From Vacant to Vibrant: Proposing a New Approach to the Anchor Store Typology

Samantha L. Greenberg
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FROM VACANT TO VIBRANT:
PROPOSING A NEW APPROACH TO THE ANCHOR SPACE TYPOLOGY

A Thesis Presented

by

SAMANTHA L. GREENBERG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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FROM VACANT TO VIBRANT:
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ABSTRACT

FROM VACANT TO VIBRANT:
PROPOSING A NEW APPROACH TO THE ANCHOR SPACE TYPOLOGY

MAY 2014

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The ever-evolving retail landscape in the United States represents a narrative of change for local communities. While change may signify instability, it also presents opportunities for innovation. This dichotomy is particularly pertinent in small downtowns, where the faltering of both national chain and locally owned retail establishments is felt, not only by business owners, but by all members of the community. The loss of anchor stores (large stores that serve to draw patrons to a commercial center) has proven especially challenging for downtowns that formerly relied on the consumer traffic generated by a big-name retailer. The loss of anchor stores also scars the built environment, which is often not designed to respond fluidly to programmatic flux.

While the default response to a failed anchor store is often to simply replace it with a slightly more robust retail anchor, this approach to renewal is shortsighted, for the replaced anchor store will inevitably fail as well. Instead, it is essential that the reuse of vacant anchor spaces be designed to not only sustainably support local economies, but also to address and enhance community and the built environment.

Reprogramming, as opposed to replacing, former anchor stores presents an opportunity
to embrace change in order to build a truly sustainable and vibrant neighborhood that considers retail to be one of many assets.

This thesis presents a study of and an intervention at the site of a, still vacant, former Borders bookstore and café in the downtown of a New York City metro north community. The design proposal seeks to identify, develop, and celebrate the coalescence of the site’s economic, social, and architectural potentials. Paradoxically, while the proposal focuses on promoting the local capacity of a particular place, the greater implications of this study can be translated to other small downtowns nationwide, and perhaps even globally.
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CHAPTER 1
ANCHOR STORE TYPOLOGY

Introduction

An anchor store refers to a big-name retailer that serves to consistently draw patrons to a commercial center. This reliable flow of consumer traffic benefits, not only the anchor store, but also neighboring retailers and restaurants. Anchor stores are not defined by an architectural type, but must be sited and designed to maximize visibility and ease of consumer flow to the anchor and its surrounding businesses. In the context of a shopping mall, the major, flagship department stores, like Macy’s, Bloomingdale’s, and Sears serve as anchors. Smaller stores are intentionally nestled between the prominently sized and located anchors, such that consumers are exposed to a variety of retail types. Anchor stores are also salient economic drivers beyond the boundaries of the shopping mall. Driveable, suburban strip malls, for example, frequently rely on anchor stores to generate consumer traffic for smaller stores located on the strip. Likewise, walkable downtown areas may host anchor stores that help to attract patrons to the shopping district.

In all of these contexts, the anchor store’s prominence, both economically and architecturally, is profound. If anchor stores thrive, smaller shops and businesses benefit from consistent consumer traffic in the commercial center. Similarly, the built environment is likely to benefit from the steady use of, investment in, and upkeep of the local infrastructure and buildings that support the anchor. But what happens if anchor

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stores fail? Depending on the strength of a place, the departure of an anchor store can negatively impact surrounding businesses.\(^2\) The loss of an anchor store and the subsequent timeline of building vacancy, threaten to drain a commercial center of its consumer traffic, and of its vitality. Commercial centers may face a deterioration of streetscape or landscape, a loss of identity, and a decline in places that support public and social gatherings.

![Image of Four Seasons Mall](image-url)

Figure 1: Joel Koyama, "Four Seasons Mall."

**Opportunities for Innovation**

The departure of an anchor store, however, does not predicate such a foreboding forecast. Instead, vacant anchor stores, often previously controlled by national corporations, provide new opportunities for local innovation and ownership. In

“The Upside of a Down Economy: Going Local,” Fred Kent, president of Project for Public Spaces, explains that these kinds of changes in our economy:

[offer] communities an opportunity to revisit their values, local assets, and resources; to consider what they want their city or town to be known for; and to envision new types of destinations that could attract people to their downtowns and neighborhoods.³

These possibilities are especially pertinent at the scale of the walkable downtown, as renewed interest in walkable, urban places grows.⁴ Additionally, while the anchor store typology has proven problematic, Larisa Ortiz, an urban planner, examines what it means to “[redefine] the downtown anchor.”⁵ Anchors, she explains, can support activity within a commercial district by serving as entertainment, culture, or education-focused destinations; by providing services or goods that extend a visitor’s time in the district; or by providing a “niche or specialty” retail destination.⁶ Furthermore, “downtown anchors define the downtown brand, so attracting an anchor, or helping to grow [one], inevitably becomes part of [a] district’s strategic positioning.”⁷

Because anchors fundamentally occur within existing fabrics, it is essential to sensitively assess opportunities for rebranding, renewal, and regeneration within these contexts. For example, considering the ways in which an anchor can promote social and cultural inclusivity by engaging all members of the community is important during this

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⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid.
time of flux. Additionally, decisions to assess, alter, and adapt the anchor’s architectural language may play a significant role in the success, sustainability, and identity of the downtown. Designing an anchor that not only draws from, but also highlights, the community’s economic, social, cultural, and architectural assets, holds great potential for sustainable downtown renewal.

This thesis examines both the challenges and opportunities associated with anchor store loss at the site of a former Borders bookstore and café located in the walkable downtown of a New York City metro north community. The community’s contexts provide for a rich study into the potential for sustainable regeneration of the downtown, specifically looking at methodologies for supporting local economic health, engaging multiple publics, and designing for the adaptive reuse of mundane pieces of architecture.

Figure 2: Mind Map.
CHAPTER 2
THIS PARTICULAR PLACE

Introduction

Mount Kisco, New York is a village of approximately 11,000 located in the Hudson River Valley, approximately 30 miles north of New York City. Mount Kisco’s population is both economically and ethnically diverse. Over one third of the population identifies as foreign born and 50 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home. The village’s highly walkable downtown is located at the geographic center of its leafy 3.25 square mile area. Residents have access to multiple public services, including transit systems, a library, park, elementary school, police station, two fire stations, and a town hall. The range of businesses and non-profit organizations in the village reflects Mount Kisco’s diversity. The village’s 400 storefronts include locally, regionally, and nationally owned retailers, restaurants, and service providers that serve local residents as well as those from neighboring towns. In recent years, a number of storefronts in the village’s downtown have become vacant. One such vacant storefront is that of the former Borders Group Inc. bookstore and café.

In 1997, Borders Group Inc. announced that it would be opening a Borders Books Music & Café at the intersection of Main Street and Green Street in Mount Kisco, New York. The site for the new bookstore and café would serve as a highly visible gateway to

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9 Ibid.
Figure 3: Commercial Center Context Diagram.

Figure 4: Commercial Center Context Diagram.
the downtown commercial district, sitting at the crux of two of the village’s busiest streets. In its press release, Borders Group Inc. boasted that:

In addition to its vast selection [of books, music, and movies], the new Mt. Kisco store will host many special events including author appearances and book signings, live music performances, children’s events and other activities. Each Borders store employs a local community relations coordinator whose sole responsibility is to assure that the store reflects the interests of the community.10

The approximately 22,000 square foot building that would become Borders’s home was renovated, with a lower level café and a large selection of book, music, and movie merchandise at street level. The same year that the Borders bookstore and café opened in Mount Kisco, Borders Group Inc. peaked on the New York Stock Exchange selling for $44.88 per share.11

Thirteen years later, in 2010, the Mount Kisco Borders bookstore and café continued to thrive, serving as a regional hub12 and a local anchor, but the Michigan-based corporation’s stock had plunged to $0.90 per share.13 In the summer of 2011, Borders Group Inc. liquidated its assets. As a result, Borders would be closing its bookstores nationwide. Approximately 10,700 Borders employees would lose their

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13 Bomey, “Borders’ Rise and Fall: A Timeline of the Bookstore Chain’s 40-Year History.”
jobs,\textsuperscript{14} including 45 employees at the Mount Kisco store.\textsuperscript{15} In 2014, nearly three years after the Mount Kisco anchor store’s doors closed, the storefront remains vacant.

**Negative Implications of Anchor Store Loss**

Local newspapers consistently cover the status of Mount Kisco’s former anchor store, wondering what’s next for the vast expanse of vacancy that wearily welcomes visitors to the downtown. Of particular interest to community members and neighbors is the economic impact that the loss of Borders has had on local businesses. At the onset of the Borders bookstore and café closure, the owner of an Italian family restaurant, located directly across the street, reported that the Borders closure “‘...[is] going to affect every other business in the community...’”\textsuperscript{16} The online journal, *Patch*, reported that “in the months immediately after... [Borders’s] demise, East Main Street retail owners noted that they took a hit from the loss.”\textsuperscript{17} More specifically, the Mount Kisco Daily Voice reported that “small businesses have complained of negative consequences since Borders closed: a reduction in foot traffic, especially from those who came to Mount Kisco from other towns to visit the store.”\textsuperscript{18} In 2013, one such local business, The Farm, closed its doors after 25 years of business. The grocery store’s

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Aucherlonie, “End of Borders Leaves a Local Blow, Changed Book Landscape.”
owner, George Kim, cited a number of reasons for the store’s closure, including the closure of Borders in 2011. While it is certainly evident that the loss of the Mount Kisco anchor store has presented economic challenges, it has also presented sociocultural and architectural ones.

Throughout its thirteen-year operation in Mount Kisco, Borders bookstore and café activated the street. In a 2013 interview, Mount Kisco Mayor Michael Cindrich reflected on the excitement and activity along East Main Street that Borders generated. He noted that while Borders served as a place to purchase books and CDs, it also served as a gathering space: a place to socialize. The Mayor explained that many of the people with whom he has spoken, even from other communities, miss that aspect. Located adjacent to the local cinema and nearby many restaurants and shops, Borders served as a safe and convenient place to gather both during the day and at night. A resident of a neighboring town reported, “‘it was more than just a bookstore; it was a place to meet with friends and clients.’ She said she spent many hours in the café working (it was like an extension of her office).” Opportunities to gather both formally and informally in the bookstore and café drew residents and neighbors to the village’s active anchor store. However, with Borders gone, the 22,000 square foot gateway space is devoid of both business and social activity and the once-vibrant intersection is tired.

When Borders closed, the building’s owners, Mt. Kisco Associates L.P., were

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20 Barron, “Mount Kisco’s The Farm Grocery to Close in August.”
22 Jean Farber (Village Trustee) in discussion with the author, August 2013.
intent on finding a new tenant, but this pursuit proved challenging. They faced numerous obstacles securing a tenant who could afford the rent, finance necessary interior renovations, utilize the unique multi-level layout, and successfully navigate the logistics of getting deliveries to the downtown location.\textsuperscript{23} Complications persisted in 2013, when the owners were served a lawsuit seeking foreclosure on the property, due to a default on a $6.3 million loan.\textsuperscript{24} It is important to note, however, that while Mt. Kisco Associates L.P. owns the property, other stakeholders have continued to take interest in its future. One local online newspaper took a poll to better understand residents’ desires for the filling the vacant space. The poll found that “more than 67 percent of responders [supported] a specialty market such as Trader Joe’s or Whole Foods,” while only 5 percent supported a non-retail alternative.\textsuperscript{25} Others polled expressed concern with reintroducing a national chain to the location.\textsuperscript{26} Mayor Michael Cindrich supports a retail business that would operate between 10am and 6pm and would serve as a “destination location.”\textsuperscript{27} The Mayor stressed the importance of the space being unique so that “the smaller stores: the mom and pop stores, could feed off of the foot traffic” and so that it would not present competition for local businesses.\textsuperscript{28}

Mount Kisco’s initial response to anchor store loss is not uncommon. In other former Borders bookstore locations nationwide, new retailers have cropped up. In

\textsuperscript{23} Michael Cindrich (Village Mayor) in discussion with the author, August 2013.
\textsuperscript{25} Michael Cindrich (Village Mayor) in discussion with the author, August 2013.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
Montclair, New Jersey an Ashley Furniture Homestore opened and in Chicago, Topshop filled the empty space. In Lower Paxton Township, Pennsylvania a Books-A-Million replaced the former Borders store and in Mentor, Ohio, a HomeGoods opened up.

Brookings Institution visiting fellow and director of the University of Michigan’s real estate graduate studies program, Chris Leinberger explains, “Retail changes. That’s just the nature of the beast.”29 The history of retail in the United States is one of flux and current trends do not promise stability. To propose a new retail anchor for a former anchor store is to ignore the inevitable sector changes that will spark the cycle of instability and loss again. Instead, exciting opportunities to explore new types of anchors emerge.

Positive Implications of Anchor Store Loss

As the anchor store typology is called into question, it becomes essential for all stakeholders to get involved in the conversation, including private landowners and developers, as well as residents, business owners, and the local government. Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a New York City-based nonprofit that focuses on “helping people create and sustain public places that build communities“ and works with various entities to do so. PPS President, Fred Kent, reports, “Developers in the vanguard are turning away from national business opportunities to local ones; from big-box construction to a smaller scale; from fast development to slow; from going it alone to forging partnerships; and from shopping-only developments to a new array of public gathering

spaces.” Similarly, Larisa Ortiz, founder of Larisa Ortiz Associates, a consulting firm that specializes in the commercial revitalization of challenging retail environments, works with a variety of stakeholders on projects that meld private and public interests to strengthen downtowns nationwide. In Mount Kisco, integrating a new approach to strengthening the economic health of the commercial district, enhancing public space, and architecturally redefining the downtown’s gateway, all coalesce at the site of the downtown’s former anchor.

The sections that follow will explore the ways in which the loss of Mount Kisco’s anchor store can be reframed as an opportunity for innovation. Specifically, the sections will examine, within this context: (1) the importance of sustaining the health of the local economy, (2) the ways in which design can promote the engagement of multiple publics, and (3) the opportunities for reviving mundane architecture.

Support Local Economic Health

Reassessing a downtown anchor presents opportunities to consider the ways in which the anchor can contribute to, support, or even, root the local economy. The dissolution of Borders Group Inc. in 2011 reflected industry and corporate changes at the national level that, in turn, reaped consequences for individuals and communities at the local level. The instability of the anchor store typology is highlighted in this example; where national and corporate trends affect, but do not necessarily reflect the health of local economies, as was the case in Mount Kisco. Conversely, locally owned

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30 Kent, “The Upside of a Down Economy: Going Local.”
businesses are both dependent on and representative of the local economy. They also help to keep more money in the community. For every $100 spent at a locally owned store, $45 stays in the local economy. Conversely, for every $100 spent at a big-box chain store, $15 stays in the local economy.\textsuperscript{31} Local businesses also generate jobs. In a 2007 study conducted by Civic Economics, data showed that “a slight shift in San Francisco consumer purchasing behavior-diverting just 10% of purchases from national chain stores to locally owned businesses-would, each year, create 1,300 new jobs and yield nearly $200 million in incremental economic activity.”\textsuperscript{32} Studies in other cities present similar results. Furthermore, Stacy Mitchell, author of \textit{Big Box Swindle}, explains that corporations that consolidate industries not only fail to support local economies, but also fail to provide efficiency (a misnomer associated with corporate consolidation).\textsuperscript{33} “Economies rooted in community” excel at supporting local economic health and have been proven to enhance social health:

We’ve learned that we’re far more likely to have a conversation at a farmer’s market than we are at a big box store. Seven times more likely, in fact, according to researchers, who confirmed that communities that have a lot of locally-owned businesses do...have stronger social networks and those social networks, in turn, give them an edge when it comes to solving problems and innovating.\textsuperscript{34}

It seems evident that a downtown anchor space that is designed to support and reflect local capacity can promote sustainable growth and development, both economically and

\textsuperscript{32} “Why Buy Local?”
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
socially.

In Mount Kisco, locally owned businesses include restaurants, retailers, and service providers. Many are based out of the downtown’s storefronts along Main Street and Moger Avenue, while others are located in upper story offices and office parks. The rich variety of businesses reflects and serves the village’s diverse population. Nevertheless, a handful of storefronts remain vacant along Mount Kisco’s two main commercial corridors. The ability of an anchor to not only support existing locally owned businesses, but to also help spawn new businesses to fill these vacancies could be particularly useful for this downtown, and others like it.

Engage Multiple Publics

It is also essential to assess an anchor space’s ability to inclusively engage all members of the community. This question is of particular relevance for communities with a diverse population, where design and rules governing access may inadvertently, or not, promote exclusivity.

Anchor stores, usually designed to maximize profits, may prove divisive, if they strive to target only one segment of the population. For example, an anchor may not equitably serve an economically diverse community if its products or services are expensive and out of reach for some community members. In Mount Kisco, this is

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especially pertinent given the considerable economic diversity of the population.\textsuperscript{36} Ethnic and cultural diversity can also inform an anchor’s ability to engage multiple publics, as cultural cues may be salient factors in perceptions of space.

Published in \textit{Current Anthropology} in 1968, Edward T. Hall’s paper, “Proxemics,” deals with “the study of man’s perception and use of space...”\textsuperscript{37} Hall’s research and analysis deals primarily with the idea that people of different cultures experience, occupy, interact with, and express space in different ways. In one of the simplest and most meaningful quotes from “Proxemics,” Hall says, “...what crowds one people does not necessarily crowd another.”\textsuperscript{38} This is to say that people relate to other people and their environments in varying ways that follow patterns informed by their culture. The role of bias in research and design is inevitable, but Hall states that bias can be used as a “‘control’” from which to measure spatial understandings and practices that deviate from one’s own culture.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, it is important for inclusive design to acknowledge and address cultural contexts.

William H. Whyte, an American urbanist working around the same time as Hall, explored the ways in which design can dramatically affect a public space’s success at attracting people. Whyte discussed the importance of moveable chairs that allow people to personalize a space.\textsuperscript{40} This technique, for example, has been used with much success in New York City’s Bryant Park and in other similar urban areas. Using Hall’s

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{38} Hall, “Proxemics,” 84.
\textsuperscript{39} Hall, “Proxemics,” 83.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces}, directed by William H. Whyte (1988, Santa Monica, CA: Direct Cinema, Ltd.), DVD.
\end{quote}
discussion on proxemics as a lens through which to view Whyte’s observation is illuminating. On one hand, moveable chairs may increase the range of people who feel comfortable using a single space. Those whose cultures require less distance between individuals might arrange the chairs in close proximity to one another. Members of cultures where individuals space themselves farther apart may adjust the arrangement of chairs accordingly. Notably, these changes in layout are all temporary and flexible. On the other hand, moveable chairs may make some people feel uncomfortable. Hall defines three categories of space, which include “fixed, semi-fixed, or dynamic.”

“Furniture,” he says, “can be either fixed or semi-fixed.” In some cultures, furniture is bolted to the ground. In others, less formal, cultural constructs inhibit individuals from rearranging furniture. It is thus important to consider that design strategies, such as moveable chairs may hold the potential to be both inclusive and exclusive.

Though Hall’s discussion on proxemics is undeniably architectural, he makes one very important mention of architecture directly in his piece:

People from different cultures inhabit different sensory worlds (see Hall 1966; Chaps. 10, 11). They not only structure space differently, but experience it differently, because the sensorium is differently ‘programmed.’ There is a selective screening or filtering that admits some types of data while rejecting others…. [Sometimes], it is accomplished by screening, which is one of many important functions of architecture.

Like moveable chairs, screens may be used to promote satisfaction and encourage the active use of a space. Hall recounts the findings of Fried and

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41 Hall, “Proxemics,” 91
42 Hall, “Proxemics,” 91
43 Ibid.
44 Hall, “Proxemics,” 52.
Gleicher (1961) and Fried (1963) that discovered the ways in which sensory needs are tied to daily life and perception of space. They studied the auditory experience of Italian immigrants moving from the West End in Boston to more modern buildings: from a place of higher sensory involvement to a place where “[they] felt shut off from people.”  

Hall also noted feelings of discomfort amongst Americans working in Latin America, where the visual cues of high adobe walls may cause Americans to feel isolated or alienated. Therefore, it seems that the perception of screens, used to modulate sight, sound, smell, and touch, is contextual and cultural and, thus, the architectural application of screening should be cognizant of cultural contexts and varying perceptions of space.

Hall’s discussion on sociopetal versus sociofugal space is also extremely important. Sociopetal organization describes space that is “conducive to communication between people” and encourages interactions. Conversely, sociofugal space “produce[s] solidarity” and discourages interactions and communication. Importantly, Hall states, “What is sociofugal to one culture or subculture may be sociopetal to another.” This concept is also relevant to architecture, but may be quite challenging for architects to use in design, especially given a goal of designing for multiple publics, where sociopetal and sociofugal arrangements may vary.

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45 Hall, “Proxemics,” 94.
46 Ibid.
47 Hall, “Proxemics,” 91.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
In the diverse village of Mount Kisco, ethnic and cultural cues may be salient factors in perceptions of space. One third of the population identifies as foreign born, hailing predominantly from Guatemala, but also from numerous other countries, including many from Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Korea, China, the Ukraine, and Italy. The design for Neighbors Link, a Mount Kisco-based non-profit organization, interestingly, addresses immigrants’ culturally-informed perceptions of space. With a mission to “strengthen the whole community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of immigrants,” Neighbors Link provides a range of services to newly immigrated individuals and families in Mount Kisco. Located in a converted warehouse, the Neighbors Link community center provides a spaces for both formal and informal activities and gatherings. For example, Neighbors Link serves as a semi-formal hiring site for general laborers who fill 6,000 day jobs per year. The worker center/hiring site was intentionally designed to eliminate hallways, utilize transparent partitions and doors, and maximize windows. These design elements aim to increase user comfort by replicating the feeling of being on the street, where there are minimal opportunities for private or covert job negotiations, a particular concern for the building’s users.

In addition to designing an anchor that addresses multiple cultural perceptions of space, in the context of Mount Kisco, it is essential to design for speakers of multiple languages. In Mount Kisco, 50 percent of the population speaks a language other than

52 Carola Bracco (Executive Director of Neighbors Link) in discussion with the author, August 2013.
English at home and one quarter of the population speaks English “less than ‘very well,’” according to a 2008-2012 American Community Survey. An anchor that equitably serves speakers of multiple languages, through programming and signage, may set the tone for the community’s overall approach to social and cultural inclusivity.

Adaptive Reuse of the Mundane

The architecture of former anchor stores varies dramatically. The former Borders bookstore and café in Mount Kisco, is an arguably mundane piece of architecture. Roughly 22,000 square feet, the two-story building features a lower level, adjacent to the parking lot off Green Street, and a vast upper level that provides for pedestrian entry from East Main Street. The building was formerly owned and used by the a telephone company, but was renovated in the mid-nineteen nineties for use as a retail space by Borders Group Inc.. Clad in brick and concrete, with green-framed fenestrations running along the east and west sides, the building is architecturally pleasant, but certainly not interesting. For example, a dummy clock tower on the southeast corner of the building (the most prominent corner of the building) is generic and commercial. To redefine this place as a new type of anchor requires marked attention to developing a new, appropriate architectural language and a new, responsive organization of space.

Adaptive reuse is a name used to describe the “[repurposing] of older buildings

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Many contemporary adaptive reuse projects focus on redeveloping buildings that have maintained meaningful architectural character, despite waning function. Today, mills, factories, churches, and barns present exciting opportunities for architectural experimentation and expression. Even shipping containers have been repurposed as modular units from which to build homes and other structures.

Bruner Cott’s Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (also known as Mass MoCA) is a beautiful illustration of adaptive reuse. In this example, an old, industrial complex was renewed through architectural and programmatic intervention and now boasts open, bright, and airy spaces that host incredibly unique and engaging exhibits. Importantly, the campus’s architectural character was maintained and, even, celebrated in the renewal.

What happens, however, to buildings that lack architectural integrity, or at the very least, lack an appreciated aesthetic (given time and context)? Old mills and factories present exciting opportunities for reuse, not only because of their flexible interior spatial organizations, but also because of the historic-meets-industrial aesthetic they express. Many buildings around us, however, lack this character, but, nonetheless, require the kind of architectural attention and innovation bestowed upon more appreciated works.

Julia Christensen’s *Big Box Reuse* examines ten adaptive reuse projects, specifically focusing on the reuse of vacant, big box stores initially developed by Kmart or Walmart. A big box, she explains, is “a large, freestanding, one-story warehouse

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building with one main room, ranging from 20,000 to 280,000 square feet, used initially for retail purposes. Christensen provides an impressive catalogue of big box adaptive reuse projects: showcasing, to name a few, a school, museum, and senior center all derived from former big box stores. However, the new designs for many of these projects fail to address the importance of architectural language in reflecting a building’s purpose. In these examples, the big box store becomes a big box something else.

These types of adaptive reuse projects are particularly challenging. As Christensen explains, “The primary objection [to renovating a big box building] is that the site is culturally toxic.” The narrative of exploitation, failure, and demise associated with these buildings and sites can be profound. The concept of cognitive dirt, or the idea that a space, object, or resource remains, in some way, contaminated even after decontamination may deter the use of former anchor spaces. The development of a new architectural language can play an important role in redefining the anchor space (especially an architecturally mundane space) as vibrant and dynamic. Furthermore, the reuse of existing building stock is an essential element of environmental sustainability: in short, allowing for the conservation of materials, resources, and energy.

Anchor space renewal is exceptionally important. It is also possible. The section that follows will present precedent studies that (1) illustrate innovative models for

56 Christensen, *Big Box Reuse*, 119.
supporting local economic health, (2) present design strategies for engaging multiple publics, and (3) demonstrate transformative adaptive reuse techniques for renewing mundane pieces of architecture.
CHAPTER 3
PRECEDENT STUDIES

Support Local Economic Health

In redefining a downtown anchor with the purpose of supporting the sustainable regeneration of a commercial district, it is essential that the anchor space both promotes and reflects the needs of the local economy. The three precedent studies that follow delve into unique models for tapping into local assets to sustainably support local economies.

Impact HUB Westminster

The Impact HUB Westminster is a “super-studio for the new economy.”\(^{58}\) Located in the heart of London, the Impact HUB Westminster is a shared workspace that engages social entrepreneurs whose work focuses on creating positive social and/or environmental change.\(^{59}\) The Impact HUB Westminster is part of a global network, comprised of 40 HUB locations worldwide. Each locally owned HUB provides physical spaces intended to “combine the best of a trusted community, innovation lab, business incubator, and the comforts of home”\(^{60}\) in order to provide spaces for “meaningful encounters, exchanges and inspiration, filled with diverse people doing extraordinary things.”\(^{61}\) The HUB network provides a venue that encourages collaboration between “inventors, venture capitalists, community activists, designers, engineers, and policy


\(^{59}\) Ibid.


makers.” In addition to providing a range of physical spaces for working and collaborating, the Impact HUB Westminster supports learning by hosting lectures and seminars, including facilitation, co-design, and ideation workshops.

Designed by the sustainably minded strategy and design practice of 00:/ (pronounced ‘zero zero’), the HUB Westminster is housed on the first floor of the 15-story New Zealand House on London’s Pall Mall. The 12,000 square foot Impact HUB Westminster space includes open and private workspaces, a kitchen, library, lounge area, café, meeting spaces, and a lecture room. The Impact HUB Westminster’s large, open workspace houses two special spaces intended for more intense collaboration and private meetings. The first, the Innovation Greenhouse, is a small, glass structure with a pitched roof and conference table. Though the form resembles a greenhouse, the space is not used for cultivating plants. Instead, the Innovation Greenhouse is designed to provide a more intimate meeting space for groups of four to six. The second space, the Wikihouse, is a “wooden [structure] (an open-source-design structure that can be built with minimal skill and training).” The Wikihouse is composed of a series of routed plywood and translucent panels, the plans and assembly instructions for which can be downloaded off the Internet for free. By utilizing a free, open-source design for the private Wikihouse workspace, the Impact HUB Westminster’s designers emphasize the importance of expanding access to architectural spaces that foster creativity and collaboration. The design for the Impact HUB Westminster also illustrates themes of

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64 “A Village Square for the Modern Age.”
sharing, approachability, and transparency: vital components of the “new economy.”

Both the Innovation Greenhouse and Wikihouse hold the potential for mobility and their spatial organizations are general enough to be adapted for a variety of uses. This designed adaptability suggests that the “new economy” is likely to change and shift and, when it does, it will require an infrastructure that can do so as well. Additionally, this flexibility supports the notion that even if the Impact HUB were to vacate the New Zealand House, the spaces would still be viable for other uses. These design choices support the local economy by providing an adaptable infrastructure that can fluidly respond to and reflect the local economy’s evolving needs.

The “super-studio” is also able to support the local economy by increasing localized control and accountability, and by providing flexible and affordable workspaces for social entrepreneurs. Each HUB is locally owned and funded by membership dues (though non-members can rent spaces or attend events for a fee). Membership packages vary from approximately 20USD per month to 640USD per month and provide services ranging from membership to the digital Impact HUB network and discounted access to events and meeting rooms to unlimited use of on-site workspaces and complimentary tea and coffee. The Impact Hub Westminster offers a staggered fee structure, where members’ dues reflect their ability to pay (based on their enterprises’ varying needs and stages). By increasing access to the facilities and

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65 “A Village Square for the Modern Age.”
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
69 “Membership.”
resources, the Impact HUB Westminster supports local innovation and entrepreneurship, which in turn, supports the local economy. The local ownership model of the Impact HUB Westminster branch also maximizes accountability to members and the greater community.

The Impact HUB Westminster’s facility illustrates the trend toward new shared, co-working spaces that provide expanded, sustainable opportunities for community, networking, financing, and innovation. Furthermore, the Impact HUB Westminster highlights local assets (the skills and networks of its members) and builds local capacity (by encouraging collaboration). In doing so, the Impact HUB Westminster is able to both support and reflect the local economy.

![Figure 5: Impact HUB Westminster, "Membership."](image)

MindLab

MindLab is a cross-ministry organization and physical space designed to incubate and test strategies for innovation across private and public sectors in Copenhagen, Denmark. Co-operated by the Ministry of Employment, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Business and Growth, and Odense Municipality, MindLab employs a
collaborative approach to problem solving: engaging, not only governmental institutions, but also Danish citizens and businesses.\textsuperscript{70} Specifically, MindLab seeks to improve ministry operations in order to both increase efficiency of operations and increase constituents’ understanding of and ability to navigate ministry-administered systems. MindLab’s three chief areas of activities include creating “specific changes through an experimental and engaging approach,” acquiring knowledge through research and analysis, and providing information and strategies for increasing organizational capacity for the owner ministries and the public.\textsuperscript{71}

MindLab is able to support the local economy by framing both public and private issues as design challenges and by engaging all stakeholders, allowing for the development of innovative and creative problem solving processes across sectors. One such project sought to reduce the amount of red tape surrounding the taxation and business filings processes for young business owners. This initiative not only helped to relieve young business owners of the frustration and confusion related to the processes of setting up and operating their businesses, but also helped the ministries to collect taxes and information more effectively. MindLab worked with young business owners, external experts, and staff from the Danish Tax and Customs Administration and the Danish Commerce and Companies Agency to transform insights into specific initiatives to symbiotically address the needs of young business owners and improve organizational capacity. In doing so, this collaborative approach encourages local


entrepreneurship and eases the administrative burden carried previously by young business owners. By serving all stakeholder groups, including the constituents and governing bodies, MindLab is able to contribute to the sustainability of the local political and economic systems. MindLab’s physical space is able to support its innovative initiatives by providing spaces for collaboration and brainstorming. The Mind, an egg-shaped pod lined with white board surfaces, is located in the MindLab’s offices and serves as a space to foster intimate, and even messy, problem-solving sessions.

![Figure 6: Jesper Christiansen, “Social Sciences in Action.”](image)

Center for Culinary Enterprises

The Enterprise Center is a Philadelphia-based business development organization that “provides access to capital, building capacity, business education and economic development opportunities to high-potential, minority entrepreneurs.” The Dorrance H. Hamilton Center for Culinary Enterprises (CCE) is one of its many initiatives.

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The CCE is a 13,000 square foot culinary business incubator and accelerator that supports both new and established food enterprises.73 Providing educational resources as well as four state-of-the-art, shared commercial kitchens, the CCE is able to engage the local community in a variety of ways. Located in a formerly vacant supermarket, the CCE, an adaptive reuse project was designed by Friday Architects/Planners Inc.. In addition the commercial kitchens, the CCE design features a rain garden, three retail spaces, a lounge for informal meetings, cold storage, dry storage, and an eKitchen Multimedia Learning Center.

The CCE was developed to utilize the potential of Philadelphia’s robust culinary and hospitality sector as a catalyst for addressing the city’s “high poverty rate, a critical need for jobs and economic development, and a need for bringing fresh food to underserved communities.”74 This initiative is incredibly place-based: utilizing the city’s existing assets to promote equitable economic prosperity. Funded by national, state and local grants, local development corporations, and private donors, the CCE is committed to supporting the creation of “food-related jobs and businesses, and...[supporting] emerging food entrepreneurs in Philadelphia.”75 The co-working model that provides members with access to shared facilities helps to keep costs low. This development structure enables the CCE to offer affordable membership fees and, thus, increased access to the facilities. The base fee for membership is $100 per year.

Members are able to reserve bakery, kitchen, storage, and meeting space facilities for

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75 “Center for Culinary Enterprises Member Handbook.”
additional hourly fees.\textsuperscript{76}

The CCE not only helps small culinary businesses to develop and thrive by providing affordable access to kitchen and storage facilities, but also presents members with opportunities to develop their own community engagement programs. The eKitchen Multimedia Learning Center can accommodate “receptions, cooking classes, workshops, networking and team-building events” and is available for rent at an hourly rate.\textsuperscript{77} Small, street-side retail spaces also activate the local economy by providing nascent culinary businesses with spaces in which they can test their culinary ventures. Retail spaces also help to demonstrate investment in the community and can serve to spawn other new businesses in the neighborhood. By providing a framework and physical space for increased access to the city’s existing resources, the CCE is able to support the equitable regeneration of the local economy.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
Engage Multiple Publics

Downtown anchors can be designed to not only support local economic health, but to also support social and cultural health. The ways in which an anchor reflects and engages the local community, may indicate the community’s overall approach to inclusivity. In diverse communities, this is particularly important. However, it can be incredibly challenging to design a space that successfully engages multiple publics. The precedent studies that follow illustrate varying approaches to inclusive design for diverse populations.

New McAllen Public Library

In 2011, a new public library opened in McAllen, Texas, a city that sits in the Rio Grande Valley, near the southern most tip of Texas, along the U.S.-Mexico border. Nearly the size of two and a half football fields, the 123,000 square foot public library was designed to serve the diverse needs of the city’s population. McAllen is home to almost 135,000 residents, approximately 82% of whom speak a language other than English at home. Of those who do not speak English at home, 78% speak Spanish and 30% speak English “less than ‘very well.’” Thus, it was essential that the design for the library reflect the specific linguistic needs of the city of McAllen.

Designed by architects Meyer, Scherer & Rockcastle, the McAllen Public Library is bright and cheery and features a variety of wayfinding and organizational strategies to

79 Ibid.
maximize ease of use. The interior, for example, features colorful and graphic multilingual signage, identifying the various sections and services within the library.

Other playful elements, like a height chart in the children’s section, include multilingual text. It appears that the library’s approach to inclusivity has been effective. “In the library’s first month of operation, new user registration for library cards increased 23 times from the same period last year [in the old library], and existing account updates were up nearly 2,000%.”80

The library also provides resources to engage the diverse population. According to the library’s director, Jose Gamez, the library seeks to serve the entire population of McAllen, many of whom are recent immigrants from Mexico:

...where there is no tradition of public libraries like we are accustomed to in the United States and [in designing the library], we worked with the architects to find a prominent location for the Spanish collection. We also made sure that in the signage program, the Spanish books, Spanish collections were identified. It is working. We are seeing more and more non-traditional, Hispanic, recent immigrants coming into the library.81

Gamez also noted that to realize the library’s goals, the administration should expand the Spanish selection “to make it more relevant to our Spanish readers.”82

Additionally, the library offers a variety of classes and activities (some of which are

offered bilingually) to residents of all ages. These include computer classes, book clubs, health insurance marketplace assistance workshops, and career fairs. The library also hosts a wide array of activities for its teen patrons.

In McAllen, over fourteen percent of the population is between the ages of ten and 19. The library provides a safe place for teens “where they can go after school, where they can go on the weekends, and...a place that doesn’t exist elsewhere in McAllen.” During the library’s design process, the Teen Advisory Council (TAC) provided “valuable input as to what they want the teen section of the library to look and

![Figure 8: Lara Swimmer, "Untitled," The Texas Tribune.](image)

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84 Ibid.
86 McAllen Public Library, directed by Ryan Siemers.
feel like, from colors and seating to the types of programs that will be available once the library opens.\textsuperscript{87} Every day of the week, the McAllen public library holds events for teens and the library provides a variety of spaces in which these events can be held.\textsuperscript{88}

The approach to designing for multiple publics taken at the McAllen Public Library is one that emphasizes integration. From the multilingual signage to the inclusive programming, the library provides services and spaces that engage all members of the diverse community.

![Figure 9: Engaging Multiple Publics Strategy Diagram](image)

Fusion Multicultural Center

Located in Amsterdam, a city of almost 780,000 residents, the Fusion Multicultural Center was built in 2009.\textsuperscript{89} The Fusion Multicultural Center, as its name suggests, is a building that attempts to fuse diverse cultures together. Specifically, the center is designed to house a Turkish and Moroccan community and prayer center and a

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{88} “Calendar of Events.”

Dutch institution for job creation.\textsuperscript{90} It is projected that in 2015, Turks and Moroccans will make up 5.5\% and 8.9\% of the population in Amsterdam, respectively.\textsuperscript{91}

Nevertheless, it is considered to be “highly unusual to accommodate Moroccan, Turkish and ‘Dutch’ activities under one roof.”\textsuperscript{92} In the Fusion Multicultural Center, the architect, Marlies Rohmer, seems to have taken a more compartmentalized approach to designing for multiple publics. While the intricate façade integrates Arabic geometries into the brickwork, the building’s interior segregates Arabic/Muslim design features from more Western/Dutch design features.

Figure 10: Thea van den Heuvel, "Untitled," Fusion: Multicultural Centre with Prayer Rooms, Archello.

Interior prayer and community spaces, designed for the Turkish and Moroccan occupants, are colorful, ornate, and geometric. The institutional spaces designed for job seekers, are sleek and unadorned, except where the exterior brick façade is revealed

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{92} “Fusion Multicultural Center.”
through glazed openings. In the Turkish and Moroccan spaces, furniture is minimal, as occupants sit on the colorful carpeting. Conversely, in the spaces designed for the Dutch institution for job creation, occupants sit behind desks in red, modern, moveable chairs. Additionally, “the rooms for Moroccan and Turkish organizations each have their own separate entrances, but these are subordinate to the communal, more assertive, main entrance. Together with the central staircase, the latter forms a space for contact and mutual interaction.” Thus, while spaces for cohabitation exist, the overall design for the Fusion Multicultural Center relegates diverse cultures to separate spaces and entrances; each designed to reflect the occupants’ distinct cultures.

Figure 11: Thea van den Heuvel, "Untitled," Fusion: Multicultural Centre with Prayer Rooms, Archello.

Figure 12: Ad van Denderen, "Untitled," Fusion: Multicultural Centre with Prayer Rooms, Archello.

This compartmentalized approach enables diverse groups to operate comfortably under one roof, albeit in separate spaces. Varying requirements for furniture or flooring, for example, can be achieved to meet each group’s unique specifications. However, this approach does not promote the integration of or communication between diverse cultures. Instead, the design suggests that separation is essential and that coexistence is unnatural. While the building’s façade successfully

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93 Ibid.
and beautifully integrates cultural and architectural elements of each user group, the building’s spatial organization and interior finishes lack concepts of fusion, synthesis, and integration.

Adaptive Reuse of the Mundane

Breathing new life into a failed anchor space requires a thorough analysis of economic, social, and cultural contexts. It is also essential to examine the ways in which the existing architectural language conveys information about the anchor and the overall community identity. Adaptive reuse is a strategy used to redesign existing spaces for new uses. Many adaptive reuse projects are lauded for the ways in which the redesign preserves or pays homage to the building’s history or architectural significance. When a building’s architecture lacks interest or an appreciated aesthetic, however, strategies to introduce a new architectural language are required. The precedent studies that follow examine three adaptive reuse projects that demonstrate the ways in which a mundane piece of architecture can be successfully renewed through architectural interventions.
St. Croix Falls Library

The design for the St. Croix Falls Public Library located in St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin, addressed an existing building that lacked architectural character (given today’s standards) and vital programming. Located just south of the downtown, the building, originally clad in ordinary brick with a mustard yellow roof, sat vacant for eleven years. Because the building, a former supermarket, served as “a gateway...to

Figure 14: Norsman Architects, Ltd., “Untitled,” St. Croix Falls Library.

Figure 15: Norsman Architects, Ltd., “Untitled,” St. Croix Falls Library.

the historic downtown of this...community of just over 2,000 residents,” it was essential that it represent the community’s ideals and identity.\textsuperscript{95} The vacant supermarket failed to do so. In her “Personal Landmarks Along the Highway,” architecture critic, Ada Louise Huxtable discussed the role that buildings observed from the highway serve in our personal lives. She argued that we unintentionally develop relationships with buildings that we experience from the car. We bestow meaning on these buildings and associate them with places and travel.\textsuperscript{96} As a gateway building to the town of St. Croix Falls, the vacant supermarket suggested that the town was tired and uninspired. The St. Croix Falls community wanted to convey a very different message. By 2008, the community had raised over one million dollars for the design and construction of a new library, with the goal of breathing new life into the downtown gateway space. The redesign for the space was motivated by the “community’s interest in developing a progressive, sustainable vision...” for their town.\textsuperscript{97} While it would have been straightforward to demolish the existing structure and to erect a brand new one, the community and project architects pursued a more responsible approach to redesign that embodied the community’s vision for the future.

Designed by Norsman Architects of Chicago, IL, this project utilized a variety of sustainable strategies, including using local and recycled materials, solar-powered radiant heating, water conservation strategies, a reduced area of impermeable surfaces, sunlight monitoring lighting controls, and a super insulated roof. Completed in 2009,

\textsuperscript{97} “St. Croix Falls Library.”
the project received the 2010 Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) Illumination Award of Merit:

To supplement the daylight, [the lighting designer] selected direct/indirect linear fluorescent luminaires with adjustable light distribution patterns. ‘Not only does the fixture have a nice clean look,’ says [the lighting designer], ‘it also allows you to choose whatever up and downlight component you want and adjust the percentage in either direction...’

As a result of the innovative lighting scheme, the interior space is bright and airy and supports flexible programming. The interior also features sound absorptive hanging panels that express a design inspired by the community’s river valley topography. While much of the redesign required new systems, including interior finishes, mechanical systems, flooring, roof, façade, glazing, and landscaping, the architects were able to preserve the building’s structure and general footprint. This reaps life cycle energy savings and also demonstrates the community’s commitment to innovation and sustainability.

The community’s commitment to sustainability is also evident in the building’s occupancy structure. Because “[t]he building was too large for the library’s needs...the city purchased it in partnership with a local dentist who occupies the other half of the 15,700-square-foot structure.” This arrangement demonstrates community cohesiveness and a symbiotic approach to sustainability. The St. Croix Falls Public Library project illustrates an innovative approach to redesigning a mundane building,

addressing the importance of downtown branding and identity, and allocating space
within an existing footprint.

New McAllen Public Library

The new McAllen Public Library, described previously, is notable for its
commitment to engaging all members of the diverse community it serves, but is also
notable for its architectural origins. The new McAllen Public Library was designed as an
adaptive reuse project: converting a mammoth, 123,000 square foot Walmart into a
truly public space: a public library. The library’s interiors are beautiful, light, and
cheerful. Designed by Meyer, Scherer & Rockastle, the library features “a patterned
wood ceiling that runs the length of the building” drawing patrons into the library’s
active spaces. The circulation is further defined by “[a] secondary spine in orange, which bisects the first to further distinguish the public community meeting rooms from the private staff area and the children’s spaces from the adult service areas.” Bright colors and bold patterns and textures are used throughout the interior. Many of the patterns and textures are derived from the local natural habitat, where animals, birds, and insects abound.

Figure 17: Lara Swimmer, "Untitled," McAllen Main Library, ArchDaily.

The transformations of the site’s infrastructure and the building’s façade were incredibly important given the site’s history as a Walmart. The massive parking lot was redesigned as a pedestrian-friendly esplanade and a new water feature and native plantings help to provide a pleasant outdoor experience for library patrons. The building’s entrance was also renewed: now reading more as institutional than

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100 “McAllen Main Library.”

101 Ibid.
commercial. The redesign of the site, exterior façade, and interior spaces, demonstrate the ways in which even the most mundane of structures can be architecturally renewed.

North Central Elementary School

The design for the North Central Elementary School in Austin, Texas is underway. Slated to open before the 2014-2015 school year, the new school is located in a former vacant lighting warehouse. Though this might seem an unlikely adaptive reuse project, “[t]here is a pressing need for new facilities to accommodate families in North Austin, in part because of the availability of affordable housing and access to transportation in the area.” The new facility will provide the North Austin area with approximately 140,000 square feet of space for their new school, including 57

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103 Ibid.
classrooms and six common areas.\textsuperscript{104} 

The school’s interiors, mechanical systems, flooring, glazing, energy generation strategies, and landscaping are all new additions to the building’s design. “[This is] a building that has really good bones,” reported Mac Ragsdale, Principal at Architecture Plus, one of the firms designing the project. Along with Heimsath Architects, Architecture Plus has devised a design that will insert a second floor into the existing space of the former warehouse to maximize useable space.\textsuperscript{105} Additionally, the architects have retained exterior façade elements, in addition to the structure and footprint. “The design uses existing elements, such as the former loading area with openings for trucks, to add decorative features and large windows to the school.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.  
Colored numbers labeling each loading bay will stay on the outside of the building.

Playing on the brightly colored numbers that will be preserved on the building’s facade, the designers also added color on the interior and exterior to create a cheery atmosphere. Skylights on the interior help to bring natural light into the previously cavernous warehouse. While retaining some of the building’s original elements, the redesign modifies other existing features and introduces new architectural elements to successfully welcome a completely new program.

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**Figure 20: Engaging Multiple Publics Strategy Diagram.**

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106 Kelli Weldon, “AISD Retrofits Former Warehouse for Location of New North Central School.”
Downtown commercial centers nationwide are in flux due, in large part, to widespread changes in America’s retail sector. Mount Kisco, New York is amongst countless communities in the U.S., facing the effects of these changes. The failure of

Figure 21: Samantha Greenberg, “Vacant Borders Bookstore and Café in Mount Kisco, NY,” 2013.

Figure 22: Samantha Greenberg, “Vacant Borders Bookstore and Café in Mount Kisco, NY,” 2014.
anchor stores, specifically, reaps negative consequences for commercial centers’ economic, social, cultural, and architectural landscapes. But, what if communities consider anchor store failure as an opportunity for innovation? Because anchor spaces are inherently embedded in existing contexts, the ways in which a community addresses this opportunity will set the tone for its future growth and potential regeneration.

Responses to anchor store loss should fall within a framework that examines and addresses three key issues: (1) supporting local economic health, (2) engaging multiple publics, and (3) designing for the adaptive reuse of the mundane.

The proposal that follows expressly seeks to address these issues at the site of a still vacant former anchor store in Mount Kisco, New York. Using the framework outlined above to assess context and existing conditions, a comprehensive design has been developed to promote the sustainability of Mount Kisco’s downtown commercial center.

Support Local Economic Health

This project proposes several strategies to support the local economic health of Mount Kisco in the wake of anchor store failure. By analyzing context and site at various scales it became clear that this project could directly impact the local economy through the design of program as well as the design of site and building circulation.

Reprogramming

Based on a thorough analysis of the selected site’s potentials and a wide and
deep survey of precedents that address many of the issues at hand, I propose that Mount Kisco’s vacant Borders bookstore and café be reprogrammed as a business incubator. Business incubators focus on cultivating “the successful development of start-up and fledgling companies by providing entrepreneurs with an array of targeted resources and services.” These programs come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Over half of North American business incubators are considered “‘mixed-use’” as they serve a range of company types, while others focus their services toward specific industries such as culinary, fashion, or technology businesses. Incubator types range in almost all facets of operation, including management structures, “exit rules” which dictate how long a business can use the incubator, funding sources, and size. Incubators usually provide clients with a physical space from which they can base their operations. These spaces typically include shared business services and equipment, meeting spaces, and, may even include cafés or more informal gathering spaces.

Incubators help to foster business development: in doing so, they support the local economy and the greater community. Members of the National Business Incubator Association report that 84 percent of incubator graduates stay in their communities. This is important, as locally owned businesses help keep more money

110 “What is Business Incubation?”
111 “Business Incubation FAQ.”
in the community. In 2011 alone, “North American incubators assisted about 49,000 start-up companies that provided full-time employment for nearly 200,000 workers and generated annual revenue of almost $15 billion.”

By providing a shared, physical space for entrepreneurs to develop and grow their businesses, incubators serve as local hubs of activity. They provide a home base for entrepreneurs, who, in turn, may become patrons at local businesses. Incubators may also host experimental retail spaces and special events, drawing visitors to the district and serving as an “activity generator.” By engaging entrepreneurs and visitors, a business incubator can serve as a successful anchor that not only attracts people to the commercial district, but also promotes the growth and sustainability of new businesses in the district. This is essential in areas where vacant storefronts are ample. The insertion of a business incubator into a neighborhood can help to rebrand the downtown and can also help to highlight the community’s assets and ideals. Particularly in walkable downtowns with robust public transit systems, a business incubator can serve a wide range of people who seek to start or grow new businesses.

In Mount Kisco, the former Borders bookstore and café provides an excellent infrastructure for a business incubator. Serviced by the MetroNorth railway and the Westchester County Bee-Line bus system and supported by a large parking lot, the site is highly accessible to both residents and visitors. The site’s location, at the crux of one of Mount Kisco’s busiest traffic intersections and along one of Mount Kisco’s primary

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113 “The ‘Buy Local’ Boost.”
114 Larisa Ortiz, “Managing Mix: Redefining the Downtown Anchor.”
commercial corridors, provides for visibility and connectivity at various scales. The proposal of a business incubator is highly relevant as Mount Kisco currently struggles with the aftermath of anchor store loss. This proposal holds the potential to support local economic growth and stability, activate the street and provide a venue for community engagement, and initiate the rebranding of the commercial district through a redefinition of architectural language.

The proposal, which I will call from here forward, the Local Enterprise Incubator (LEI), will provide a range of spaces to help community members develop small businesses and harness new skills. The incubator will foster the cultivation of local capital by encouraging exchange and collaboration between all members of the diverse community.

![Program Narrative Diagram](image)

Figure 23: Program Narrative Diagram.

Spread over two levels, the LEI supports a narrative of exploration, engagement, and experimentation. Ideas are generated and investigated in the LEI’s open spaces, which include a café, open workspaces, lounge spaces, and an interactive information kiosk. Users collect information in the lecture hall, classroom, and administrative
spaces. Enterprises and skills are developed in the specialized, but mutable, incubator home base spaces, which are initially programmed as workspaces for design, digital, trades, and culinary enterprises. The design, digital, and trades workspaces are furnished with a conference table, shared office services and equipment, and flexible workstations. The culinary workspaces feature commercial-grade kitchen equipment, serving counters, and display cases. All workspaces are tied together by a curving promenade that functions as a place for circulation, café, exhibit, open workspaces, and

Figure 24: Floor Plan 1.
chance encounters. The building’s gestural circulation also helps to define the interior allocation of more tightly programmed spaces and, most importantly, serves to link Mount Kisco’s two main streets.

Figure 25: Floor Plan 2.

Site and Building Circulation

Currently, Mount Kisco’s downtown consists of two primary, but disconnected
commercial corridors, Moger Avenue and Main Street. Each lined with a mix of retail, restaurants, institutions, and services, the corridors run parallel, on a northeast-southwest axis. Moger and Main are split apart by two large parking lots and a narrow strip of land zoned as a Preservation Development District through which a branch of the Kisco River creek runs. While cars can pass easily between and around the two main streets via the parking lots and connecting roadways, pedestrians are less able to comfortably do so. The town has attempted to stitch pedestrian passageways across the parking lots and creek to connect the two disparate commercial corridors, but these paths seem to fade into parking lots, leaving pedestrians stranded amidst a sea of cars.

The limitation of pedestrian traffic between the two main commercial corridors hinders the downtown’s walkability and is, consequently, detrimental to Mount Kisco’s overall economic health. The potential for a successful pedestrian-friendly link between Moger and Main is critical. The former Borders bookstore and café site, which sits along

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Main Street, serves as a physically and conceptually appropriate node on this link.

By simply reorienting the existing building’s entryways, a more natural connection to the Moger corridor emerges. Specifically, by redesigning the northwest corner of the building as a primary entrance, it becomes clear that one of the existing pedestrian pathways can be redeveloped to serve as a successful link between the two corridors. The pedestrian pathway is designed to continue *through* the building to fully link Moger and Main. The placement of the new entryways coincides with the pushing and pulling of the existing building’s façade to indicate the importance of the new circulation pattern. Approaching from the revived Moger pedestrian passageway, building users ease into a sheltered, single-height entry vestibule and emerge in a bright and airy double height space on the west side of the LEI. A figural lightwell illuminates the grand stair where people can ascend to the upper level or sit and relax. On the upper level, a series of similar lightwells guide movement through the open workspaces and café and out to Main Street. The open circulation is designed to support both the incubator users and the larger community: facilitating opportunities for exchange,
engagement, and, most importantly, connection.

Engage Multiple Publics

The open, gestural circulation is amongst several design strategies used to engage the diverse Mount Kisco public. Glazing and cladding strategies informed by program help to provide cues to building users by signaling ranges of use: from public to private and from open to opaque. For example, threshold/transition spaces (stairs, entries/exits, and outdoor plazas) and most gathering spaces (open workspaces, café, information kiosk, exhibit spaces, lecture hall, and classroom) are typically highly public and open. As such, their visual accessibility is unrestricted, defined by curtain walls and open layouts. Vertically-oriented metal rain screen panels shade the curtain wall on the east and west facades to limit excessive solar heat gain, but do not limit views into these spaces. As a result, these spaces are visually connected to the exterior street and sidewalk and to the interior promenade that runs through the building. By providing for high levels of transparency, the design seeks to engage the street, providing meaningful views into the building that highlight the new, accessible program.

Figure 29: Visual Access. Diagram.
Figure 30: Building Section Looking North.

Figure 31: Interior Rendering Facing Culinary Workstations.

Figure 32: Interior Rendering Facing Information Kiosk.
Home base spaces, including the digital, design, trades, and culinary incubators, are more private and are defined by modulated visual access. On the exterior, these spaces are clad in a vertically-oriented terracotta baguette rain screen. The rain screen’s dense pattern suggests privacy and is punctured purposefully to provide building users with connections to the outdoors and daylight. On the interior, the digital, design, and trades incubator spaces are organized such that the conference room and shared office services flank the open circulation spaces, partitioned by a translucent curtain wall. This translucency helps to illuminate the building’s function to people passing through, but also fosters collaboration across disciplines and provides opportunities for showing displays and exhibits. Linear lightwells hover above these partitions, providing daylight to the deeper, interior spaces and illuminating displays behind the translucent curtain walls. Translucency and transparency also serve to encourage trust and increase user comfort across cultures. By providing modulated visual access to even the most private spaces, the building suggests a sense of community and collaboration, interdependence and connection. Within each home base, flexible, more intimate workstations are nestled behind the conference rooms, as to provide for privacy from public circulation. The careful consideration of visual access via glazing and cladding is essential in signaling gradients of use to a diverse public.

Another strategy for engaging diverse users within the Local Enterprise Incubator is the inclusion of movable chairs and mutable workstations. These strategies provide for the customization of work and social environments, helping to make diverse building

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116 Carola Bracco (Executive Director of Neighbors Link) in discussion with the author, August 2013.
users comfortable in a single space. They also provide for the long-term sustainability of the building, by promoting flexibility and adaptability. The largely freestanding furniture pieces, flexible floor plans, and mutable workstations, ensure that this building can be used for many years to come, even if small or large changes to the program occur. Additionally, the inclusion of multilingual signage helps to engage diverse building users and signals inclusivity.

![Figure 33: Engaging Multiple Publics Strategy Diagram.](image)

**Adaptive Reuse of the Mundane**

Designing a sustainable approach to the Local Enterprise Incubator (LEI) deals both with creating a design that is resilient to change in the future and with preserving and utilizing existing, valuable infrastructural elements. The existing steel structure, which is composed of columns, open web I-Joists, beams, and decking is almost entirely retained in this design proposal. Structure is only removed where the southeast corner tower, the west elevator tower, and the three bays on the upper floor of the building’s southwest corner will be demolished. New structure is inserted only to frame the gestural approach that reaches out to the Moger connector.
Figure 34: Adaptive Reuse Exploded Perspective Diagram.
The existing building’s plumbing systems are retained and wet spaces, which include the restrooms and culinary incubators, are sited to access the existing plumbing and to reduce the need for new plumbing infrastructure. Exterior sheathing is also retained, where possible, and new, smaller fenestrations are placed within larger existing openings. The original brick cladding is removed completely and the building is wrapped in new insulation to increase thermal comfort and energy performance. New terracotta rain screen panels sit to the exterior of the insulation, limiting the possibility of moisture infiltration into the wall cavity. The floor and roof slabs are retained, but altered: punctured to accommodate new vertical circulation elements and lightwells.

Figure 35: Adaptive Reuse Diagrams.

The site’s prominent location has always made it suitable as both an anchor space and as a gateway to the downtown. Thus, the design for the LEI, the downtown’s gateway building, must address the ways in which this building can define the
downtown brand. From the south of the site, visitors and workers approach the downtown by foot, car, or public transit, hailing from Northern Westchester Hospital, the Mount Kisco Medical Group campus, Interstate-684, and residential neighborhoods, coming face-to-face with the site’s southeast corner. This corner is entirely glazed, providing views from passing cars to the open workspaces, café, and culinary incubators inside. Designed for the pedestrian scale as well, the corner’s curtain wall is set inward, widening the sidewalk. The overhang provides for a sensitively scaled threshold and protected gathering space at the street corner.

Figure 36: Adaptive Reuse Strategy Diagram.

Figure 37: Model.
Figure 38: Exterior Rendering from Southeast Corner.

Figure 39: Samantha Greenberg, "Vacant Borders Bookstore and Cafe in Mount Kisco, NY from Southeast Corner," 2014.

Figure 40: Exterior Rendering from Northeast Corner.

Figure 41: Samantha Greenberg, "Vacant Borders Bookstore and Cafe in Mount Kisco, NY from Northeast Corner, 2014."
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The proposed design for the Local Enterprise Incubator highlights a specific community’s assets and potentials in order to solve problems faced at the local level. This design project follows a proposed framework that communities nationwide can use to challenge the anchor store typology. The framework stresses three key issues that all communities should consider: (1) promoting the health of the local economy, (2) designing for the engagement of multiple publics, and (3) addressing opportunities for reviving mundane architecture. By incorporating elements of flexibility and adaptability, this approach strives to produce regenerative and sustainable results. This approach also requires sensitivity, accountability, and transparency. To challenge the anchor store typology, all stakeholder groups should work together to carefully assess existing contexts and opportunities for innovation. It is also essential to consider feasibility limitations, which may include, to name a few, zoning and building codes, ownership, and costs. Nevertheless, communities can begin to address these limitations through collaboration, coordination, and innovation at the local level.

In Mount Kisco, New York, where the former Borders bookstore and café was quite successful in many ways, it may be particularly challenging to gain support for a proposal that challenges the anchor store typology. After all, retail spaces often do help to activate walkable downtowns. This thesis does not seek to discredit the importance of retail as part of a healthy and vibrant walkable downtown. Instead, it proposes that retail is better suited for non-anchor spaces. In Mount Kisco, the closing of the Borders bookstore and café at the site of the community’s anchor demonstrated, not only the
fragility of the retail sector, but also the interconnectedness of the entire downtown. Three years of persisting vacancy have prolonged the negative effects of anchor store loss: disrupting economic, social, cultural, and architectural spheres. By acknowledging the systemic instability of the anchor store model, Mount Kisco can begin to explore a non-retail alternative to the downtown’s anchor space. Mount Kisco’s tendency toward progressive, innovative, and inclusive policies and programs suggests that the community could serve as a great candidate for the implementation of a new, sustainable anchor model.

It is essential to note that the feasibility of generating a new anchor space typology is not only limited by the commitment of the community at large. Because the Mount Kisco Borders bookstore and café, like most anchor spaces, is privately owned, the owner will ultimately determine its use. The community, however, need not feel paralyzed by the condition whereby a public resource is controlled by a private entity. A community or government could seek to acquire ownership of the property. This is a particularly plausible option in Mount Kisco, where the anchor space building is in the process of foreclosure. Alternatively, policy makers might establish incentive programs to encourage the exploration of non-retail alternatives for privately-owned anchor spaces. Finally, new partnerships could emerge as a solution. All stakeholders, including residents, policy makers, business owners, and building owners can work cooperatively to establish joint goals. If the building owner commits to sharing and supporting the community’s vision, it is likely that the owner will reap the benefits of a sustainable anchor space as well.
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