

URBAN THAW:

Encouraging Human Connection within a Winter City

Master's of Architecture Thesis by Austin Foss

Cities thrive on human interaction. It is what makes urban living possible. Cities are hubs of human activity, and interaction happens when this activity takes place between two or more individuals. There would not be a need for urban living if these interactions did not take place. It is part of who we are as humans. Social connection is as much of a need to human beings as food or water.

It is increasingly easier for the populace to become, essentially, "hermits." With the increasing technology in social media, Internet shopping, and residential comforts, many do not see a reason to experience the world around them, along with the people

in their neighborhood. This is increasingly prominent when the weather outside is less than ideal.

In many smaller northern cities, such as Grand Forks, North Dakota, interaction decreases during the winter season. During the winter, the climate can become uncomfortable to inhabitants, thus creating less active members of neighborhoods. Through climate-sensitive urban and architectural design, we can create more comfortable environments for city dwellers, creating more active places to live, and, in turn, encourage human connection.



Town Square



Town Square is currently an outdoor plaza used for events in Downtown Grand Forks. The space is used sparingly on a daily basis, and is only successful when special events or festivals are being held. According to Jonathan Holth, a winter city design expert from Grand Forks, what it lacks is a true connection to the Greenway along the river and the Red River itself. The river itself is safe enough to skate on and one of the cleanest in the Midwest. My design features two buildings along the streets of Demers Avenue and 3rd Street that extend the streetscape and provide a place of warmth, gathering, housing, and retail. They also embrace the public space to give a sense of enclosure, with an abundance of glass facing the square to break the barrier between inner and outer space. The stage now opens both to the square and the river to allow for concerts to be held as people sit on the berm. There is also now a connection to the river that cuts through the berm for people to skate.

1. Water Wheel Entrance (Existing)
2. Ice Skating Areas, with temporary walls set up during winter
3. Seating Areas
4. Balconies for residents, plus areas of refuge on ground floor for rain protection
5. Community Gathering Space and Winter Outdoor Equipment Rental
6. Stage, warming place during winter
7. Access to river for skating
8. Mixed Use Building, high-end residential on top, space for retail or start-up office on ground floor
9. Snow Hill Area, plows can dispose of snow here to create a hill attached to the berm for sledding

