



# Landscape Design for the Well-being of Women:

Redesigning the Woodland Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Center

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# ABSTRACT

The design of public spaces requires a great amount of investment. Public spaces are not limited to the physical construct, but are also informed by their social attributes in which they are perceived and used. A crucial step in design is to understand the needs of the user; their patterns of appropriating space are critical to the success of public spaces.

One consideration that is often overlooked is the affect of a space on women. For example, safety issues affect women's physical and psychological health and force women to change their life style and conform to the dangers that exist in their environment. The significance of my study is to acknowledge these issues.

My senior project will analyze case studies and research on women and space. I will then gather my findings from extraneous sources and from my own analysis to inform my design of the Women's Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Center in Woodland (SADVC).

Although SADVC is not a public space, I believe the principles for a healthy public space design for women will span space in general: public and private. I hope my project will not only acknowledge these issues surrounding women and space, but will also encourage people to think critically about it.

# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born and raised in Pasadena, a suburb of Los Angeles. The city proved to be a major inspiration in my life. Being filled with scientific and cultural institutions, The city exposed me to the arts at a young age and I experienced different art forms from dance to visual art, and from music to creative writing. Even though I was raised in Pasadena, I would make frequent trips to the Philippines to visit relatives. There, I also found sources of creative inspiration in the colorful bustling streets where fruit vendors sold beautiful, exotic produce and small horse drawn carriages intertwined between bright-colored jeeps.

In high school, I would supplement my education with classes at my community college and nearby art schools with classes such as environmental design and advertising. I found my niche as an artist with an affinity for vibrant color and texture. Since then, I knew I had to incorporate my passion into something greater.

I entered UC Davis as a Fine Arts major not knowing where it would take me beyond college. When I discovered Landscape Architecture, I had found an area that stringed together the different disciplines I enjoyed while being a possible career choice. I especially loved the effect Landscape Architecture had in not only in shaping an environment, but also in changing people's lives. I am proud to say I have the ability to be a part of that change.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the UC Davis Landscape Architecture faculty with a special thank you to my senior project committee members: Patsy Owens, Heath Schenker, Dr. Richard Coss, and Lynette Irlmeier. I would like to also thank my family and friends for their continued support and encouragement.

# PART I.

## GOALS

The idea that women experience landscapes in a specific way and the influences the environment has on women's behavior are topics that have been studied for decades. In this project, I will address a variety of issues on the same topic.

My first goal is to research information on how the environment influences women's psychological and physical well-being. A case study will be presented as an example of a space that fosters the well-being of women.

My next goal is to interview the staff of the Woodland Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Center. Their responses to my set questions are most prevalent to my design supplement. The goal of the interviews is to better understand the needs of the women and staff of SACVC.

This leads to my next goal, which is to create a set of recommendations. These recommendations will contain elements that encompass elements of a healthy design with women in mind.

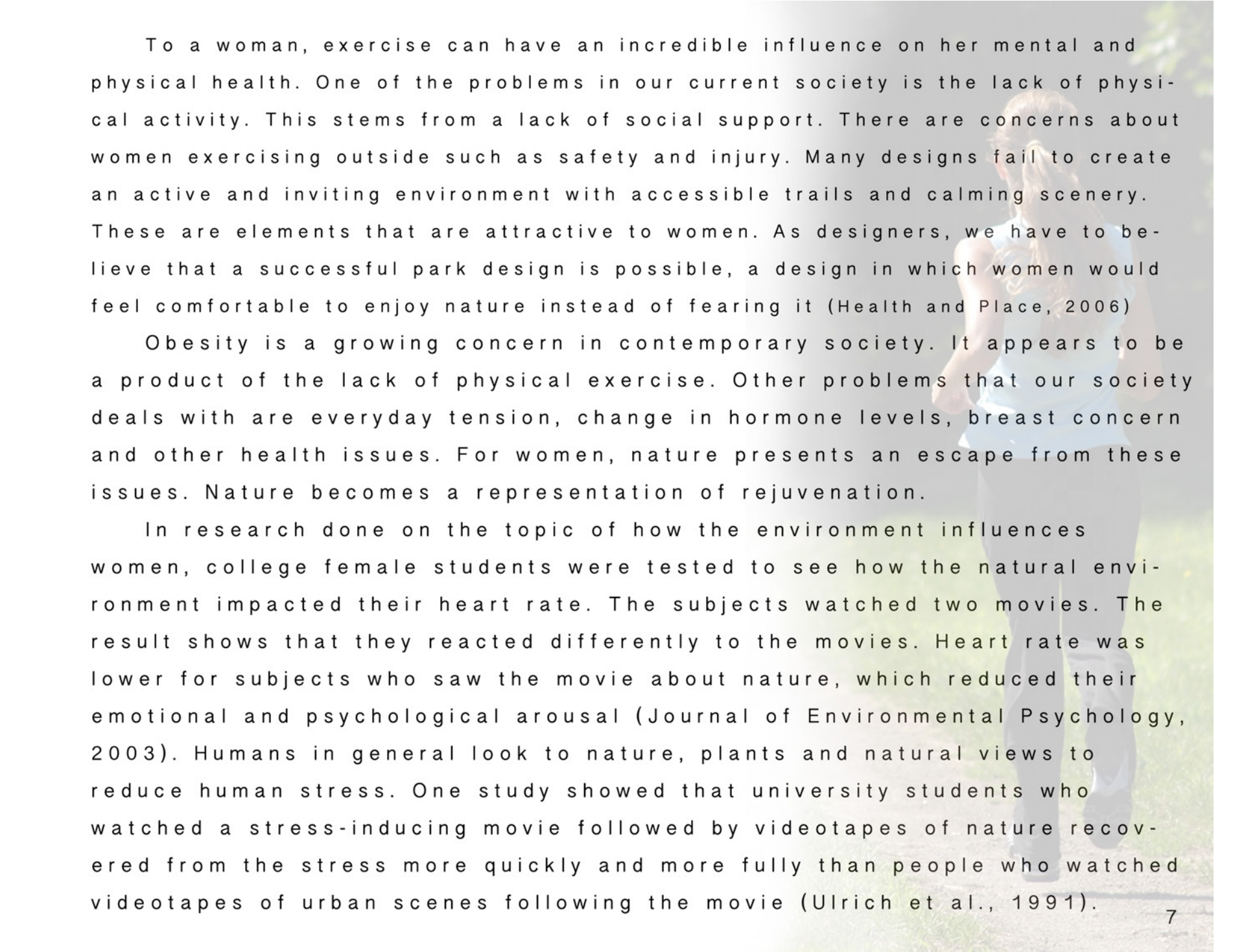
My last goal is to take my own recommendations and findings from extraneous sources to influence a master plan design for an existing space: The Women Sexual Assault Center in Woodland. The design will hopefully contain elements that could be a potential answer to the issues surrounding designing for women.

# PART II.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### a. What is important to women in a space?

It is a known fact that when one is stressed, it is often recommended to turn to nature. As Landscape Architects, it is evident that a good design means a reduced amount of stress. There are countless surveys on this subject and the key, it seem like, to avoid stress is physical exercise, contact with natural daylight, and a pleasant and enjoyable visual experience (Urban Forestry & Urban Greening, 2003).



To a woman, exercise can have an incredible influence on her mental and physical health. One of the problems in our current society is the lack of physical activity. This stems from a lack of social support. There are concerns about women exercising outside such as safety and injury. Many designs fail to create an active and inviting environment with accessible trails and calming scenery. These are elements that are attractive to women. As designers, we have to believe that a successful park design is possible, a design in which women would feel comfortable to enjoy nature instead of fearing it (Health and Place, 2006)

Obesity is a growing concern in contemporary society. It appears to be a product of the lack of physical exercise. Other problems that our society deals with are everyday tension, change in hormone levels, breast concern and other health issues. For women, nature presents an escape from these issues. Nature becomes a representation of rejuvenation.

In research done on the topic of how the environment influences women, college female students were tested to see how the natural environment impacted their heart rate. The subjects watched two movies. The result shows that they reacted differently to the movies. Heart rate was lower for subjects who saw the movie about nature, which reduced their emotional and psychological arousal (Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2003). Humans in general look to nature, plants and natural views to reduce human stress. One study showed that university students who watched a stress-inducing movie followed by videotapes of nature recovered from the stress more quickly and more fully than people who watched videotapes of urban scenes following the movie (Ulrich et al., 1991).

The study conducted with the Research Center of Gender and Health at the University of Newcastle Australia, showed that as a women ages, the dependency on their neighborhood increases. The study found that womans' satisfaction with their neighborhood corrolates with their fear of crime. This fear reduced outdoor activity, lowered the feeling of belonging and prevented women from identifying with their neighborhood. The surveys conducted on satisfaction show how important it is to be part of someone's neighborhood and also show that the women with inactive lifestyles have lower safety scores than women who are more active. Also, women feel safest in rural and remote neighborhoods, as their sense of safety decreases in the urban areas (Social Sciences and Medicine, 2004).

There is a great amount of benefit coming from nature. Society has severe issues to deal with interms of women's health. The profound impact of nature on a women's physical and mental health defines her general satisfaction with life and self-esteem.





# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE



## b. Women's experience in a public space

Safety is a woman's biggest concern when it comes to public open space. Almost all of the current research the relationship between women and space has supported this conclusion. The fear of personal safety presents a big issue in today's society. For a long time, there was a popular belief that a woman's place in the world was in the domestic sphere- the home while the outdoor environment was a man's place. Urban settings were especially considered unsafe (American Journal of Community Psychology, 2002).

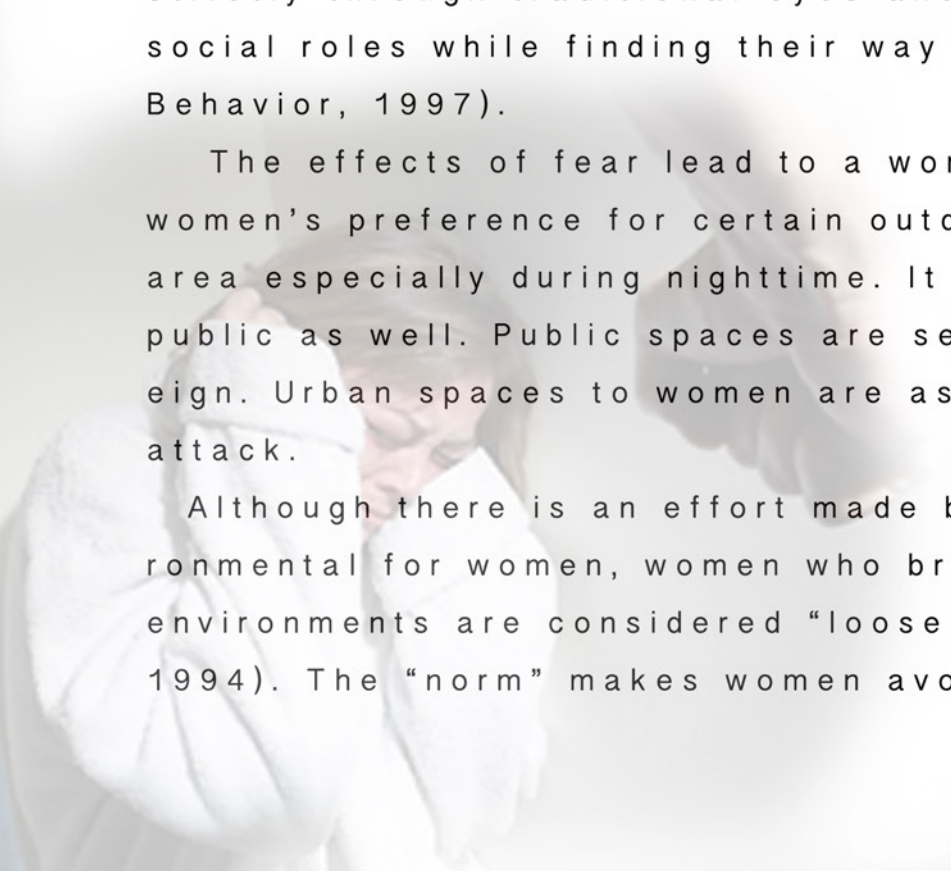
According to Anamika Mishra's "Women's Appropriation of Public Spaces", women had limited access to public spaces and continue to have reduced exposure to the city, particularly at night. Although a women's response is further nuanced based upon other factors such as religion and ethnicities, factors related to safety takes precedence over these differences. Research shows the experience of fear is not gender neutral. Women consistently express greater fears for

their personal safety in urban environments than do men. Statistics demonstrate that, conversely, young men are the most vulnerable to actual attack in towns and cities, while women are more likely to be attacked not in the public setting but in their own homes by someone they know well. However, these figures are possibly skewed by the fact that if women are afraid to go out on the streets alone they are less likely to become victims of crime in the urban environment.

Men have been considered fearless and fear provoking while women have been labeled as meek and vulnerable. This theory has made women fear public open spaces. Social equity and women's lower social status supports this fear. Public spaces are typically a "spatial expression of patriarchy" (Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 1997). These spaces support the traditional roles and the idea that men are free to experience outdoor spaces and women need to obey traditional female roles while doing the same. They also support the ideas that women should visit only the places that are appropriate for women. This kind of special dichotomy demonstrates a belief that women are not safe and welcome in public spaces.

Life lived in fear of public spaces molds women's identities and forces them to conform to restrictive norms in order to protect their personal safety. The identities formed out of fear may perhaps reinforce women's trust in traditional behavior, which is considered proper. This also supports the stand that public spaces are dangerous for their female users (Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2003).





The topic of gender and landscape has been seriously studied no more than the last couple of decades. Some of the reasons for the lack of public attention have been that not enough women have been included in the research. An example is that there is a lack of women contributions in transportation planning. Some of the questions that many feminist groups tried to answer and acknowledge in the past three decades regard social class, public authority and labor force (Spatial behavior, 1997). The role of women in the urban landscape has been forsaken for a long time. Women were seen strictly through traditional eyes and were expected to take on traditional social roles while finding their way through the urban environment (Spatial Behavior, 1997).

The effects of fear lead to a woman's avoidance of many neighborhoods, women's preference for certain outdoor activities, and aversion of secluded area especially during nighttime. It affects the way they dress and act in public as well. Public spaces are seen by women as unsafe, dark, and foreign. Urban spaces to women are associated with a high risk of a physical attack.

Although there is an effort made by universities in creating a safer environmental for women, women who break social norms and seek out hazardous environments are considered "loose and wild" (Environment and Behavior, 1994). The "norm" makes women avoid particular places as well as avoid

eye contact and interactions with other site users. As designers, we try to enhance a social activity of a public space. We see this as a benefit to the space and the community but how do we do this with the fear in women is so strong?

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## c. A common thread through history

It is important to note that these feelings women have on public space is not a recent development; there is a history behind it. The analysis of the history of women and landscape shows that there have been some major changes in how women experience the outdoors and behave in the environment, even though some problems that existed in the past have persisted.

The earlier studies that address women in landscape focused primarily on the limitations on the use of public spaces which is linked to the social perception of females in the landscape (Transaction of the Institute of British geographers, 1997)

The theme of gender and landscape has been analyzed for merely a couple of decades. Some of the reasons for the lack of public awareness include the lack of women involved in the process of greater public concern over these problems.

A process called "The Domestication of Public Spaces" arose in the 19th century. This was a goal to create a friendlier urban environment where women could be included. For example, the beach became a place women could now show more skin, which was taboo in any other setting. The rough country environment was still very much reserved for men.

Mainly middle class women had access to public spaces. The women's main impact on the landscape was domesticating it. Their expected role was to bring the suitable behavior of the home into the public sphere. People still believed that women truly had no real place in the urban environment. The public realm was a manly environment where they can display their superior power and participate in activities such as hunting and fishing (Gender and Landscape, 2005)

In the 1980's, the fear of the female being sexually assaulted became an academic concern. Men's aggressions and harassment came to light. This led to women having lower activity levels than men and then the contemporary urban planning trends increased the motor vehicle dependence (Health and Place, 2006)

According to the guidebooks from the late 1800s, the activities for men were more diverse and took place during the nighttime as well. However, working class women in the city moved with more freedom than middle class women. Late 20th century brought more spatial freedom but the urban environment still is seen as unsafe and dangerous. The common thread throughout time is that women had and still has to deal with "gender vulnerability" (Antipod, 1998).

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## d. Elements to avoid/include to a space that contribute to the well-being of women

When designers create a space with women in mind, they are also encompassing the needs of other various users. Women find some landscapes more attractive than others. What makes a space especially unattractive is when the space produces "fear". The fear is enhanced by different design elements that are often unintentionally included. Some of the factors of fear include: restricted viewing opportunities, dense flora, presence of potential hiding places for a possible assailant nearby, and a low potential for escape (Health and Place, 2006).

The main concern with women in a landscape is safety. Women mainly feel uncomfortable because of the dark streets and poor lighting (American Journal of Community Psychology, 2002) Shady, forlorn and alien spaces are linked with the likelihood of physical attack. Some examples of these spaces are city park meadows, secluded city corners,



poorly lit spaces and unfamiliar neighborhoods.

In the studies conducted in Britain on women's landscape preference, women reported feeling afraid to visit the forest by themselves, although they could not provide an explanation for the fear. Women also dislike green open spaces. Greenwich open space study showed that women who were uncertain about using green open space said that they were afraid of dense flora. This was also aligned with men's opinion but the fear stopping women from going outdoors alone (Landscape Research, 1997).

In addition to the previously mentioned factors, the places that women are least likely to go to are buildings covered in graffiti and places that are not well lit. More places include dark pathways, secluded bus stops, parking lots, alleys, open parks, and natural areas. (Environment and Behavior, 1994)

# CASE STUDY

Lacy Park- San Marino, CA

Lacy Park is an example of a well designed park that meet the needs of its women users. As a child, I would frequently go there with my mother and enjoyed its natural features such as water, forested areas, open green areas for play and sports, and broad views. It has an impressive trail that encourages exercise around women as well. The built elements such as stairs to an elevated area add and not hinder the design.

The general feeling of Lacy Park is that it is a controlled environment. It feels safe especially from the busy nearby streets. Some of the elements that make this park female friendly include plentiful restrooms and drinking fountains, as well as excellent lighting. Often women come the park to exercise. It is truly a beautiful piece of nature in the heart of a populated residential area, filled with a beautiful rose garden and other flower gardens and grasses, which add to a rich experience of seasonal changes.

For women, Lacy Park is an ideal escape from tension. The attractive large space also encourages walking and opportunities for sports. I find that the amenities, aesthetics, and open areas for activity were overall the best elements of the park that are tailored for women and most every other user of Lacy Park.





LACY PARK SITE LOCATION



VISITORS ENJOYING  
THE 4th of JULY



# PART III.

## ABOUT

### THE WOODLAND WOMENS SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CENTER

“In 1977, a group of concerned community members created the Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Center. The Center began to provide crisis intervention services to battered women and sexual assault victims in Yolo County and a 24-hour crisis hotline, individual counseling, and support groups. The need for services continued to grow and, in 1980, Harper House, our county's only shelter for battered women and children, was opened. In 1982, a child abuse prevention component was added, and in 1986 the Latina Outreach Program was launched. In January of 1994, the Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Program was added. It is a long-term treatment program for children who are victims of sexual abuse and for their families.”

-<http://www.sadvc.org/>

# GOALS FOR THE DESIGN

Currently, the Woodland Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Center is a bare slate and is lacking the most important outdoor features of a place for refuge and council. The center has incredible potential to transform into a place that aids in the healing process of its clients.

My goals are to create a space that promotes the physical, emotional, and mental well being of the clients of SADVC as well as its staff. Incorporated in my design is the presence of water for water is a soothing agent. A small fountain in the lush courtyard provides a setting for meditation while the sound and view of moving water is restorative.

To add to the sense of enclosure and safety, I incorporated ground lights for nighttime garden visits as well as dense vegetation around the perimeter. The flower palette provides a visual stimulus while adding focal points, accents, and definition to a garden. I used warm colors such as red, orange, and yellow to promote activity and cool colors, such as blue, purple, and white, which tend to be soothing.

My other main goal was to make the space accommodating to all of the visitors who range from the handicapped to children. To make the space ADA accessible, I used the existing wheelchair walk way and beautified it with low flowering hedges that flank each side. A playground is incorporated on the North end for the children that frequently visit the site. Seating is placed in the courtyard for staff lunch breaks and other such uses.



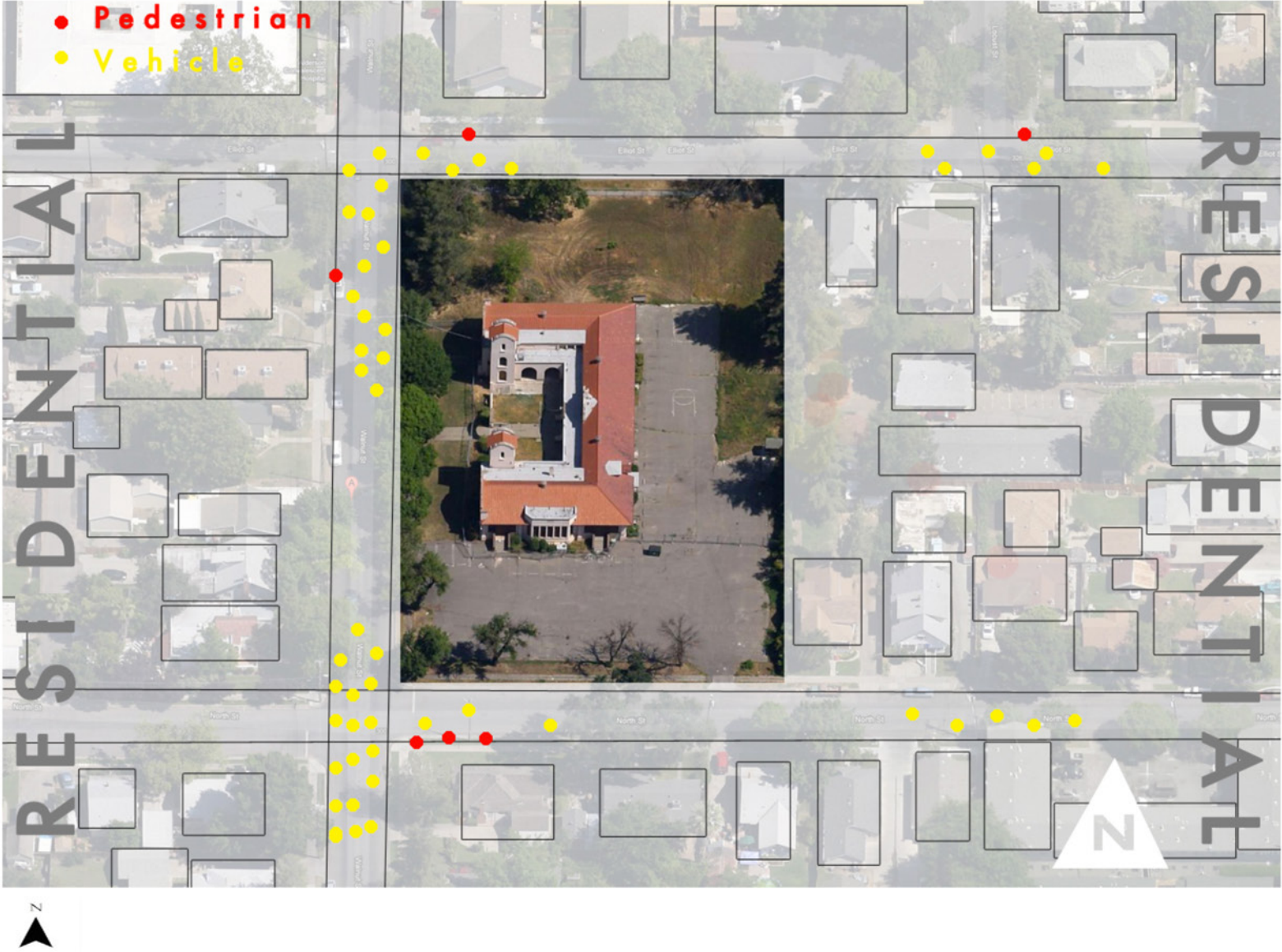
175 Walnut Street,  
Woodland, California



Existing Site Photographs



Analysis of Pedestrian and Vehicular Traffic  
(Tuesday at 2:30pm-2:40pm)





Highlighted are the 5 main sections of  
The Woodland Sexual Assault Center my  
design will incorporate



# DATA GATHERING

This short interview, was originally intended to be given to the women who use the Sexual Assault Center's services. Due to identity protection, these questions were altered to be given to the staff. These questions are designed to convey a general preference in the redesign of the Woodland Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Center.

1. What is the typical age of clients?

Clients' ages range from children to adult.

2. How do they arrive at the center? (transportation method)

By car.

3. Does anyone accompany them to the center?

It is discouraged, but sometimes a friend or parent comes along.

4. What time of day do they visit?

Between 8:30am to 5:00pm. Few come as late as 8pm for council

5. How long do they stay at the center?

Depends. Few hours but never over night.

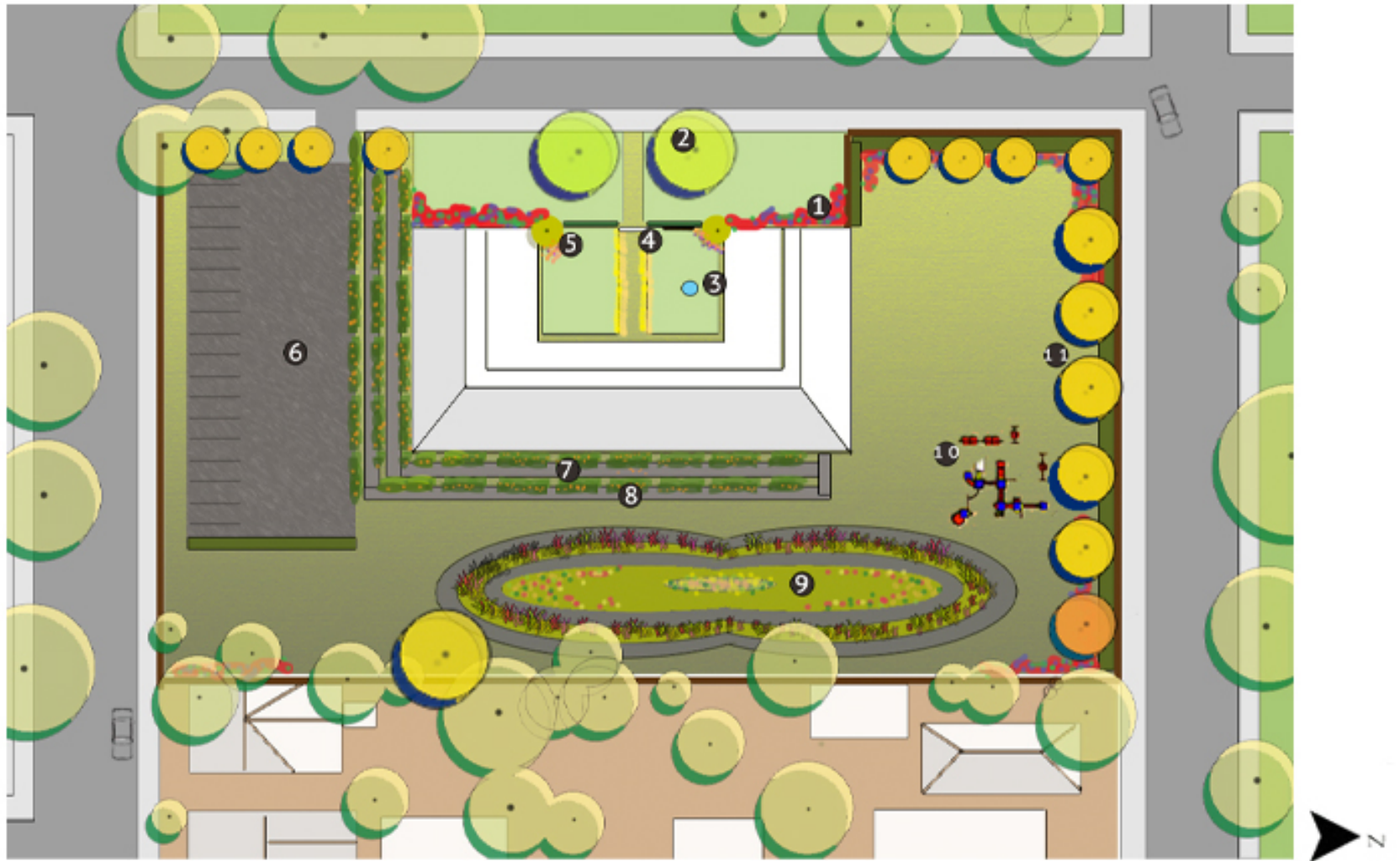
6. What is it that you find about the center that could be improved?

More color.

7. What useful features would you like to see added to the new landscape of the center?

More places to sit and eat during lunch (tables and benches)

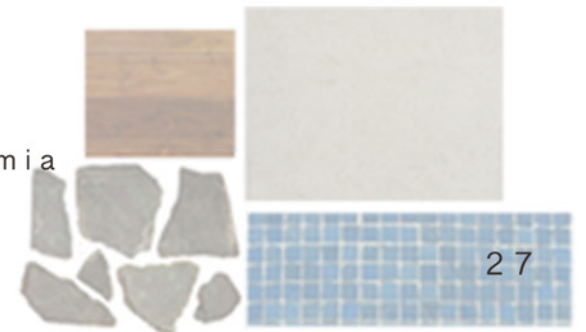
MASTER PLAN





# KEY to Master Plan

1. Raised Planter Bed  
Japanese Maples, Daffodils, Columbines, Cone Flowers, Henery Eilers, & Geranium
2. Ginkgo biloba trees flank entrance to the center
3. Mosaic water fountain in courtyard
4. Gloriosa daisy-lined wooden walkway
5. Corner Flower Bed  
Dark purple salvias, Bearded Iris, Blue Catmint, Coral bells, Bowles' golden sedge & Crocosmias
6. Decreased parking lot- accomodates 18 cars
7. Pedestrian pathway to back door
8. ADA accessable pathway
9. Vegitated walkway  
Ligularia, Henery Eilers, & Crocosmia
10. Playground
11. Crepe myrtle row

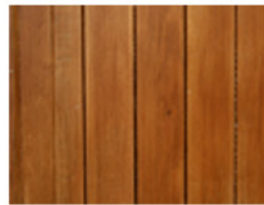
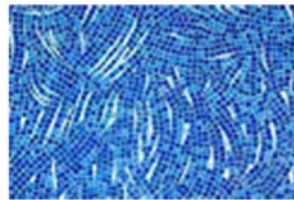
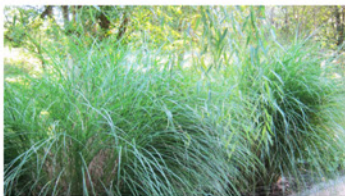


BEFORE  
Perspective 1: Entrance





AFTER  
Perspective 1: Entrance



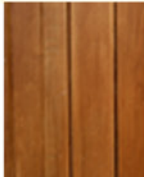
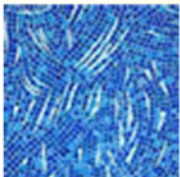


BEFORE  
Perspective 2: Courtyard





AFTER  
Perspective 2: Courtyard



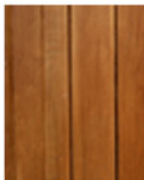
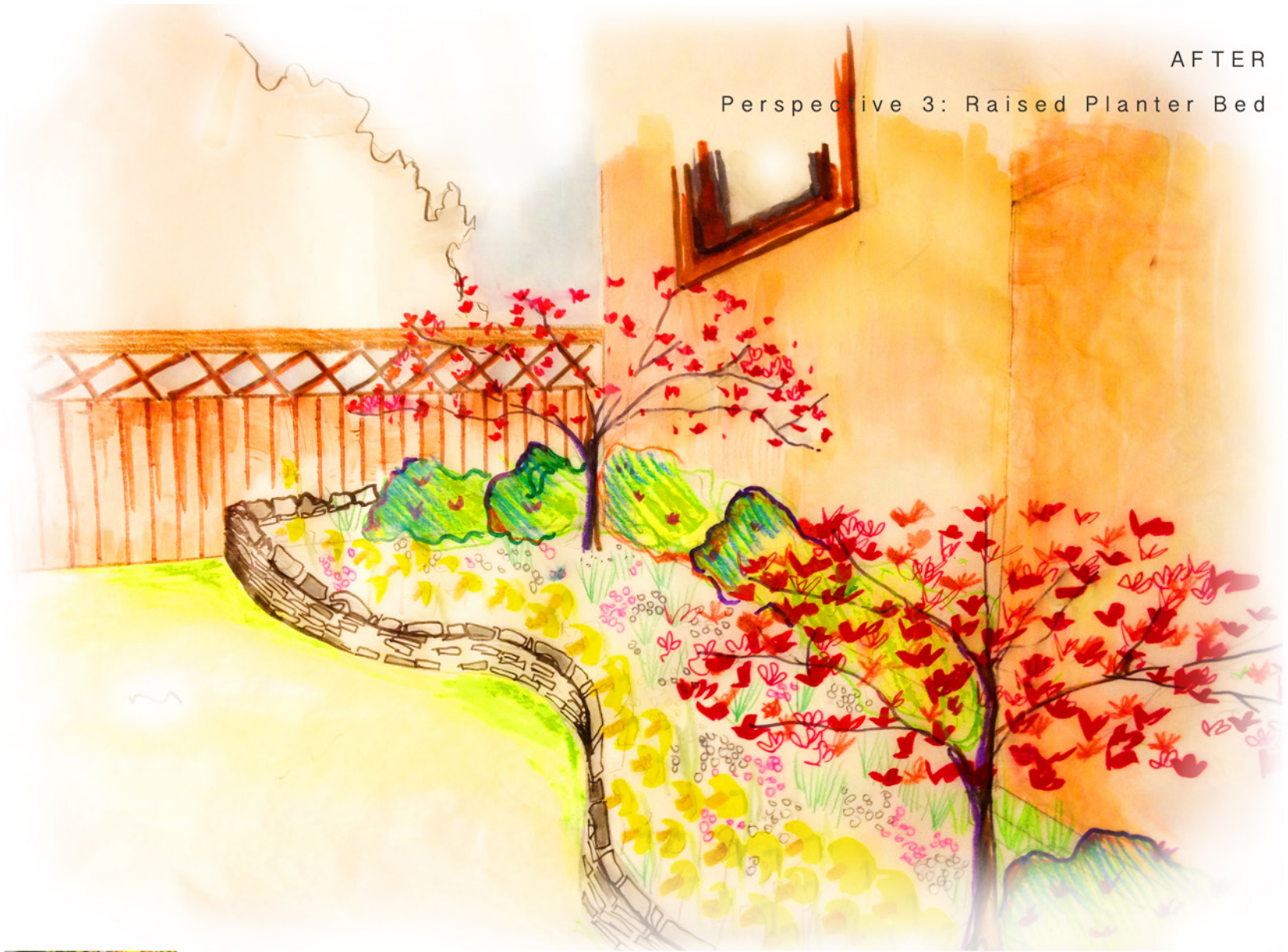


BEFORE  
Perspective 3: Raised Planter Bed





AFTER  
Perspective 3: Raised Planter Bed





BEFORE  
Perspective 4: Entrance to parking lot





AFTER

Perspective 4: Entrance to parking lot





BEFORE  
Perspective 5: Back Lawn





AFTER  
Perspective 5: Back lawn





BEFORE  
Perspective 6: ADA Walkway





AFTER  
Perspective 6: ADA Walkway



# PART IV.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As we had a chance to see in previously reviewed literature, as well as in the data I collected through my interviews of the women in the sexual assault and domestic abuse center, there are measures we as designers can take in ensuring we take proper measurements to design for the well being of women and in turn, for the well being of everyone else.

One of the factors that can make a place appear more attractive is the increase of the viewing opportunities. This could be done either by reducing dense vegetation, defining the pathways or opening up a viewing area. Women like to have a clear view of what lies before them. Another important measurement to take into consideration is to define the pathways so to diminish any chance of getting lost.

A good public space for women will also be free of lonely and isolated spots. Therefore, the agenda of designers should be to reduce the number of dark corners and hiding places for a potential assailant.

Light is an important element for women in an outdoor space. People in general have a negative reaction to artificial light that takes away from the beauty of nature and urban spaces. Therefore using fluorescent lighting spoils the natural setting. Ground lights are a better solution. Lighting is important in areas such as parking lots, pathways, large open areas and places with dense vegetation.

Amenities are also important and are what women find attractive in public spaces. Restrooms located far away from areas of activity is considered unappealing and dangerous. As designers, it is important to create spaces that are manageable and easily accessible.

Scenery is an important element women look for. A place with fresh air and green landscape filled with grasses and flowers is interesting and attractive to women. Scenery is a large factor that brings women from the indoors out.

Lastly, one of the draws of women to a public place is simply the presence of people. The presence of visitors engaging in outdoor activities creates a greater sense of comfort for women. This is seen in my case study of Lacy Park. Women prefer busy, bustling areas over secluded isolated areas. Increasing the number of visitors can be achieved by organizing community events, picnics, and sport events.



# PART V.

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Landscape Design for the Well-being of Women:  
Designing the Woodland Womans Sexual Assault  
and Domestic Abuse Center

A Senior Project/Thesis  
Presented to the Faculty of the  
Landscape Architecture Program  
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
For the Degree of  
Bachelors of Science of Landscape Architecture

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