ENRICHING COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE REUSE OF DISMANTLED
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE SITES

By

Widney Pierson
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Student:  Widney Pierson

Committee:

Asst. Prof. Jonathan Healey,
IDEC, ASSOC. AIA

Emily Bishop, NCIDQ

Department Chairperson Krystal
Arnett Henson, LEED

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Corcoran College of Art and Design

By

Widney Pierson
Bachelor of Business Administration, Marketing
The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Advisor(s): Jonathan Healey, Emily Bishop

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Washington, D.C.
ABSTRACT

ADAPTIVE REUSE OF DISMANTLED US POSTAL SERVICE SITES

Widney Pierson Master of Arts in Interior Design
Corcoran College of Art + Design, 2014

Thesis Advisor: Jonathan Healey, IDEC, ASSOC. AIA; Emily Bishop, NCIDQ

Driven by massive consumption levels, standardized design developed as a way to maximize profit through economies of scale. This standardization has created a built landscape of generic structures across the United States, which have become short-lived and disposable – even to the degree that we are now abandoning our public institutions. With growing environmental concerns and depletion of resources comes a need to conserve resources and look to adaptive reuse of existing architecture in order to reduce this consumption.

With the advent of email and online bill pay, the United States Postal Service has found a decreasing demand for physical Post Office sites and has begun closing facilities nationwide, leaving behind thousands of uninhabited buildings. Looking to the near future, it is predicted that The United States Postal Service buildings across the country will be completely obsolete. In an effort to build sustainable landscapes, these spaces can be adaptively reused as markets showcasing local, artisanal items, and as coffee shops encouraging informal gathering. By promoting local economies while encouraging
sustainability and healthy communities, the loss of historical U.S.P.S. institutions will be mitigated. This thesis will explore a closing U.S.P.S. site in the Washington, D.C. metro area to demonstrate this proposal in action and to serve as a prototype for other sites across the country.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

C&D – Construction and Demolition

U.S.P.S. – United States Postal Service
INTRODUCTION

As technology changes every aspect of our lives more and more each day, we are finding that even public spaces are being abandoned in favor of virtual ones. The United States Postal Service (U.S.P.S.) is no exception. With the advent of email and the ease of online bill pay, the U.S.P.S. has found a decreasing demand for physical Post Office sites and has begun shutting their doors across the nation. Leaving behind thousands of uninhabited buildings, it is the challenge of designers and community members alike—in an effort to build sustainable landscapes—to adaptively reuse these spaces rather than demolish and re-build.

While current building practices encourage demolition and new construction, our environmental crisis requires that we begin to keep our existing structures in place and retrofit them to their new use. This saves natural resources, prevents urban sprawl and the destruction of virgin land, and reduces waste being sent to landfills.

In the specific case of U.S.P.S. sites, adaptive reuse also eases community tensions surrounding the closure of these sites, which have served as informal gathering places and local landmarks. Rather than shutting their doors to the public, former U.S.P.S. sites can still provide these same benefits if reused as community markets and coffee shops. Even more, these markets provide local jobs and support local economies while encouraging sustainability and healthy communities.
This thesis proposes that reusing Post Offices as community markets and coffee shops will benefit communities and the environment alike. By designing both interior and exterior elements of a specific closed U.S.P.S. site located in the Washington, D.C. metro area, this thesis will serve as a prototype for other sites across the country. Specifically, the exterior elements that will be addressed include creating a more sustainable site while transforming the atmosphere from austere to inviting and welcoming. To address the austere exterior and to invite the community to explore the terrace spaces, exterior seating/resting areas and shaded informal gathering spaces will be added to the landscape design. Additionally, exterior branding strategies to encourage the community to enter and interact with the space will be employed.

The main goal of the interior spaces is to preserve as much of the existing elements as possible as a sustainable measure, but also to honor the history of the site. The ground level market space will be treated as a separate entity from the upper coffee shop, but both spaces will relate and speak to one another. In the lower level, design constraint and simplicity is the main focus to both highlight existing architectural elements and to call attention to the focus of the space: the products being sold. Main interior design elements will include the reclamation of U.S.P.S. materials as a reference to the building’s previous use.

This thesis will first discuss the United States’ construction industry in an effort to demonstrate how the current processes are detrimental to our environment and have negative impacts upon our communities. Next will be the exploration regarding why
sustainable design – specifically adaptive reuse – is a far better model than our currently used models. The USPS closures will then be discussed, which will lead into the argument of why these sites are superior candidates for adaptive reuse. A specific site in the Washington, D.C. area will be introduced and the interior and exterior modifications to this site will be outlined. The design research, which led to the specific strategies that were employed within the site will both be covered thoroughly. Finally, the findings and contributions of this thesis to the design community will be presented.
CHAPTER 1: THE U.S. CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

“One can see how buildings constructed rapidly by indifferent men with indifferent plans, using remotely made and general parts, are bound to create indifference – at best – in the population at large, let alone in those actually involved”

– Michael Benedikt

The United States’ construction industry relies heavily on what is known as standardized design to create architecture quickly in order to maximize profits while ignoring the effects of these processes upon our environment. Whereas construction once used local materials, craftsmen, and techniques, today with the advent of modern transportation, materials are shipped around the country and even the world. This sharing of material has eliminated our reliance on local sources and has created generic built landscapes. Architecture was once unique to an area, but today we can visit any American city and see the same types of structures constructed with identical materials and techniques. “Combined with efficient systems of national distribution and highly mechanized on-site assembly, both of which minimize the high costs of labor, these conditions have standardized design and commoditized construction to create generic buildings across the country.”

Two major drawbacks to this standardized design are: loss of place and inflexibility with regards to sustainability.

Loss of place refers to the generic landscapes that now predominately make up our American cities, towns, and suburbs. “A simple look at most of our communities being built today shows that we have indeed lost our respect for place. We seek our cultural development in sensationalism and misplaced individualism and technology for
the sake of itself. It used to be that our places defined our architecture, but with a lot of modern urban design and architecture place has become irrelevant, or worse, scorned.”³

This loss of place leads to a loss of ownership and responsibility for our architecture and with this comes our readiness to demolish generic structures and re-build often. It is because our structures are not unique and, therefore, each is not significant to the environment that we are willing and even happy to view architecture as temporary. A lack of commitment to the built world has resulted and we now find our community members have no attachment to their architecture. “Americans move frequently and their seemingly innate restlessness tends to replace a long-term respect for the particularities of site, climate or materials and the traditions of place with more immediate and generalized interests that are placeless.”⁴

Even more detrimental than creating visually uniform and uninteresting architecture across the country, standardized design has led in the opposite direction of sustainability. While profits can indeed be maximized with these systems in the short run, non-local sourcing and the reliance upon transportation is extremely harmful to the planet. With cheaper materials and “the development of the construction industries towards a high dependence on standard building products and standard construction methods, of which many do not allow for highly efficient buildings”⁵ have come not only the generic built landscape, but a landscape of poor quality and energy inefficiency.

With the private building sector representing about 93% of the total U.S. building stock and building construction alone accounting for approximately 10% of US GDP⁶, it
is easy to see why many are reluctant to change the currents ways of our building industries, as they maximize profits.

However, we are dedicating enormous amounts of scarce natural resources to construction and, as a consequence, the construction of our buildings consumes about one-fourth of all wood harvested. In fact, according to the Rocky Mountain Institute, three billion tons of raw materials are used annually to construct buildings worldwide. Although we have just five percent of the world’s population, we consume a hugely disproportionate share of natural resources such as twenty-seven percent of the aluminum and nineteen percent of the copper.7

With cheap materials and lack of leadership from industry professionals regarding sustainability, the construction industry is a leader in resource consumption and disposal above virtually all other industries. With every demolition, new construction and renovation project, construction and demolition (C&D) waste is created and often sent straight to landfills. “C&D waste includes concrete, wood, gypsum drywall, metal, bricks, glass, plastic, and building components such as doors, windows, old bathtubs, pipes, and more…The Construction Materials Recycling Association estimates that more than 325 million tons of C&D waste are produced in the United States each year.”8

“Compared to Europe, which recycles an estimated 46 percent of its construction and demolition waste, the U.S. recycles at a rate of 30 percent.9 As landfills become overcrowded and the price of valuable land increases, we can no longer dedicate acres of our planet to the disposal of waste. “Even the recent economic entrenchment has hardly
altered the nation’s out-with-the-old, in-with-the-new mind-set.” In fact, our C&D materials account for as much as 40 percent of the U.S.’s annual solid-waste stream.

As represented in Figure 1, “According to statistics complied by Environmental Building News, we have approximately 4.6 million commercial buildings in the United States, and we build nearly one hundred and seventy thousand more each year. At the same time, we demolish forty-four thousand commercial buildings each year and send most of the materials to the landfill – many of these buildings are less than thirty years old. On the residential side, there are 101.5 million housing units in the nation, and 63.8 percent are single-family homes. We build nearly two million more homes each year while tearing down a quarter million old ones.”

Figure 1: United States Construction & Demolition

Beyond just the waste that is created from building and demolition, which ends up in landfills, natural materials are being harvested from the environment and used as
building materials. “The United States holds all the records for resource consumption and wastefulness in the world. Since 1940 Americans alone have used up as large a share of the Earth’s mineral resources as all previous generations put together.”

One of the main building materials used is timber. Although timber is vital to air quality and the filtration of our natural water sources, we are cutting down forests at rapid rates. “Globally, we’ve been losing more than 7 million hectares a year, or 20,000 hectares – almost 50,000 acres – a day. This is equivalent to an area twice the size of Paris each day, or about thirty-three football fields’ worth every minute. According to Rainforest Action Network, fifty thousand species of trees go extinct every year.” It is not just the construction of sites that depletes our natural resources, either. We are building structures that do not operate and cannot be managed in sustainable fashions. The US Green Building Council reports that buildings account for almost forty percent of the energy and twenty percent of the water used in the United States today.

Even with these appalling statistics, we are not slowing down consumption nor are we doing enough to change our outdated models of construction techniques, use of resources, and material consumption.

Considering that we use 26% more energy than 20 years ago, and that buildings account for 39% of the energy consumption and 39% of carbon dioxide emissions in the US, buildings consume 70% of the US electricity, and it is projected that the US will double its existing building stock within one generation until 2030, the enormous potential for energy savings (and therefore CO2 reduction) in the U.S. construction market is obvious.
Chapter two will discuss sustainable design as an alternative to the current building model – specifically focusing on adaptive reuse of existing architecture.

Adaptive reuse provides the opportunity to start right away with existing structures and to retrofit them both with sustainable, local materials and systems to fit their new tenants’ needs. In the case of the United States Postal Service, thousands of sites will no longer be actively used as Post Offices, but should be considered as sites for other programs that will benefit communities.
CHAPTER 2: SUSTAINABILITY IN DESIGN & ADAPTIVE REUSE

“In many ways the environmental crisis is a design crisis.”

-Sim Van der Ryn & Stuart Cowan

It is clear that we have an environmental crisis looming and that largely contributing to this crisis is the way we construct our buildings with no regard for longevity or sustainability. First, we must understand as designers and also as citizens what exactly sustainability means. Today the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as: “meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” To start combatting our patterns of consumption, designers must begin to design sustainable systems, products, and environments. As sustainable designers (and consumers), we must decrease our need for extraction of natural materials and look to recycling, reuse, and environmentally friendly materials. “From a materials and energy viewpoint, our current economy and industrial models are vastly inefficient. We could use less and waste less starting right now. In the United States the materials used by industry amounts to more than twenty times each person’s weight per day – more than 1 million pounds per American year.”

As discussed in the previous chapter, the United States’ construction and demolition industries (like virtually all other industries) are designed around the notion of consumption, not conservation.
By both inventing and assimilating ideas and directing the raw energy of a nation committed to innovation, the United States has produced some outstanding achievements. However, the cycle of invention and obsolescence, which is integral to the American psyche, has also created a chronic appetite for change with the consequence that climates are thoughtlessly modified; land is settled, used and abandoned with impunity; and buildings become pragmatic, short-lived and disposable.\textsuperscript{20}

Therefore, we must remember that “sustainable design also implies intention – intention to seek the best solution that balances environmental concerns with comfort, aesthetics, cost and a host of traditional architectural or design concerns.”\textsuperscript{21} It is only with clear and very mindful intentions that we can change our built landscape to a sustainable one. While many are often hesitant of sustainable design and believe eco-friendly means lack-luster quality, aesthetically unpleasant, or outrageously expensive, Jason F. McLennan, author of \textit{The Philosophy of Sustainable Design}, argues that sustainable design can actually improve comfort and overall quality. McLennan’s sustainable qualities include, but are not limited to the following thirteen strategies, components, and technologies:

- Daylighting
- Indoor Air Quality
- Passive Solar Heating
- Natural Ventilation
- Energy Efficiency
- Embodied Energy
- Construction Waste Minimization
- Water Conservation
- Commissioning
- Solid Waste Management
- Renewable Energy
• Xeriscaping/Natural Landscaping
• Site Preservation

Using McLennan’s strategies as much as possible when designing can help ensure that a project considers an array of sustainable strategies and is, therefore, truly eco-friendly on a variety of levels.

One very important way in which we can drastically cut back on the waste generated from construction and demolition is by reusing existing architecture and adapting it to the new need. The re-use of USPS sites specifically will keep in mind McLennan’s strategies, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 with the examination of the prototype U.S.P.S. site in the Washington, D.C. area.

This multifaceted movement is spreading nationally and internationally as cities recognize they can’t just ‘grow smarter’ – they have to fundamentally remake themselves to be resilient for the unprecedented economic, social, and environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. In the United States, existing metropolitan areas can be retrofitted to take advantage of breakthroughs in sustainability and efficiency technologies, as well as new financial incentives.

Adaptive reuse allows us to cut down on materials and resources used, but it also prevents the destruction of virgin land. “For the most part, we should no longer be building on virgin land, and looking to locate our homes and offices at the edge of town. So much underutilized and abandoned infrastructure exists within the fabric of our communities that could be re-used revitalized and made to thrive…In almost every case, revitalizing the places we have already developed results in greater cultural richness as well.”
Many people will argue that deconstructing requires more time, and is therefore less economically viable than demolition and re-build. According to the nonprofit organization Deconstruction and Reuse Network, full deconstruction of a residential structure in which nearly everything is salvaged proceeds at an average pace of 1,000 square feet per week (per five-to-seven-person crew) while a complete tear-down via traditional machine demolition occurs at 1,000 square feet per day. Meaning that a 3,000-square-foot house could be completely demolished in less than three days. Lorenz Schilling, President of Deconstruction and Reuse Network, however turns to his go-to case study: the demolition of a 2,500-square-foot Southern California residence. While he agrees that up-front labor and disposal costs associated with conventional demolition are substantially lower than that of laborious deconstruction ($15,000 versus $37,000), after tax deductions, the bottom line actually favors deconstruction by more than $10,000.

By implementing McLennan’s strategies (i.e. rainwater harvesting, solar energy, renewable energy, etc.), the savings grow even more. We prevent urban sprawl, preserve sites, conserve resources, energy, and material and prevent the expansion of landfills all by adaptively reusing architecture in conjunction with sustainable practices. As shown in Figure 1, we have evolved to a consumer society where at first we just threw away our stuff, but have now begun throwing away our cultural institutions (Fig. 2). This leaves us with the question of “what will we throw away next?” The choice we have is to preserve the nature of the institutions through their reuse as comparable institutions that serve the community in the same beneficial ways as the U.S.P.S. did.
Chapter 4 will provide the plans for how U.S.P.S. sites can be adaptively and sustainably reused. First, however, Chapter 3 will provide a background of the U.S.P.S. in order to explain why these sites and structures are the perfect candidates for reuse and how the changing economic and social climate has led to the closure of this historic institution.
CHAPTER 3: CHANGING CLIMATE: CLOSURE OF U.S. THE POSTAL SERVICE

The United States Postal Office Department (the predecessor to the United States Postal Service) was created by Congress in 1775, making it the second oldest federal department or agency in the nation. The first Post Office was created in Philadelphia in 1683 and the infrastructure continued to expand over many decades to handle ever-increasing volumes of mail.

In the past, the mailstream was composed mostly of statements, bills, and payments. This “transactional” First-Class Mail was largely resistant to changes in the economy. Today, the largest share of mail is advertising. Because advertising is considered a discretionary expense, it is much more sensitive to economic fluctuations. Looking forward, this shift will result in more volatility in mail volume and a larger negative impact from economic downturns.\(^27\)

Beyond the fluctuation of advertisement expenses, however, came a much larger problem for the U.S.P.S. Beginning in 2000, the growing popularity of e-mail and electronic bill payments sent mail volume plummeting. From 2006 to 2010, the Postal Service’s annual volume declined by 43.1 billion pieces. It is the main factor behind a $5.6 billion fail in annual revenues during this period.\(^28\)

In 1971, Congress had declared the U.S.P.S. a quasi-corporation and mandated a debt cap of $15 billion. When that cap was met in 2011, the U.S.P.S. announced it would begin looking at closing some of its nearly 32,000 retail locations across the country. Of those 32,000 locations, the U.S.P.S. leases 24,309 buildings and owns another 8,644. (The General Services Administration also owns around 300 buildings used as postal
facilities). Since 2006, approximately 2,680 leases have been terminated and since 2008, 111 owned buildings have been sold.\(^\text{29}\)

Although this number seems large on its own, it is not until we consider that the U.S.P.S. has more retail locations that McDonald’s, Starbucks, Walmart, and Walgreens combined\(^\text{30}\) that the gravity of these closures begins to set in. Currently the U.S.P.S. has complied a list for further review of 3,653 sites (about 12 percent of total locations) in every state except Delaware for closure (Fig. 2). Eighty four percent of the locations on the list take in less than $27,500 in annual revenue and have less than two hours of work a day.\(^\text{31}\) Savings from the closings could be as much as $200 million.\(^\text{32}\)

![Figure 3: U.S.P.S. Sites Under Review for Closure](image)
In order to continue to serve customers (even on a limited scale), the Postal Service has proposed the creation of 2,500 “village post offices,” geared primarily toward smaller communities. “They would be installed in nonunionized grocery and convenience stores, and perhaps even libraries or government centers, and offer services such as selling stamps and flat-rate shipping.”

There is much tension at the community level surrounding the closure of these U.S.P.S. sites. Local post offices have often played an essential role in the lives of Americans.

In many cases, the buildings have not only been community hubs, but also remain among the most architecturally distinguished buildings in their towns, legacies of New Deal efforts to put America back to work. So as the Postal Service tries to shrink, it is often finding itself in a battle with groups trying to prevent what the National Trust for Historic Preservation last year labeled one of the most significant threats to the country’s architectural heritage.

Many of the concerns and tensions revolve around the transition of these public institutions into private hands. Post offices – along with banks and grocery stores – have often served as informal gathering places for neighbors. With the shift toward an Internet society, there also comes a shift away from impromptu face-to-face interactions and many are in strong opposition to this removal of human contact. The closing of U.S.P.S. sites represents a shift away from community and neighborhood interactions, causing many to protest the closing of their neighborhood branches in an effort to keep impromptu interactions intact.
In an interview with Dr. Gray Brechin, project scholar for the Living New Deal at the University of California, Berkeley, Dr. Brechin said:

Those that rely on the Post Office are protesting the disappearance for this still vital public service but few have registered what this fire sale represents to the nation’s architectural and artistic legacy…and you can actually make a very nice profit from doing so as you privatize what was the commons and take it away from the public that paid for and built it. And that’s essentially what’s happening with the Post Office.”

By adaptively reusing the Post Office sites and transforming them into community markets and coffee shops where neighbors can shop and local producers can sell their goods, however, these sites still provide a common good for the community. Impromptu interactions will still occur and the architectural and artistic legacy that Dr. Brechin speaks of will remain intact. Additionally, by preserving the existing architecture and highlighting existing U.S.P.S. materials within the spaces, the history will not be lost as it would with a demolition or renovation.

In small communities this preservation and adaptation takes on an even more important role as Post Offices “are generally the most important of the local buildings, and taken together, [are] seen daily by thousands, who have little opportunity to feel the influence of the great architectural works in the large cities.” The historic, beautiful sites will be preserved and the public will still be able to enter the sites just as they had before. In Geneva, Illinois, city officials refer to their local Post Office as the “community kitchen table” as it serves as a meeting and gathering place in the heart of their historic downtown district. This is just a micro-example of the thousands of
U.S.P.S. branches like that of Geneva, where the Post Office is vital to the sense of community and gathering. Without a plan to reuse these spaces in an equally beneficial way, communities across the nation will lose their “community kitchen tables”.

Moreover, this thesis argues that the nationwide site closures leave an opportunity as designers, architects and developers to adaptively reuse these structures in an effort to be sustainable. Community markets and coffee shops will allow for the ease of these community tensions as the sites will not be taken away from the public, but rather adapted to a new public use. With the likelihood that 3,653 sites will be closing in the near future and that thousands more may follow soon behind, a well-structured plan will benefit our communities, natural environment, and built landscapes.
CHAPTER 4: ADAPTIVE REUSE OF CLOSED U.S.P.S. SITES

“The cultural memory is not about giving testimony of past events, as accurately and truthfully as possible, nor is it necessarily about ensuring cultural continuity: it is about making meaningful statements about the past in a given cultural context of the present.”
—Cornelius Holtorf

The generalities of the adaptive reuse of the U.S.P.S. sites will be discussed here, while the specific Post Office site that will serve as a prototype will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Community markets featuring local vendors’ handmade or hand-grown goods will be the focus of the interior spaces, while the coffee shop will serve as an additional program, which creates more interaction and gathering space. When possible, outdoor spaces should serve to expand the market when weather permits, which allows for more vendors and a greater interaction with the community at large. The following qualities will be discussed as to why markets and coffee shops will work well in closed USPS buildings: located centrally, eases tensions, serves community, and promotes sustainability (Fig. 4).
First, “because many post office buildings are centrally located, often within downtown districts, and tend to feature large open spaces, their potential as adaptive use projects is enormous.” Whether in small towns where Post Offices are typically located on the main strip or in big cities where the site is one of many spread across the city, these sites are ideal as markets because of their location. They are easily accessible either by personal or public transportation and since they have served as places of business, they are in areas that can support commerce. In smaller communities, the central location is an enormous factor to the success of the market, as patrons tend to use the central district for their shopping needs. In another interview with Dr. Brechin, he said: “these
Post Offices were designed for the centers of every town and city, because it had to be most accessible, and to serve all the businesses as well as the people in those places.  

Second, community markets and coffee shops will help to ease the tensions surrounding the closure of these sites (as discussed previously). Many people view their local post office as a historic pillar of their community, as an informal gathering place for neighbors, and as a public, architectural icon. If these sites are sold and privatized, these tensions will only be heightened. By reusing the sites as community markets and coffee shops, however, they will continue to serve the community and will help dissipate the opposition. Allowing community members to continue to have access to the sites and by preserving the important architectural and U.S.P.S. features, the sites will continue to remain and function in much the same way as they did while serving as Post Offices.

Third, these markets and coffee shops will serve the community. By featuring the products of local vendors and producers, the sites will create local jobs and help boost the local economy. The market and the coffee shop will also serve as the informal gathering place that many people enjoyed when going to the Post Office. Keeping the buildings as public use spaces helps to boost the neighborhood as well. Mixed-use projects inherently promote vibrancy within communities, as they attract more visitors. With multiple functions and services, foot traffic is increased and urban areas are activated during more hours of the day. The environment become safer and, when located near residential sectors, promotes walking.
Last, community markets will promote sustainability and the goals of the market will go hand-in-hand with the goals of adaptive reuse. Local producers often create or cultivate organic and other sustainable products. Additionally, local vendors promote the idea of buying local—a sustainable strategy for decreasing unnecessary transport of goods.

According to the Project for Public Spaces, there are ten qualities that make for a successful market, each with multiple sub-qualities as well (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Qualities of Successful Markets

![Diagram showing qualities of successful markets](image)

Image copyright Widney Pierson
Data Source: Project for Public Spaces
While not all will be discussed in great detail here, they include: vendors, location, mix, mission, public spaces, connections, economics, promotion, value, and management. Vendors should provide quality products, as this is the second most popular reason why people like markets (after the experience) and presentation of product must be informative and distinctive. Local vendors are also preferred, as customers feel connected when they see “their own”. Location should be visible, accessible, and memorable. The interiors should flow, meaning the space should be easy to navigate and for one to orient himself. Mix refers to different price and quality levels so as to appeal to multiple tastes and income levels. The mission should be clear from the start. Missions should also include socialization, community health, local culture, and self-sustaining operations. The right public space refers to not just the site, but also interior and architectural elements as well. For example, the market must have a clear sense of entry and provide seating as a place to rest and socialize. Shade is important for outdoor markets as well. Connections encourage markets to create partnerships with organizations whose missions overlap. Connections also means ensuring that markets are accessible, have nearby housing for a built-in customer base, and promote the “giveback” aspect that it is creating by strengthening the local community. Economics ensures that the markets are built on sustainable foundations and that they keep money local. Promotion encourages events and demonstrations, as this brings the community in and are always popular with patrons. Additionally, having a clear, compelling, and consistent market image from the start is important. Value refers to quality products as well as a quality
experience, but also to social capital or the shared experiences that build communities. Additionally, value helps to affirm a sense of place. Finally, management should be promotion-minded and focus on outreach, as a diverse market is a strong market.42

These qualities will be addressed further in chapter six, where they will be discussed in relation to the design of the Washington, D.C. prototype site. Just as they were important to the design of the prototype site, they should be implemented in all sites using this plan of adaptive reuse.
CHAPTER 5: PROTOTYPE SITE & SPACE CONSIDERATIONS

*Additional site photos: Appendix i.

Washington Post Office, Georgetown Branch (Custom House)
1215 31st St NW
Washington, DC 20007  (Fig. 6).

Building Size: 7,950 square feet
Level 01: 5,250 square feet
Level 02: 2,700 square feet
Lot Size: 14,880 square feet
The Washington Post Office and Custom House was registered as a National Historic site on September 10, 1971. Originally constructed in 1857-58, the exterior of the building has undergone relatively few changes with the exception of a one-story addition to the rear in 1906. The interior of the building, however, has been altered extensively throughout its history. The main interior features that are original to the structure are the twelve cast iron Corinthian columns and a cast iron stairway, which runs south to north along the east wall, black-and-white marble flooring and hardwood floors. Original fireplace and moldings are also present. The main doorway is on the west façade. (See Appendix ii for site photos of existing elements to remain.)
The architect Ammi B. Young, who in 1852 became the supervising architect of the Treasury, was put in charge of revenue-producing buildings such as custom houses across the D.C. area and other emerging cities nationwide. “In that capacity Young designed this restrained Italianate building in granite ashlar. During his District stint Young erected several other Tuscany-evoking piles, but Talbot Hamlin, in Greek Revival Architecture in America (1944), declare this rather simply massed structure ‘the best’ of Young’s Washington buildings.”

Along with its stylistic freshness however, the building is also distinguished for another and equally important innovation. The interior construction utilizes the then recently introduced fireproof method of iron posts and beams, with segmental brick vaults between the latter. This revolutionary technique was, in fact, used in all Young’s customhouses and post offices. From then on it became standard for all federal buildings, and it remained as such until the introduction of the steel frame late in the nineteenth century.

The exterior today remains largely untouched. It rises from a granite terrace, which serves to distinguish the structure from its immediate neighbors. “While not as imposing as federal buildings closer to the city center, the Georgetown Custom House and Post Office nevertheless serves as a dignified reminder of Young’s contribution during the early years of the Office of the Supervising Architect and of Georgetown’s once active port.”

As a site for a community market and coffee shop, the Georgetown Post Office has many benefits. To begin, the two levels will allow for separation between the two functions. Level one, which is approximately 5,250 square feet, will house the market.
The rear of level one (located to the East) will feature perishable products. Typical examples of these types of products may include meat/deli/seafood, flowers, cheese and dairy, and baked goods. These vendors will have access storage and prep areas for goods located in the basement, as well as refrigerated display cases and two sinks located on the market level. The vendors will not rotate, which will allow for familiarity from shoppers who could return to the market confident they will be able to buy a product from a vendor whose goods are always stationed within the building. The front of level one (located to the West) will feature a curated mix of local, non-perishable products. Typical examples of these products may include candles and soaps, jewelry, hand-woven baskets and throws, artisanal packaged foods, spices and oils, tabletop and home décor, and stationary. Additionally, the market can expand to the exterior terraces during warm weather to accommodate more temporary vendors, which will also help invite the community in.

The second level is approximately 2,700 square feet and will be used as the coffee shop area. With the designed layout (discussed more in chapter six), the indoor space will accommodate 66 patrons. The existing roof of the first level rear space will be turned into a terrace for outdoor sitting and gathering. This exterior terrace will provide an additional table seating for 28 persons (excluding the benches provided on the outdoor planters, which allow for casual seating).

The benefits specific to this site include: parking for patrons of the market and coffee shop, bus route accessibility nearby, access to outdoor terrace space for
community gathering as well as market expansion, space for variety of products, as well as “permanent” vendors, and ease of access/walkability (Fig. 7).

Since Washington, D.C. is home to numerous Post Office sites, the site functions differently than in small communities where the Post Office is located in a central district. It was, therefore, particularly important to analyze the area and the other markets within the city to ensure that the market and coffee shop fit programmatically and will thrive. Had there been another similar market in the area, the success of the project may have been compromised. Through a comparison with other markets in the Washington, D.C. area, however, this market’s unique benefits provide additional platforms for success (Figure 8).
Arguably one of the most important features of this market, which will lend to its success is the Georgetown location and its lack of a community market like this in the area. Adding to this is the absence of a Metro stop in the Georgetown area, making it more difficult for patrons living in the area to access the other community markets located across D.C. Those who live in the area, therefore, typically shop at stores located near their homes. While this may make the area seem secluded, it is actually a vibrant...
commercial area. M Street, which is located just a block away, is one of the busiest commercial areas in the city featuring a variety of shops and restaurants.

By placing a community market in the Georgetown area – a densely populated residential and commercial area – access will be provided to patrons who would otherwise not be able to participate in a community market experience often. Patrons who live outside of the Georgetown area would also frequent the market and coffee shop, as they would be in the area shopping or dining. While this site is a prime example of a building that will thrive as a community market and coffee shop, it is just that: an example. This proposal will work at a variety of sites across the country as it is not limited by this specific site’s qualities. However, each site should be carefully analyzed as this one was.
CHAPTER 6: DESIGN & MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS & GOALS

“We shape our environments, thereafter, they shape us.”
– Winston Churchill

To address the design (and specifically the material) challenges of this site as a model for other U.S.P.S. sites, both exterior and interior elements were modified and added using sustainable practices. Beginning with the exterior, the two main design goals included creating a more sustainable site and transforming the atmosphere from austere to inviting and welcoming. Located in a dense, urban setting, this site suffers from a lack of natural plantings, which provide life and softness to the hard surfaces all around. A low-maintenance, low-water landscape design that feels lush and welcoming will help invite community members to experience the space both from the exterior and the interior. “Architecture and landscape design that maintains a dialogue with its surroundings, and teaches us about the places we inhabit, enrich our experiences on all levels.” Solar panels and rainwater harvesting will allow for this site to be self-sustainable and environmentally conscious without interfering with the required programs in any way.

To address the austere exterior and to invite the community to explore the terrace spaces, exterior seating/resting areas and shaded informal gathering spaces will be added to the landscape design. Providing a place for community members to interact and gather is one of the main goals of this project. Currently, U.S.P.S. sites only provides for this interaction in small time slots while patrons are gathered inside. By providing outdoor
seating, this interaction becomes even more casual and encourages lengthier conversations and more intimate connections. The ground level terrace will allow for set up of temporary vendor stalls during appropriate weather. These stalls feature collapsible tables and red umbrellas (as red is the U.S.P.S. accent color). The north side of the terrace will be kept clear of temporary vendors, as this area functions as parking for patrons. Space allows for four temporary vendor stalls – two smaller (10’2” x 10’2”) and two larger (10’2” x 20’). This would likely allow for anywhere from six to ten vendors. The outdoor ground level terrace also includes the installation of four combination planters/ exterior benches. These planters are custom made (6’4” x 6’4”) with central planters (3’3/8” x 3’3/8”). The planter portion serves as backrest and also allows for small trees, which will provide shade. The planters are important to this site to encourage the use of the previously un-used terrace and to encourage informal gathering. As patrons shop both the interior and exterior market, they can enjoy their new purchases as well as engage with one another. For a visual representation of the outdoor terrace, refer to chapter eight (Fig. 27).

The interior ground level market will be called The Provisional Post and occupies 5,200 square feet. The front market to the West is 2,700 square feet and the rear market to the East is 2,500 square feet. The main design goal of the interior spaces was to preserve as much of the existing elements as possible in keeping with sustainable practices, but also to honor the history of the site as a Post Office. On the ground level, these existing materials include original hardwood flooring and black-and-white marble tile flooring,
twelve cast-iron columns, cast iron stairs, and ceiling moldings. In the rear, the interior plaster was removed to expose the underlying brick. Both front and rear markets were kept minimalistic and clean in an effort to showcase these architectural elements, and also to highlight the products for sale. The original cast-iron columns are currently painted green, but will be encased in white Carrera marble to simultaneously highlight their strong architectural feature, but also to keep within the neutral color palette.

Beyond the preservation and highlighting of the existing elements, new elements had to be added to the space to allow for its function as a market. Beginning with the West market, or the front market, the most important addition was product display. Permanent displays which wrapped the existing columns served to both engage the existing architecture and also to create traffic flow. The twelve existing columns divided the space into three rows and by incorporating the product display shelving within these columns, the market was divided into areas which encourage meandering and browsing. Additional permanent shelving was placed along the West entrance wall, the wall across from the front register, the East wall dividing the two market areas, and encasing the windows on the North and South middle rows. Finally, merchandise display was incorporated with the placement of four rectangular, moveable tables and two round top tables. These tables break up the repetition of the permanent shelving, creating more pathways, which force the customer to wind through the space and allow for adjustability of merchandise display. In the layout of this space, as mentioned, it was important for the shopper to wind and meander through the space, as this ensures that more time is spent in
the market looking at the merchandise. A custom marble checkout counter was created and placed toward the rear of the front market, in the Northeast corner. The same checkout counter was placed in the rear market as well for consistency. For a visual layout of the space described above, see floor plan in chapter eight (Fig. 17).

The rear or East portion of the market, is located in the space that was the addition to the original structure. This space is 2,500 square feet with an emergency exit located in the Northeast corner. As mentioned, the existing interior plaster will be removed to expose the existing brick. In this space, four columns matching the style of the West market were added and create a central market zone. The ceiling was dropped two feet and crown molding to match the original crown was placed around this drop. Each of the four columns is anchored by shelving, matching that of the West market. The front of the central market zone features two refrigerated cases, topped with a marble counter and hanging shelves above for storage. The two sides of the central market zone each have five bar stools and are illuminated with hanging pendants. This seating area allows for patrons to have tasting of the various food products for sale. The rear of the central market zone features shelving for storage, a food prep and hand-washing sink, and swinging café door for entry/exit to the space.

Behind the central market zone along the back wall of the space is the pantry. The pantry spans the entire length of the wall (56’0”) and features custom built shelving and two library ladders. The custom shelving encases the five existing windows and utilizes closed storage below counter-height. An elevation of this system can be seen in chapter
eight (Fig. 18). Placed in front of the shelving system are three permanent counters with butcher-block tops where baskets of grains and other food items can be displayed. Along the North and South areas of the rear market are more refrigerated cases with marble counters, shelving with butcher-block counters, and glass-encased display for food items. Chalkboard menus are illuminated with wall-mounted pendants and hanging shelving is present in the Northwest corner. Additionally, a refrigerated beverage case is placed along the Northwest wall that separates the two market areas. In the Southwest section of the rear market is a checkout counter matching the checkout counter of the front market area.

One of the leading design inspirations was the use of U.S.P.S. materials and motifs to reference the site as a historic Post Office. In the front market, a total of five enlarge postage stamps are framed and placed on the walls. In the rear market area, a large postage stamp has been used as a wall mural and original P.O. boxes have been placed along the wall behind the checkout station. Interior renderings of the ground level market spaces described above can be seen in chapter eight (Figs. 19 – 22).

In addressing the two levels of this site as two separate entities and opening up the second level for public use, an elevator had to be added. Additionally, interior walls were placed around the stairwell and encapsulating the new elevator to allow for the two spaces to operate with separate business hours. This elevator and stairwell area has access to an exterior door, but also includes interior doors for access to the market. Exterior signage and branding will be discussed further in chapter nine.
The second level coffee shop, named Penny Black Coffee, is a play on both black coffee and the penny black stamp, which was the name of the first postage stamp. This space relates to the ground level market, but is also more playful, as the interior elements did not have to be kept minimalistic for product display purposes. The interior features original black-and-white marble and hardwood floorings. As one enters the space from the original cast iron stairwell, the windows to the right look out on the rooftop terrace. To the left, cardboard tape rolls that would have been discarded are encased in glass and allow the patron to peek through and watch baristas behind the coffee bar. An original fireplace and crown moldings provide the historic architectural backdrop to the renovated and updated space. The main feature wall is located along the south wall of the building and is a stamp mural 45’0” in length. Mounted pendants used in the lower market are placed along this wall, but are now in a bright red. Banquette seating runs underneath the mural with tables seating up to four patrons. Smaller bistro tables are placed in the center of the space with two chairs each and additional upholstered chairs are placed in groups for lounging and relaxed sitting.

The coffee bar is once again Carrera marble and has seating for eight. Along the rear wall of the coffee bar is a built-in shelving unit matching that of the pantry wall from the lower market. Chalkboard menus with wall-mounted red pendants like those of the lower level (in white) are placed along the walls and red pendants hang above the barista’s bar. Red was chosen as it is the accent color of the U.S.P.S. and helps to create the vibrant and active space the designer was looking to achieve. Above the coffee bar is
a dropped ceiling of two feet mimicking the dropped ceiling of the lower level. Crown molding wraps this dropped ceiling and matches the original moldings of the space. Wall niches at the beverage station keep sugar and other condiments neatly stored, while trash cans have been concealed underneath the counters for a clean, streamlined aesthetic. Red coffee mugs and table vases provide additional pops of red. (For level 02 floor plan refer to chapter eight (Fig. 23). For interior renderings of the Penny Black Coffee shop, refer to chapter eight, (Figs. 24 and 25)).

The second story rooftop terrace will be added to the existing roof space of the level one rear addition. This terrace will expand the seating area provided to the patrons of the coffee shop, but can be used by patrons of the market. In the dense urban neighborhood, this seating terrace will provide a place for relaxation and casual conversation. The second story terrace will provide tables with umbrellas for shade, each seating four patrons. In total, there will be seven tables, allowing for seating for twenty-eight persons. In addition, five planters will be placed on this terrace identical to the ones used on the ground level terrace. These planter benches will allow for additional, more informal seating. These planters will also provide shade to the rooftop terrace. A rendering of the rooftop terrace can be seen in chapter eight (Fig. 26).

All employees of The Provisional Post and Penny Black Coffee will wear aprons (waist style or bib style depending on job function) made from the blue-and-white striped Post Office uniform shirts. Those handling food or baristas making beverages will wear bib style aprons. Cashiers and employees not handling food will wear waist style aprons.
This small touch will be another reference to the site as a former Post Office and will also create a small connection between the two spaces (Fig. 34).

As aforementioned, the mission of the market is to support the advancement of local craftsmen and tradesmen in order to cultivate a vibrant community market. The market will serve as a community gathering place celebrating local farmers, food producers, and artisans and the coffee shop will further many of these goals as well. As discussed in chapter four, the qualities that contribute to a successful market as described by the Project for Public Spaces were important to the design of the market spaces and were also applied to the Penny Black Coffee shop. The revisting of these qualities along with a brief description of their placement within the site will serve to demonstrate how the design aspects incorporated the qualities. It will also enforce the premise that The Provisional Post and Penny Black Coffee will be successful ventures.

First was the discussion of vendors and the requirement that vendors provide quality products, as this is the second most popular reason why people like markets (after the experience) and presentation of product must be informative and distinctive. Local vendors are also preferred, as customers feel connected when they see “their own”. The Provisional Post and subsequent Post Office reuse markets should feature local, high-quality products catered to the specific demographic. In the case of The Provisional Post, high-end merchandise was chosen to appeal to the Georgetown demographic. The interior elements chosen including the use of marble, the clean aesthetic, and custom display units all lend to the high-end feel of the space. The display of the products, as mentioned,
was the top priority when designing the space, which led to the clean, minimal, white architectural backdrop.

The second quality of successful markets is a visible, accessible, and memorable location. As discussed in chapter five (and show visually in Fig. 7), the location was carefully assessed in relation to other markets in the area to ensure that, if there was competition, it would not be an immediate or detrimental threat to the success of the market and coffee shop. Beyond that, consideration was given to the quality of the building, the probability of shoppers visiting the area, the relation to both residences and commerce, and the ability to adapt this building to meet all codes as required by law. All of this determined that the market and coffee shop would be successful. A thorough analysis such as this should be performed for all sites under consideration for reuse using this plan. In particular, some of the strongest advantages to this site can be seen in Fig. 9 below.

Figure 9: Why This Site?

| ✓ | Area can support commerce |
| ✓ | Near public transportation/walk-able |
| ✓ | Not near other similar markets |
| ✓ | Area lacking local artisans/farmers market |
| ✓ | Residential area: community gathering |

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The third quality of successful markets pertains to the interior flow, meaning the space should be easy to navigate and for one to orient himself. This was addressed through the sight line upon entering through the front or West entrance, which is the main entrance to the building. The interior display shelving leaves an area 21′10-3/8″ wide, which is not occupied by shelving. Two columns interrupt this space with the central, round table placed between them, still allowing for uninterrupted sight through to the rear. The layout of the space promotes wandering and meandering in order to encourage browsing. However, all display shelving in the center of the space is kept to a height of 43.5″ at its highest when wrapping columns and 40″ between columns. Only display shelving that is placed against the walls is 11′3″ high (including decorative crown moldings). By keeping the interior aisles low, a customer is always able to see through the center of the space. Additionally, this allows one to see that there is a rear market and encourages the exploration of the entire space. Finally, the entrance between the front and rear markets measures 15′5-3/8″ wide. This expansive pass-through keeps the two areas open to each other as opposed to a small doorway where one would not be able to ascertain what is occurring in the rear of the space.

The next quality of a successful market is mix. Mix refers to different price and quality levels so as to appeal to multiple tastes and income levels. Mix was addressed in a variety of ways. First, by implementing two basic varieties of goods: home wares and food, price points vary drastically. While one patron may visit the front of the market to pick up a gift or to shop for a specialty home item, another might come in simply to pick
up a loaf of bread and wedge of cheese for an appetizer. In the Georgetown area, however, the neighborhood lent itself to high-end goods and the market, therefore, addressed that clientele.

In addressing this high-end clientele and, therefore, featuring high-end goods, the next quality of the market was also addressed: mission. A successful market should have a mission that is clear from the start and should also include socialization, community health, local culture, and self-sustaining operations. As aforementioned, the idea behind implementing community markets and coffee shops into closing U.S.P.S. sites is to develop public spaces where people can socialize while promoting local economies through the purchasing of locally made goods. Overall, the mission of these markets and coffee shops is always the same, no matter the location of the U.S.P.S. site.

According to The Project For Public Spaces, the next condition of successful markets is finding the right location. The right public space refers to not just the site, but also interior and architectural elements as well. For example, the market must have a clear sense of entry and provide seating as a place to rest and socialize. Shade is important for outdoor markets as well. As discussed, each site must be individually accessed in order to ensure the location will promote commerce. Additionally, each site will have unique interior and exterior architectural or decorative elements pertaining to its use as a Post Office that should be preserved.

The next condition of successful markets is connections. Connections encourage markets to create partnerships with organizations whose missions overlap. Connections
also means ensuring that markets are accessible, have nearby housing for a built-in customer base, and promote the “giveback” aspect that it is creating by strengthening the local community. By partnering with local artisans, craftsmen, farmers, and other producers, these markets encourage local goods and promote small business mentality.

As discussed in chapters one and two, our environmental crisis is heavily caused by the reliance upon transportation of non-local goods. Purchasing at the community level is a sustainable practice and also promotes the “giveback” aspect. Additionally, by analyzing each site as was done with the D.C. prototype, one can determine the accessibility of the site as well as the proximity of nearby housing. A quick walkability map as shown in Fig. 7 is an easy way to determine how accessible the site is to nearby residents, should the city be heavily reliant on foot-traffic as D.C. is.

The final quality of successful markets, which will be touched upon here is value. Value refers to quality products as well as a quality experience, but also to social capital or the shared experiences that build communities. Additionally, value helps to affirm a sense of place. As has been discussed, one of the major complaints regarding the closure of U.S.P.S. sites comes from concerned community members regarding the loss of their historic cultural institutions. By ensuring that these sites do not get turned into private entities where the public is denied access, or worse – demolished – the plan also ensures that the new function will serve communities. As local landmarks, community gathering centers, and markets featuring high-quality, local merchandise, the sites ensure that the
value that the community will receive from these sites remains intact, and to many degrees increases.

With the clear plan for the reuse of the D.C. prototype site as well as research to support the design decisions, the plan can then be put into action. Chapter seven will explore the design decisions as they evolved, highlighting certain decisions that were changed in order to support better solutions as they arose. The goal of chapter seven is to show the evolution of the design process, but also to address ideas that many might think of as viable solutions, but which were ultimately proven to be inferior options.
CHAPTER 7: DESIGN RESEARCH AND PROCESS

One of the main challenges of this process was determining the right program to place within the space. Originally, plans were created for two residences on the upper level (Fig. 10).

After exploring the community tensions regarding the closure of many U.S.P.S. sites, however, it became clear that using these sites as private spaces would only increase the tensions. The spaces needed to be kept public and access could not be given
to only a select few community members. It is at this time that exploration into public programs began and coffee shops were eventually chosen as the additional program.

Researching market prototypes was important in understanding how markets functioned and what components are necessary for daily functioning. Below (Fig. 11) are six of the many markets that were researched as prototypes.

Figure 11: Market Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NORTH MARKET</th>
<th>EATALY</th>
<th>UNION MARKET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COLUMBUS, OH</td>
<td>NEW YORK CITY, NY</td>
<td>WASHINGTON, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• 1 MILLION SHOPPERS ANNUALLY</strong></td>
<td><strong>• 50,000 SQUARE FEET</strong></td>
<td><strong>• 47,000 SQUARE FEET</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• MORE THAN 30 MERCHANTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>• ITALIAN FOOD MARKET</strong></td>
<td><strong>• ARTESINAL &amp; FOOD MARKET</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• SATURDAYS DURING GROWING SEASON: OUTDOOR FARMERS MARKET IN PLAZA</strong></td>
<td><strong>• RESTAURANTS, FOOD &amp; BEVERAGE STATIONS, BAKERY, &amp; RETAIL ITEMS</strong></td>
<td><strong>• 40+ LOCAL FOOD VENDORS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• SUNDAYS MAY-OCTOBER: LOCAL ARTISANS &amp; CRAFTSMEN SELL HANDMADE WARES</strong></td>
<td><strong>• SOUTH HALL - 13 INDOOR MERCHANTS: PRODUCE, FLOWERS, CHEESE, MEATS, ETC.</strong></td>
<td><strong>• 200,000 SQUARE FEET</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• EASTERN MARKET</strong></td>
<td><strong>• EASTERN MARKET</strong></td>
<td><strong>• 49 SHOPS, 18 RESTAURANTS &amp; PUBS, 35 COLONNADE EATERIES, 44 PUSHCARTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASHINGTON, DC</td>
<td>WASHINGTON, DC</td>
<td><strong>• SET AROUND A COBBLESTONE PROMENADE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• 300,000 SQUARE FEET</strong></td>
<td><strong>• SOUTH HALL - EVENTS SPACE (ARTS &amp; CRAFTS, WEDDINGS, DANCE CLASSES, ETC.)</strong></td>
<td><strong>• SOUTH HALL - 13 INDOOR MERCHANTS: PRODUCE, FLOWERS, CHEESE, MEATS, ETC.)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• 49 SHOPS, 18 RESTAURANTS &amp; PUBS, 35 COLONNADE EATERIES, 44 PUSHCARTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>• WEEKEND FARMERS LINE - OPEN AIR; FARMERS SELL PRODUCE</strong></td>
<td><strong>• WEEKEND OUTDOOR MARKET - ARTS &amp; CRAFTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>• SET AROUND A COBBLESTONE PROMENADE</strong></td>
<td><strong>• WEEKEND OUTDOOR MARKET - ARTS &amp; CRAFTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>• WEEKEND OUTDOOR MARKET - ARTS &amp; CRAFTS</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Another consideration of the D.C. prototype site was special constraints.

Concerns arose regarding the adequacy of space within the ground level for a market. Fit
studies were diagrammed to test layouts (Fig. 12). After this fit study confirmed that a market program would adequately work, plans continued to develop.

Figure 12: Fit Studies for Market Program

The exploration of U.S.P.S. materials to be used within the space was an important part of this design process. Through the process of editing, the use of these
materials became very select and many of the ideas regarding use of other materials were rejected. Overall, the choice was to use a light hand and to choose just a few U.S.P.S. materials to be used in larger gestures rather than a lot of materials in small gestures. Below is a presentation of the materials under consideration for reuse (Fig. 13), but which were ultimately not used. The unused materials are discussed here as they could be placed in other sites at the discretion of the designer and determinate upon the intended design outcomes.

Figure 13: U.S.P.S. Materials and Reuse Options
A final component which could be explored in more depth should this project continue to expand would be the closer examination of sustainable systems. The following chart was created to explore systems that could be employed at the D.C. prototype site to make for a more sustainable environment (Fig. 14).

Figure 14: Goals for a Sustainable Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYSTEMS TO ADDRESS SUSTAINABILITY</th>
<th>LEED GREEN BUILDING STANDARDS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daylighting</td>
<td>Sustainable Sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Ventilation</td>
<td>Water Efficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Waste Minimization</td>
<td>Energy &amp; Atmosphere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xeriscaping (Natural Landscaping)</td>
<td>Materials &amp; Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuse of Existing Architecture</td>
<td>Indoor Environmental Quality</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rainwater Harvesting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Solar Panels (Renewable Energy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Indoor Fans (Air Flow and Quality)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy Efficient Appliances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reuse of Existing Interior Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainably Sourced New Materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Energy Systems (i.e. Lighting, HVAC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS

This chapter will focus on the final drawings as presented to the thesis panel. A brief description of each image will be given. For full representation of the drawings as presented on design board, refer to Appendices iii - xiv.

Figure 15: Building Section with Existing Conditions Callouts

Figure 15 above shows an architectural section with three callouts noting existing conditions. This image was used to give the panel an overview of the buildings layout.
and to call out existing conditions including columns, flooring, moldings, windows, and rooftop. The drawing also notes the existence of a basement level, which was not addressed in the design portion of this thesis, but would be used programmatically for storage and food prep.

Figure 16: Site Rendering

Figure 16 above is a visual representation of the site as a whole. This image was used to show a variety of things including the building size, lot size, ground and rooftop terraces, and the plan for market expansion. As the site has numerous elevation changes with steps, ramps, and slopes, this rendering helps show the overall placement of the building and its' surrounding components.
Figure 17 above is a floor plan showing the ground level. This plan includes the proposed furniture placement of both the indoor and outdoor components. From this floor plan, one can see the custom shelving designed to wrap the existing columns and the other furniture placement.
Figure 18 above is an elevation drawing of the rear pantry wall in the ground level market. The custom shelving encases the existing windows and two library ladders allow for access to the highest shelves. Closed storage underneath the counter allows for unsightly items to be stored. Track lighting can be adjusted to highlight products within the shelving. The expansiveness of this panty wall makes it a feature within the space. The pantry wall was, therefore, painted white to both highlight the merchandise and to lighten the overall heaviness of the piece.
Figure 19 is a rendering depicting the view one would experience upon entering the main door located on 31st Street. This rendering shows the original black-and-white marble floors and hardwood floors. It also features the custom shelving units. Framed enlarged stamps are also featured on the walls. Pendant, recessed, and track lighting helps to provide the overall cheery, bright ambience of the space.
Figure 20 above is another view of the front area of The Provisional Post. This view is from the rear corner, behind the check out counter. This view shows the use of Carrera marble, lighting, and the overall neutral color palette chosen.
Figure 21 above is a view from the Northeast corner of the building, showing the rear of the market. Features include the large mural wall, P.O. boxes behind the register, exposed brick walls, pendant and track lighting, and pantry wall. This view also calls attention to the shelving systems and the three buffet-style pieces placed in front of the pantry wall for product display.
Figure 22 is another view of the rear market space. This view highlights the use of wall-mounted luminaires over the chalkboard menu. The beams will also illuminate the exposed brick. Glass enclosures protect food while allowing patrons to clearly see the items. Shelves hang above the center market for storage. The pantry wall is featured along the rear wall.
The overall floor plan of the second level as shown in Fig. 23 includes both the indoor and outdoor terrace spaces. The interior space is 2,700 sq. ft. and the outdoor terrace is 2,500. Indoor seating can accommodate 66 persons and outdoor 28+ persons.
Figure 24 is an overall view of Penny Black Coffee shop. In this view, one can see a neutral palette with pops of red, the main coffee bar with shelving in the same style as the ground level pantry wall, and a mix of seating types. Another feature is the dropped ceiling, which mimics the dropped ceiling from the lower level. The glass-enclosed tape roll wall can also be seen in this rendering.
In Figure 25, the main features of this rendering include the large mural wall and the wall of cardboard tape rolls encased in glass. Wall-mounted pendants are once again used, this time in a bright red. Hanging shelving provides storage for the baristas. Carrera marble is used for the coffee bar.
Figure 26 is a view of the rooftop terrace. Red umbrellas are used and tables each accommodate four. The planters provide additional casual seating.
Figure 27 is a view of the ground level terrace featuring pop-up stalls where vendors can sell their goods during the appropriate months. Original brick pavers remain intact and the addition of large planters helps create zones.
CHAPTER 9: CONTRIBUTIONS

This final chapter will discuss the thesis presentation that was given on May 1, 2014 in front of a panel of local architects, designers, and Corcoran faculty members. The panel presented suggestions for both improvement and for further research and development. Below will be a discussion of the suggestions as well as a brief introduction to how these ideas could be implemented. These ideas were generated quickly and represent the beginning stage of further design development – they are not meant to be interpreted as final.

One of the suggestions given by the panel was to work on branding the exterior of the site and to address how the public would know where to enter the different areas. This suggestion mainly focuses on the idea of exterior signage and way finding. Specifically, one juror asked the question: “how will people know the coffee shop is even there?” Below are diagrams dealing with the exterior signage concerns (Figs. 28 & 29).
Figure 28 above depicts the areas of the site where primary and secondary signage would be most important. The challenge of this signage is the design so as to not interfere with the original exterior of the building. The signage, therefore, must be freestanding or attached in such a way as to be removed without damage. The blue circles represent the
primary signage, which would be larger and the red represents smaller, secondary signage. Figure 29 below shows mock-ups of the signage that might be successful at this site.

Figure 29: Signage at Site

Another concern from one of the jurors was that the interior had become too static and that flexibility for the products and vendors did not exist. In the original design development, the idea for the market was to have rotating vendors who could rent out stalls on a weekly or monthly basis. This concept would obviously center around stall-type displays that could easily be moved, manipulated, and resized to the needs of the particular vendors. After conducting research of the surrounding area, the concept of a high-end market proved to be the most successful concept. From there, the design
decision came to make the interior space feel more permanent, curated, and luxurious. The idea was to provide a farmers market, but to do so in a high-end way. Therefore, temporary or moveable stalls was not the best option and was ruled out, as aesthetically these types of systems would not fit the design goals. While the overall suggestion from the juror was valid, the designer had actually considered this option and decided against taking this route in the design.

However, one important consideration that comes from the above suggestion is the idea of creating more individualized spaces within the market for each of the vendors. Allowing each vendor to brand his or her space to fit the product image is an interesting idea. It is worth noting, however, that since this market relies on local vendors – many of which have a small production of their merchandise – the market will likely feature many different vendors. Having each vendor presenting their brand would likely become overwhelming and would detract from the overall design objective of a clean aesthetic.

Another concern dealt with the idea of flipping the placement of the two market spaces with food being placed at the West end and the home wares at the East end of the building. A juror suggested that patrons might be intimidated upon entering the main entrance and being greeted immediately with the high-end goods. This suggestion would be an easy-enough fix should it turn out this concern is held by many others. In the opinion of the designer, however, the placement of the home wares at the front of the space forces patrons to walk through this area. If it is, indeed, the part of the market that would attract less patrons, placing it at the rear would only decrease the number of
visitors. Through its placement at the front of the building, many who walk through to the rear might find their eye caught by a particular item and decide to inspect it further. In this way, the placement of the less-popular (in the eyes of the juror) market in the front ensures its success more so than had it been placed in the rear.

A final concern that was addressed was the circulation of the interior and the possibility that re-designing the second level would provide for better circulation. In particular, it was suggested that another entrance to the rooftop terrace be added. Figure 30 is a mock-up of a new floor plan with additional entrance to the terrace. Other elements including furniture elements have been kept the same, as the design of the interior was praised –only circulation needed re-working.
Figure 30: Level 02 Floor Plan Re-Work

Floor Plan Not to Scale
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REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


Site Photos

Photos courtesy of CORE DC
Material Elements to Salvage

existing stairs
existing columns
existing fireplaces
existing tile floors
existing wood floors
existing entry tile & wood
existing stairs & floor
existing post office boxes

Photos courtesy of CORE DC
APPENDIX iii

Figure 31: Final Presentation Board #1

SUSTAINABLE RE-USE OF USPS SITES

In an effort to build sustainable landscapes, USPS sites can be adaptively reused as MARKETS showcasing local, artisanal items, and as coffee shops encouraging informal GATHERING. By promoting local economies while encouraging sustainability and healthy communities, the loss of historical USPS institutions will be mitigated.

This thesis examines a closing USPS site in the Washington, D.C. metro area to demonstrate the proposal in action and to serve as a PROTOTYPE for other sites.

TOTAL NUMBER OF LOCATIONS

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APPENDIX iv

Figure 32: Final Presentation Board #2

THE SITE - EXISTING CONDITIONS

WHY THIS SITE?

- Area can support commerce
- Near public transportation/walkable
- Situated near other similar markets
- Area lacking local arts/crafts market
- Residential area community gathering

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APPENDIX v

Figure 33: Final Presentation Board #3

Figure 34: Final Presentation Board #4

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APPENDIX vi

Figure 35: Final Presentation Board #5

LEVEL 01 - THE PROVISIONAL POST

LEVEL 01 TOTAL INTERIOR: 5,250 SQ. FT.
FRONT MARKET: 2,700 SQ. FT.
REAR MARKET: 2,500 SQ. FT.
OUTDOOR MARKET: 2,890 SQ. FT.

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APPENDIX vii

Figure 36: Final Presentation Board #6

VIEW FROM FRONT ENTRANCE

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Figure 37: Final Presentation Board #7

VIEW FROM FRONT REGISTER

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APPENDIX viii

Figure 38: Final Presentation Board #8

![View from Rear Register](image1)

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Figure 39: Final Presentation Board #9

![View from Market Rear](image2)

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APPENDIX ix

Figure 40: Final Presentation Board #10

ELEVATION: PANTRY WALL

LEVEL 02 - PENNY BLACK COFFEE

LEVEL 02 TOTAL INTERIOR: 2,700 SQ. FT.
INTERIOR SEATING: 16 PERSONS
LEVEL 02 TOTAL EXTERIOR: 2,500 SQ. FT.
EXTERIOR SEATING: 28 PERSONS (3 granite benches)

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APPENDIX x

Figure 41: Final Presentation Board #11

OVERALL SPACE VIEW

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Figure 42: Final Presentation Board #12

VIEW FEATURING MURAL WALL

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APPENDIX xi

Figure 43: Final Presentation Board #13

**EXTERIOR ROOFTOP COFFEE TERRACE**

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Figure 44: Final Presentation Board #14

**EXTERIOR MARKET TERRACE**

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APPENDIX xii

Figure 45: Final Presentation Layout #1

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APPENDIX xiii

Figure 46: Final Presentation Layout #2

Copyright Widney Pierson
APPENDIX xiv

Figure 47: Final Presentation Layout #3

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1 Carter, iv.
2 Carter, iii.
3 McLennan, 53.
4 Carter, iv.
5 Ruegemer, 153.
6 Ruegemer, 153
7 McLennan, 81.
8 Leonard 199-200.
9 Volner, 2
10 Volner, 1.
11 Volner, 1.
12 McLennan, 80.
13 McLennan, 80.
14 Leonard, 5.
15 McLennan, 27.
16 Ruegemer, 152.
17 Van der Ryn, 5.
18 Leonard, xxxiii.
19 Leonard, 41.
20 Carter, ii.
21 McLennan, 6.
22 McLennan, 8.
23 Heinberg and Lerch, 303.
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25 Volner, 4.
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27 Vision 2013, 2
28 Haq.
29 Ikenson, 1
30 Ikenson, 1
31 Haq.
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33 Haq.
34 Pogrebin, 1-2
35 Bernstein, 1
36 Brechin, 1.
37 Ikenson, 1
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