for other uses during off hours.

*Headstart Workroom, 250 s.f.*
Office and supply area for the headstart program. Immediate adjacency to headstart classrooms.
Miscellaneous

Entry/Coffee Station, 400 s.f.
To serve as an arrival and gathering point for the community center. Casual use as a people-watching space with snacking and local information. Coffee/refreshment service available by contract or concession.

This space will serve as the hub of activity, a place where people’s paths cross and they are caused to interact. It is a place that is comfortable to sit in or pass through. Should feel like a coming together point, where community meets community center.

Facility Administration, 200 s.f.

Public Restrooms, 500 s.f. (2 at 250 s.f.)
Design
Play

Explorations of a variety of ideas and relationships in collage and sketch/idea form. Refer to the appendix for the full set of sketches from these explorations.
After generating ideas and looking at issues, I began to tackle to design task. Important in the decision-making process were points of entry, urban and park edges, bridging the context of park and town, functionality, and interaction among the various program spaces.

The design process began with three basic ideas which attempted to solve the connectional and functional requirements of the program, but all three focused on trying to cram as many spaces as possible around a central core while giving all access to the creek side.

After meeting with Professor Segedy and later Dustin Hunter, I began to explore the notion that the “communal” space, the connector, could be a type of spine which the various spaces were attached to and looked into. This notion also took on the form of the creek with a curve.

Efforts to develop the curve also proved difficult and not entirely practical with respect to the other design criteria.

Finally, I found the right approach for this project: a straight spine, with the exterior wall on the creek side taking the form of the curve.

Along the way, it was often difficult to discern where program concerns and “interaction” goals should part ways. Some things which cause interaction work against program goals.

The final design offers a functional, elegant design for Albany, and also offers a potential prototype layout for future projects using the spine approach.
Stages of plan development.
Design developments through massing and details.
The 3-D models which follow unfortunately do not show the metal accents or the curtainwall on the east facade, or the windows. They do, however, give a good idea what the massing of the building would look like, especially the use of brick and stone. With respect to materiality, the design intent is to move from heavy, blocky masonry with stone accents on the west side to lighter steel, glass and stone on the park side.

Images of the small physical model which was constructed for this project were not available at the time of publication.
Suggestions for the further development of Albany

It is proposed that Albany further develop a park “corridor” including the current park, the undeveloped land along the creek to the north, and the wide railroad right of way. This park corridor could become a jogging/biking trail with recreational amenities along the way.

The areas colored blue are suggested for higher density, mixed-type housing, perhaps following the model outlined earlier in this book. These areas, close to the community center and park, could be especially suited to the elderly and to young families.

The brown zones are ones which might be developed according to the standard of “traditional Albany,” single family residences along the street with sidewalks and wide grass & tree strips adjacent to the road.

It is suggested that the entire town within the brown boundary look for ways to establish its “urban identity,” so that areas within that boundary are definitively “Albany.”
Conclusion