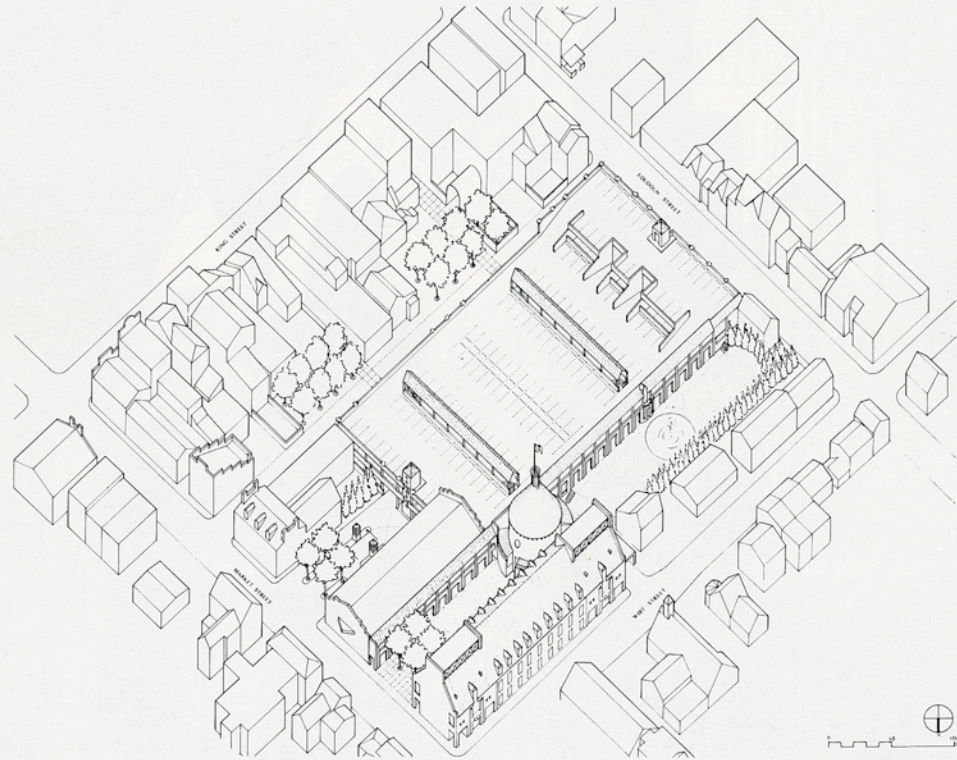


CITY AND SYMBOL

The Winning Competition for a Municipal Government Center in the Town of Leesburg, Virginia by the Chicago Firm of Hanno Weber & Associates.

by Hanno Weber



This winning entry for a competition to design a new Town Hall and Municipal Parking Structure for the Town of Leesburg, Virginia presents an opportunity to serve the town's commercial core while reweaving a piece of the urban fabric of the city.

Sited on a portion of a block in the old colonial grid of the city, currently a surface parking lot and fortunately a part of the city that retains many of its buildings along the main street, the project calls for a program to accommodate over 30,000 square feet of ceremonial and office space and 320 parking spaces. These programmatic requirements are not only extensive, but present large scale interventions on this existing small parcel of development. Also, the town hall is expected to convey the iconographic associations of govern-

ment and institution, which, in this case, are nearby county symbols, since Leesburg is the Loudoun County seat.

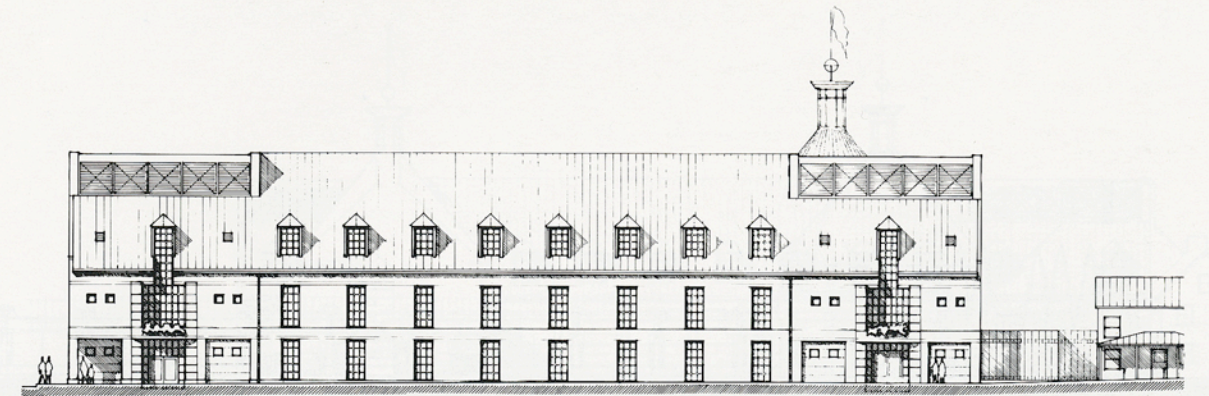
The existing 19th-Century County Court House, surrounded by a lawn and cast iron fence furnishes the first contextual reference to a design *parti*: a civic open space — a “town green” — containing an “object building” affronting the north boundary of the development and an extension of the Court House precinct across the town's main thoroughfare, King Street.

A sense that the site would be best served if its western edge along Wirt Street were established with a building, even if it limited the frontage on Market Street, endangered the long and narrow open space — reminiscent of the spirit of Thomas Jefferson's Green at the Univer-

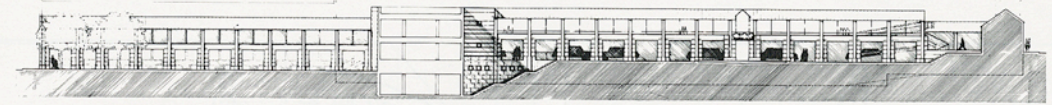
sity of Virginia.

With the Town Green running through the block and punctuated by an equivalent to the Rotunda at Charlottesville, the Council Chamber, a formal armature to restructure the block, is established using “arcades”: to the west, a single loaded concourse serving the Town Hall and, to the east, a covered path masking the parking structure. Within this framework, each component is elaborated on as a subservient contributor to the fabric of the town block, each one seeking congruence with the context and merging into the neighboring surroundings while asserting a public presence that celebrates civic life and rituals.

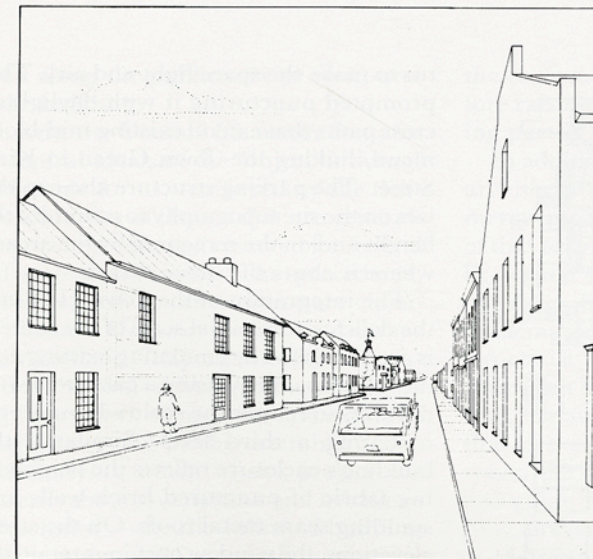
In the case of the parking structure, embedment behind existing and new buildings is complemented with an impe-



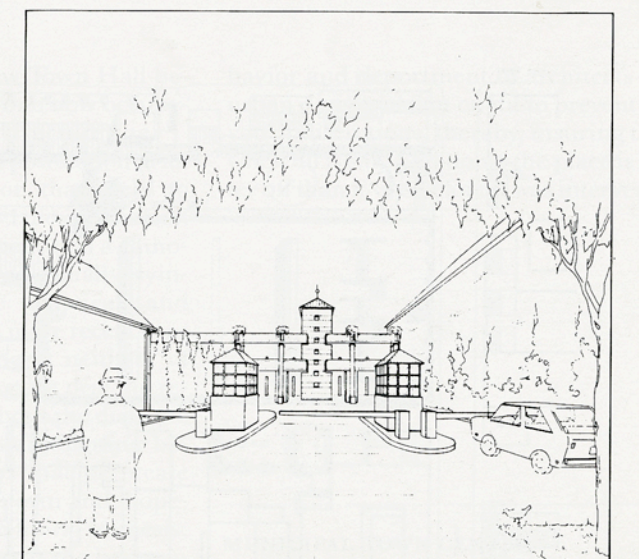
EAST ELEVATION WIRT STREET



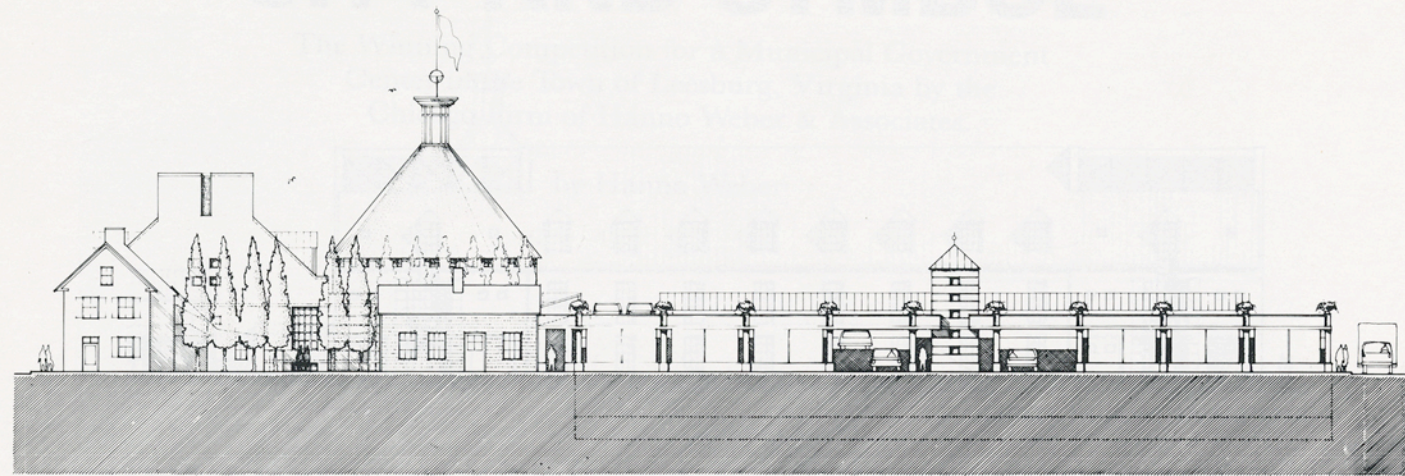
SOUTH ELEVATION MARKET STREET



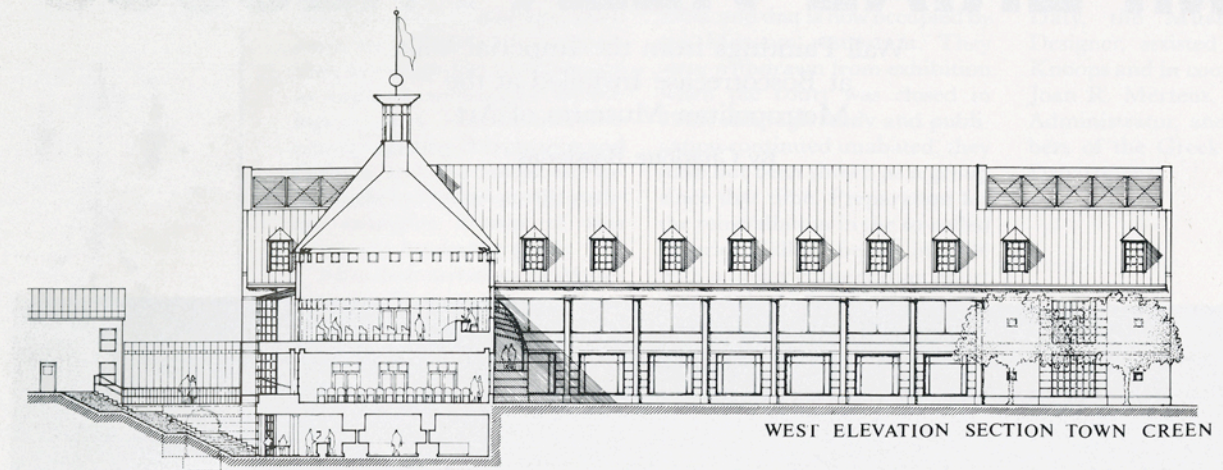
MARKET STREET APPROACH



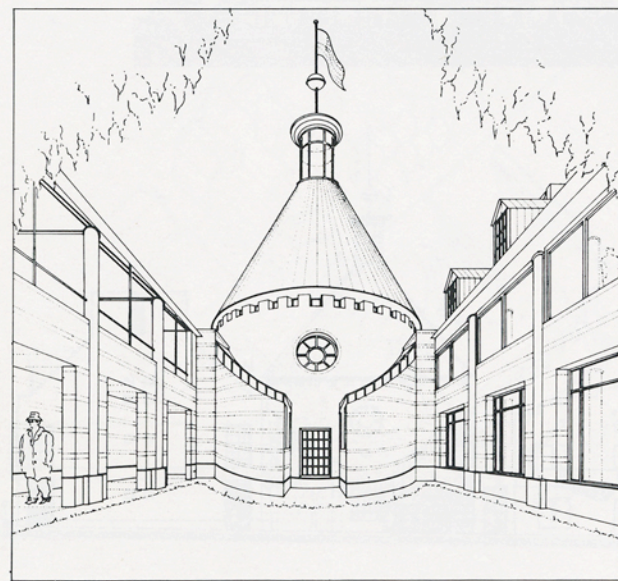
MUNICIPAL PARKING ENTRANCE



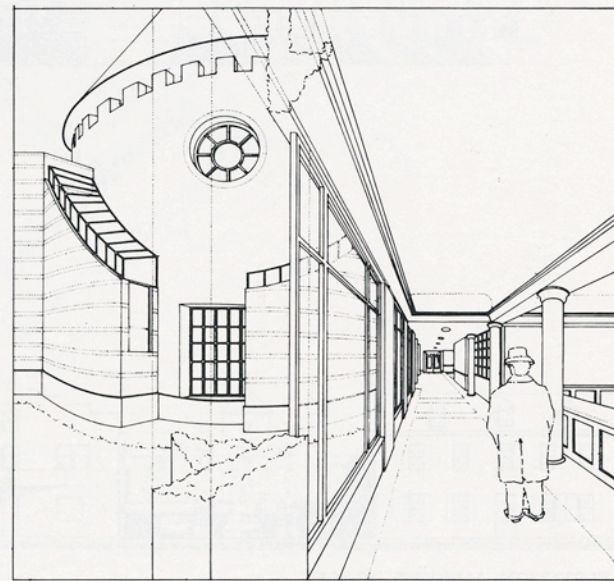
NORTH ELEVATION LOUDOUN STREET



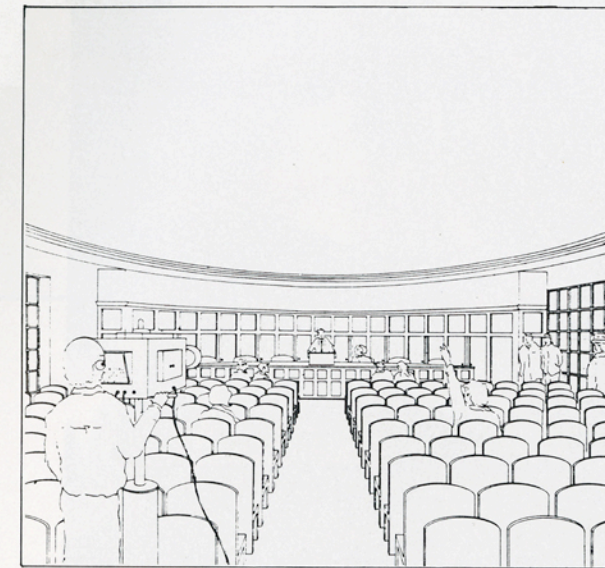
WEST ELEVATION SECTION TOWN GREEN



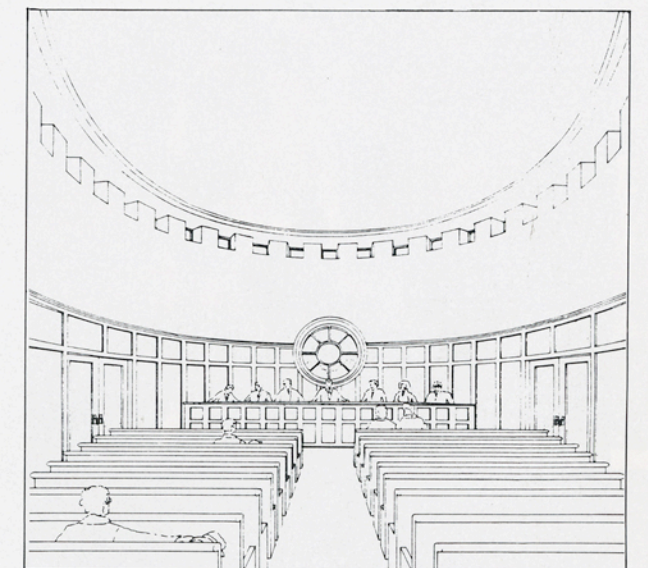
TOWN GREEN: NORTH



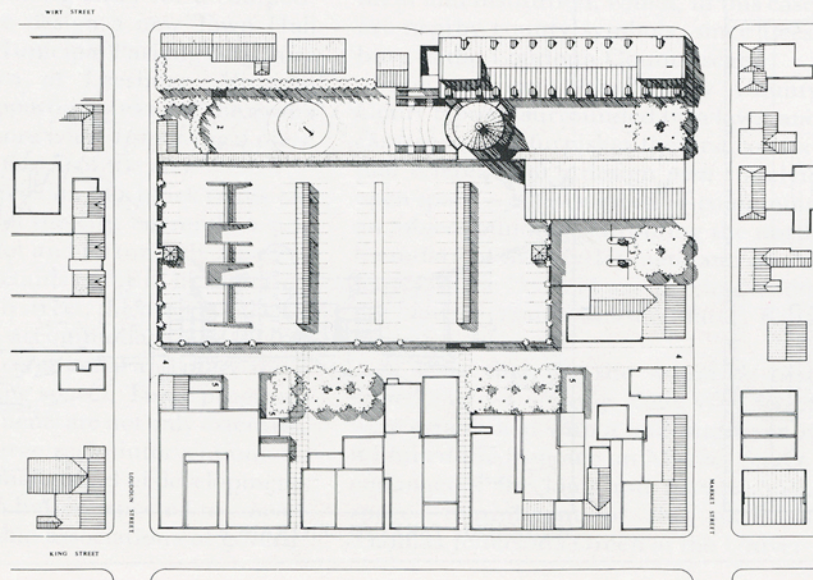
TOWN HALL PUBLIC SERVICE CONCOURSE



CONFERENCE ROOM · MEDIA CENTER



COUNCIL CHAMBER



tus to make the space light and airy. This prompted puncturing it with daylighted cross paths that extend existing mid-block mews, linking the Town Green to King Street. The parking structure also capitalizes on the site topography to minimize the height and on the screening by the arcade where it abuts the Town Green.

The integration of the Town Hall into the delicate residential scale of the context is accomplished by emulating existing cornice heights and by using a gable roof with dormers to reduce the scale while accommodating a third level. Similarly, the building's enclosure reflects the neighboring fabric of punctured brick walls and standing seam metal roofs. On the street elevations, the window openings retain the existing vertical proportions, while, on the Town Green facade, the arcade is mir-

rored along the public service concourse of the building.

Lastly, the Council Chamber contains the figural ideals of the "object building" — Platonic forms, tempered by the delicate exclusion of domes that are generally associated with and reserved for federal and state institutions. The precedents, therefore, drift to other than pure classical forms — Gunnar Asplund's Library and Woodland Chapel in Stockholm, coupled to the conical roofs at Chenonceaux and Chambord, all merging into a distinct image conveying public assembly.

Underlying much of the project are concerns about architecture and urbanism as "technics" — the discipline of building and the demands of practicality; not placing the Town Hall over the parking structure and the pragmatic issues as enabling

the construction of a new Town Hall before raising the existing one now occupying part of the parking structure site.

In addition, the design postulation of an architectural composition that seeks to merge into its context and the elaboration of that *parti* rests and depends on a catholic formal literacy that is equally sympathetic to both the classical and academic, as well as to its more recent constructivist underpinnings, neither of which can be negated. A great deal, therefore, remains unstated about the dialogue that is ever present while designing between the two traditions that permeate and guide the search for form and, hopefully, prevent falling into literal mimesis.

Merging into a context is the best tradition of architecture and urbanism, not unlike "good manners" — the public be-

havior and deportment of architects and urban designers that ought to prevent private indiscretions, thereby, insuring that, when all is said and done, the place is better off than it was before it was intervened.

MUNICIPAL TOWN CENTER
Leesburg, Virginia
Hanno Weber & Associates, Architects
The City of Leesburg, Clients