### **BRANDON MONROE**

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

MICHAEL O'BRIEN - CHAIR

MARCEL ERMINY - MEMBER

DR. JOHN COOPER - MEMBER

BRIAN GIBBS - PROFESSOR

### SPECIAL THANKS:

T.L.L. TEMPLE FOUNDATION

IMPACT LUFKIN

JAMIE MASTERSON

CHANAM LEE

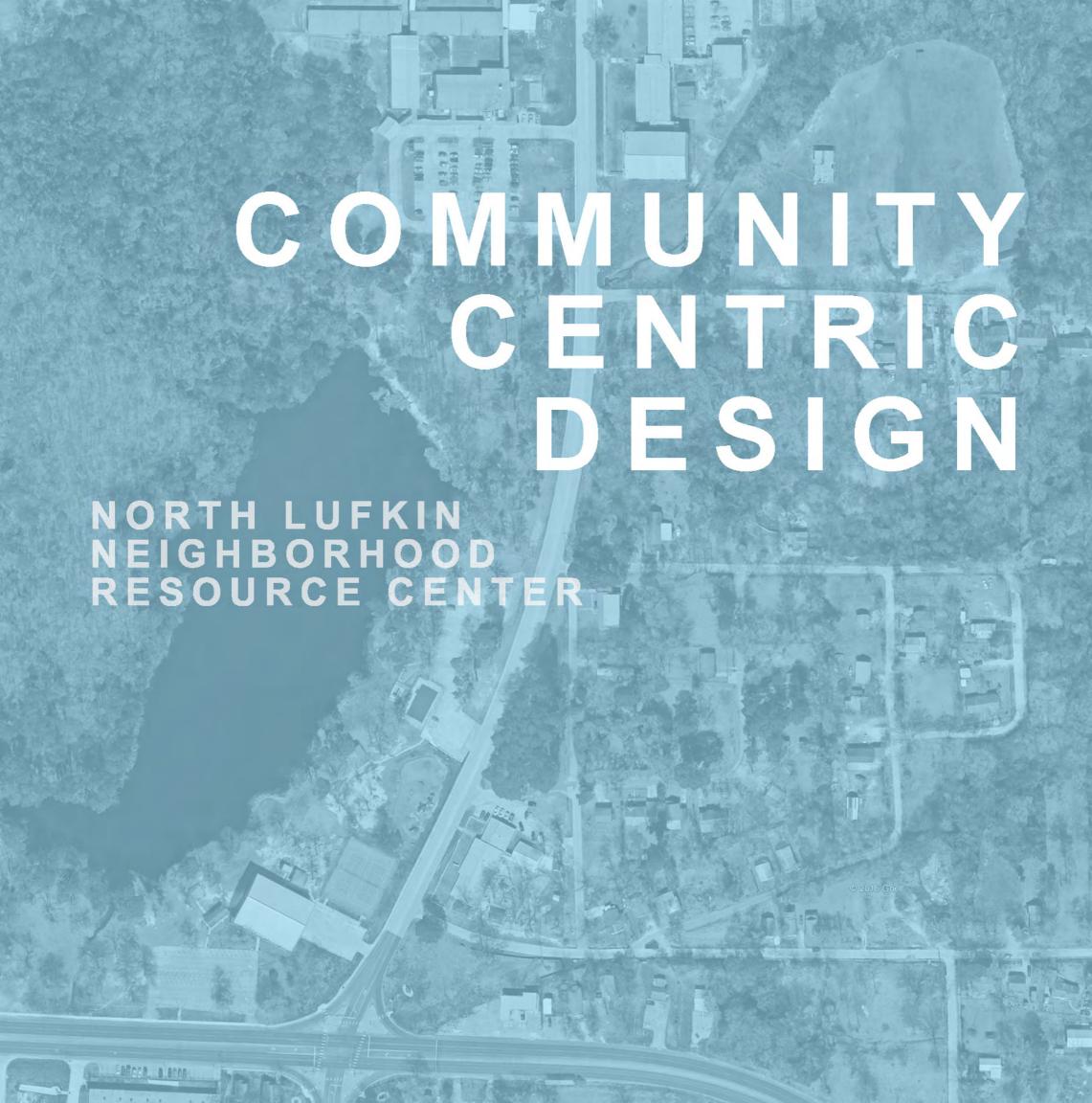
KENNETH HURST

WEI SHI

CHEN YE

JEEWASMI THAPA





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Community buildings are unique architectural projects for several reasons. Being open to the public they typically serve a wider and more diverse user group than buildings built for specific clients or organizations. (O'Brien, 2017) As a result, the needs and expectations of this large user base is likely to fluctuate and change over time. In addition, the commissioning agents of community building projects are often not the same individuals who will be the primary users. (O'Brien, 2017) A city government or other agency may commission the design, but the general public will occupy and use the building on a regular basis. For these and many other reasons, community buildings present unique design challenges for architects.

This book presents what I call Community-Centric Design as a framework for approaching the unique design challenges of community buildings. Community centers, libraries, and schools are just a few of examples of community projects that could benefit from this design approach. As an example, this book documents the community-centric design process that was used to develop the North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center.



# OVERVIEW

LAKE SIDE TRAIL AND WATERFRONT DECK



Akron, Alabama. Rural Studio. Akron Boys & Girls Club 2.



Dallas, Texas. bcWORKSHOP. Community meeting signs for South Boulevard project which consisted of four single-family townhomes.



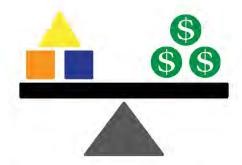
Dallas, Texas. bcWORKSHOP. Ten weeks of community stakeholder focus groups and on-the-ground engagement drove the design process for the South Boulevard project.



### ARCHITECTURE FOR EVERYONE

The first principle of communitycentric design is a general belief that architecture should be for everyone. Often the practice of architecture is seen as a profession that primarily serves the wealthy. Extravagant houses, elaborate sports arenas, and other flashy buildings often get the most attention in the architectural world. (Architecture for Humanity, 2006) However, community-centric design takes the position that architecture has an ethical responsibility to extend its services to all types of people regardless of race, creed, social status, or wealth.

An excellent example of architecture designed for everyone comes from Sam Mockbee and the work he started with the Rural Studio. He operated under the philosophy that everyone, both rich and poor, deserve the benefits of good design (Rural Studio, 2017). The humble yet beautiful projects of the Rural Studio are proof that "good" architecture can come with a small price tag and still make a lasting impact.



### SOCIOECONOMIC UNDERSTANDING

The second principle of community-centric design is a commitment to understanding the various socioeconomic issues present in a given context. This is important to ensure that architecture does not exacerbate socioeconomic imbalances, and so that architecture can make an effort to alleviate those imbalances where possible. Architecture cannot be a standalone solution to these kinds of problems, however, it can play a role in beginning to address them.

One organization that has pioneered this kind of social activism in architecture is bcWORKSHOP. The mission of this community-minded organization is to enrich the lives of citizens by bringing design thinking to areas where resources are most scarce. (bcWORKSHOP, 2017) Focusing on a wide range of issues from affordable housing to public utility systems, bcWORKSHOP, recognizes that architecture has a role in making a difference in communities.



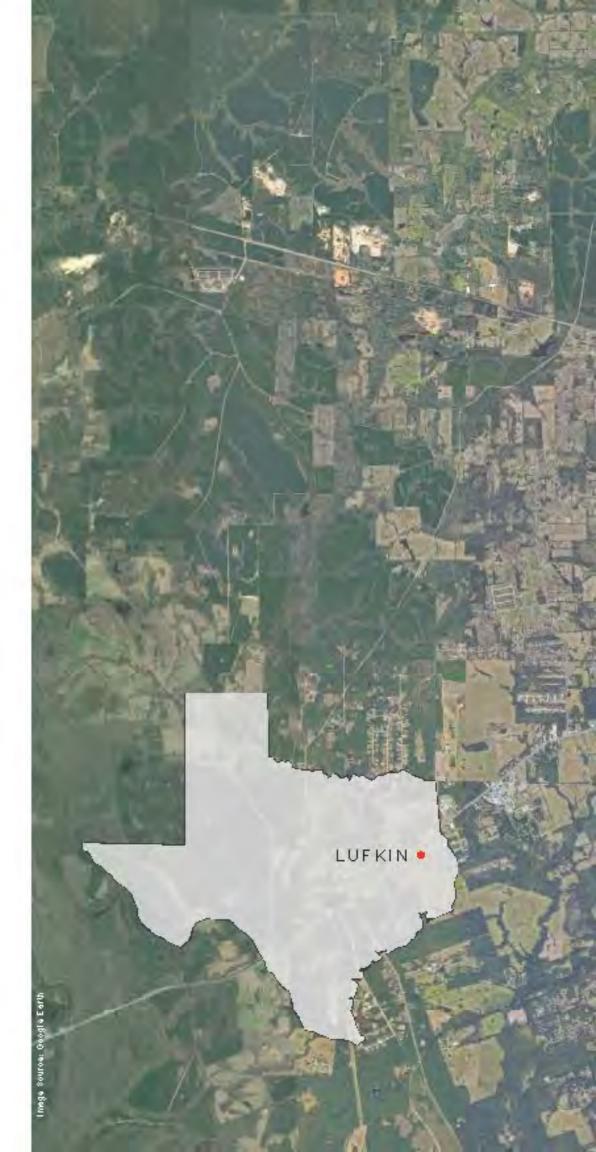
### LOCAL ARCHITECTURE

The third principle of community-centric design is the pursuit of creating architecture that is deeply rooted in its local context. Thoughtful design must listen and respond to the desires of the community. (MacKay-Lyons, 2015) In the words of Thomas Fisher, "Great buildings help define and create the context in which they stand, to reveal the nature of a place that was often unappreciated before the architecture made it visible." (Fisher, 2015)

Architecture rooted in its local context should speak about its unique historical and environmental characteristics. It is the architect's job to understand these characteristics and attempt to manifest them in some way throughout the project. Architecture that is unreflective of its user's character will hold no meaning to them. Creating a sense of value in a community project is challenging, however, it can be done by working closely with the community to have a better understanding of what is important to them.

In the moderate-sized east Texas town of Lufkin, the T.T.L. Temple Foundation and non-profit organization, Impact Lufkin, began with a vision to make a difference in their community. Their goal was to provide the predominantly low-income area of northern Lufkin with a space where local residents could have access to resources they needed as well as a place to enjoy recreational activities. Together, these two organizations sought out the technical assistance of Texas Target Communities and the Texas A&M College of Architecture to aid in the design and development of what would become the North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center.

The vision for the North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center was to create a space that was at once innovative, relevant, and meaningful to the community. The process began with a joint meeting between representatives from the Temple Foundation, Impact Lufkin, members of the community, and the design team. With community-centric design principles as a guide, the goal was to develop a design solution that reflected the unique characteristics and values of the community while providing them with the resources they needed.





With a population of around 36,000 people the city of Lufkin is small enough that individuals from any location could be potential users of the Resource Center. As a result, it was important to incorporate a design that was reflective of the entire city. The area around Lufkin is full of tall pine trees and the city grew up out of the extensive lumber industry. Evidence of this can be seen in the "Welcome to Lufkin" sign that greets visitors entering the city. It was natural, then, that the design of the Resource Center should incorporate wood in some way.

While all of Lufkin can enjoy
the amenities provided by the
Neighborhood Resource Center,
the residents of North Lufkin
were considered the primary
"client". North Lufkin has the
highest concentration of lowincome residents in the city and,
as a result, is in need of the
most resources. It was important,
then, that the Neighborhood
Resource Center be easily
accessible to this target group.





Lufkin, Texas. Southland Paper Mill. Four foot pulp logs in storage at the wood yard.



Lufkin, Texas. Southland Paper Mill. Moving logs onto a conveyor belt which carries them to grinders, where they are made into ground wood.



Lufkin, Texas. Southland Paper Mill. Grinding room where pulplogs are made into ground wood.



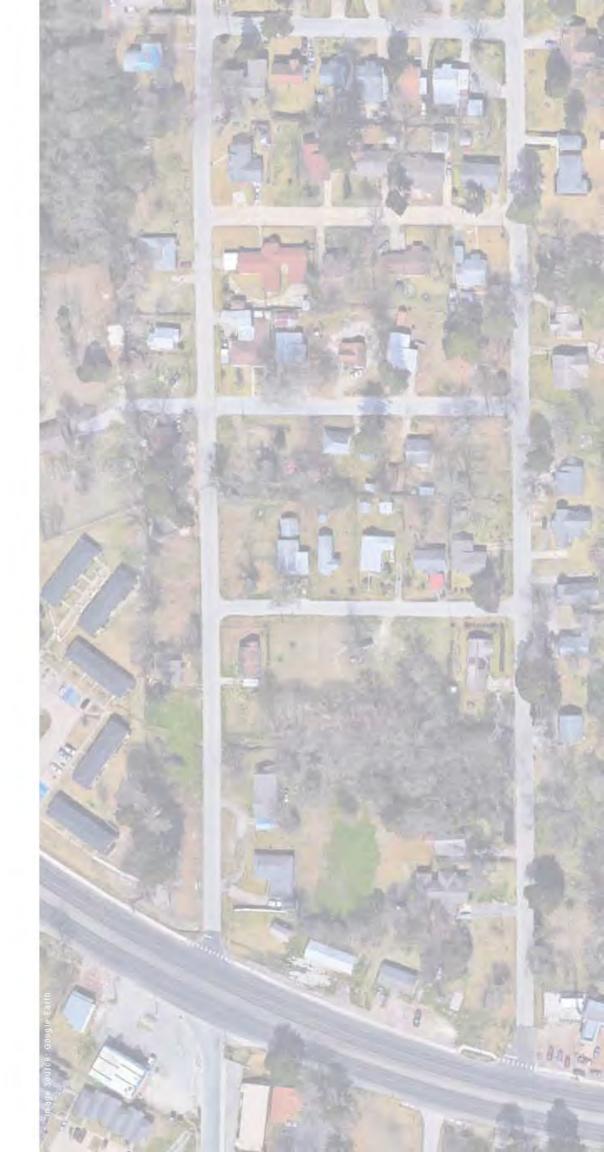
Lufkin, Texas. Loblolly Pine Tree located at Jones Park.



Lufkin, Texas. Satellite imagery of North Lufkin neighborhood located adjacent to project site.

With a clear understanding of the community and client for the project, the next step in the community-centric design process was to select an appropriate site for the project. In addition to common site considerations such as solar orientation, topography, and surrounding context, a community-centric design approach requires added attention to various aspects of a site.

For example, in keeping with the principle that architecture should be for everyone, architects must put great thought into how users will be able access the site. This is because community buildings typically serve a wide range of people from several different locations and socioeconomic backgrounds. For some it is easy to get in the car and drive to site. For others, private transportation may not be readily available. (O'Brien, 2017) For this reason, it is a good idea to site community projects close to public transportation routes or within walking distance of target user areas. (City of New York, 2010). Doing so ensures that users from all levels of society will equally be able to access the site.



# SIIE

JONES PARK

Jones Park was the site chosen for the North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center. Its prominent location at the intersection of Kurth Drive and MLK Jr. Boulevard - both primary arterial roads that feed off the city's highway loop - gives the site prominence and visibility while also allowing easy accessibility. In addition, Jones Park is well-located adjacent to several neighborhoods housing the target users. These individuals are still able to easily access the Neighborhood Resource Center by foot in the event they do not own a private vehicle.

Another reason the Jones Park site was chosen was the presence of several existing recreational amenities. A small lake rests directly in the center of the site providing a scenic backdrop for the Neighborhood Resource Center. In addition, the park contains pavilions, tennis courts, covered basketball courts, a children's playground, and a public pool. However, several of these amenities remain unused and are in need of improvement. Siting the project among these amenities provided the opportunity to redesign them in a way to bring new life and activity to the area.



Lufkin, TX. Jones Park. Existing Basketball Pavilion.



Lufkin, TX. Jones Park. Existing tennis courts and playground.



Lufkin, TX. Jones Park. Existing public pool.



1 - BASKETBALL COURTS

2 - COVERED PAVILION

3 - WOODEN DECK

4 - PUBLIC RESTROOM

5 - SPLASH PAD

6 - TENNIS COURTS

7 - PLAYGROUND

8 - PUBLIC POOL

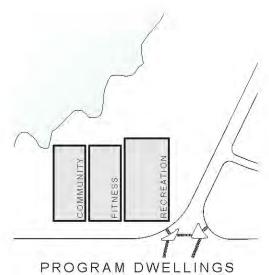
9 - FISHING DOCK

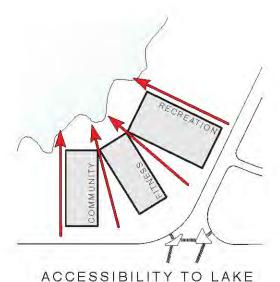
10 - JONES PARK TRAIL

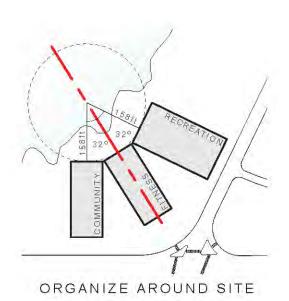
The organization of the site was heavily influenced by early meetings between key stakeholders, the design team, and the community. Insight into the community's vision for the project was gained through appreciative inquire studies using community surveys and interviews conducted by the Impact Lufkin team.

A major take-away from these studies was the community's desire to have both resource services and recreational facilities included in the Neighborhood Resource Center. It was also important that the facility not feel like typical support service offices. The idea was proposed that some support services be located peripherally to other amenities so as not to make them the prominent feature of the project.

The final master plan includes the Neighborhood Resource Center, adjacent support service offices, and redesigned and expanded park amenities. The Neighborhood Resource Center was divided into three separate structures as a way to phase the project as well as a means of organizing the program. Separating the structures also allowed for their rhythmic rotation along the curve of the intersection while still maintaining accessibility to the lake beyond.







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- 1 RESOURCE CENTER
- 2 HEALTH CENTER
- 3 BASKETBALL/POOL PAVILION 7 TENNIS COURTS
- 4 COMMUNITY GARDEN
- 5 PLAYGROUND
- 6 SPLASH PAD
- 8 LAKE FRONT TERRACE
- 9 FISHING DOCK
- 10 SUPPORT SERVICES
- 11 LAKE SIDE TRAIL
- 12 BRIDGE

- 13 SOCCER FIELDS
- 14 AMPHITHEATER
- 15 PARK LOOP ROAD





The formal composition of a building - its shape and organization - can be used as a means to speak about the local ethos of a community. Designing a community building that starkly contrasts to its surroundings would stand out as "other" and undermine the community-centric design principle of being rooted in its local context. This does not mean, however, that communitycentric designs should look the same as everything around them. On the contrary, communitycentric design should stand out in an iconic way by taking local precedents and interpreting them in new and exciting ways. (MacKay-Lyons, 2015)

One way the North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center accomplished this was in the materials selected for the buildings. As mentioned previously, wood is important to Lufkin's history and economy. Because of this, it was important to make the use of wood in the project very visible. Large glulaminated timber frames were used as the primary structure and became the focal point of the design. In addition, steel was used as the secondary support structure in order to further highlight the prominence of wood. The smaller size required of steel columns allowed them to visually recede into the background while still providing a complementary material palette.



# FORM

RESOURCE CENTER EAST ELEVATION AND COMMUNITY GARDEN

Inspiration for the form of the North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center came from viewing the facility as a kind of "new home" for the community. The formal composition of each of the three buildings was a reinterpretation of the vernacular style of typical homes in the area. Gable roofs are a common trait of houses throughout the city, as is the presence of front porches. The design intent of the Neighborhood Resource Center was to reimagine this typology at a bigger scale.

To accomplish this, the typological elements of local houses were synthesized into a simple contemporary form. Each structure is composed of a single folded plane that forms the roof and western wall of the buildings. The folded plane creates a "half-gable" providing a simple form with a contemporary nod to the local aesthetic. The plane of this halfgable is then extended on the front and back of the structures to provide covered entrances reminiscent of front and back porches.

In the same way, the area behind the three structures was viewed as the community's "backyard". and effort was made to centralize the majority of outdoor amenities in this area.



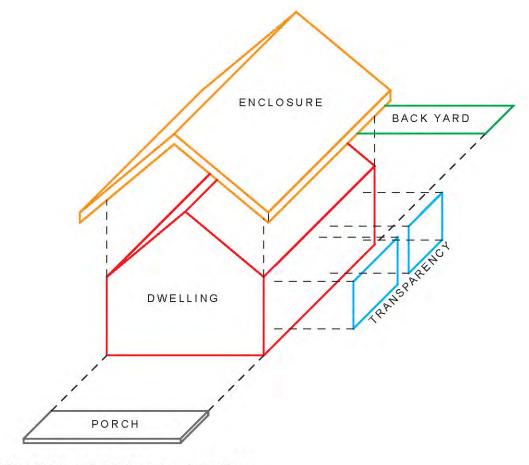
Lufkin, TX. Typical house form.



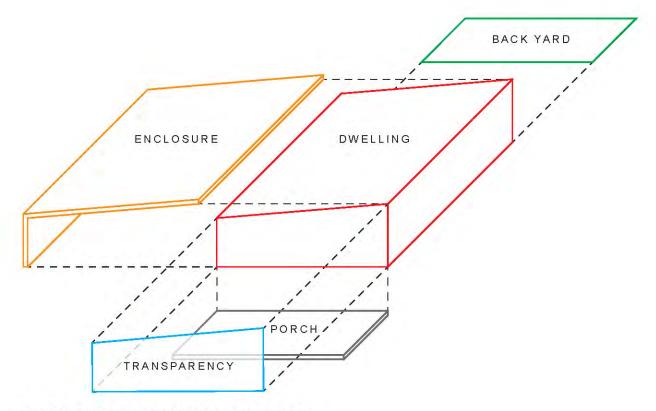
Lufkin, TX. Typical house form.



Lufkin, TX. Typical house form.



TRADITIONAL VERNACULAR FORM



REIMAGINED VERNACULAR FORM





When developing the program for a community building it is important to seek out community input in the design process as much as possible. From the earliest stages of design it is important to understand the community's vision for the project and what programmatic features are important to them. While the commissioning agents funding the project will ultimately be making the final decisions, it is important that the community feels as if they have been heard and that their opinions are valued. (Cooper, 2017) Community engagement in the design process will help foster a communal sense of pride and ownership for the project. (Hertzberger, 1991)

Again, the appreciative inquiry studies conducted by the Impact Lufkin team provided valuable insight that helped guide the program development of the Neighborhood Resource Center. The initial list of amenities desired by the community was extensive and unfortunately not everything could be accommodated in the final design. However, several key elements were determined and the program was divided into three primary categories: community resources, health and wellness resources, and recreational amenities.



# PROGRAM



HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER, CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND, AND BASKETBALL/POOL PAVILION

LIBRARY 3,500 SF	MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM 3,200 SF	ENTRANCE LOBBY 1,900 SF	CLASSROOMS 2,100 Si	MECHANICAL	OMPUTER LAB 1,000 SF 750 SF	REST- ROOMS 600 SF
FREE WEIGHTS/MACHINES 3.500 SE	ENTRANCE LOBBY	LOCKER ROOMS R	ACQUETBALL COURTS	RECREATION AREA	MEDICAL MECHA	ANICAL 1.100

BASKETBALL COURTS 10.300 SF PUBLIC POOL 4.500 SF TENNIS 1 500 SF SPLASH PAI

Using the three program categories as the basis for organization, the Neighborhood Resource Center was divided into separate structures. The first structure houses general community resources where visitors are welcomed by a generous entrance lobby on the first floor. The main corridor then leads past new Impact Lufkin offices to a large multipurpose room with direct views to the lake. Attached is a large community kitchen which has easy access to the adjacent community garden.

The second structure houses resources concerned with health and wellness and is organized in a similar fashion to the resource center. Here, the entrance lobby also serves as a waiting area for small health screening offices at the front of the building. The main corridor then leads past two racquetball courts flanked by locker rooms on either side. In addition, space is allocated for exercise machines as well as a freeweight area with views to lake.

The third structure is an openair pavilion with basketball courts and a new enclosed public pool. On either side of this pavilion is a new playground and splash pad. These recreational amenities were redesigned with closer proximity to each other in order to concentrate activity to a more central location.



- 1 ENTRANCE PLAZA
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 IMPACT LUFKIN
- 4 MAIN CORRIDOR
- 5 KITCHEN
- 6 MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM
- 7 RESTROOM
- 8 MECHANICAL
- 9 HEALTH SCREENING
- 10 LOCKER ROOM
- 11 RACQUETBALL COURT
- 12 FREE WEIGHTS
- 13 EXERCISE MACHINES
- 14 COMMUNITY GARDEN
- 15 PLAYGROUND
- 16 LAKE FRONT TERRACE
- 17 WATERFRONT DECK
- 18 PUBLIC POOL
- 19 BASKETBALL COURTS
- 20 SPLASH PAD

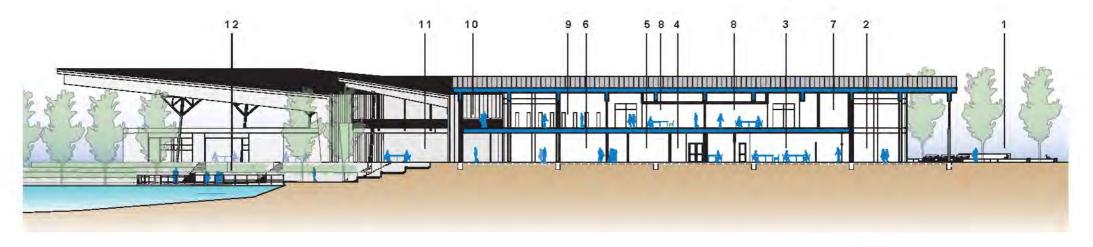
The second floor of the community resource structure is accessed by stairs on either end of the building. The long landing at the top of these stairs looks down onto the main corridor defined by the regular spacing of glulaminated timber frames. The second floor also contains space for two large classrooms which can be subdivided to create four smaller rooms. Behind the classrooms is a computer lab with views of the community garden below. In addition, a resource library with an exterior balcony at the rear of the building has excellent views of the lake.

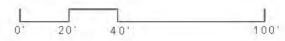
The second floor of the health and wellness structure is also accessed by stairs on either end of the building which look down onto its main corridor. The long landing in this structure also serves as a viewing deck for the racquetball courts below. In addition, space is allocated for several exercise rooms as well as a general recreation area. Like the community resource building, the health and wellness center also has great views of the lake from its exterior balcony.

The roof of the enclosed public pool houses all the mechanical equipment needed to keep the structure conditioned. Doing so allows the pool to be used yearround.

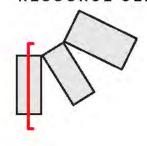


- 1 LANDING
- 2 CLASSROOM
- 3 COMPUTER LAB
- 4 RESOURCE LIBRARY
- 5 BALCONY
- 6 RECREATION AREA
- 7 WORKOUT ROOM
- 8 GROUP WORKOUT
- 9 AIR HANDLER





#### RESOURCE CENTER LONGITUDINAL SECTION



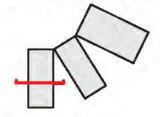
- 1 ENTRANCE PLAZA
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 IMPACT LUFKIN
- 4 CORRIDOR

- 5 KITCHEN
- 6 MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM 10 BALCONY
- 7 MECHANICAL
- 8 CLASSROOM
- 9 RESOURCE LIBRARY

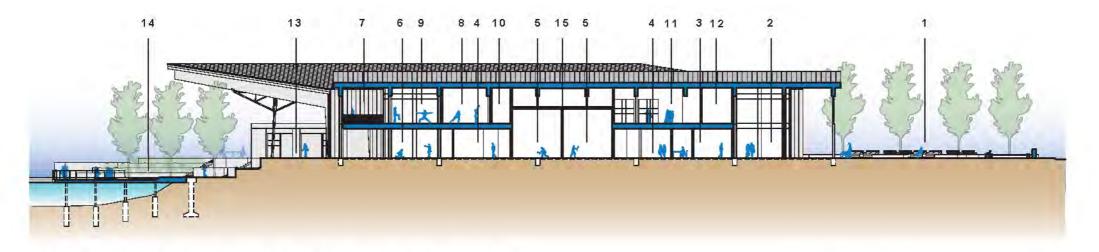
  - 11 LAKE FRONT TERRACE
  - 12 WATERFRONT DECK



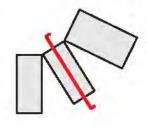
### RESOURCE CENTER CROSS SECTION



- 1 IMPACT LUFKIN
- 2 OFFICE
- 3 MAIN CORRIDOR
- 4 CLASSROOM
- 5 COMPUTER LAB
- 6 SUN SCREENING
- 7 MECHANICAL
- 8 COMMUNITY GARDEN

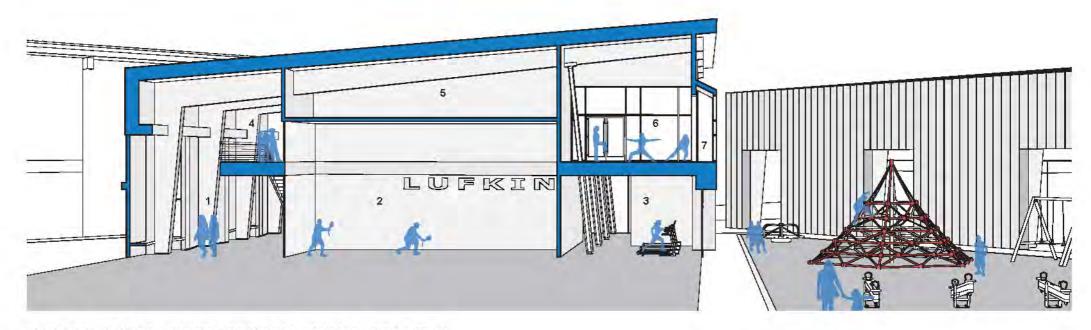


### HEALTH & WELLNESS CENTER LONGITUDINAL SECTION

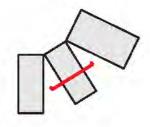


- 1 ENTRANCE PLAZA
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 HEALTH SCREENING
- 4 LOCKER ROOM

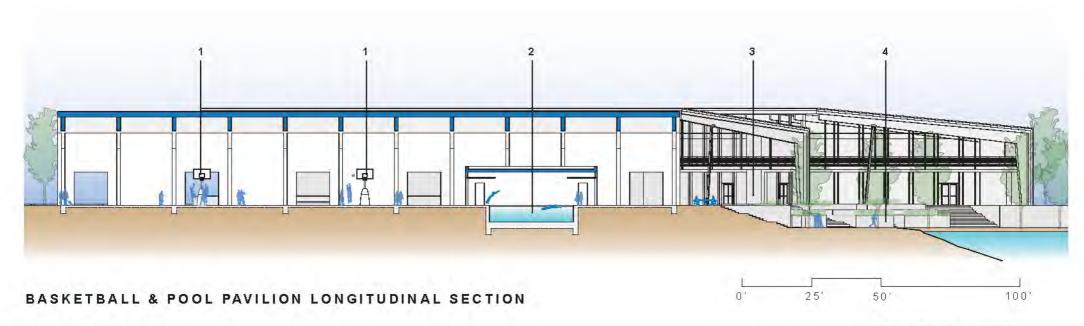
- 5 RACQUETBALL COURT 9 GROUP WORKOUT
- 6 FREE WEIGHTS
- 7 BALCONY
- 8 WORKOUT ROOM
- 10 CORRIDOR
- 11 RECREATION AREA
- 12 AIR HANDLER
- 13 LAKE FRONT TER-
- RACE
- 14 WATERFRONT DECK
- 15 MECHANICAL

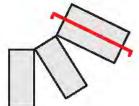


### **HEALTH & WELLNESS CENTER CROSS SECTION**



- 1 MAIN CORRIDOR
- 2 RACQUETBALL COURT
- 3 EXERCISE MACHINES
- 4 VIEWING DECK
- 5 MECHANICAL
- 6 WORKOUT ROOM
- 7 SUN SCREENING
- 8 PLAYGROUND





- 1 BASKETBALL COURT
- 2 PUBLIC POOL
- 3 LAKE FRONT TERRACE
- 4 LAKE SIDE TRAIL



Community-centric design should take care to remember human nature in the design process. Architects should remember that spaces and objects are often used in more than one way when actually used. For example, a handrail can be more than just an aid in keeping balance. It can be a place to lean and enjoy a view or place to set down a cup of coffee. In the same way, with thoughtful design, a stair well can be an informal meeting place or impromptu stage in addition to its primary function as a means for connecting two levels. (Hertzberger, 1991) Designing spaces and objects with these secondary purposes in mind can improve functionality and elevate user's sense of connection to a building.

The North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center sought to remember this human element in its design. Certain aspects of the design presented opportunities to extend the functionality of spaces and better cater to user's needs. Community-centric design should always be attentive to unique design opportunities that will further enhance public interaction and functionality of the building. The following documents several of the details of the Neighborhood Resource Center to illustrate how this was accomplished.





In order to further connect to Lufkin's history with the lumber industry, the finish material selection for the Neighborhood Resource Center sought to use wood wherever possible. Wood is used as the flooring material in the lobby, corridors, multipurpose room, and exercise areas. The pattern of the wood floors follows the geometry of the glulam frames with dark wood tracing the grid lines and creating an accent border around the perimeter of rooms. In rooms where wood was not practical, such as the kitchen and locker rooms, tile was selected as a durable material that cleans easily.

Thought was also put into the geometry of the exterior paving surrounding the Neighborhood Resource Center. The angle of rotation of the structures around the curve of the site provided the geometry used for the control joints of the hardscaping. Typical concrete pavement is used along the street and landscaping at the front of the property. The 12'x12' grid of the sidewalk is modified to align with the angle of rotation of the buildings as you move along the curve. As you approach the buildings the grid pattern is expanded to a 24'x24' grid using patterned stone pavers rather than sidewalk concrete.







STONE PAVERS



WOOD CHIP MULCH



WOOD DECKING



TILE



CARPET





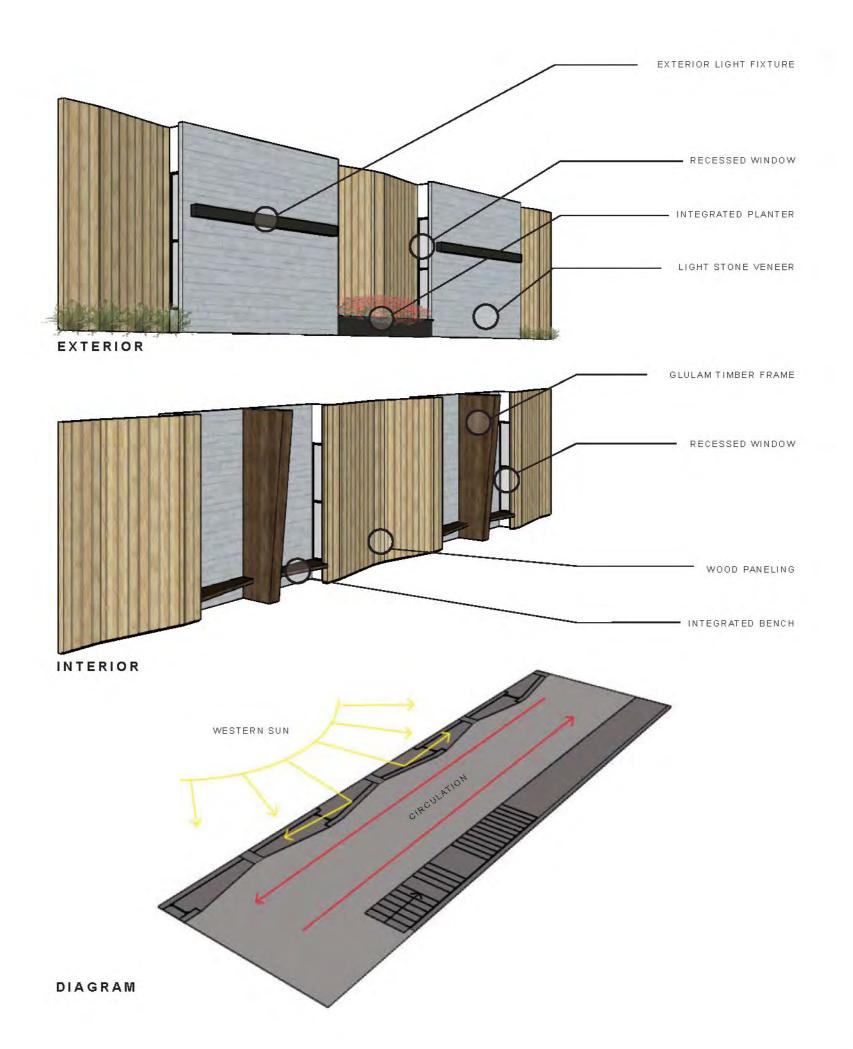
DARK WOOD FLOORING

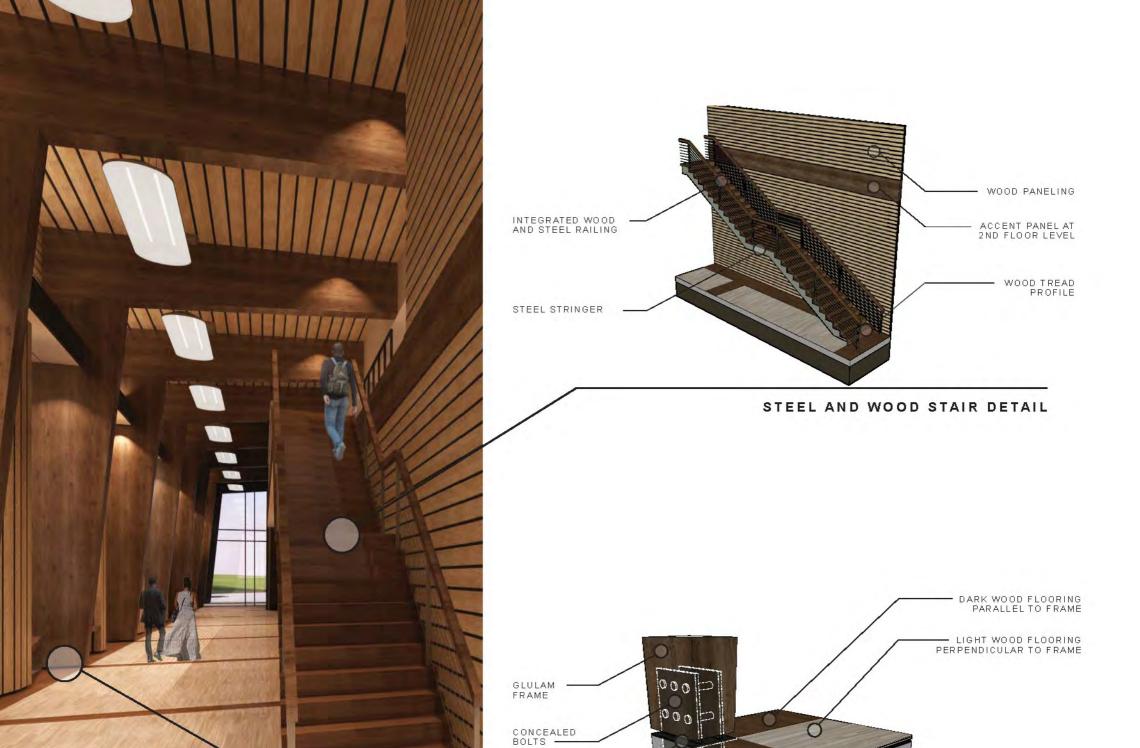
The western wall that forms the main corridor inside the community resource center and the health and wellness center was originally designed to block light from directly entering the buildings. This was done in order to reduce the amount of heat entering the building caused by the harsh western sun. During the design development of this wall, however, an additional function for the wall was created.

Northern facing windows were placed along an undulating wall around the glulam frames that allowed light to bounce into the building indirectly. The undulation of the wall, however, also allowed a unique opportunity to create integrated bench seating inside the building. This feature gives users additional spaces to sit, relax, and foster further community interaction within the space. In a similar fashion, the undulation of the wall also creates niches on the exterior of the building that can be used for additional benches or planters.

The dual function of the western walls of the Neighborhood Resource Center provides an example of a community-centric design solution that pays attention to the human element.







BASE PLATE LEVEL WITH FINISH FLOOR -

EMBEDDED STEEL BASE

PLYWOOD — SUBFLOOR ON 1x1 SLEEPERS

FOOTER -

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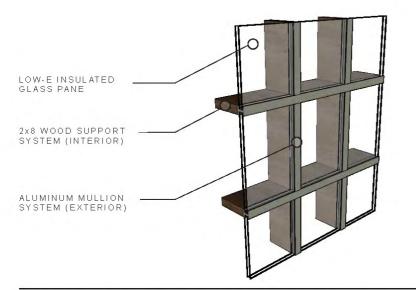
CONCRETE SLAB WITH
VAPOR BARRIER

GLULAM FRAME BASE CONNECTION DETAIL

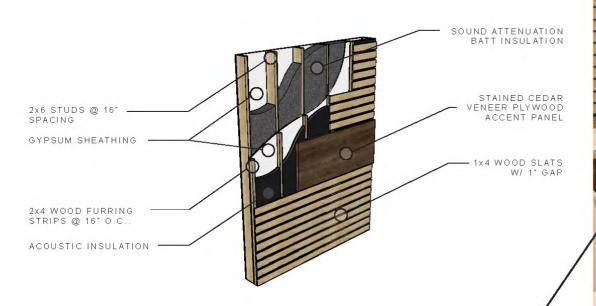
UNDERLAYMENT

- GRAVEL

- EARTH



# WOOD MULLION WINDOW SYSTEM DETAIL



# ACOUSTICAL WOOD WALL PANELING DETAIL





Using a community-centric design approach in the design of the North Lufkin Neighborhood Resource Center taught me many things. The first lesson I learned was the value of engaging in thorough research about the local community. It is important not to make assumptions about what the community wants or needs. Making big decisions or design choices without first consulting the community can be risky. If your assumptions are wrong they may lose faith in your ability or at worst take offence. On the other hand, if you take initiative to learn what is important to them you can quickly gain trust and make a good impression.

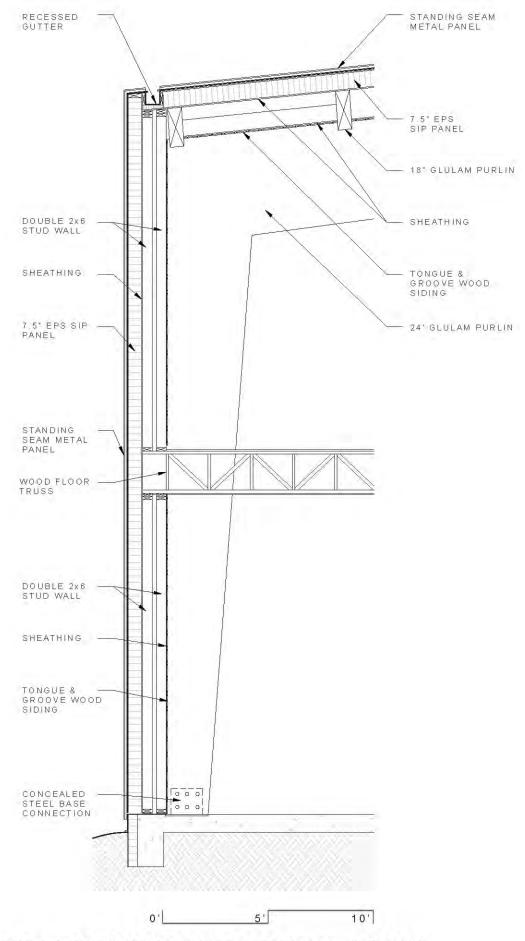
Secondly, in community-centric design it is essential to envision what daily life will look like inside the project. Ask questions about what will take place in and around the building to help inform the design process. What will people see when they first enter the building? What path will someone take to get from one place to the next and what is that experience like? Asking these types of questions will help you identify potential design problems and give you opportunities to create unique and creative solutions.



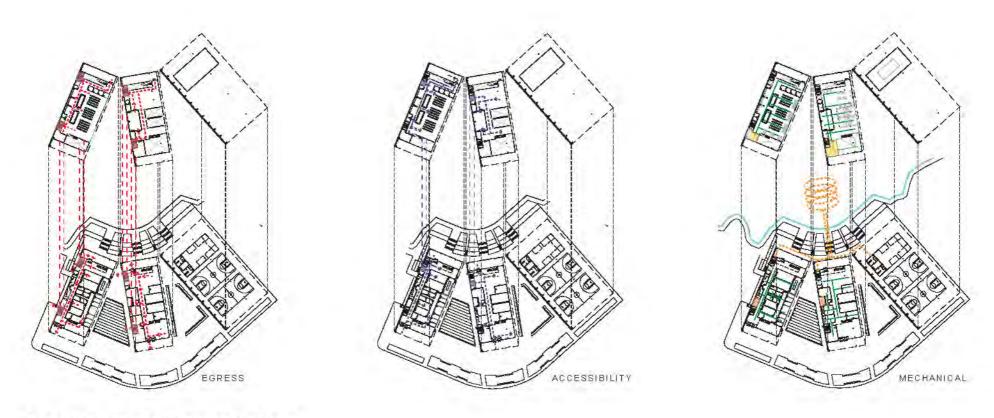


It is also important to remember that often the first design solution is not always the best. Many revisions are likely to be made until the best design presents itself. Previous plan iterations of the Neighborhood Resource Center, for example, did not include the main corridor along the western walls. Instead, the glulam frames intersected the second floor and were concealed behind various walls. Later, It became clear that the frames were a key component to the design as they linked to Lufkin's history and needed to be celebrated as much as possible. To do this the entire plan had to be reworked. It was a long process but the overall design benefited as a result.

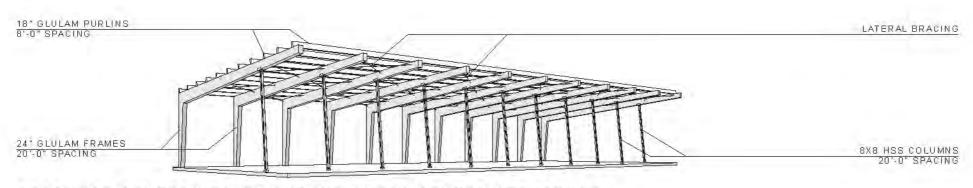
Finally, it is important to remember that it will not be possible to please everyone in community projects. It is essential to understand the wants and needs of the community and keep them involved in the design process, however, it is impossible to accommodate everything. Practical matters such as building size, location, and budget will place restraints on what can and cannot be done. Architects must consider all these things in the design process and make smart decisions about what is essential and what can be let go.



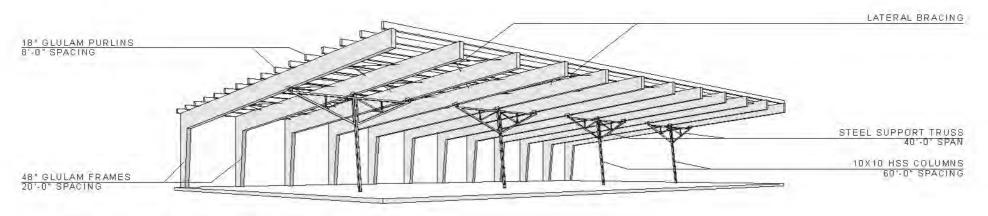
EARLY ITERATION OF WESTERN WALL SECTION



EARLY FLOOR PLAN DIAGRAMS



RESOURCE CENTER/HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER STRUCTURE



BASKETBALL/POOL PAVILION STRUCTURE

## bcWORKSHOP.org

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SAMUEL MOCKBEE AND AN ARCHITECTURE OF DECENCY

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BUILDING PLACE, CRAFT, AND COMMUNITY

Herman Hertzberger

THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT **AMERICAN** CITIES JANE JACOBS

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces



William H. Whyte

ACTIVE **DESIGN** 

**GUIDELINES** 

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