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Writ 2500 Final Project
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Constructing a Community Center

Part 1: The Proposal

For my project, I assumed the role of an architect, hired by the city of Chapel Hill, to create the design of a building that will potentially fill an empty lot downtown. This empty lot has great walking access, curb appeal, and a close proximity to many other businesses. When given this task, there were several perspectives I needed to take into account. City planners told me that the lot had been empty for some time as no one can agree to what should fill the space in a way that would make all involved parties happy. Residents use the site as an informal gathering place for activist movements and community outreach. Land developers and businesses hope to make a profit off the site. And most importantly, the city council wants to preserve the charm and image of city itself. My task was to design a building that could function within the constraints of the proposed property but accommodate all the cultural needs of the community. I had a couple of options when thinking about the design: a community center, multi-use, commercial, residential, or a combination. My only requirement was that I was able to accommodate all the needs of each perspective. I needed to make certain design choices, e.g., exterior, interior floor plan, etc. which I will discuss. In creating my design, I needed to reference outside sources for inspiration and guidance, which I will also talk about.

Part 2: Theory

There were several sources I used for inspiration for my design, some we've discussed in class and some I pulled externally. First, I drew on Langegger's ideas of place, territory, and locality. Currently, the community views the property as a place, having cultural meaning, belonging to the people, and having a collective memory which legitimizes its community ownership in the eyes of Chapel Hillians. However, the city views the property as a territory, a place to enforce laws (like removal of graffiti and signage and enforcing the privacy of the property with a fence) and stake a claim over a potential money maker that is not shareable with the general public. My design for a community center would unite the two, where people can attach collective memory, belonging, and culture to this place, while the city retains its rights to the property, through an income and a regulation of laws on the site. As a locality, Chapel Hill could repurpose the site into something of value without reducing its value. To represent these three functions, I've color coded where I've incorporated them into my design of the floor plan, with blue representing place, red representing territory, and purple representing locality. I haven't completed this part yet, so I don't have any images of it, but this is my intention.

Additionally, I pulled from Kitto's definition and philosophy of the polis. This locality could act as the central location of the polis' activities, a sort of acropolis in a sense. Kitto defines the polis as the whole communal life of the people, including the political, cultural, moral, and even economic. My design would be that for Chapel Hill, drawing on its collective memory and its future. Acts common in the polis would be able to occur here, like presentations of art, debate, communal aid, discussion, and community classes.

Sharon Zukin's "Whose City, Whose Culture" also provided insight into my proposal. I began to question what about this proposal makes it my city, what makes it my culture? I realized I had to be careful to not overstep the boundaries of this city and its culture. There's a fine line between improvement and gentrification, which makes a space an exclusive one. Everyone who wants to use this building should be able to use it. But we have to make it so that everyone does want to use it (meaning that is appeals to everyone). If we don't design it that way, we are still making it exclusive by not accommodating all people, on their terms, even if we say everyone is welcome.
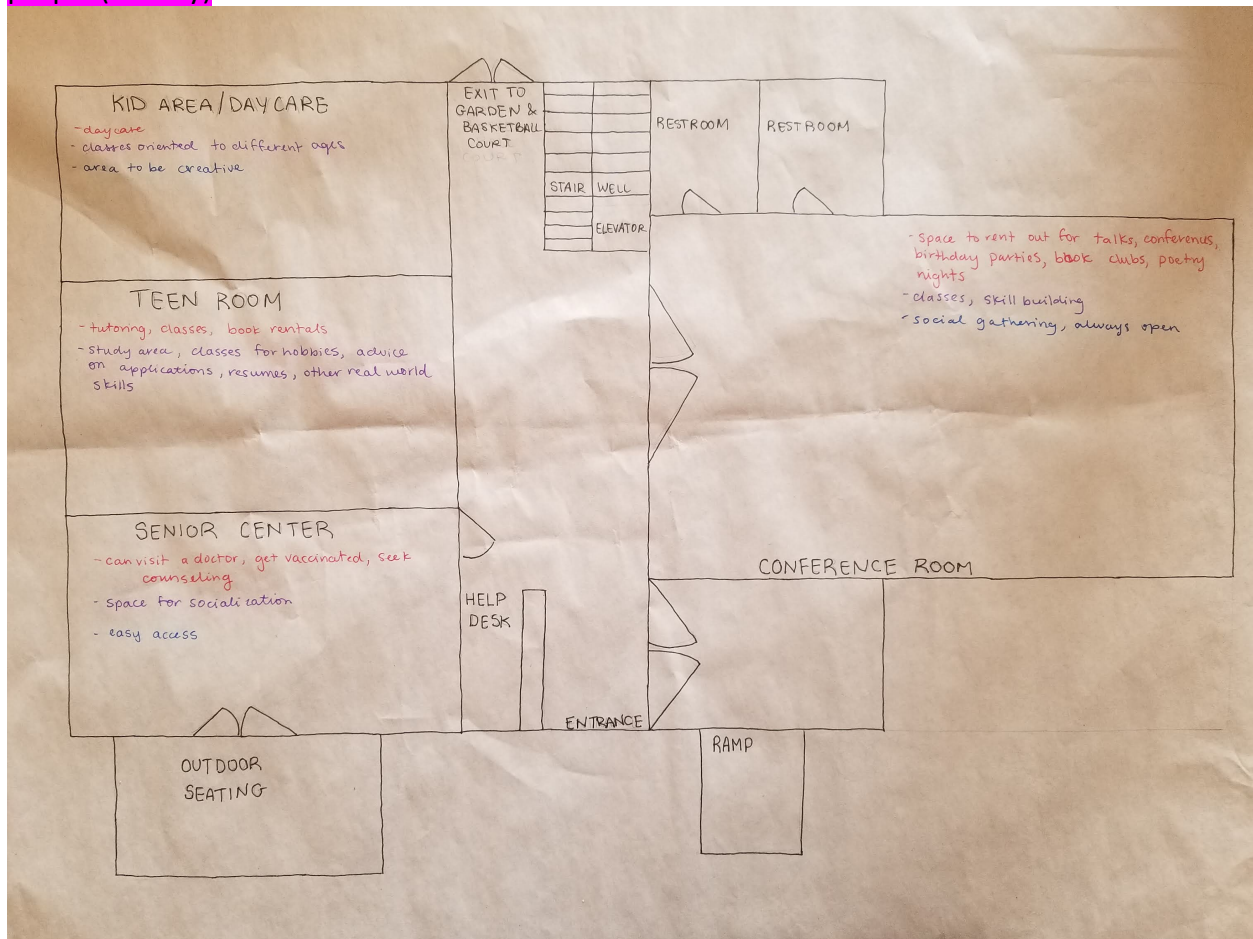
In continuing to think about how to incorporate each aspect of my audience, there were some things I needed to take into account. What was preventing me from simply turning this space into a high rise? What can I do to justify spending the money on this building and not turning it into the most profitable building we can, like apartments? In the end, I decided to try to incorporate both of these aspects.

Part 3: Design Visuals

Exterior- These images represent the exterior design of the community center. I decided to use a lot of brick and incorporate as much glass as possible to give the building natural light.

Interior- The following image is a representation of the community center on the first floor. Within each room is a color-coded functionality for each space: red (territory), blue (place), purple (locality).

KID AREA/DAY CARE
- day care
- classes oriented to different ages
- area to be creative

EXIT TO GARDEN & BASKETBALL COURT

RESTROOM   RESTROOM

STAIR WELL

ELEVATOR

- Space to rent out for talks, conferenus, birthday parties, book clubs, poetry nights
- classes, skill building
- social gathering, always open

TEEN ROOM
- tutoring, classes, book rentals
- study area, classes for hobbies, advice on applications, resumes, other real world skills

SENIOR CENTER
- can visit a doctor, get vaccinated, seek counseling
- space for socialization
- easy access

HELP DESK

CONFERENCE ROOM

ENTRANCE

RAMP

OUTDOOR SEATING

Inspiration- The following two images are designs that I drew inspiration from when thinking about my own design. They helped refine my ideas of the atmosphere and aesthetic that I wanted to achieve.

The next three images are of the buildings that surround the property I designed the building for. I used these images to inspire my design choices, as I wanted to create a building that fit aesthetically with its surrounding and with Chapel Hill.

Part 4: Design Selection

The first floor I designed as a community center, with a senior center, teen and kid only areas, an art room, a basketball court, meeting rooms, and a community garden. In this design, I made accommodations for community learning, tutoring, socialization, presentations, and outreach. I hope that my design is also able to accommodate space for a soup kitchen, writing workshops for resumes and job applications, and space to socialize that can be rented out for birthdays, conferences, or book clubs. I made each piece easily accessible, regardless of physical capabilities. Additionally, I made the space accessible to food trucks to bring in money for businesses and attract people to gather.

In choosing what to include in my community center, I had to think about what would make the space inclusive for all. Having spaces for all ages that catered to all ages, children, teenagers, adults, and seniors was a priority for making the space age inclusive. It was also

important that the space was disability inclusive, so I included ramps and elevators. All services

and spaces are free, including tutoring, workshops, and rooms, to be inclusive for all economic

statuses. The bathrooms are not gendered. I made this decision because North Carolina was

recently embroiled in a scandal with a piece of legislature known as House Bill 2 that would

prevent transgender folks from using the bathroom of their choice.

In the end, I made the decision to build apartments above the community center on the

first floor. I felt that this would best combine the ideas of place and territory into a locality. This

way, the property would retain its ability to make a profit while also maintaining its cultural

significance. By turning the property into a community center with housing above, I could

accommodate the cultural needs of the property as well as provide convenient housing.