

Planning for People
Returning to the Basics

S h e k o o f a h K h e d h r i

Introduction:

Clean walkways, illuminated sites, welcoming landscapes, seating areas, small outlets with outdoor settings, safe and comfortable environment – these are few techniques planners use to create a vibrant site. But, what are the tangible elements that make a place more interesting and vibrant than the other? And how can we enhance a place that lacks those elements?

I will attempt to answer these questions through exploring the following two sites:

A-The public space that exists between the two office buildings located on the block bounded by Market, 15th and 16th Streets and JFK Boulevard. For the sake of easy reference I shall refer to this space as The JFK Public Space

B-The Lehmann Brothers Quadrangle, the campus space between the McNeil Building and Vance Hall located between 37th and 38th Street on the Penn Campus.

Engaging Basic Human Senses

Checklist

Before getting into the details of analyzing each space, we have to understand the users' requirements. Making places that fit human purposes is the task of site planning. Two things must then be understood: the nature of the site, on the one hand, and how its users will act in it and value it, on the other hand. I will discuss the nature of the site when analyzing each space, but first, this question must be kept in perspective. What are the criteria that make users interact with a space and create a positive behavioral setting?

Behavioral settings are something planners should be aware of. Behavioral settings are the behaviors expected to occur in a space and how these behaviors will match the purposes of site uses.¹

A sense of place is a criteria shared by all human users. A place must not only fit the structure of our bodies, it must fit the way in which our minds work: how we perceive and image and feel. While sense varies with culture and with personal temperament and experience, there are regularities in these perceptions due to the structure of our senses and brains. Thus a place should have a clear perceptual identity: be recognizable, memorable, vivid, engaging of our attention.¹

To make a vibrant space is to be able to create a space that engages our five senses, as well as creating a feeling of safety and comfort through our sixth sense.

Appearance

Visually, a space should not only be pleasantly lit, have a well planned landscape and incorporate a comfortable color palette - It should also be attractive and, sometimes, raise public curiosity.



Safe, fun and attractive
Millenium Park, Chicago



Visual curiosity draws people,
eventually becomes a landmark
Wall street, New York

Scents

We should take into account avoiding any activities that cause undesirable odor. In the case of designing public spaces, it is important to segregate loading/unloading, garbage collection and any other activity of such nature from the public space. In fact, having restaurants and coffee shops would help generate good, but subtle, desirable scents that attract people: delicious brewed coffee and pastries in the morning, a smell of good pizza perhaps.

Delicious food scents draw people to use a public space to enjoy eating
CheeseBoard, Berkeley, California



Sounds

Audible comfort is another factor. Blocking undesirable noise or heavy traffic or avoid placing activities under flight path, as an extreme example, are some of the considerations that need to be taken into account when planning a public space.

A relative case: A strategy that restaurants use to cover the noise created by their client conversation is bringing in a layer of music. This strategy is sometimes applied in public spaces.

Interaction

Physical interaction with site objects is an important factor. For example, temporary art installations, interesting features, or just comfortable seating are some of the ingredients, in my opinion, of a successful and vibrant space.

Social

When providing comfort that is suitable for human senses, only then we can have a social space. What differentiates humans from other creatures is the ability to socialize, interact, and have conversation with one another. That is why it is important to have a social space. The last element arises on its own, which is the sense of safety and comfort through the eyes on the streets or street surveillance. As Jane Jacob puts it in her book "The Life and Death of Great American Cities", the basic requisite for such surveillance is a substantial quantity of stores and other public places sprinkled along the sidewalks of a district; enterprises and public places that are used by evening and night must be among them. Stores, bars and restaurants, as the chief examples, work in several different and complex ways to abet sidewalk safety. First, they give people concrete reasons for using the sidewalks on which these enterprises face. Second, they draw people along the sidewalks past places which have no attractions to public use in themselves but which become traveled. Third, storekeepers and other small businessmen are typically strong proponents of peach and order themselves. Fourth, the activity generated by people on errands, or people aiming for food or drink, is itself an attraction to still other people.

When we manage to bring elements into a space that make the public engage their five senses positively, only then have successfully created an environment recognizable, memorable, vivid and engaging of our attention.

Engaging all senses
Reading Terminal
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Site Strengths *Economically viable?*

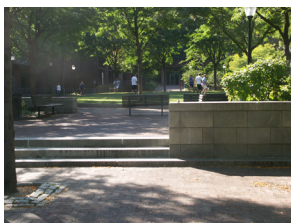
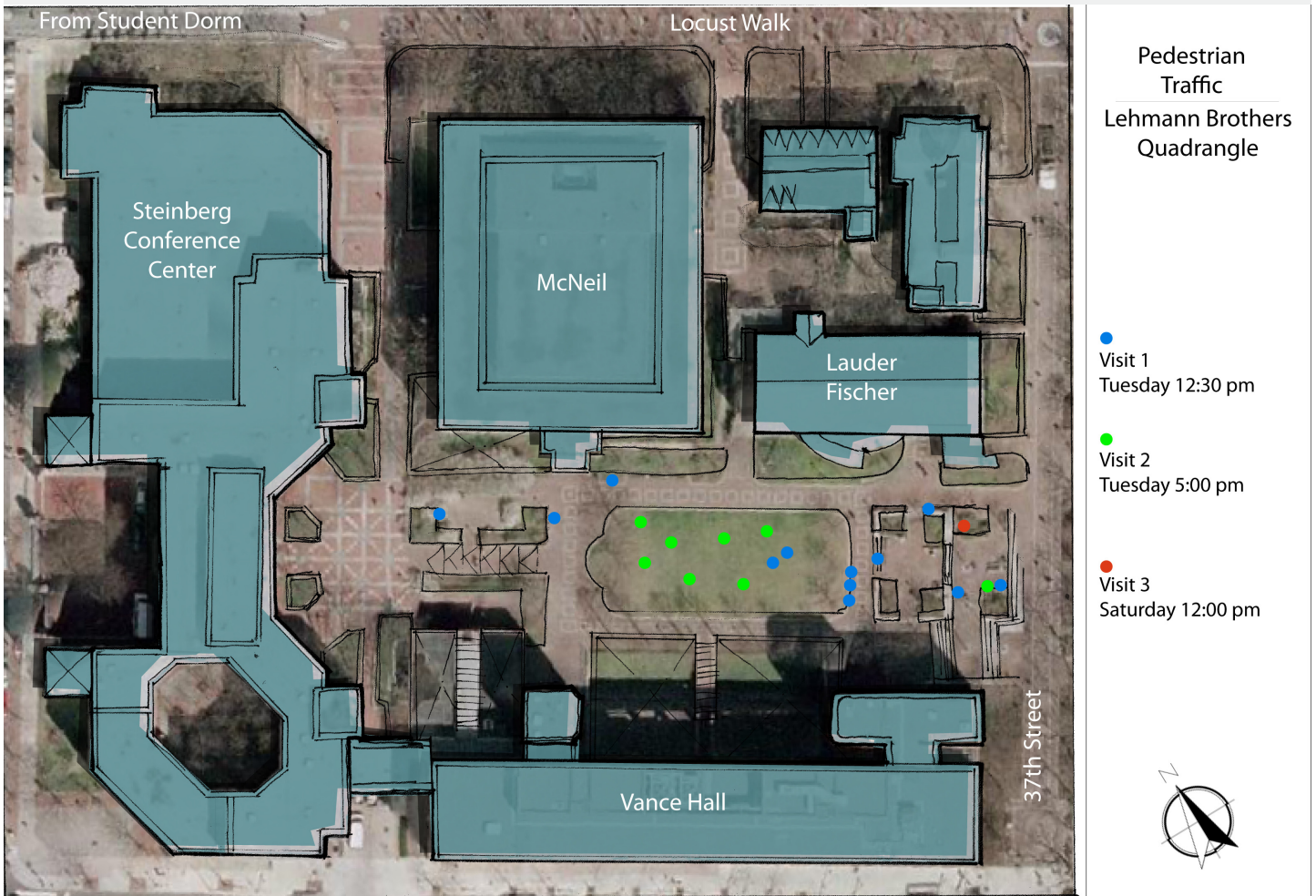
In order to create a friendly and usable environment, we first and foremost should have a reason to do so. By reason I mean, a successful economy that supports any outdoor activity. In both sites we do have a solid economy. One of the sites (the JFK public space) is located in the heart of downtown Philadelphia major businesses are located. The other site (Lehmann Brothers Quadrangle) is in the heart of University of Pennsylvania campus, where there is an institutional economy that can support and carry such expense. This is sufficient reason to go to the next stage and attempt to create a vibrant environment. According to Jan Gehl, people flocked to the streets out of necessity, because that's where work was often performed.

Traffic Analysis

By observing each site on three different occasions I understood some basic characteristics of each site, and how the public responds to the existing conditions. The observation days were: during work/class hours, during lunch break and after work/class hours. Later, I created a traffic map of each visit. The traffic map only shows activities taking place within the space (i.e. I excluded people passing by and trying to get from one point to another) - **Plan1 & Plan2**

This study is not sufficient to fully understand peoples' behaviour within the existing condition, because it does not take into account different seasonal behaviours as well as different school seasonal activities and events.

Plan -1



Visit 1 - Tuesday 12:30 pm

During regular lunch time few students come to find a quiet space to sit and read, have a conversation or eat lunch. The total number of people using the space at one time was around 10 people or less. Student choose to go to more visible and convenient places, such as the open space in front of Huntsman Hall or in front of Annenberg Center. This is a typical public space competition.

Visit 2 - Tuesday 5:00 pm

The space is not used, except for a group of students playing football (soccer) and another person sitting on one of the benches having a telephone conversation.

Visit 3: - Saturday 12:00 pm

The space is empty except for people passing by. A homeless person is laying comfortably on one of the benches during a good sunny day.

Plan -2



Visit 1 - Tuesday 12:00 pm

The site was unused except for two people standing beside the tower entrance for short smoke break and several people in the space, probably waiting for a friend in one of the offices. Other than that, the site is only used by package delivery personnel or the passing public.

Visit 2 - Monday 7:00 pm

During weekdays after work the space becomes extremely empty. Only a couple of homeless people can be spotted on the site.

Visit 3 - Thursday 5:00 pm

Immediately after work the space becomes vibrant. People leaving their offices use the space to have their last business conversation or just chitchat. Unfortunately, there aren't any benches for sitting. Everyone is either standing or sitting on newspapers on the edge of the flower pot.

JFK Public Space Plan 3

Comfort and Image

The site, although clean and well maintained, is unattractive to the public and doesn't draw any attention. This is because there aren't any interesting features that are worth coming to. A person standing in the middle of this site, feels small and disproportionate to the giant towers standing on both sides. The only elements used are giant plant pots, which are obviously used to overcome the cold gray concrete and gray steel monotony. Unfortunately these pots take a lot of space, without any benefit. People are not able to sit on the edges of these pots, because they are designed not to allow people to sit on them. The large number of pots creates an undesirable endless rhythm that is visually unattractive. The space feels vacant and deserted because it is bound by two towers of which the commercial spaces on the ground floor are not accessible, in fact people in the offices have drawn their curtains and blocked their view to the space. Naturally, the site doesn't have street surveillance that Jane Jacob explains in her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities".



Crowd moving away from the site



Blocked views



Disproportionate scale

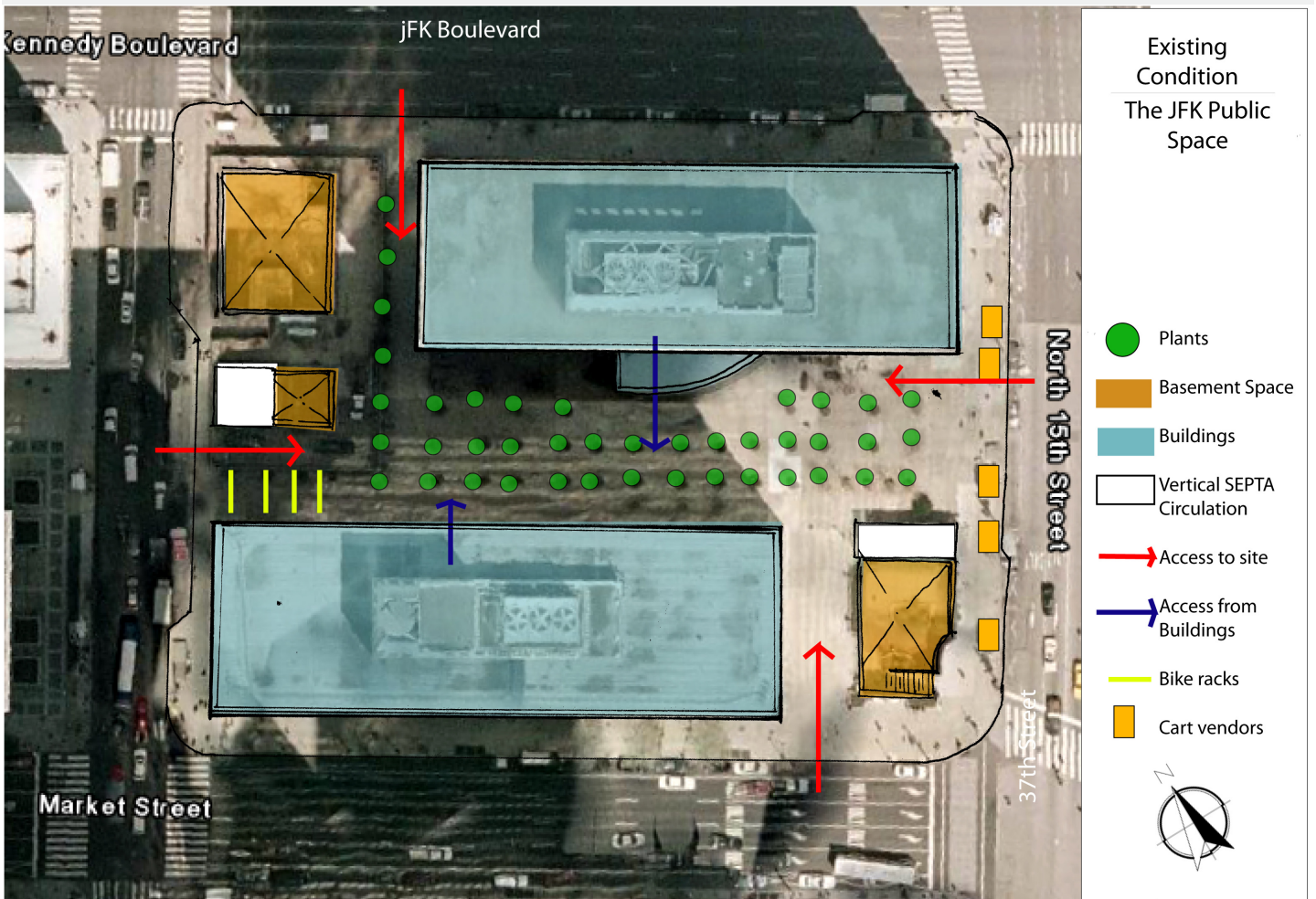
Access and Linkage

This open space is located in the heart of center city and there are two direct accesses to the site (east access and west access). It is extremely well connected, since SEPTA is located under the site and there are two entries to the transit. It is also located in the middle of two major streets, Market Street and JFK Boulevard. Not to mention that it is a walkable distance to some of the major tourist attraction sites: City Hall, Reading Terminal, Benjamin Franklin Parkway (where a lot of famous parades take place) and Chestnut Street for shopping. The visibility of City Hall from the space is extremely valuable.

A major disadvantage of the site is that the pedestrian traffic coming outside of SEPTA is directed outwards. Even the small cart vendors notice this phenomenon and have consequently located their carts on the edge of the street, and in front of the SEPTA entries, where they can capture pedestrian traffic.

The solution is extremely simple, and it is to create an attraction that can draw public. Sometimes it could be through providing restaurants, where people can come during lunch breaks. This can also be an attraction for people working in the two office towers. Music could capture people moving in the opposite direction, open art galleries and different seasonal events are other strategies.

Plan -3



Newly renovated areas, as well as underground renovations, show interest in bringing life back to the space.

Breaking the monotony

The site needs colorful elements to overcome the gray dull color. This can be achieved by using colorful shading devices, outdoor art galleries and of course by the people using the space.

Invest in the strengths

By placing the fountain opposite the City Hall, many people would use the space. It is also close to the street food vendors and the restaurant on the ground floor. The site has a very strong access to SEPTA which should be taken advantage of.

Vital street furniture

The site lacks benches, bike racks and light fixtures. The negative behavioural result of not having these vital furnitures are:

- Public use handrails to chain thier bike
- Avoid the space at night
- Use the space for short period of time because there aren't any benches.

Use and Activity

The site doesn't have any activities that draw people. There is one restaurant that is oriented towards the space. However, to enter the restaurant, one must go one level below the ground level. This creates difficulty of attempting to create an access to the restaurant in the future. There is a 7/11 store on the northern corner which doesn't have an opening towards the site. If the store opened towards the site, people would visit the store more often.

Sociability

Few people use the JFK public space and usually stand or wait in front of the tower doors, since there aren't any pleasant places to sit and enjoy. The activities seen:

- People waiting for friends/family.
- Employees who take a quick break for smoking a cigarette.
- people sit on the restaurants seats.
- Mail delivery services or other loading/unloading workers

*Alternative Plan
Plan 4*

By moving the pots from the middle, we create an opportunity for better activities such as: outdoor cafés, small water fountains with seating around, outdoor temporary art galleries, or even small setting that allows an occasional multipurpose activities. Managing the site is a vital tool to ensure the ultimate revenue generation and best economic usage of the site. Marketing is one of the managing responsibilities. Informing the public about the existence of such space, and creating an easy and attractive name for the open space, where people can advertise through word of mouth is one of the marketing tactics. Advertising for art gallery events, winter snow sculptures, summer sand sculptures and occasional night time outdoor movies would also attract people to explore this space during different times of the years, and during day and night.

The proposed plan shows an alternative approach. I attempted to focus on quality of space and the activities that draw the public. **Plan 4**

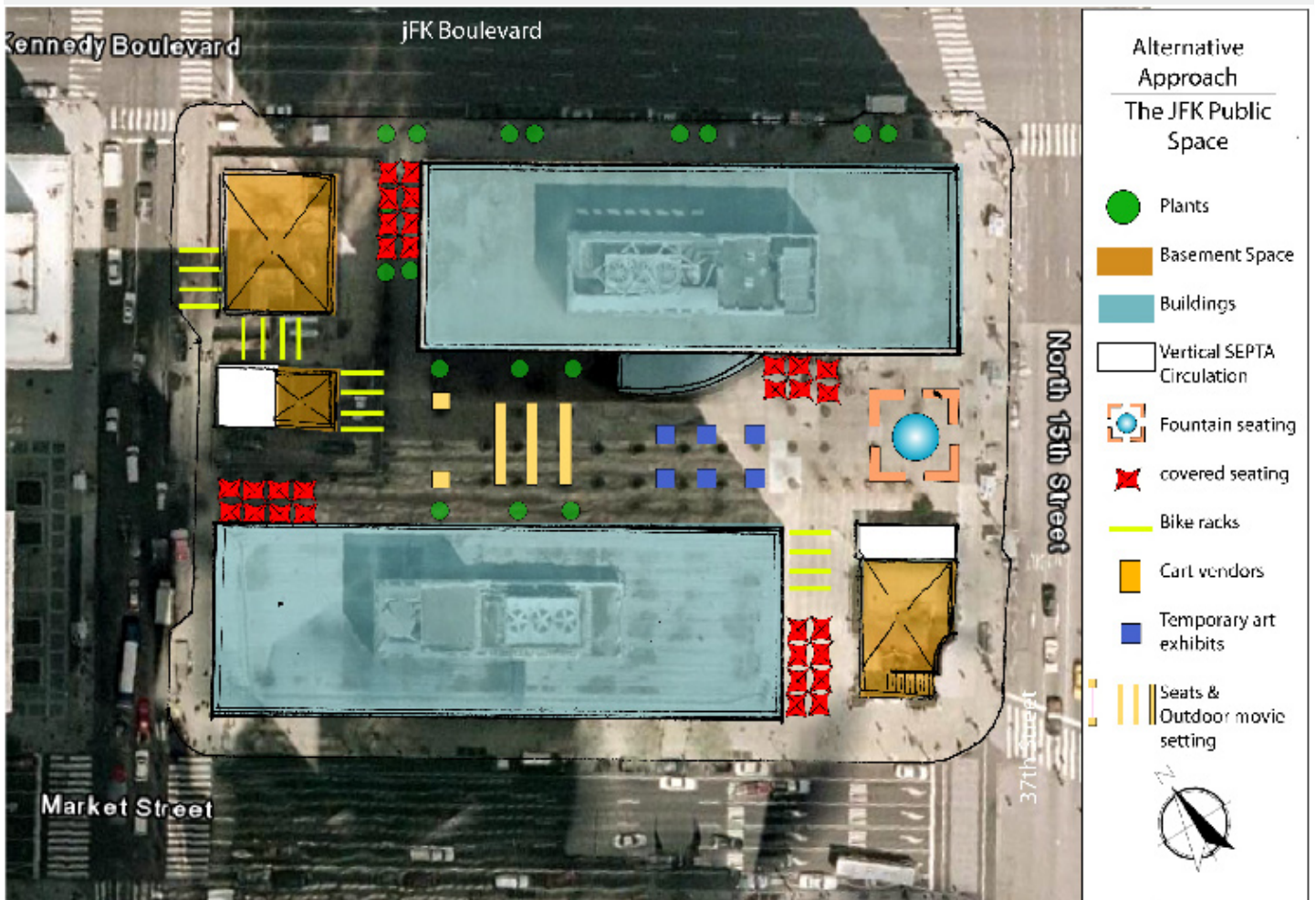


Settings for temporary night shows
Bryant Park
New York



Shaded Outdoor
Coffee Shops
Maiden Lane
San Francisco, California

Plan -4

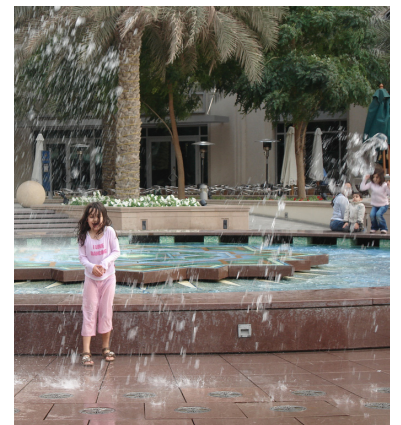


Sidewalk Art Festival
Downtown Orlando
Florida

Outdoor Caffe
Munich
Germany



Marsa Jumeriah
Dubai UAE



The Lehmann Brothers Quadrangle Plan 5

Comfort and Image

The site is clean, well maintained and feels safe because it is located in the middle of academic buildings. There is comfortable seating around the site which varies from benches along plantations, to steps in front of academic building or chairs surrounded by landscape. In addition, there are bike racks, light fixtures and pleasantly landscaped areas. Thus, the space can be considered a good example in terms of comfort and image.

Access and Linkage

The site is located in the heart of the campus, adjacent to Wharton school and a walkable distance to many other departments and important facilities such as libraries, administration offices, school of art and school of medicine. Locust walk is one of the major walkways that connects to several important buildings on campus such as Huntsman Hall and Steinberg Dietrich Hall and even to the student housing facilities located on the block of 38th and Walnut. The major entry to the site is from Locust walk and 37th Street, where the famous Benjamin Franklin sculpture sits on the bench with his pigeon. There are three other indirect entries between the buildings. The downfall is that the site has many entrances but is still hidden behind McNeil building, and since the chances of removing the building and integrating the space with Locust Walk is zero, the chances of students using this space more often is also slim. This is because many students are unaware that it exists in the first place. The site also competes with other more popular, visible spaces in the vicinity.

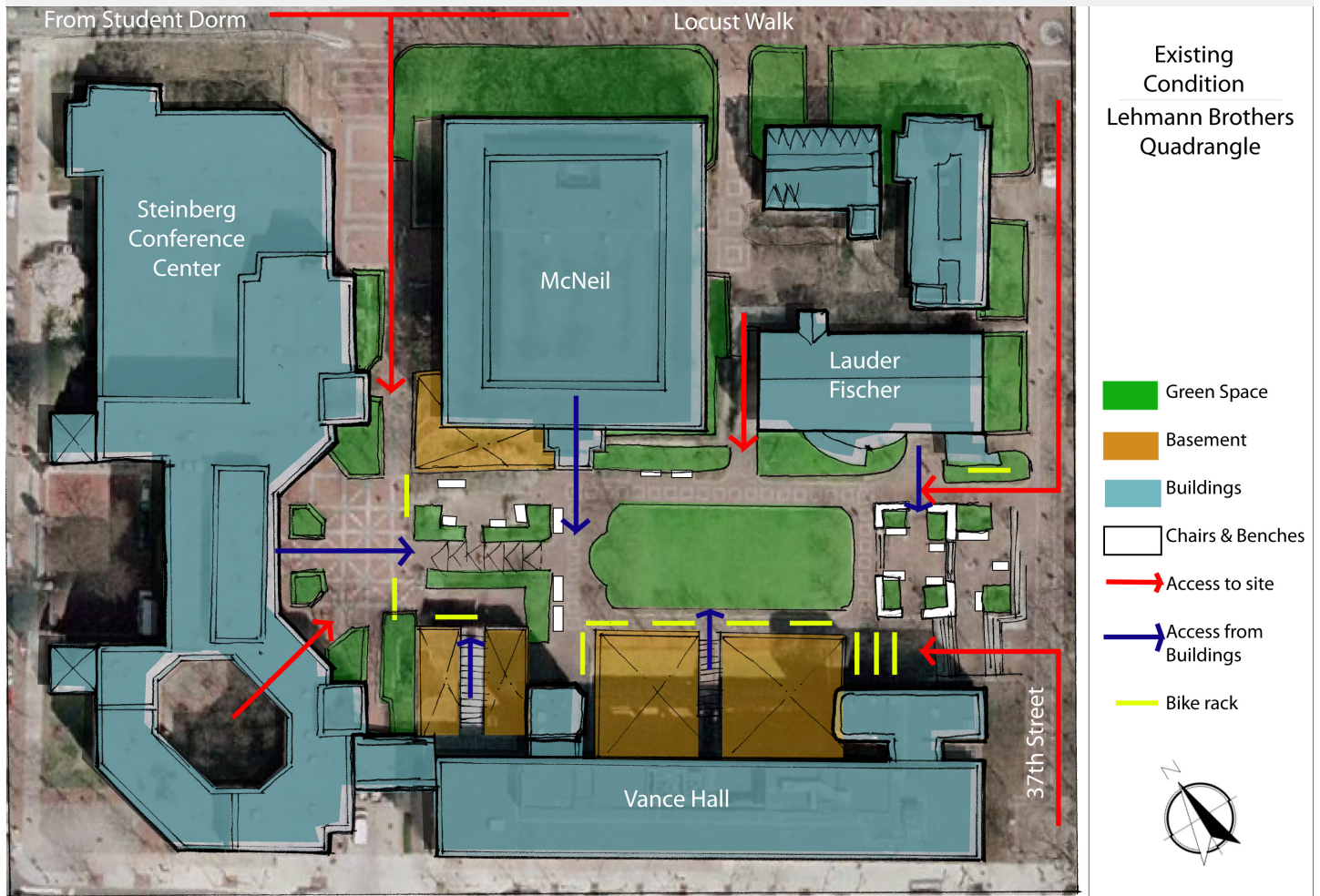
Use and Activity

There is Vance Hall, McNeil building, Steinberg Conference Center and Lauder Fischer Building around the space. People who have easy access to the back of the building tend to use this open space. The other drawback to the site is that there aren't any vendors or carts that sell food. Thus, people who want to eat during lunch time are mostly surrounding the food carts scattered around the campus and naturally sit at the closest place they find immediately after buying food, or go back to their offices or class.

Observation:

I spent the last year on campus, and the first time I knew about this space was in the cold winter of January 2007, when I was waiting for my friend. She traveled from overseas to take crash course in Wharton school and stayed in Steinberg Conference Center, which is one of the buildings surrounding the site. While I was waiting for her, a band of 10 to 15 students in the Vance Hall stood in circle and started playing different drums. Although the weather was cold and I could have gone inside to warm up, I preferred to stay outside and listen to the music. I saw other students do the same, but they were very few because I doubt people would have found the place in the first place

Plan -5



Shadowed walkways



Open green landscape



Unused space, except for passing through

Use and Activity

There are several social activities take place during different times:

- Students sit on the bench during lunch break
- Students use the middle space to play games
- Visitors staying in the Steinberg Center come outside for business discussions
- Staff come outside for quick lunch from McNeil Building, Vance Building, Steinberg Center and Fischer hall

Unfortunately, during work hours and nights, the space is less usable. It is for the same reason: people on campus are not aware of this space.

Alternative Plan

The site doesn't have any planning issues. In fact, it doesn't require any physical change or alteration. It only requires some features encouraging the use of the space. Listed below are different features:

- Sign announcing "public space"
- More active public ownership or management to arrange different events
- Directions to public restrooms or other facilities
- Small-scale food vendors – this is vital to encourage more use of the space

Endnote

1 Kevin Lynch and Gary Hack, "Site Planning",
Third Edition, The MIT Press, 1984

2 Jane Jacobs, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities", Toronto, 1961

3 Using the "Elements of Great Spaces"
Project for Public Spaces evaluation Form

4 Reid Ewing, "Security of Public Space: New Measures Are Reliable, But Are They Valid?", The magazine of the American Planning Association, Vol.73, No7, July 2007