An exploration in planning and design concepts for a place- and community-based museum process
curiosity inspires the plan

Q. How could a museum be relevant to a wider audience regardless of geography, educational attainment or income?

Q. What might be the physical result of a blending all of the different museum types?

Q. What cultural resource could be offered to be accessible, educational, and participatory?

Q. What could the museum of the future look like?

Q. How could more people find the knowledge accessible and interesting at the same time?

A: Start with the mission
What is place- and community-based education?

“Place-based education is not a new phenomenon.”

“The process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school.”


5 thematic patterns of the approach can be adapted to different settings

- CULTURAL STUDIES
- NATURE STUDIES
- REAL-WORLD PROBLEM SOLVING
- INTERNSHIPS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES
- INTRODUCTION INTO COMMUNITY PROCESSES

choosing a transformational agenda

• “...teachers and students turn to phenomena immediately around them as the foundation for curriculum development”

• “...it’s emphasis on learning experiences that allow students to become the creators of knowledge rather than the consumers of knowledge created by others”

• “...student’s questions and concerns play a central role in determining what is studied. Student ownership and engagement are much more likely to emerge when the students have had the chance to participate in their own learning agenda.”

• “...teachers act as experienced guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities.”

• “the wall between school and community becomes much more permeable and is crossed with frequency”

“A sense of place is the sixth sense, an internal compass and map made by memory and spatial perception together.”

—Rebecca Solnit


What kind of museum could be created with a community- and place-based mission at its foundation and core not just applied to an education department?
The mission of Second Nature Prairie Community Museum is to engage and give voice to the community which it represents and validate the place in which it exists by collecting, preserving, and exhibiting the knowledge of that community, via partnerships, participation, problem-solving and investment.

“Mission is purpose; vision is future; and values are beliefs”

Prairie-inspired color palette

prairie-inspired identity

(naming the museum)

second nature

noun

Originally Latin secundum naturam, "according to nature," it is from Aristotelian philosophy and contrasts with phenomena that are super naturam ("above nature," such as God's grace), extra naturam ("outside nature"), supra naturam ("beyond nature," such as miracles), or contra naturam ("against nature").


(primary museum logo)

second
nature
prairie community museum

(secondary logo & tagline)

second
nature
art
nature
expression
prairie-inspired design

Graphic palette derived from colors of tallgrass prairie wildflowers

- Orange accent from the center of a purple coneflower
- Yellow from the compass plant
- Blue from the vast sky above the prairie
- Purple from the lead plant
- Pale green from the rattlesnake master
Land use is becoming a controversial topic in rural areas of the United States. It is an issue that has recently been brought to mass attention with the creation of the superstore retail chain Walmart. During the 1990s, Walmart grew with seemingly unbounded restrictions that enabled the corporation to amass one of the largest real estate holdings in the country. The community, lured by the promise of jobs and economic stimulus, welcomed the big box chain Walmart who provided more readily available goods. Walmart’s growth was in turn fueled by the supportive economic plans of small towns in rural America.

- An American town has land and wants to stimulate economic growth
- Town seeks and attracts corporations to come in to the area with incentives including cheap land prices, tax breaks, and/or waived fees
- Big Box is built on an average 8 acre lot, with 3 of those total acres of parking lots
- 5-10 years later, the Big Box seeks to expand to a “superstore,” usually across the street or nearby, leaving an “abandoned” structure
- Leasing restrictions imposed by the Big Box owner of the land prohibits leasing to any competitor for up to 50 years.
- The structure will sit crumbling, unless it can be leased or resold, and then turn into a physical eye-sore and a scar on the psychology of the community.
- The process is a sophisticated land-grab and can/will be repeated for as long as the Big Box retailer can attain land. So the superstore will eventually be abandoned as well.
- **A non-competitive non-profit organization such as a museum is ideal with its intent to be a community resource in perpetuity.**

place inspired design

- Being where you are at and starting with what you have
- Born out of the place, continually regenerating
- Sustainable use of local materials and resources
- Adaptive reuse of big box structure
- Facilitates learning opportunities about the environment

“The greenest building is the one that is already built.”


Building concept
"museum planning is neither architecture nor design, neither management and operations planning nor communications strategy. Although it may borrow from all four disciplines, and certainly works cooperatively with each, it has its own contribution to make."

The museum is hypothetically located in a small rural town of 15,000 people in Iowa. Faced with the reality that economic growth investment decisions made in the early 90s had left the town with the blight of an abandoned big box structure, the town board wondered what could potentially fill the space. Community members at the meeting, concerned that children had little connection to the local history, suggested a museum. A local K-12 educator had recently sat in on a presentation given at a conference at the local university on the educational approach derived for and gaining popularity in K-12 schooling called Place- and Community-Based education and wondered if one problem could be solved by another...

Physical space estimations and functions are represented with a conventional tool used in the interior design discipline called space bubbles. Space bubbles are a quick and easy way to convey preliminary estimations and relationships visually.
Space allotment changes as design develops further
Circulation overlay is placed onto space bubble drawing to determine where public and private spaces will be located, designing with community accessibility in mind.
A scalable floor plan is produced and all activities and spaces are determined.
tying art and nature

- Drawing and painting wildlife
- Abstracted work inspired by natural environment
- Harvesting natural materials for artmaking
- Book and paper making with natural fibers
- Nature and landscape photography
- Nature journaling
place and community collections

TANGIBLE

ART
  - Regional art and artists

NATURE
  - Regenerated tallgrass prairie habitat

COMMUNITY
  - local community photo collection

HISTORY
  - costume, tools, maps

SCIENCE & NATURAL HISTORY
  - plant and animal specimen, bird nests, native seeds

INTANGIBLE

PERFORMANCE
  - interpretive dance and song, puppet theater

ORAL HISTORY
  - storytelling

NATURE INTERPRETATION
  - plant identification

AUDIO & VIDEO
  - found sound, birdsongs, folk music
place and community exhibits

Exterior exhibits

• Tallgrass prairie exhibit tells the story of adaptive reuse of building and regenerating prairie habitat on land reclaimed from parking lots.

• The Nest Sculpture, inspired by artwork of Jayson Fann at the Big Sur Spirit Garden in California, would be commissioned and used interpretively.

• The Insect Condo is an approachable interpretive teaching tool that demonstrates the important role insects play in a habitat.

Interior exhibits

• WIND & WINGS includes photos of birds, feathers, bird nests, birdsongs, birdwatching on the site, sketching birds in flight, looking for bird tracks, and a bird puppet show demonstrating what birds eat and their social behaviors.
1. Second Nature Prairie Community Museum entry
2. Earth Seats Council Ring inspired by Jens Jenson
3. Butterfly Garden
4. The Backyard Rain Garden
5. Insect Condo
6. Artist’s Overlook Tree House
7. Regenerated Prairie Habitat
8. The Nest sculpture
9. Shaded family-friendly parking lot A - existing
10. Staff and contributor parking lot B - existing
11. Accessibility parking
12. Drop off and loading for buses and cars
13. Accessibility Ramp and Entrance
14. Rooftop solar panels
15. Loading dock
16. Delivery entrance
new operational metrics

• Museum staff transforms from specialists to operational generalists who serves as co-learners or facilitators

• Traditional membership resembles that of a member-owned food co-op with participatory investment and volunteerism at the core

• Community participation becomes a financial development strategy via participatory grant writing, fundraising, and budget development

• Museum becomes a viable contributor to economic growth of a region by highlighting community assets

“There are millions of creative, community-minded people who are ready to visit, contribute to, and participate with cultural institutions that support their interests. While many people explore their passions in online communities, there is enormous potential for them to come together in physical spaces organized around stories and objects that matter to them. These physical spaces may be historical societies or science cafes, art centers or libraries. They may be museums of all sizes and types.”

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