



**DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC
REVITALIZATION IN**

West  Point

C a l i f o r n i a

Javan Bowsher
University of California, Davis
Senior Thesis
2013

SIGNATURES

Downtown Economic Revitalization in West Point, CA

2013 Senior Project, Javan Bowsher

Presented to the faculty of the Landscape Architecture Program at the University of California, Davis in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Bachelors of Science of Landscape Architecture.

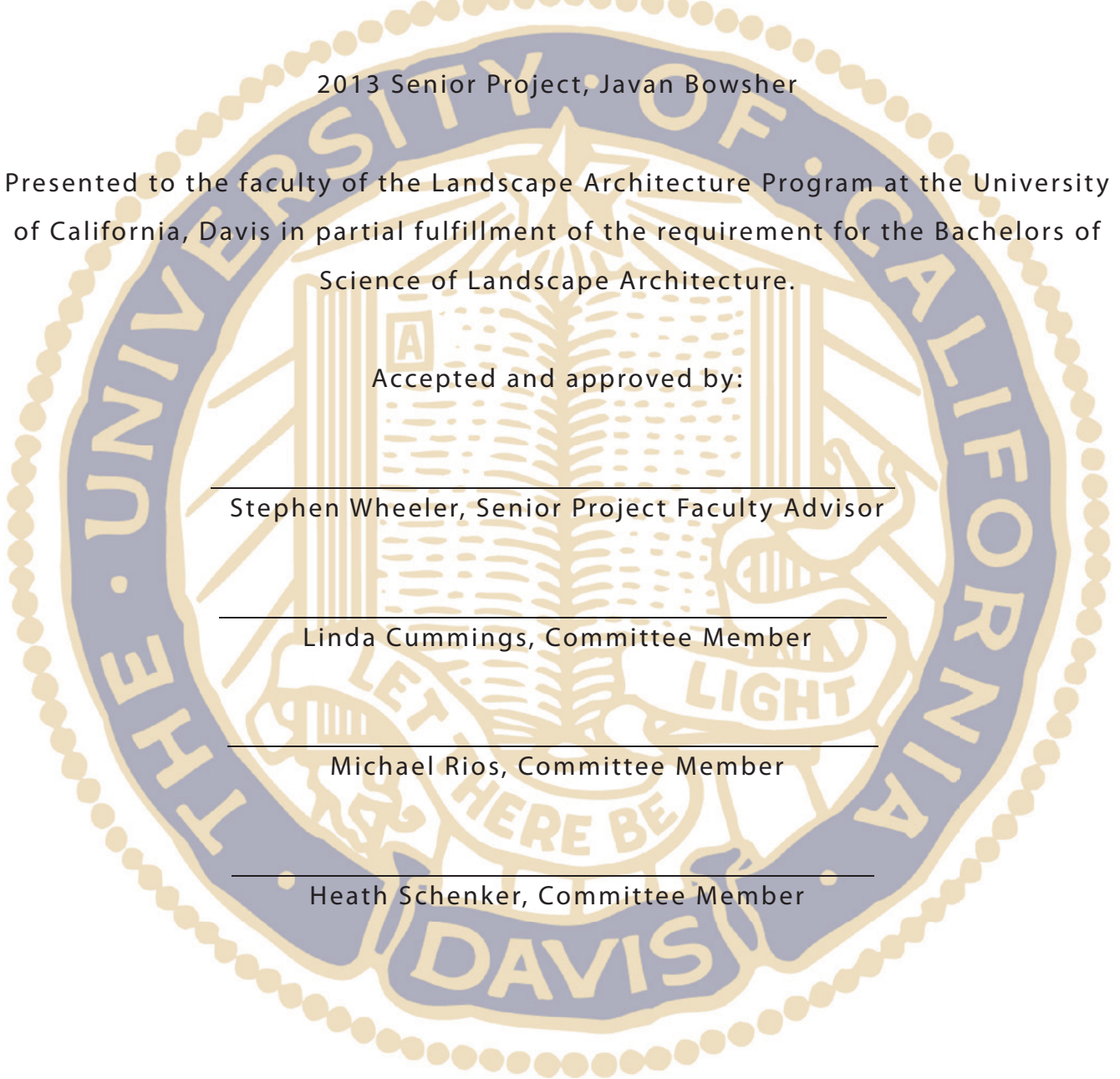
Accepted and approved by:

Stephen Wheeler, Senior Project Faculty Advisor

Linda Cummings, Committee Member

Michael Rios, Committee Member

Heath Schenker, Committee Member



ABSTRACT

The purpose for this project is to address the decline in rural economies, using design and landscape architecture to improve economic situations in small towns. The project focused on my hometown of West Point, CA, located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains about an hour and a half from both Sacramento and Lake Tahoe.

The focus of the project is on improving the quality of life in town by designing West Point's first park as a cornerstone for further improvement, which focuses on the town's rich logging history. Additionally, a guide has been made to guide individuals or groups who may have been stimulated by the positive effects of the park and wish to continue the revitalization effort through the rest of the downtown area.

The final goal of the design and future guidelines is to attract tourists to the West Point area, allowing them to benefit from its rich natural beauty, history, and improved downtown, while also bringing in new money to stimulate West Point's economy.

Key words: economic revitalization, west point, small towns, logging park, rural economies

BIOGRAPHY

Javan Bowsher hopes to be a registered landscape architect designing public places with a focus on improving rural towns. He seeks to improve their economies and bring their charm to the rest of the world.

Other than designing landscapes and outdoor spaces, Javan likes to work in his garden, read, and do outside activities such as biking, hiking, and playing catch.

After graduation, Javan would like to do some traveling and camping with his new wife, who he will be marrying the week after graduation. He plans to go on lots of adventures with her and hopefully some Christian mission trips.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, Linda Cummings, Michael Rios, and Heath Schenker, for all of the help and advice they have given to me throughout this project.

I would like to thank Stephen and Gayle for putting so much of their time into helping all of us seniors with our senior projects.

I would also like to thank my family for always supporting my ideas and helping me to find new ones.

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* All images created or taken by the author, Javan Bowsher, unless otherwise noted.



RESEARCH

QUESTIONS & DESCRIPTIONS

Research Question

Earlier this year, a reporter wrote that “in the past four years, more than 50 percent of rural counties have seen their population decline” (Doering, 2013). That is a huge number that reflects the rise in urban living in America, as well as the decline in rural economies. As these economies get worse, more people leave, creating a downward spiral, causing many of our rural small towns to suffer. The question that I sought to answer is how can we use design of key areas to bring people back to small towns as tourists as well as stemming the flow of people moving away, thereby increasing the economies and helping those towns out of their hardships?

Project Description

For this project I focused on West Point, CA, designing a park as the cornerstone of the economic revitalization and launching point for the redesign of the rest of its downtown. West Point has a population of 674 and is about half an hour from the closest grocery store and forty-five minutes from the area’s high school (American Fact Finder, 2013). The idea behind the project is that if the heart of the town can be revitalized, that revitalization will spread throughout the rest of the town. The project has two parts; the first and largest section focuses on designing a park downtown adjacent to Main Street, which has a logging theme in accordance with the town’s logging history, as a way to introduce the community to the idea and benefits of improving the downtown. The second part focuses on setting down steps by which the rest of Main Street could be revitalized including laying out a simple plan that lists potential programs that would benefit the area and draw in tourists. In the end, this project will serve as an example for how other small towns can revitalize their own downtown economies and increase tourism.

HYPOTHESIS & METHODS

Research Methods

To provide the most successful answer to my question of how to bring tourists to small towns I have researched four case studies of small towns that have gone through a similar revitalization process. I looked at each town and determined its main goals, the process it went through to reach those goals, and whether the project was successful or not. I investigated the demographics, age, and income of West Point residents. I also completed a literature review of a manual produced by Pennsylvania State University designed to help small town revitalization efforts, which lists and describes the most fundamental features of a successful downtown program.

Hypothesis

For this project I intend to specify key areas which need improvement, such as improving the existing degraded building strip, creating a park, and adding new businesses with the intent of drawing in tourists and visitors. The next step would be to design and build the park, which ought to create pride in the downtown area so that funds to continue the revitalization process can be acquired more easily. Once those funds have been acquired improvements to the streetscape can begin by narrowing the roadway and adding sidewalks, which will create a more comfortable atmosphere and create a desire in people to utilize downtown for events and hang out later which will put more eyes on the street and limit any crime there. The next step would be to improve and build upon any existing unimproved lots, putting in new businesses, such as restaurants and recreational businesses. This should create more jobs, and create a reason for tourists to want to visit West Point and enjoy its attractions. As more people come to the town , it will bring in a fresh flow of income for the businesses downtown, thereby improving the economy.

CASE STUDIES

Malden, MA

In 2008, the city of Malden, MA began work to revitalize their downtown area with the hopes of embracing a creative economy, improving public areas such as squares and streetscapes, improving public transportation, and bringing in new businesses. While work is still ongoing, many of their projects have been finished. To cater to artists and to bring in the economy that stems from their work, the Malden Redevelopment Authority (MRA) developed and built the Irving Street Studios as 9 live/work spaces for artists, which they then sold as condominiums for \$125,000. The city also began construction on \$3.5 million worth of public improvements throughout downtown and Malden Square, planting new flowering street trees, replacing old lighting to “period” lighting, and resurfacing the roadway. They gave the Malden Center Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) station seen in Fig.1, a face-lift, putting in \$6 million to beautify this gateway to downtown, and improving the public transportation in the area. The MRA replaced a vacant building with a 17,000 square foot senior center, which allows senior citizens to participate in many programs downtown. They also allowed a private



Fig. 1: The new MBTA station.

These improvements by the city and MRA focused on key areas throughout downtown and enriched them, often using federal grants. According to the city’s website, their “efforts are indeed paying off”, suggesting that if certain important sites and improvements are done, then the entire downtown does not need to be rebuilt (City of Malden, 2012). Overall, the Malden downtown revitalization program was successful, focusing on improving the streetscape, gateways into the area, the public sites, and bringing in new businesses to bring new life into the economy.

CASE STUDIES

Twentynine Palms, CA

The city of Twentynine Palms set about creating a Downtown Economic Revitalization Plan in 2012 that would promote the community's vision for the area. Currently, it is still in the planning and design phase. Twentynine Palms took a slightly different approach than Malden, by systematically looking at the existing conditions, meeting with stakeholders about new ideas, meeting with CalTrans, who controls the roadway, meeting with the Redevelopment Agency, and finally having a City Council workshop to plan out a preliminary design, seen in Fig. 2. In the Twentynine Palms project, the city identified several key concerns after they had finished their preliminary research, interviews, and meetings. These concerns included controlling heavy traffic along the highway that runs through downtown, improving cleanliness, and attracting appropriate businesses that cater to a diverse market, as well as creating a safe, memorable, walkable, and inviting downtown (Twentynine Palms, 2012).

So far, it is unknown whether this plan will succeed, as the project has not been built yet, but having such a systematic approach has helped to organize their designs in a logical way. By meeting with all of the key stakeholders, the city was able to give the community a way of being involved and taking their desires into consideration. This helps to bring the community onboard with the project, and by allowing their ideas to be included helps those stakeholders to become passionate about the new design and willing to help and contribute later.



Fig. 2: City planning meeting in 29 Palms.

Newport, PA

Newport is a small town in Pennsylvania that began work on their downtown area in 1990. Newport Revitalization, Inc. (NRI), was formed in 1990 by a few residents concerned about the decline of Newport's downtown to improve the downtown area.

CASE STUDIES

The NRI was able to gain non-profit status which has allowed them to get many grants and financial aid. It is guided by a strategic plan developed in combination with the Pennsylvania Downtown Center that is then guided by a number of surveys, including a consumer survey and market analysis, a business owner survey and analysis, and a preliminary historic sites survey. One important point that the NRI has focused on is recognizing that small, visible accomplishments help to generate community enthusiasm. Using grants from Pennsylvania Power and Light, they focused first on improving facades within downtown to beautify that area. Along with this visible success, the NRI has initiated an annual clean-up and flower planting day to build community ownership as well as beautifying downtown. The NRI also worked with Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) to help rebuild Main Street, add new crosswalks, new lighting, and new downtown landscaping. The NRI also incorporates promotional activities within its goals to raise awareness and funds for future renovation projects. These activities include a Christmas House Tour, Newport's Ole Fashion Christmas, and Canal Day. Finally, the NRI has a periodic column in the local newspaper that highlights the group's recent activities (Shields, 2001).

The success of Newport's downtown revitalization program hinged on the creation of Newport Revitalization, Inc. which effectively spearheaded the successful revitalization of the downtown. The group had a unique plan in that it decided to first focus on small, visible improvements to gain the community's approval and backing, which then allowed work on less visible infrastructure projects to commence. Their choice in partnering with Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation also helped them to design a new Main Street that helps to create a town identity and town center.

Belleville, PA

The town of Belleville has been working on its own revitalization effort through a group called Village Pride (VP). This organization seeks to improve the downtown area by improving

CASE STUDIES

restrictions around Belleville. At the time, local Kish Creek would flood periodically and placed downtown in a 100-year flood plain. Due to this designation, many businesses were reluctant to set up shop there and it was difficult for existing businesses to obtain loans or financial assistance. To solve this problem, VP created Project Impact to increase the creek's carrying capacity of flood waters, help property owners better prepare for and deal with floods, and restore the creek as a focal point of the community. They were able to obtain a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for \$300,000, and then work with the Army Corps of Engineers to develop a plan for improving the creek. VP also created the Business Retention and Expansion program to "encourage local businesses to remain in place and even grow" (Shields, 2001). They were able to work with the Penn State Cooperative Extension to survey the business community to identify problems or obstacles they were facing that limited their growth. This information was then brought to local governing bodies who created committees to deal with problems such as power surges, traffic during the Wednesday auction, and improving local business-to-business networking. Finally, VP has also taken some more direct steps in improving downtown with some quick, visible solutions such as an Annual Clean-up Day, planting trees and flowers throughout, installing a new walking path, designing and installing new entrance signs, and overseeing the efforts to move the local library to a larger building. VP focuses heavily on community involvement to generate local support and to include input from informed community members by having regularly scheduled public meetings, and by producing a regular newsletter (Shields, 2001).

Village Pride, within Belleville, took a very different route to downtown revitalization than the previous three case studies. While they did form an organization similar to Newport Revitalization, Inc. and also beautified the downtown area, they focused more on projects that would improve the business climate, to allow the effects of that to really improve downtown.

CONCLUSIONS

Because they were in a 100-year flood plain and businesses could not get loans there, VP had to think of a way to still draw businesses in, because just providing space for businesses would not be enough. As a result, Project Impact was created to mitigate the creek flooding, helping businesses to become more comfortable with the idea of moving there. They also focused on working with the local government to make it easier to start and maintain a business in Belleville, getting rid of red tape and improving the infrastructure.

Conclusion

Overall, there are several things to be learned from these case studies, and while not all of them may apply to West Point, many of them do. The first key thing to do is to be organized about the process which the revitalization efforts will follow. Basically, have a plan and stick to that plan, if there is not an organized method for improving the area then progress will be slow and difficult. The second thing is to enlist the community; if the community is passionate about the idea then they will be much more willing to help make the process smoother, volunteer, donate funds or materials, and they will also take more pride in their town in the end. Thirdly, start with very easily visible improvements, such as renovating the building facades, planting new trees and flowers, replacing sidewalks, or even just cleaning up. Once these visible improvements are finished people get excited and are more willing to work on larger and less visible improvements, such as renovating the infrastructure. Fourthly, determine key areas in which to focus the most efforts, rather than trying to completely redo the entire downtown. If the appropriate areas are chosen, then benefits from those areas can often spill out around them and make the surrounding area a more pleasant place to be or visit. Finally, use all of these efforts to create a clear and unique town identity that people will want to be a part of, will be proud of, and will want to visit.



BACKGROUND

Location

West Point is located 67 miles east of Sacramento in the Sierra Nevada mountains. The closest city is Jackson, which is about 21 miles away.

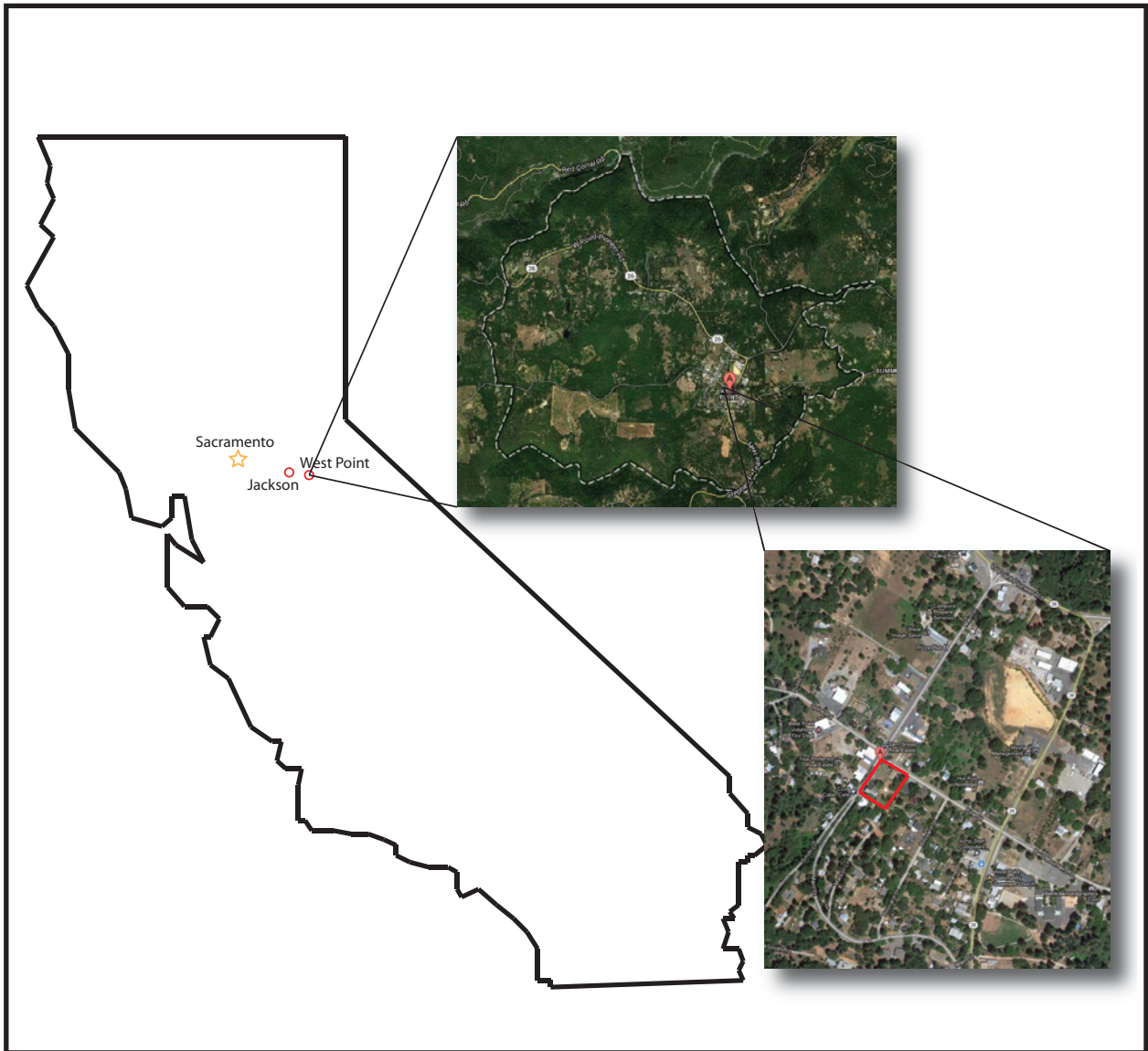


Fig. 3: West Point location map

HISTORY

History

West Point was originally founded in 1852 by explorer Kit Carson as he was searching for a pass over the Sierra Nevada Mountains (Durham, 1998). It started out as a trading post and mining town serving the miners of the Mother Lode area, nestled conveniently in the heart of the Gold Country during the Gold Rush. As mining began to slow down loggers started to trickle in to take advantage of the surrounding forests, cutting huge swathes of trees. Over the years however, many of the loggers have moved on or retired, leaving a hole in the town's economic base that has not been replaced by anything.

Over the years, West Point has changed its economic base to keep up with the times. A draft community plan was written in 2009 with the intent of revitalizing the downtown area to encourage "cottage industry, open space, pedestrian friendly streets, small scale eco-friendly business, agriculture, and the arts" (Calaveras County California, 2009). While this plan suggests that there is a strong desire for downtown revitalization improvement efforts to be made, there

is no evidence that anything more has happened to move in that direction.



Fig. 4: A logger with his loaded truck at the Stockton Box Mill in 1950.



Fig. 5: A logging truck as it passes through West Point in 2013.

Lumberjack Day

In 2013, West Point celebrated its 38th annual Lumberjack Day festival and parade, a yearly event started in the early 1970's, that celebrates its logging history. Lumberjack Day is the only large event that occurs in West Point, and is also one of the larger events in the county, bringing in an average of 3000 people for the day (Truppner, 2012). It always takes place on the first



Fig. 6: A participant in the West Point Lumberjack Day logging show.

Saturday of October and includes a soapbox derby race, a parade, a car show, a logging show, and many fun booths for food and shopping.



SITE ANALYSIS

EXISTING CONDITIONS



Fig. 7: A scenic road in West Point.

West Point is located at an elevation of 3000' above sea level, just above the snow line. This means that during the summer, temperatures will reach above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, but usually stay in the high 80's and 90's. During the winter, temperatures will occasionally reach below 20 degrees during the night, but on average the daytime temperatures are in the 40's and 50's. Most of the rainfall occurs in late fall to early spring with occasional snowfalls occurring that leave snow for about 3 days before it melts away. The wind patterns are generally flowing east and slightly south, continuing on over the Sierra Nevadas.

Demographically, West Point has a majority of white individuals, with this race constituting 83.5 % of the town's population, as shown in the graph below, which also delineates the town's boundaries. The second most populous group is the American Indians at 6.4 % due to the Mi wok Indian Reservation near the edge of the town. The least populous group would be that of black individuals, of which there are none (American Fact Finder, 2013).

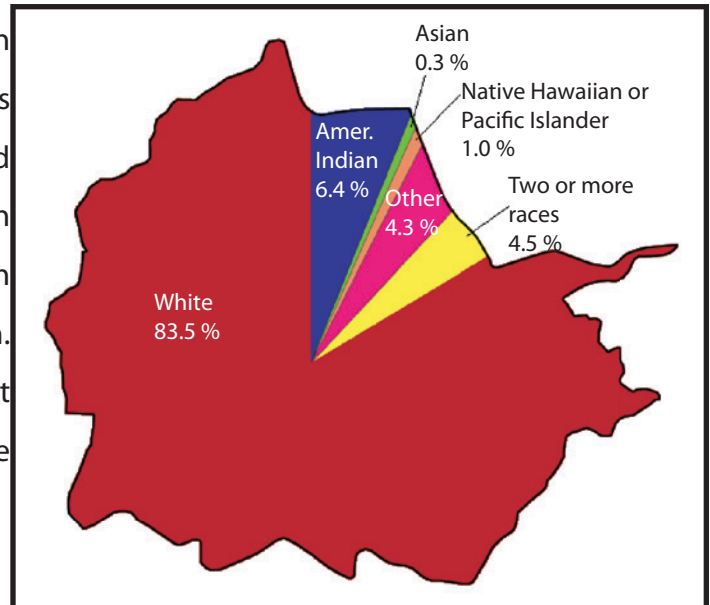


Fig. 8: West Point demographics

Age-wise, the majority of West Point's population is between 50 and 70 years old, as seen in Fig. 9 (American Fact Finder, 2013). Fig. 10 shows

EXISTING CONDITIONS

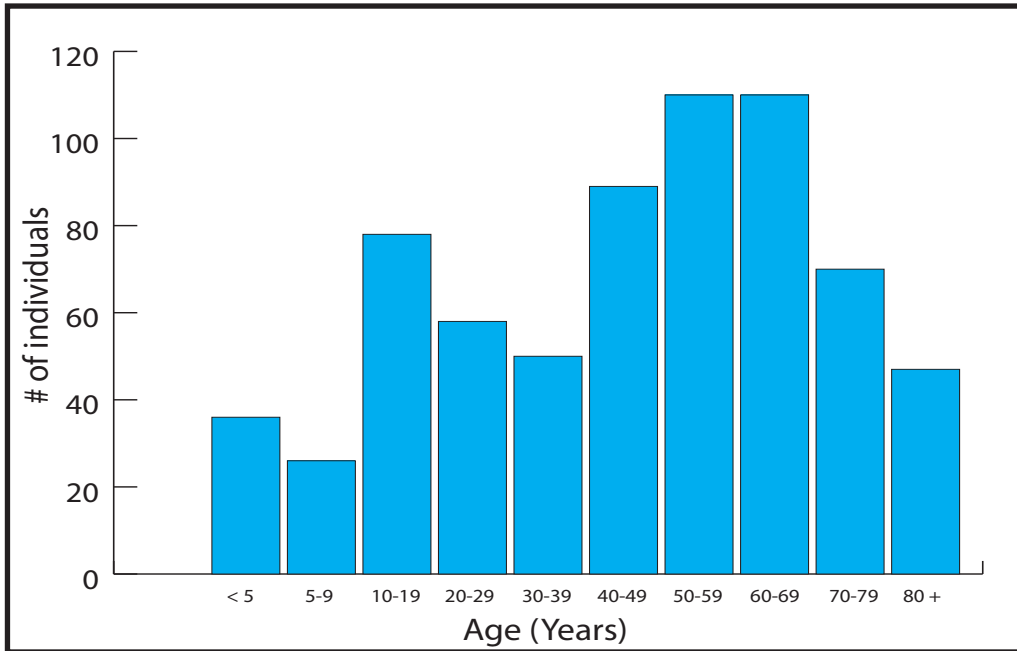


Fig. 9: West Point age graph

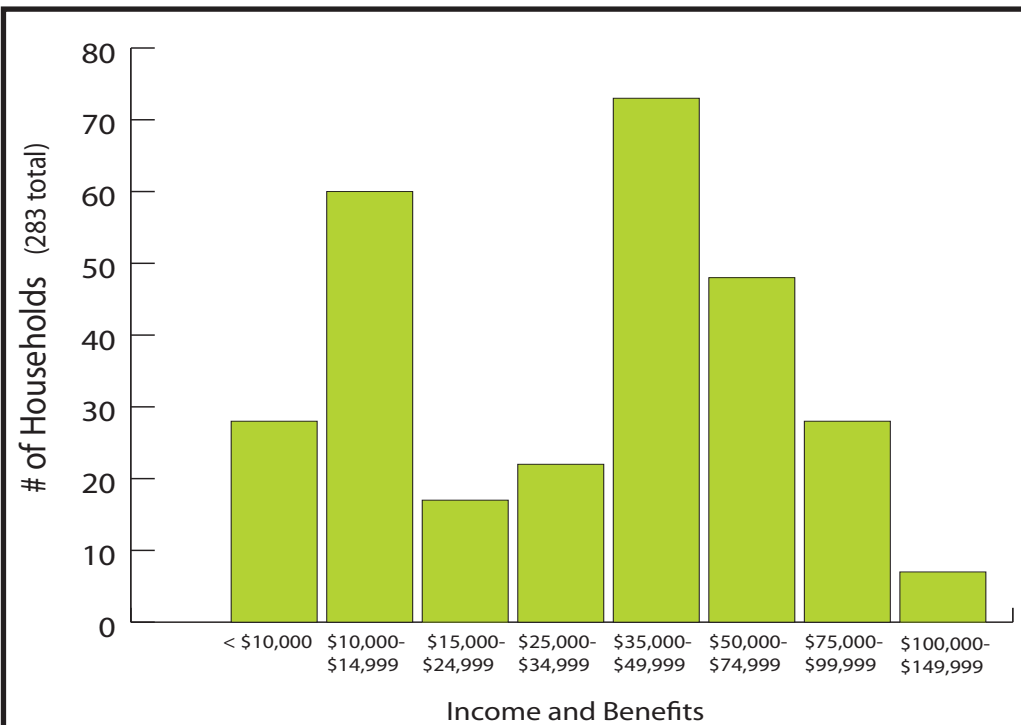


Fig. 10: West Point income graph

SITE CONTEXT

the average income for households in the town, with the majority being at around \$37,000 per year. 25 % of these household's incomes are below the poverty level and the unemployment rate is at 11.4 % (American Fact Finder, 2013). Fig. 11, illustrates the surrounding context of the



Fig. 11: West Point site context

park site, color coding each area based on its purpose. The red border delineates the park site. In the map, orange = residential, blue = business, red = public services, cyan = churches, green = gardens, and pink = vacant land or forest. Main St. can be seen running from the top right to the bottom left. This map shows that most of downtown is residential with a few businesses and some vacant land.

SITE ANALYSIS

West Point

Currently, the 0.6 mile long Main Street has two restaurants, a Pizza Plus and the Cozy Cabin Cafe, which also happen to be the only two places in town to go out to eat. There is a small theatre called The Blue Mountain Playhouse, a small library, a post office, Sam Snead Real



Fig. 12: Strip of businesses in downtown West Point.

Estate, Campora Propane, a thrift store, the West Point Market, Blue Mountain Youth Coalition, Hesketh Automotive, Jenkin's Tax Services, Blue Mountain Community Services Center, Your Preferred Real Estate, and Pure Joy Variety Store. Everything else is empty lots, closed businesses, and some housing. There is

one sidewalk along about 200 feet of one side of the street and lighting is provided by standard high pressure sodium streetlights.

The Park Site

The site for the park is located at the corner of Main Street and Pine Street on the same piece of property as the Pure Joy Variety Store and the old Odd Fellow's Hall. The site has a small slope on most of the site with a steep incline on the southeastern corner. The Odd Fellow's Hall, or Rebecca's Lodge as it is also known as, is the oldest building in town, built around 1890. It is currently under renovation but has survived fairly well over the years. The site was selected because of its proximity to two of the entrances to downtown, making it very visible, as well as being close to most of the main businesses currently downtown.

Fig. 13, shown on the next page, gives an idea of how the climate affects the site, showing the wind as the blue zig zag arrows coming from the NW and blowing in a south-easterly direction. Also shown are the sun patterns across the sky, with the more golden suns representing the summer pattern and the yellower suns representing the winter pattern. The dashed arrows mark the higher and lower traffic areas near the park site.

SITE ANALYSIS

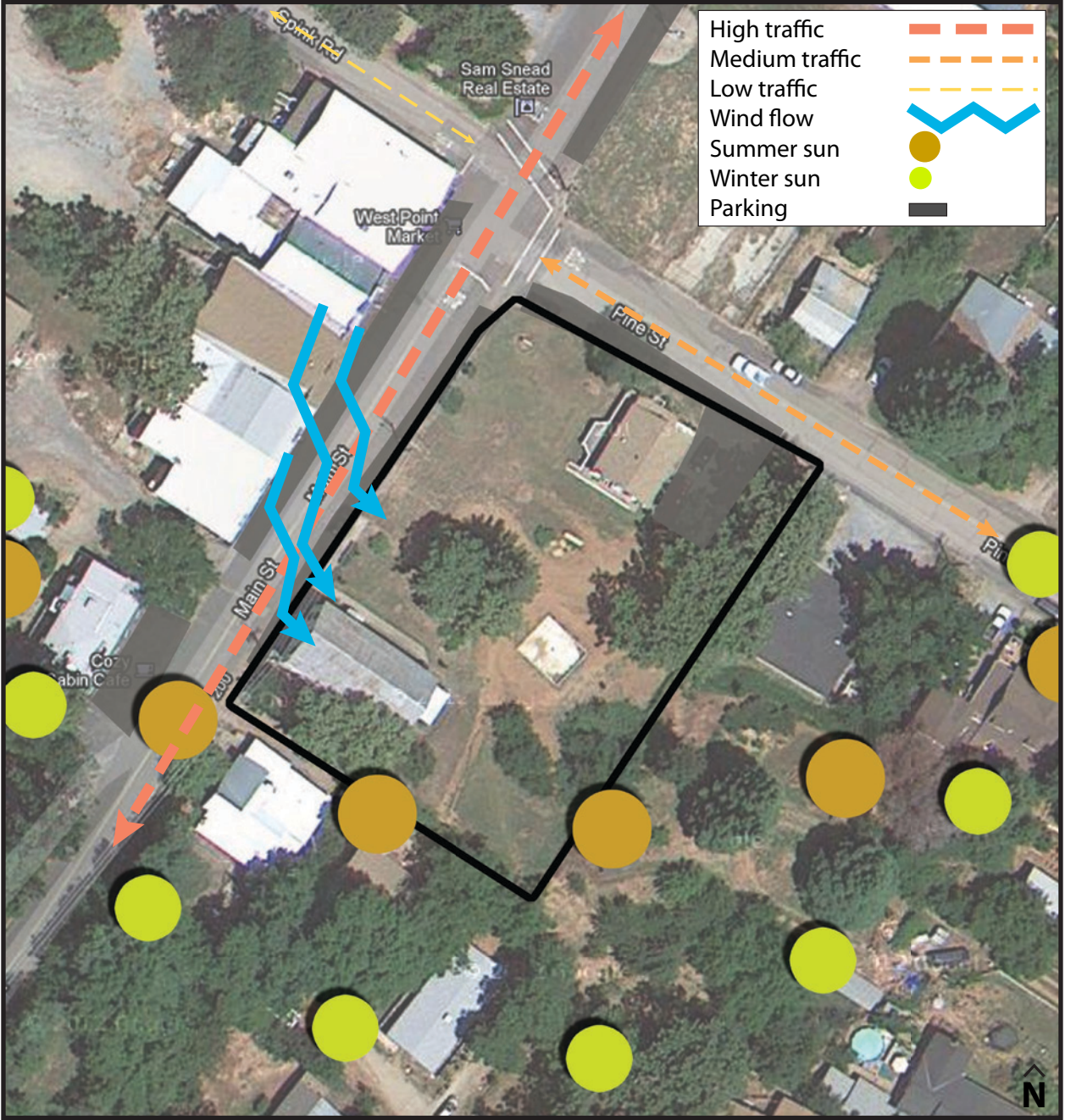


Fig. 13: Park site analysis

PROS & CONS OF SITE

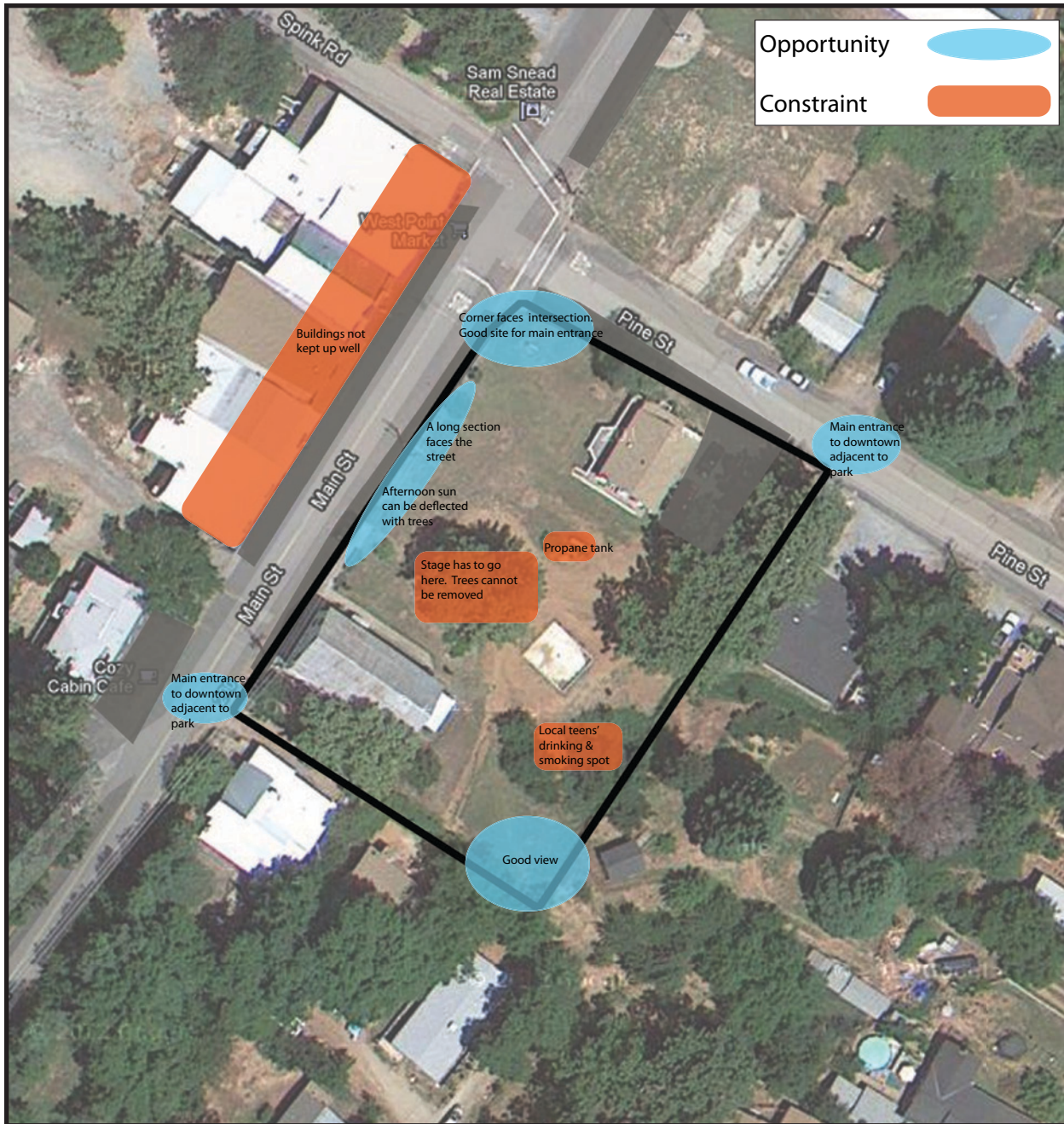


Fig. 14: Park site opportunities and constraints



DESIGN

DESIRED PROGRAMS

Desired Programs

When the owner of the park site approached me to design the park she had a number of ideas that she wanted me to keep in mind to create her vision for the site. Those ideas were to:

- Utilize existing boulders
- Keep large trees
- Use Pine trees (owner has starters)
- Design a stage between the clump of trees in the middle of the site
- Include a maze
- Remove existing blackberries
- Keep the design open, with some trees
- Use plants that do not require much water

Along with her ideas, I had a few of my own that I wanted to include which were to :

- Keep an historical theme with a focus on the logging history
- Invigorate the downtown area
- Address steep slope of hill in the south corner
- Create an identity for West Point

SITE PICTURES

Observations

I took several pictures of the park site before designing anything to get an idea of what I had to work with. Fig. 15 shows some of those observations.



Fig. 15: Pictures of the site showing the main area, the entrance to the Odd Fellow's Hall, the view from the back hill, and the path going up to the hill.



PROCESS & SOLUTIONS



Fig. 16: A panorama of the park site.

Designing the Park

The park was designed with a logging theme to celebrate West Point's logging heritage. This was done by using wooden walkways as the paths, lots of pine trees, and a logging themed play area. To address the steep hill and to include the required maze, I terraced the south hill, creating gardens and a fountain, and designing a maze-like path to reach the top as well as experience the beauty of the garden. I designed a low-water using meadow of California Meadow Sedge for concert goers to relax on while enjoying the show. For the trees and shrubs I used a palette of species found in the surrounding forest, and used lots of colorful flowers and plants for the gardens to add a cheery atmosphere to the park. The list of plants can be found on page 28.



Fig. 17: Design of the park within its context.

ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN

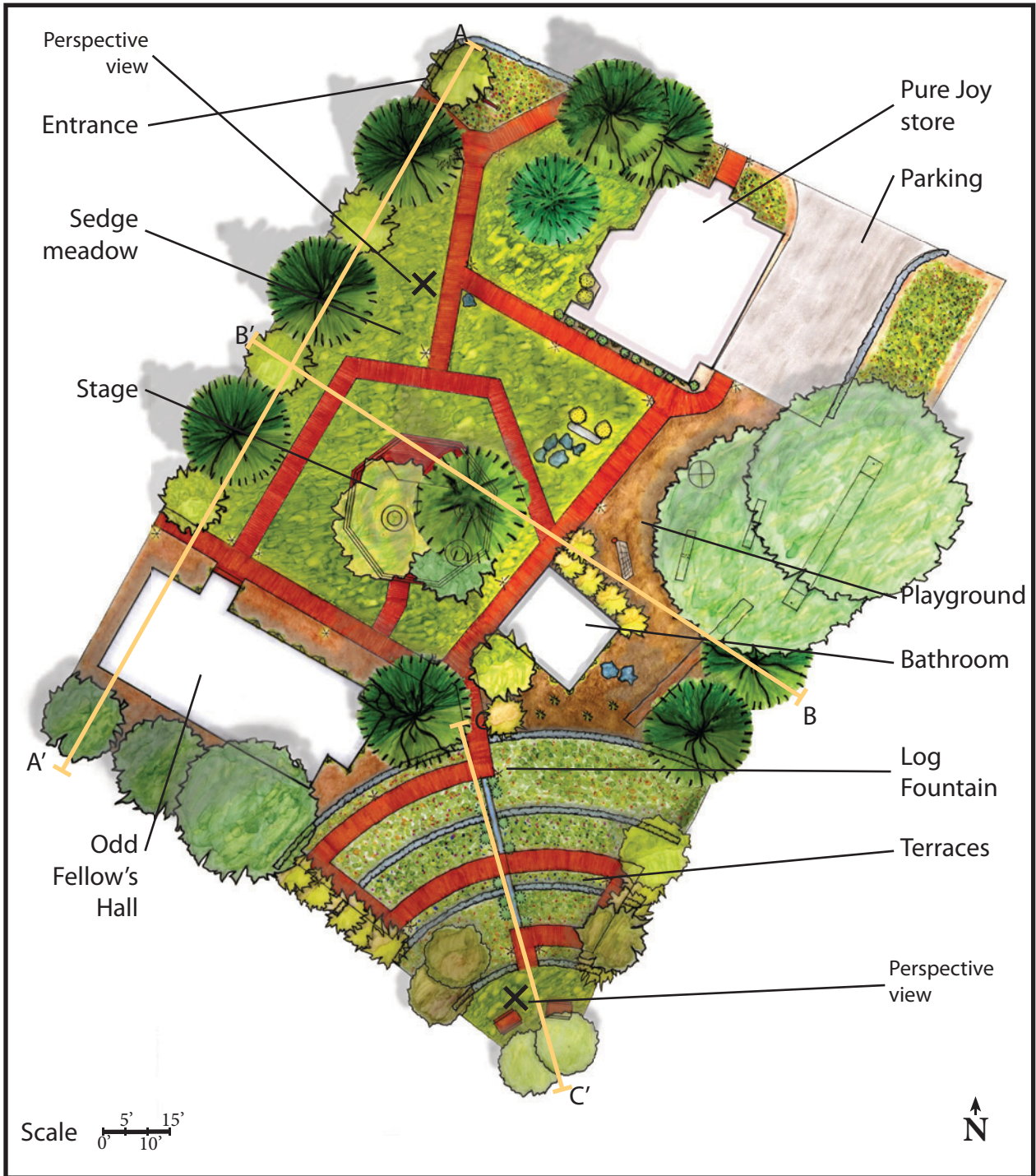


Fig. 18: Pure Joy Park illustrative plan.

DETAILS

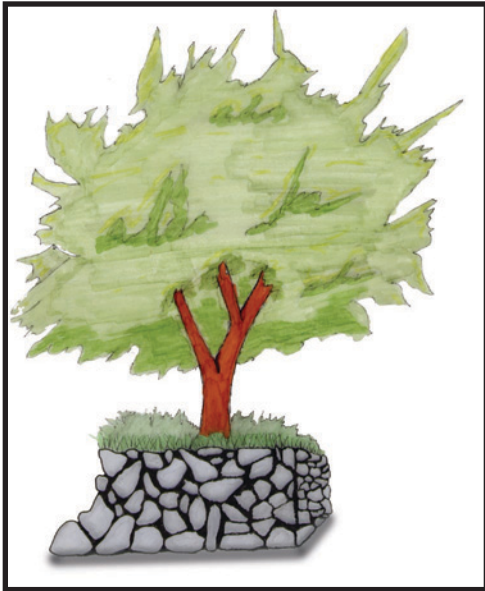


Fig. 19: Rock wall detail along terrace.

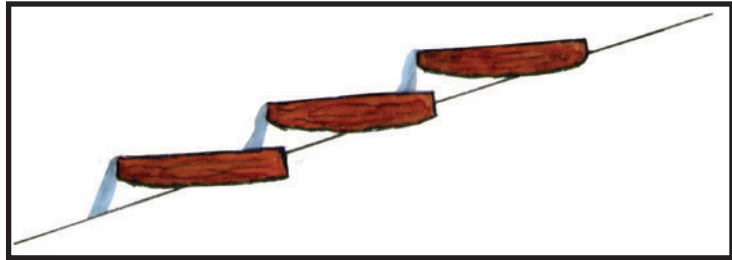


Fig. 20: Log fountain detail, to run down the terraces.

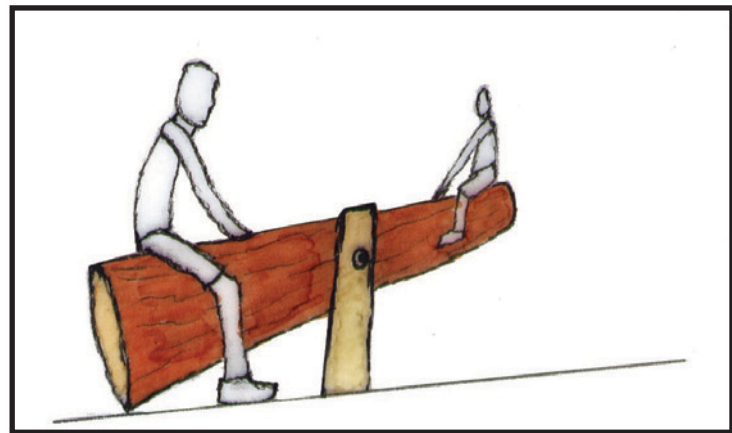


Fig. 22: See-saw detail, for playground.

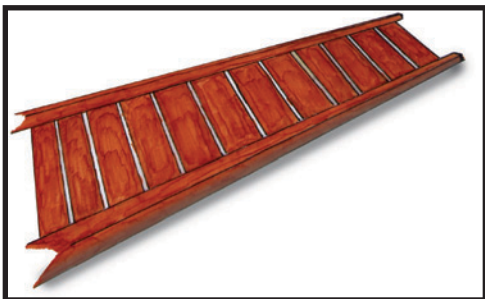


Fig. 21: Walkway detail.

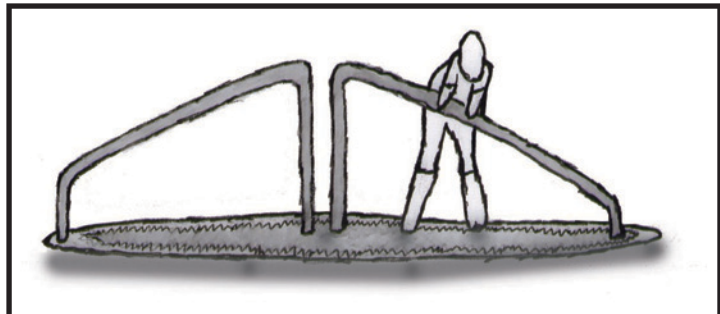


Fig. 24: Spinning plate detail. The plate is painted like a circular saw.

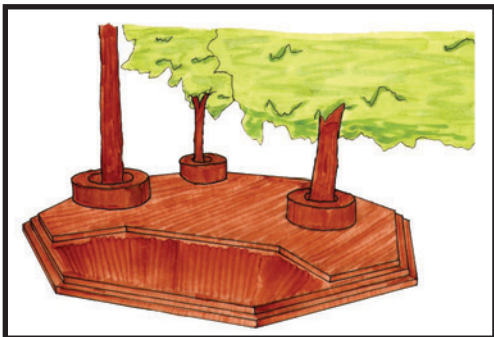


Fig. 23: Stage detail.

SECTIONS

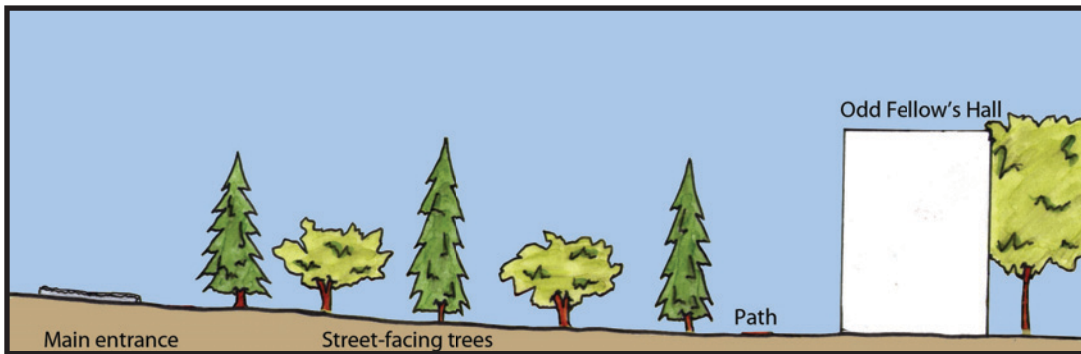


Fig. 25: Section A-A' showing the Main St. boundary.

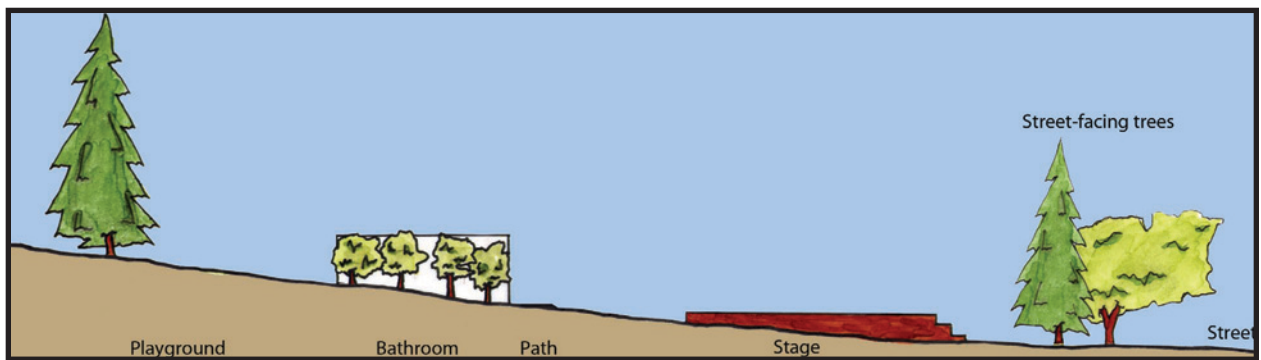


Fig. 26: Section B-B' showing a slice across the center of the park from the far edge of the playground to Main St.

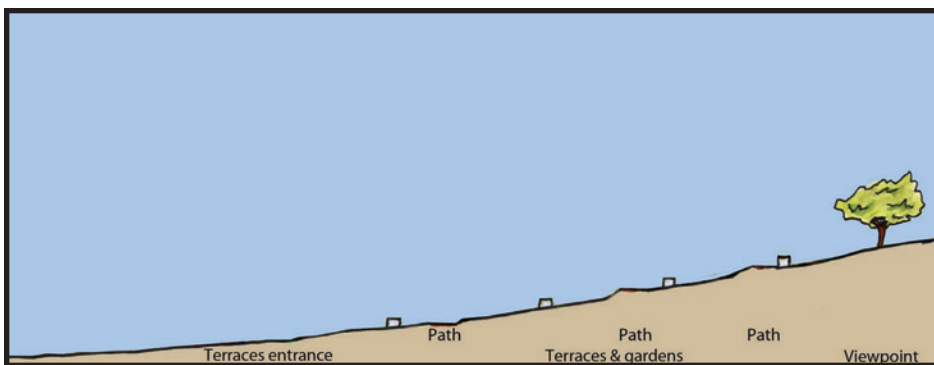


Fig. 27: Section C-C' showing the terraces.

PERSPECTIVES



Fig. 28: View of the park from the top of the terraces.



Fig. 29: View of the park from the meadow, looking towards the stage, with the terraces, bathroom, and playground in the background.

LIST OF PLANTS

Trees

Pine Tree

Noble Fir Tree

Big-leaf Maple Tree

Western Redbud Tree

Cherry Tree

Plum Tree

Apple Tree

Shrubs

Manzanita

Western Sword Fern

Camellia

Butterfly Bush

Lilac

Flowers

California Poppy

Lupine

Rose

Columbine

Foxglove

Iris

Gladiolus

Freesia

Crocasmia

Coneflower

Bellflower

Aster

Bleeding Heart

Veronica

Impatiens

Gaillardia

Verbena

Forget-me-not

Salvia

Coreopsis

Pansy

Violet

Geranium

Sunflower

Daffodil

Tulip

Crocus

Shasta Daisy

Monkey Flower

Wallflower

Hollyhock

Bee Balm

Hellebore

Phlox

California Fuschia

Lamb's Ears

Calla Lily

Vines

Wisteria

Star Jasmine

Clematis

Morning Glory

Black-eyed Susan

Vine

Climbing Rose



MOVING FORWARD

SIMPLE STEPS

While the new park is a great start to revitalizing West Point's downtown area, it is just the beginning, to get the ball rolling. The park should catch people's attention and help them to feel pride in their town, launching a desire to improve the rest of downtown. Listed below are five simple steps that can be taken by people who would like to continue improving downtown. These are not hard rules, but guidelines that can help make the process easier in the long run.

Create an organization to focus on downtown

Having an organization focused solely on downtown can be helpful in getting grants from the government and other organizations for revitalization efforts. It also creates a central group that people can turn to if they would like to help or have suggestions.

Include the community and key stakeholders

The community is what makes any town, city or even neighborhood work well. If efforts are made to improve the town but the community is not behind those efforts, they may often end up unfinished or under utilized.

Have small, visible accomplishments to keep the community's interest

As people see improvements occurring they will become more interested in the revitalization effort and help with larger projects.

Specify key areas to improve

Specifying key areas for improvement allows the organization to affect the community on a larger scale without completely rebuilding the downtown.

Create a town identity, or make an existing one clearer

Having a town identity helps the townspeople to have pride in their town, which can lead to keeping it cleaner and safer, as well as helping tourists to recognize it and remember it better, marketing the town to the larger region in which it resides.



Fig. 30: A potential logo for West Point.

POTENTIAL PROGRAMS

West Point has the potential to be a very enjoyable place to visit, with its premier location near large forests, the Mokelumne river, and other tourist attractions like Lake Tahoe, Silver Lake, Murphys, and several ski resorts. Getting to West Point is, in itself, a beautiful experience, with any



Fig. 31: Programmatic scheme for downtown West Point.

entrance winding along the canyon of one of the forks of the Mokelumne river, offering great views and exciting driving. If the downtown area was to be renovated, some potential programs that could be implemented are shown below in Fig. 28. These would include, among other things, improving and greening the streets to make them more pedestrian friendly, renovating the existing buildings and facades, adding cafes and shopping, and

introducing businesses

that take advantage of the incredible natural resources surrounding West Point as forms of recreation, such as hiking, rafting, or mountain biking. Once again, this is for the purposes of creating a guideline and does not have to be followed exactly.

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