Western Michigan University
Design Charrette Summary
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Introduction

In 2002, Western Michigan University completed a Master Plan to direct future campus growth. Generated by a broad range of campus users and neighbors, the planning effort was one of the most interactive and participatory planning events ever undertaken by the University. A View to the Future – Western Michigan University’s Master Plan Summary Report was provided to the charrette participants for insight regarding WMU’s recent planning activities and established guidelines.

With the recent flurry of new building construction on WMU’s West Campus, the Campus Planning Department recognizes there will be distinct changes to pedestrian movement patterns and new requirements for open space. In particular, the Miller Plaza (Arts Plaza) is being reshaped by the construction of the Richmond Center for Performing Arts. Best management practices for stormwater systems and maintenance issues related to the campus hardscape have been identified as some of the requirements / opportunities for development of these new spaces.

Upon assembling for the charrette, WMU staff provided a brief summation of the 2002 Master Plan along with specific information pertaining to the primary areas of the day’s focus – the Arts Plaza and West Michigan Avenue corridor. As the day progressed, ten fundamental Master Plan concepts found in the Master Plan Summary Report became the basis for design concepts prepared by the HAA/UDM team.
Team Process

Several Western Michigan University students and an architect from Kingscott Associates joined the HAA/UDM team at the onset of the morning work session. This entire session was devoted to design conversations and a walking tour of campus. The team thoroughly reviewed the University’s vision and site specific criteria for the areas of focus. A concerted effort to engage the UDM and WMU students in conversation resulted in a multilayered understanding of the design challenge.

The afternoon progressed with developing the concepts on paper. The team divided into two groups and worked on the two project sites simultaneously with free movement of people and ideas between each group. The importance of the overall campus vision and relationship of the Arts Plaza to the Michigan Avenue corridor (central campus spine) became very clear as work progressed. The students were encouraged to prepare the final plan drawings for each site and were prepped for the day’s end presentation. Their direct involvement throughout the entire process added depth to our final products while fulfilling their experience as part of a professional team.
West Michigan Avenue Corridor

Program
The University community envisions West Michigan Avenue Corridor to be developed as a pedestrian friendly central spine that ties and unifies bordering activity centers. A unique idea for parking and service access in this area is desired without dominating the space. Consideration for gateway development is important at each end of the corridor. Opportunity for large gatherings, informal recreation activities, and efficient movement of daily pedestrian traffic will need to be part of the final design.

Analysis
The corridor's west end currently functions as a primary student entry although no significant enhancements clearly identify the area as a gateway experience. Haenicke Hall strongly terminates the corridor's west end, being constructed perpendicular to the corridor's axis. An open air pedestrian port through the building allows free pedestrian movement but sets up a condition for severe wind tunneling.

The “flag pole area” lies east of Haenicke Hall. It serves as a central campus gathering space and begins to define a crossing point for a secondary axis with the Arts Plaza as a south terminus and Goldsworth Valley to the north.

A large surface parking lot occupies the mid-section of the corridor, accessed by Michigan Avenue from the east (a pedestrian and vehicular gateway). This area is flanked by heavily trafficked buildings such as Sangren Hall, Bernhard Center, Seibert Administration Building, and the Student Recreation Center. Beautiful mature trees within the park-like landscape surrounding the Oaklands Residence impact the corridor along its south side.
Design
The concept for the West Michigan Avenue Corridor is based on its need to become a prominent campus gateway on each end, have maximum flexibility for both programmed and informal events, and provide the wow! factor – to be the campus green in a traditional sense. Parking is redeveloped directly below and accessible to the green spine with vehicular access from the east. The concept makes use of the existing sloping terrain to develop several layers of below grade parking structure. Specific enhancements to the new campus green include the following:

West End Gateway
Opportunity for a new building exists at the west end gateway on the corridor’s north side. A new building mass at this location will enframe the pass through Haenicke Hall and strengthen its prominence. A new campus sign wall is also proposed to establish entry identity and diminish the impact of westerly winds.

Flag Pole Area
A proposed redevelopment plan for this existing gathering area involves the inclusion of a new iconic sculpture and stronger emphasis on cross circulation routes. An artfully designed, narrow stormwater channel originates from this area marking a path to the Arts Plaza.

Campus Green
The open space from Sangren Hall to the Student Recreation Center contain alternating panels of lawn and hard-surfaced gathering areas held together by tree-lined walkways along both sides of the corridor. A secondary diagonal grid of walkways within the lawn panels provides for cross movements in a uniform manner. Opportunity exists for soft stormwater channeling along the corridor’s length. This would be designed using best management practices and serve as a demonstration that portrays the University’s position regarding the importance of stormwater management.
Arts Plaza

Program
WMU staff, faculty and students are interested in updating the Arts Plaza design as a distinct open space that will articulate its surroundings and unify the buildings of the quad. It is to be a people friendly space and an activity hub that can be enjoyed every season for a myriad of activities both formal and informal. Anticipated activities and features include:

- Theater
- Dance
- Music / concerts
- Art display
- Places to hang out
- Water feature
- Outdoor café
- Bronco Bash (could potentially be relocated to campus central spine)
- On-site stormwater storage/ infiltration
- Snow melting systems at building entrances and easy snow removal from other areas

Analysis
The plaza currently is composed of pavement embellished with a fountain/pool (oversized pool) and pockets of trees. A new addition to the Dalton Center (Richmond Center for Visual Arts) completes a spatial enclosure surrounding the plaza to a near perfect square, although the configuration of the plaza does not address view orientation or access to the new addition. Pedestrian wayfinding to the plaza from the central spine of campus is not easily recognized. Pedestrians enter and pass through the plaza via openings at the southwest and northeast corners. Within the plaza, movements are in all directions, focused on building entrances. The plaza sees few people lingering to enjoy themselves or views.

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Design
The concept for the Arts Plaza is based on its need for flexibility and desire by the University community for the space to come alive. Use of the tried and true “urban square” theme, provides maximum flexibility and has successfully accommodated high levels of vitality in public spaces over hundreds of years. Since this design concept is not overdone for any one activity, it can service diverse programming with minimal set-up. All pedestrian movements, both through and within the space, are easily provided for. In this design, the urban square concept is enhanced to address special needs and unique existing characteristics of WMU. Specific embellishments include the following:

Building Addition
A building addition on the south side of Sprau Tower is intended to provide for the expansion of a small coffee shop. The design concept calls for a canopy to extend from the addition accommodating outdoor coffee drinkers to be seen enjoying the new sculptural water feature. The raised elevation of this area also offers excellent views of programmed events within the square.

Water Feature
A new water feature (smaller – making room for plaza events) with an integrated sculpture is strategically located as an aiming stake when approaching the plaza from the north. Consideration should be given to providing a continuous stormwater rivulet or stream from the main campus spine to this new feature to strengthen wayfinding to the plaza for visitors and new students. The water feature is deliberately sited directly opposite of the Richmond Center for Visual Arts entry and is integral with the proposed outdoor café.
**Plaza Surface**
The square is envisioned to be constructed of special unit pavers (possibly 18” or 2' square) that are supported at each corner by pedestals. This would allow for drainage through the paver joints to a detention/infiltration system beneath the surface. The paving units would be easily removed to provide for special set-up requirements for any given event, art display, or temporary landscape/environmental art.

**Expanded Terrace**
The Miller Auditorium Terrace is intended to be extended to provide an informal performance venue. Seating and tables within the square are moveable to provide maximum flexibility during various events.

**Trees**
The northern portion of the square is canopied with deciduous trees growing from large grated openings in the pavement. The design intent is to shade the sunniest area of the square during summer while allowing full sun during winter without impeding the flow of traffic.

**Art Store**
An Art/Music supply store is proposed in the southwest corner of the square to generate more activity in the plaza while being convenient to students and instructors of the arts programs.

**Surrounding Exterior Spaces**
Spaces surrounding the square are redeveloped, if possible, based on their relationship to the square. For example, an art display area is developed west of the square associated with the new Richmond Center for Visual Arts. Quiet secondary spaces are developed in the easterly approach areas connecting to Western Avenue while more formal approaches are envisioned entering the square from the north and south.
Michigan Avenue
Opportunities and Constraints

- Establish east end as the major campus gateway for both pedestrians and vehicles
- Enhance west campus entrance
- Intensify pedestrian use: use space for "Bronco Bash"
- Provide large scale art at major intersections to create nodes/focal points
- Create parking opportunities while strengthening pedestrian experiences
Michigan Avenue
Plan and Connections

New Building to frame secondary gateway space at west end

Campus Signage Wall slows winds and establishes identity at Mich. Ave. Terminus

Iconic sculpture at central gathering space to strengthen relationship to cross circulation routes

Access to below grade parking deck from existing drop off area

Green central spine to provide large gathering and event space.

Narrow stormwater channel follows tree lined walkways

Roundabout to accommodate access to ring road and parking deck below green space

Outdoor café space between Bernhard Center and Admin Bldg.

Access to below grade parking deck from existing service area

Diagonal grid of walkways provides for cross paths while creating a streetscape-like character atop below grade parking deck

Multi-level below grade parking takes advantage of grade change and brings parking into center of campus without compromising pedestrian spaces

Narrow stormwater channel follows connection to Arts Campus

Arts Campus

Western Michigan University
Design Charrette
Michigan Avenue and Arts Campus
Arts Campus
Plan and Connections
- Open plan accommodates cross circulation and high level of flexibility for programming events etc.
- Flexible pedestal paving system accommodates stormwater storage beneath and allows removal of pavers for art and temporary landscape installations
- Building terrace at Miller is extended to provide informal performance venue
- Sculpture fountain provides year round interest and terminus to view from North
- Art and Music Supply activates southwest corner at drop off entrance
Arts Plaza