

# **Re-Imagining The Small Town Community Center**

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## **Abstract**

Community centers are prominent throughout society and provide needed resources to members of its community. However, not all centers accomplish this goal equally and there are several improvements that can be made to them in order to better support the community. One type of community that needs attention is the small town. Small towns are unique communities with needs that differ greatly from those in more urban areas. These needs are different because of many factors such as a lack of available resources or the presence of a different social environment. This raises the question of, “What is the best way to design a community center for people who live in small rural towns?” This project aims to answer this question by designing a community center for a small town that I grew up in, Fairplay, Colorado. Through this design process I discovered the elements of a community center that are the most crucial to the community and how those elements can be incorporated into the design. The methods to complete this project included: research the dynamics of small towns and other successful community centers, interviewing residents, selecting a site and documenting the characteristics of it, and designing the community center for Fairplay. The product that I produced with this project is a complete design portfolio for my center completed with plans, elevations, sections, and perspective views. This project is significant because a successful and resourceful community center provides a great amount of support to a community and allows that community to thrive.

## **Research Question**

What is the best way to design a community center for people who live in small rural towns?

## **Context, Background, and History**

Social interaction and connections are extremely important for the health and well being of both individuals as well as communities as a whole (Beckes Lane). Community centers can be a great tool to promote social interaction in a community if they are designed with this purpose in mind. A community center is a place in a community that can be used to facilitate many different types of events, provide various resources of need to the residents of the community, and create and foster social connections. The general idea of this center has been realized in many different ways for communities around the world; however, there are always ways to improve and build on this idea. An example of a community that shows room for improvement in its community center is the small rural town, and an example of this is my hometown of Fairplay, Colorado. Growing up in a small town is a very unique experience that can be hard to understand if it has not been experienced. From my time in a community of this kind, residents generally live further from each other than they do in urban communities which can sometimes make it more difficult to get an adequate amount of social interaction. Because of the distance between residences, most of the social interaction in a small town comes from residents using the amenities within their community such as communal space, museums, and resources.. The use of these amenities does a sufficient job of connecting residents, but because they are spread out, the social interaction is not at the level that it could be. Therefore, I designed a new community

center for Fairplay in order to compile several amenities in close proximity to each other and increase the amount of social interaction and connection within the community.

Designing an ideal center for a community is a task that has been explored and carried out many times throughout the world. In his thesis for his Bachelor's Degree in Architecture, Jeremy Fretts designed a community center that was focused around the interactions between the residents that would be using it (Fretts Jeremy). On the surface this project seems very similar to mine; however, every community has its own set of unique characteristics that make it what it is. While broad ideas and processes can be carried from one community to another, such as incorporating the characteristics of the area into the design or designing with social connection in mind, every community requires its own research and exploration to create the ideal center for it (Tubbs Sheryl).

On the other hand, a part of this project that I didn't encounter much research on is the compiling of common amenities into a single community center. This idea is very interesting because it would have a profound effect on the social interaction of the community because residents would come into contact with one another much more frequently. In order to get a better grasp on the effects this would have on the community I had to increase the scale of my research and look at cities and how having many amenities in close proximity has affected the residents. One example that I looked at is the consolidation of the city of Sydney, Australia in order to get a better grasp on the creation, process, issues, and opinions of a city that was condensing its assets in a more concentrated area (Searle Glen). Community centers are a great asset, but I believe that it is important to not be content with what they are and look to how they can be improved even further.

## **Product, Goals, and Significance**

My product for this project is a complete design of a community center for my hometown of Fairplay, Colorado with floor plans, sections, elevations, perspective shots, and any other various diagrams that helped me portray my design. All of these elements were combined into a complete design portfolio. In completing this design I hoped to gain a better understanding of how architectural design can benefit a community and its members. The field of architectural design focuses on designing buildings that are safe and sustainable, however it goes far beyond that. An architect is always designing a building for someone or a group of people and it is very important that the wants, needs, and characteristics of those people are seriously taken into account when designing the building. A great example of this being done well is Jeremy Fretts' community center for Albany, Indiana (Fretts Jeremy). He put a large focus on designing for the residents and what would be best for all of them.

This leads into the goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion because the voices and opinions of all members of a community need to be taken into account. A community is made up of several different cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds and it is imperative that even the least represented of these groups have an equal voice and role in the designing of a community center. That way all members of the community can feel at home and welcomed in the space. My other main goals for this project were to identify the most effective way to centralize amenities in a community, and to do so while focusing on promoting interaction between members of the community.

This project provides a path to improve the quality of life in Fairplay and help bring the community closer together. The community when I left after graduating high school had gone through a large transformation from what it was when I was younger. The connection between

the residents has been on a downward trend for quite a while and because of this the overall health of the community has been going in the wrong direction. This is an issue that I have a lot of stake in because it is my hometown community. Fairplay is where I spent the first 18 years of my life and I have a strong connection to it. I want the community to be healthy and connected; therefore, my hope is that this design could work to correct these negative trends and bring the community back to what it previously was and even improve it further. On top of my personal connection to this project, it was a great experience for me as I look to further my education and career in architectural design. I have worked on many projects in my studies of architecture, but I had never attempted a project of this scale and with the real world context of this. This process helped me better understand everything that goes into the career that I am looking to pursue. Furthermore, this project will not only provide a design for a community center in Fairplay, but also give insight into how to approach designing a center for other small town communities across the world. While the exact design that I produced would probably not be an effective design for most other communities, it will provide insight on how to develop a design based on the characteristics of the community.

## **Literature Review**

### *Introduction*

Community centers can be found in many communities around the world and they can be extremely valuable. However, there are communities where the community center could use improvements and others that don't have a community center. Small rural towns are a great case study for community centers because there is a varying degree of success and presence of centers in these communities. One example of this is Fairplay, Colorado, the town where I grew up. Designing a community center for Fairplay was a great way to better understand how these centers can be most successful for these rural communities.

The process of designing a community center for a unique small town such as Fairplay required a large amount of research on multiple topics in order to fully understand all of the aspects that contributed to creating a successful design. The topics that required research for this project were: the history and context of Fairplay, the characteristics and needs of small towns, previous examples of re-imagined community centers, designing for a community, and the importance of social connections. An in depth study of these topics assisted me greatly in the completion of designing a community center for Fairplay.

### *History and Context of Fairplay, Colorado*

Fairplay, Colorado is a unique place with a rich history that has led to what it is today. The nature of this history, and the characteristics that arise from it, provided a framework for how to successfully design for the benefit of the community. Fairplay is a very small town with a population of about 700 located in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. The most common industries in Fairplay are: ranching, agriculture, construction, public administration, and



educational services (Citydata.com). The community center that I designed provides resources to assist some of these industries and others that are present as well. An industry that doesn't show up on the list of the most common is the snow sports industry and other nature focused recreational activities. Activities of this kind are a huge part of Fairplay's culture and therefore it is another industry that I provided resources for in the design for the community center.

Additionally, it was important to understand the history of Fairplay and how it came to be. The town was established as a mining community in 1859 and remained as such until the mid 20th century (Fosset, pg 123). While this industry is no longer a main component of the community, it still affects the community today as shown by events such as the annual Rock and Gem Show that the town hosts. Conserving and strengthening this connection to the community's origin is important to maintaining the integrity of the community.

In addition to that, a connection and appreciation of the land the residents live on was established back in the days when the community relied on the mining industry and that appreciation is still overwhelmingly present in today's residents. However, the appreciation stems from other industries nowadays: mainly ranching and farming. From personal experience in the community, a large portion of families make their living using the land they live on. It is truly a way of life in Fairplay and the residents are very appreciative of the land that provides for them. With this information, it was critical that the industries of ranching and farming be embraced and supported with this community center along with the appreciation for the land.

### *The Characteristics and Needs of Small Towns*

Rural communities are unique in their characteristics and how they function. “It might seem that rural communities' technology needs are just about catching up with what is available in urban communities. But rural communities have their own particular characteristics that shape what technologies are appropriate” (Hardy, pg 37-41). The whole way of life in rural areas is different from urban areas and that difference needs to be represented and nurtured through the built environment. As a result of this difference, rural areas also have unique needs in order to help the community thrive. The article *Rural Communities, the Natural Environment and Development - Some Successes, Some Challenges* outlines several issues that rural communities can and do face: rural poverty, insufficient development programs and approaches, misunderstanding of the community development process, and finding a balance between tourism and conservation (Beer, pg 52-56). These issues are present in many rural communities across the globe and they represent some of the needs of these communities. Fairplay is certainly no exception to this. I have personally experienced many of these from my time there and although a community center is not a fix all for these problems, it is a great place to start addressing them.

Another common issue in small rural communities is the lack of formal space to host a variety of events. Sheryl Tubbs mentions this issue while discussing a rural community in New York, “The citizens of Malad and residents of Oneida County agree that there is indeed a lack of space in which to hold meetings, events, and activities” (Tubbs, pg 3). This is a very common issue in these communities and one that Fairplay specifically really struggles with. Just having the space to host formal meetings and events is something that many people in larger communities take for granted because they have the infrastructure in place where it is not an

issue. There are many rural communities that do not have this luxury and simply providing a space for these purposes would go a long way to bettering these communities. Providing space for these purposes was an important part of my design because I believe they are an impactful addition.

### *Previous Examples of Re-imagined Community Centers*

Designing a community center is not a brand new idea, but other examples of this process are very different from what I undertook because every community is unique. However, looking at these examples was still valuable to my project because they provided insight on overall approaches for designing a center. One example that I looked at was Jeremy Fretts' design for Albany, Indiana. While Albany is drastically different from Fairplay, the way that its characteristics and the needs of its residents were incorporated into the design is a valuable example for this process. One way that Fretts incorporated the characteristics and wants of the community into his design is the inclusion of a physical fitness center and meeting rooms. Through his interviews with residents he noticed a strong desire for these amenities and ended up incorporating them into his final design (Fretts, pg 41). I incorporated the community in a similar fashion that Fretts did in his design process by also performing interviews with residents.

Another project that is closely related and provided some insight is Hansaplatz, Berlin. This is a project that Jeremy Fretts' also used as a resource while developing his own project. Hansaplatz is a subway station, but it also has a few other purposes. As Fretts puts it, "This meager one-story subway station provides not only transportation, but basic goods and services" such as "a library, grocery, drug store, gift and photo shop, bakery, florist, and public theater" (Fretts, pg 20). While this project does not feature a community center, it was still relevant and

useful for my project because it is a center for social interaction. This made it an important case study for how to successfully centralize several amenities in a community.

In addition to these projects focused on designing for a community, another project that provides a different perspective on this topic is the community center for Lincoln, MA designed by Maryann Thompson Architects. This project had documentation on its creation and that allowed me to see some of what the actual process for designing a community center looks like. For researching this project I looked at the *Planning and Preliminary Design Committee* to better understand the process that goes into taking these projects off the ground. The main steps that this report covers are: research of the existing location and site, key planning principles and assumptions, and two final concepts for the design. These are all important steps in the process that I adopted to my process while carrying out my design. Looking at this formal report really helped me comprehend the scale of my project and better understand what I had to do in order to make it successful.

### *Designing for the Community*

Every community has its own set of unique characteristics that make up what it is, and it is important that the design of the buildings in that community take those characteristics into account in order to maximize their connection and use for the residents. In Sheryl Tubbs' *Designing A Complete Community Center: Responsive Design in a Rural Setting* she states that, "Every community is made up of unique individuals, situations, desires, hopes, and more. A list of what a community center should or should not have would not necessarily apply to multiple settings. Each area is different and it is only by accounting for these differences that a new building be a useful tool for the community" (Tubbs pg 9). The residents within the community

will be the ones that need and will use a community center the most, therefore it must be designed in a way that caters to their characteristics in order for the most successful outcome to be achieved. Tubbs goes on to explain the importance of listening to the voices of these residents to aid in this process, “Discovering the various activity patterns for a community would be an effective way to understanding the social impact. Using a responsive design approach would be an appropriate and useful perspective to take in order to accomplish this” (Tubbs pg 10). These community members know better than anyone what would be the most helpful and beneficial to them. Therefore, providing them with the opportunity to share their opinions and really listening to those opinions is a great step to integrating their characteristics and needs into designs.

However, there is more to designing for a community than just involving the residents in the design process and including amenities that would benefit them. The other main aspect to designing for a community is creating space and an overall design that brings out and supports the characteristics of the target community. Jeremy Fretts uses a quote from Boles to expand on this idea, “Beyond working to build relationships and involve people in the design process, there are physical characteristics that make places more conducive to people and interaction. Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk contends that ‘design affects space, and space affects behavior’ (Fretts, pg 15).” The physical characteristics of a design have an immense effect on the community as a whole because those characteristics play a large role in how the residents will live their life. The buildings and spaces created are going to be used by these residents on a regular basis; and if the characteristics are focused on providing what is best for that specific community, then the overall design will benefit and be more useful and meaningful to the residents. Designing for the community is not a small task for the process of designing any building, but certainly not for a

community center. However, it is a task that holds a high level of importance and it needs to be treated as such.

### *The Importance of Social Connections*

Social connection is an extremely important aspect of life because it leads to feelings of security and benefits the health of individuals and communities as a whole. In small towns this connection is more difficult to establish and maintain because of the physical distance between residents and lack of resources that promote connection. This difficulty to establish social connections is a serious issue because of the adverse health effects one can endure due to a lack of social connection. This is elaborated on in the article *Social Relationships and Health* when it states, “Cassel and Cobb indicated that social relationships might promote health in several ways, but emphasized the role of social relationships in moderating or buffering potentially deleterious health effects of psychosocial stress or other health hazards” (House, pg 541). The article mentions how social connection can promote health in several ways and some of those ways are, “it strengthens your immune system, helps you recover from disease faster, and can even lengthen your life” (Seppala). However, a lack of social connection can have opposite effects and other consequences. These effects include, “declines in physical and psychological health as well as a higher likelihood of antisocial behavior” (Seppala). These consequences can be severe and they are something that residents of smaller communities are more susceptible to because they have to put in more effort to establish the connections that they need. With this higher susceptibility, residents of smaller communities have a bigger need for social outlets and a community center is an effective way to provide that.

In *Designing for Community: A Community Center for Albany, Indiana* Jeremy Fretts speaks on the state of social connection in society as a whole, “Our populations and places have grown to scales we are unfamiliar with. Now, we are afraid of one another, we hoard our possessions and pets behind fences and security systems, leaving only in our private tanks” (Fretts, pg 10). These words resonated with me because they explain a lot of behavior that was present in Fairplay in my later years living there. Social connection throughout much of the world is not in good shape, however the problem is more dire in rural areas because they do not have as many resources and opportunities to address it as urban areas. Furthermore, efforts to improve social connection in the world can leave rural communities behind in a way. The path to improve social connection looks very different in different communities across the world, and efforts that could improve social connection in a bigger city might not apply to the smaller communities.

Lane Beckes elaborates the effects of being alone, “According to SBT, being alone is, on average and in the aggregate, more effortful, because it renders a variety of activities more costly”(Beckes, pg 3). Residents of rural communities are and feel alone often because of the nature of the environment they live in and that is why a community center in an area such as Fairplay would be so valuable. It is a project that focuses on improving this connection in Fairplay through looking at what is specifically needed in that community to improve it.

### *Conclusion*

Designing a community center required an understanding of all of these topics. There is no shortcut in this process or single component that is more important than the others. A community center is a complex entity and all these components work together in order to make

that entity function as intended. The work of designing a community center holds a lot of importance in the world and it is a process that has been attempted many times, both successfully and unsuccessfully. However each attempt at designing a center is completely unique from the next because of all the different components each community has to offer. This allowed me to use previous examples to better understand the process of designing a community center, but made me have to apply what I learned to my specific community in order for it to be a success. Designing for a small rural town is very different from designing for a big city and it was crucial to understand what the important points to be addressed in the design were and how to best accomplish them. Only through this process could a successful result be reached.



## **Methodology**

### *Research*

Research is the backbone for most projects across the world and design projects are no exception to that. Anastasia Prokhorova says that, “ In my opinion, this stage is the most important in the design process, as all our further design decisions should be based on the facts and data we received at the research stage” (Prokhorova). Research builds the foundation of knowledge that the rest of the project will be completed from and therefore it is immensely important. There was a large amount of research that needed to be done for this project. The first aspect that I researched was community centers themselves, what they can and do provide for a community, and how they can be designed to maximize all of their benefits. This aspect was important because I needed to fully understand the role a community center plays in its community and how to maximize that role in order to create the most beneficial design for the town of Fairplay. The next aspect that required research was the history and information about Fairplay. Although I grew up there, it was still beneficial for me to do further research about how the town came to be and the details about it as it is now. Creating an ideal design required not only the physical experience of what the community is like, but also a deeper understanding of what drives and makes up the community today and what formed it into what it currently is. This is an idea that I also put a lot of research into. Understanding how to design for a specific community is important because every community is different and therefore what each community needs is different, both in general and in design specifically. Taking these unique characteristics and needs of a community and implementing and addressing them was crucial in successfully designing for a community and I took this approach in my design. With this approach, I was able to identify several characteristics and needs of Fairplay that I wanted to

incorporate into my design, such as ranching and farming support and organized outdoor space as well as others.

The final topic that I researched for this project was the idea of social connection and how it is beneficial to people. There is a large amount of research that shows that having strong social connections is beneficial to overall well-being and health, but in small communities that connection can sometimes be harder to establish. The physical distance between residents and the lifestyles of many of them lead to a lack of social connection. Additionally, there are far less resources to help with this issue than there are in urban communities. Incorporating space, resources, and opportunities to foster social connection was very important in my design, so this research was crucial.

### *Interviewing Community Members*

My next step in the project was to interview several residents that live in or near Fairplay and are active members of the community. “Conducting community interviews is a particularly effective way to gather information about community needs, questions, and concerns, as well as expectations and unique needs or cultural behaviors, customs, and values” (Semspub.epa.gov, pg 1). Residents of a community know that community better than anyone else, therefore listening to them and applying what they say is essential in creating a successful design. Originally I thought this step would be largely accessible to complete because of the connections that I have within the community. However it proved to be more difficult than I anticipated. Because I am not in Fairplay anymore, it was more difficult to organize interviews than I thought it would be. However, even with that I was able to complete interviews with seven residents of the community. These residents had varying levels of experience in the community in order to

hear many different perspectives. In these interviews I gained a better understanding of what different people feel like is missing from the community, what is working well and should be emphasized, and how they feel about the dynamic and health of the area. It was important to understand these aspects because the community center was designed for the benefit of the residents, and understanding their opinions on the community yielded a more appropriate design.

### *Site Selection and Analysis*

While completing the research and interviews to gain a stronger base of knowledge about the community, I also worked on selecting and analyzing the site for my design. “The selected site has a major impact on the customer agency in terms of convenience, access, sense of place, and social fabric” (U.S General Services Administration, pg 11). This was an immensely important step because the location that I chose for the center had just as much of an impact on the success of the project as the design itself. With one of the main focuses of this project being to promote social connection in the community, the location had to be in a place that is both convenient and equally accessible to all residents. Additionally, it had to be a location that is enjoyable for all in order to create a friendly and social environment. After I selected my site for this project, I had to fully analyze and note the details and characteristics of that site.

Understanding the geographical characteristics and assets of the site was crucial for the design process because they were integral elements to the overall design of the center. Nature is a big component of the community and incorporating the nature of the site into the design was a very important step.

## *Design*

For my design process, I started by sketching out some general concepts and layouts incorporating all of the information I had gathered. This allowed me to try many different ideas before I start working on anything concretely. Serpil Ozker states that, “finding the idea through sketch is the most important factor of the design process” (Ozker, pg 74). In the design process there are countless factors to take into account when creating a concept. Being able to quickly sketch out different ideas and possibilities benefits the rest of the design process because it allows it to go quicker. Once I had a solid concept that I wanted to pursue, I took it and modeled it in Sketch-up. This step helped me visualize my concept into a real model that I could then alter in any way to better fit my vision for the final. Once I completed my model, I used a combination of that model and hand drawing to create my base orthographic and perspective images for the final. Sketch-up and other 3-D modelers are great for using a created model to export 2-D images that can represent different views of that model, such as floor plans. Once I had all my base images, I used the various Adobe applications to clean up and finalize the images into a cohesive style for the project. This step helped me bring the space to life. The final step was to compile all the images into a complete design portfolio that I added text to in order to explain the features of the design.

## **Results**

Throughout the process of this project, there were a couple of components that produced results that greatly contributed to the final result of the project, a complete design for a community center in Fairplay, Colorado. These components were the interviews that I conducted, and the process of selecting a site. These in addition to the research that I did led to creating a design that satisfied the criteria I set and one that would be beneficial to the community of Fairplay.

### *Results of Interviews*

The interview portion of this project was a crucial step in the design process of the community center for Fairplay. Residents in a community know that community better than anyone else because they experience it on a daily basis. And for that same reason, no one has a greater connection and care for a community than its residents. Interviews allow the knowledge of the residents to be used in the design process, and ensure that the project has the support from the community. For this project I organized a list of interview questions to ask residents of Fairplay to better understand their perspectives on the community (Appendix, Figure 1). These questions covered a variety of topics related to Fairplay, but there were a few main topics that I was looking to gather information on. These topics included: how the residents evaluated the condition of the community, what they viewed the cultural foundation of the community to be, and what they felt the community was lacking. Knowledge on these topics was a required step in the process of designing the community center, and these interviews provided an abundance of it.

I completed seven interviews with residents of Fairplay for this project. These residents had various levels of experience and roles in the community in order to provide a diverse array

of perspectives. However, even with these diverse perspectives, many of the questions produced answers that were relatively consistent across the different interviews. On the topic of the condition of the community, there was a consistent theme of the residents believing that the community is in no means in a bad condition, but that it certainly could be improved and has been declining recently. This confirmed that this project's purpose was important and needed because the community is in need of something to rebound.

The next topic, understanding the cultural foundation of Fairplay, was crucial to the final design of this project because the community center needed to incorporate this culture to be a better fit for the community. In all seven interviews the residents mentioned the nature, land, and wilderness around the community as being its cultural foundation. These mentions included the industries and activities of: ranching, agriculture, hunting, snow sports, and camping. This result meant that incorporating this nature into the design and providing resources for the industries that focus on it was absolutely crucial in the success of this project.

The final topic of, what amenities the community is lacking, was another one that would heavily influence the final design of the community center. Through the interviews I was able to get several ideas for different amenities that could be included in the community center. Due to the broadness of this topic, the answers gathered from the interviews had much more variety than the others. Two residents mentioned the want for more social outlets, two mentioned the want for more formal spaces, two wanted more resources for struggling individuals and just in general, and one wanted more resources for the snow sports industry. While this was not the extent of the amenities included in the final design, they were all included in order to provide what the community is asking for.

These interviews had a large influence on the final design of this project. Without them, the connection to the residents and the community would have been nowhere near as strong, and the final result would not have been as successful or fit the community to the level that it does.

### *Results of Site Selection*

Selecting the site was another crucial aspect of this project. This was a really important step because the design was heavily influenced by where I decided to place it. The topography and characteristics of a site have a large influence on the design itself. Therefore, it was important to find a site that would compliment the ideas I had in mind. The criteria I viewed to be the most important in this site was: it had to be big enough to hold the center, it needed to be easily accessible to the residents, and it needed to have aspects of nature, such as landscape that could be used in the design and views of the wilderness that surrounds it. I chose this criteria because it was consistent with a few aspects I was looking to accomplish in my design. Mainly the incorporation of nature, and being an accessible resource to the community. These requirements were not overly strict, but they did provide an avenue to finding the site I was looking for.

The site I decided on was a grassland on the North East end of town (Appendix, Figure 2). This site was more than large enough to hold the center I designed and the landscape and views met the criteria I was looking for. The only thing left was the location and accessibility. Now this site is not located near the geographic center of Fairplay, but it is near several other major hubs for the community such as the Rec Center, and the fairgrounds. This mixed with the fact that Fairplay is just not very big, leads to this site being highly accessible to the residents. This site met the criteria I was looking for in my design, so I proceeded with using it for the

project. This step was required to complete the design because the project would not have the connection to reality that it needed without it.

### *Final Design for A Community Center in Fairplay, Colorado*

This design for a community center is completely tailored to the community of Fairplay. The main goals of this design were: to fit into and support the culture of the community, to provide the resources and amenities specifically needed in this community, and to promote social connection through design. All of the aspects of this design were focused on these goals.

- **Front Courtyard**

- The shape of the design creates a courtyard where the main entry way for the center is located. On either side of the entrance there is a space for visitors to sit, relax, and enjoy nature and being outside. This connects to the culture of the community because it provides an outlet to appreciating nature. Additionally, it promotes social connection because it provides space for residents to connect with each other.

- **Entryway and Main Room**

- The entryway for the center is a large open space that is centralized around a grand staircase. First impressions are important in design and I wanted the entrance to relay the importance of this building and having a grand central staircase does that. Furthermore, the addition of the tables allow this space to have another use as a place for social interaction.



- **Small Meeting Spaces**

- These spaces can be used for formal meetings of various kinds or more informal social meetups or events. The purpose of these spaces is to provide the residents with more space that they can use for the various needs and wants that they have. Organized space was something that was requested heavily in the interviews with the residents, and these spaces are one component that address this need.

- **Ranching and Agriculture Support Center**

- With the industries of Ranching and Agriculture being heavily important to the community, the need for more resources and information is very high and this location will provide that. This was another common theme from the interviews with the residents, but was it something that I found to be of high importance through the research for this project.

- **Food Bank**

- Rural poverty is a serious issue in many communities including Fairplay, and access to food can be a real issue because of that. This food bank would be an impactful way to help address this issue. One of the main goals of this project was to provide resources that the community needs and the need for more resources for struggling individuals was something that was brought up in the interviews with residents. Additionally, from my own experience in the community, access to food is something that many residents can struggle with so this resource is crucial.

- **Large Meeting Space**

- Similarly to the other meeting spaces, this space is meant to provide more organized space for the residents to use for various purposes as. Sometimes a

larger space is needed for certain events or meetings and that would be the main purpose for this space.

- **Nature Resources and Information Center**

- This space is meant to provide resources and information for the various activities in nature that form the culture of Fairplay such as snow sports, camping, hunting, and others. Additionally, this addresses a need for more resources related to these industries outlined in some of the interviews. On top of providing resources such as licenses and permits, I envision this space providing resources similar to the UW gear garage. A service such as this would be beneficial to many residents in the community.

- **First Floor Lounge**

- This space is designated as an informal space that is meant for residents and visitors to interact and connect with each other. The combination of this space and the other spaces designated as meeting space provides the residents with a greater variety of spaces to fit the different needs they have.

- **Cafeteria and Kitchen**

- Similarly to the food bank, this would provide another outlet to residents that are struggling with food. On top of that this space could be used for larger organized dinners or other events to promote interaction between residents. Interest in organized events was something that was brought up during the interviews with the residents. This space would have multiple uses and purposes for the community.

- **Medium Sized Meeting Space**

- Similarly to the other spaces provided in this design, this space is meant for residents to use for their various purposes or to connect with one another. This space adds to the variety of different spaces provided in this design.

- **A Local Cultural History Museum Focused on the Mining Industry**

- This space is designated as a museum of Fairplay's history and specifically its history as it relates to the mining industry. The mining industry was such a major part of Fairplay's creation, but there aren't many outlets to learning about that history in Fairplay. The room located at the back of this museum is a space to interact with this history. Growing up the main exposure to Fairplay's history as a mining community was through an activity that was set up for Burro Days, which is a yearly festival that the community hosts. That activity is gold panning. The memories I have of gold panning with my friends and family are the times when I felt most connected to the community's roots. It really was a great experience and I want to be able to provide that in a more accessible way. This space provides an outlet for the residents to become more connected with those cultural roots.

- **Third Floor Lounge**

- Similarly to the lounge of the first floor, this space is designated as an informal space that is meant for residents and visitors to interact and connect with each other.

- **Back Courtyard**

- This courtyard is much larger than the one out front and includes a couple key elements. The first of which is a space that is meant to be used as a community

garden. This idea takes inspiration from the University P-Patch garden located in the U-district in Seattle. The second key element of this courtyard is the seating area and fountain located at the end of the path. This space is meant to be used as a social space where residents can interact, connect, and enjoy the nature and views that the community of Fairplay has to offer.

This design is by no means perfect, but it would provide the community of Fairplay with resources and give it a central hub to help bring the community together. Every element of this design was thoughtfully added with what would benefit the community most in mind. I believe that this community center would be a valuable asset to Fairplay, and that it would help the community rebound from the recent struggles it has had.

After I completed the design, I shared it with several of the residents I interviewed and they all agreed that this would be a successful design for the community. However, the feedback was not completely positive as there were some concerns, mainly with the overall size of the design. There were a few residents who felt like the design was too big for the community. While my intent was to make the design very large in order to represent how important it would be for the community and to provide the needed space for the community, I would agree that the final result should be scaled down a bit. I still believe that it needs to be large for those reasons, but not to the extent that it currently is. Continually receiving feedback from residents during the design process is crucial in a design being successful and this example shows that.

It is important to note that although this is a design that I would consider to be successful for the community of Fairplay, it is not the only design that could be successful for this community. There are countless ways to successfully form the design itself as long as the process

I followed is carried out. Furthermore, it is important to remember that this design would not be nearly as successful in any other community. Every small rural community is completely unique and this process needs to be performed for each community specifically for a design to be successful.

## **Conclusion**

Fairplay is a community that I have a deep personal connection to and it hurts to see it struggle with certain issues and shortcomings. This community center would be a great first step in addressing these issues and shortcomings, and in turn strengthening the community. The scope of this project was far beyond anything I had attempted before and the end result is something that I not only am happy with, but am proud of. However, it is important to note that although this is a design that I would consider to be successful for the community of Fairplay, it is not the only design that could be successful for this community. There are countless ways to successfully form the design itself as long as the process I followed is carried out. Furthermore, it is important to remember that this design would not be nearly as successful in any other community. Every small rural community is completely unique and this process needs to be performed for each community specifically for a design to be successful.

There are two different paths to go down for the next steps of this project. The first of which is to continue working on and developing the design for the community of Fairplay. While I am happy with the results I produced for this project, there is room for a more comprehensive and involved study and project. This project would require a scope that is far beyond what I could have completed during the time frame for the Senior Project. It would involve much more research and community engagement to continue to develop the design. The other path this project could go down for next steps is to take the methodology that I used for this project and apply it to other small rural communities across the world. I believe that the process I used works and would be a great way to start developing community centers in rural areas. I am deeply passionate about this project and would really enjoy continuing to work on it through either or both of these paths given the opportunity. However, if that opportunity were to never arise, I will

be content with the work I completed for this project because I created a design that would be a beneficial addition to the struggling community that I call home. As well as, created a blueprint for how this process should be carried out for different communities across the world.

## Project Reflection

I learned so much more about myself through the completion of this project than I ever thought I would, and I had high expectations for that going into it. This project has been borderline life defining for me on several levels. When I was deciding what I wanted to do for my Senior Project, I knew that I wanted to do something that would push myself because of the importance of the project. When I decided on *Re-Imagining the Small Town Community Center*, I knew that it would push me like I wanted, but I had no idea what I had put in front of myself. The amount of times that this project pushed me to my limits and made me wonder if I really could complete it were countless, but I kept pushing forward and working. This was a level of determination and dedication that I didn't know I had and not only was I able to produce a finished product, but it is a product that met and exceeded the expectations I set at the beginning of it. I learned that if I really set my mind on something and really put the time in, then I can be better than I ever imagined.

While I learned a lot of positive things about myself through the completion of this project, there were points of personal improvement that I learned as well. The first of which is that I need to improve my interviewing skills and overall gain more experience with engaging a community. I am a pretty quiet and reserved person, but I normally don't have many issues talking to people. However, while doing this project, I learned that the process of organizing and performing interviews is something that I need more practice in. I struggled quite a bit with getting the interviews I did and looking back I believe I could have improved the interview questions and process quite a bit. This was a valuable experience to understand that I have a limitation in this area and I will focus on working on that moving forward. Another area that I found I could use some improvement in is multi-tasking. There were several points in this project



where I was working on multiple parts at once, and during those times I would get very overwhelmed and it would affect my productivity on some of those parts. Moving forward I need to be able to manage multiple elements better and this project helped me show that.

Overall this project was an extremely valuable learning experience. Many of the lessons I learned during this project will have a heavy influence on how I work in the future and how I live my life. I am so grateful that I was given the opportunity to work on and complete this project.

## **Appendix**

### **Figure 1: Interview Questions**

- How long have you lived in or been a part of the community of Fairplay?
- How would you evaluate the health of the community as a whole?
- How would you evaluate the health of the social connections between the residents of Fairplay?
- What would you say the cultural foundation for Fairplay is? What is the community at its heart?
- What are some amenities that you feel Fairplay is lacking that would really help the community?
- What are some advantages and disadvantages to living in a small town community as opposed to a big city?
- Have you noticed a decline in the quality of the community over the last several years?

**Figure 2: Picture of Site (Google Street View)**



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