



Case Study

Shirlington Education and Employment Center (SEEC)

Public spaces are defined by their form and function. My aim is to create a plaza form that makes possible the function of a day labor center. In order to understand the function of such a center, it was important for me to observe and document an existing day labor site: the Shirlington Education and Employment Center. From a series of visits, I was able to extract certain generalities and conclusions that informed the final thesis design. The case study that follows includes a description of the site, including its physical features, history of planning and design, and budgetary concerns. I describe my observations and analyze the

site's users, conflicts, and define some "zones of activity." Following this is a comparison to another day labor site in the area, the Herndon Official Workers' Center. The case study concludes with a list of recommendations that can be applied to my thesis design.

Site Description

The SEEC is in Arlington, Virginia, a highly urbanized part of the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan region. The Center is right off the exit of a major interstate, I-395, and a neighborhood of apartments, and an industrial zone, and a large retail center. Adjacent land uses include high-rise office buildings, multi-family housing, auto-repair shops, a small diner, county park and baseball fields, and a radio/television station.

The SEEC comprises two actual sites at its Nelson Street address. The Center itself is on Nelson Street, while an open pavilion (hereafter referred to as the "day labor site" or "day labor pavilion") is on the eastern end of the block. The Center is thus separated from the pavilion by about a quarter of a mile. The SEEC Center itself provides the office for the nonprofit operation, and the pavilion is where the outdoor hiring occurs. This case study focuses on the activities and events at the pavilion.

Date designed/planned

The SEEC was founded in February of 2000. The actual pavilion was designed and constructed in the fall of 2003.

Cost

The estimate for the entire site and program was 67,000 dollars. Actual construction costs weren't available to me, but were likely no more than this figure, since parts were eliminated and installation was done by the county. The pavilion structure itself cost 8,000 dollars. The installation of the site features (pavilion, plantings, gates, drinking fountain, bulletin board) cost around 14,000 dollars (Howard Hudgins, personal communication, November 25, 2005).

Landscape architects/designers

The primary designer was Howard Hudgins, a landscape architect working for Arlington County's De-

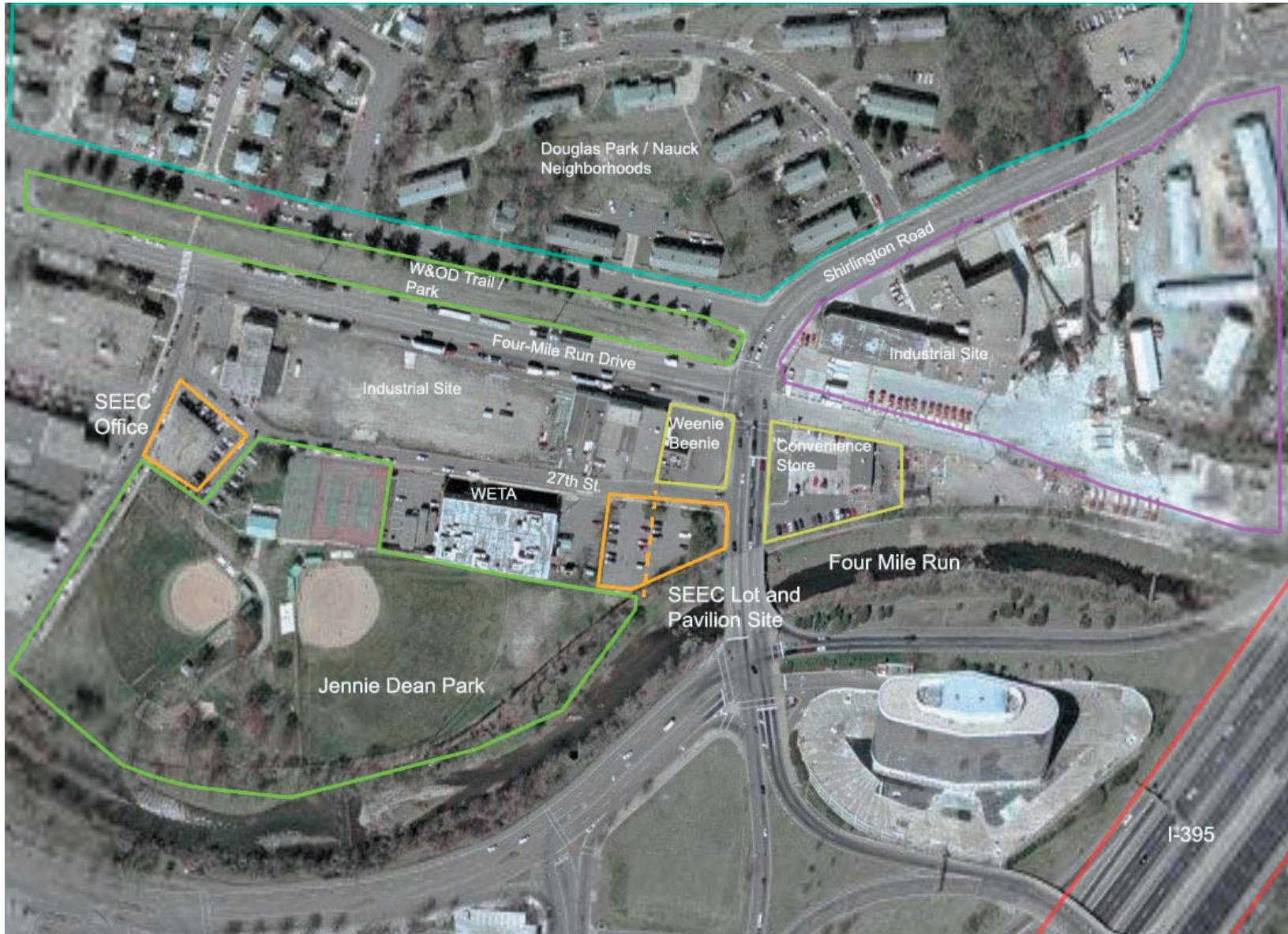


Fig. 2.1 - Aerial Photo showing the SEEC in orange outline. (5) (© Google Maps.) North is up.

partment of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources (DPRCR). His current title is Parks Manager. Several departments and entities were involved in the design and planning: DPRCR, the County Police Department, County Manager’s office, Nauck Neighborhood Civic Association, the County’s Department of Environmental Services, Community Planning and Housing Development, WETA (neighboring tenant), and the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority. No outside consultants were hired. Employees of the county installed the site furniture and pavilion structure (Howard Hudgins, personal communication, November 25, 2005).

Size

The site is a wedge-shaped parking lot. At its widest point, it’s 130 by 170 feet. Technically, the parking lot is divided in half, with the SEEC pavilion occupying the smaller side on the east. (See Fig. 2.1) The larger west side of the lot is reserved parking for surrounding businesses. However, there seemed to be plenty of standing and occupying this western end by day laborers, some of whom parked their cars there too.

The pavilion structure is 30 feet long by 12 feet wide. (see Fig 2.2).

Topography

The site is a flat parking lot, with only slight elevation changes to facilitate drainage. The site’s southeastern border is formed by the stream channel of



Fig. 2.2 - Photo of the SEEC day labor site

Four Mile Run, a big creek that runs thorough several urban neighborhoods in Northern Virginia and drains into the Potomac River. The channel has some shrub vegetation and vines, but no mature trees along this section. The stream itself is about four feet deep along this section, and the channel has been altered with some rip-rap and rock weirs, presumably to stabilize the banks and slow stream velocity. Besides providing the southeastern edge, Four Mile Run has little impact on the SEEC site. The channel is fenced off with high chain link (though there are a few tears in it where people have crawled through, as evidenced by pieces of litter and glass closer to the stream channel).

Across 27th Street is the Weenie Beenie, a small

lunch counter that opens very early and serves breakfast, lunch, and coffee. The land slopes up from the SEEC pavilion about five feet to the Weenie Beenie, so that it sits up on a little hill. This made the benches next to lunch counter a great place to sit and watch the activity at the SEEC pavilion. It was good for the day laborers too, who were often asked to leave the premises unless they were eating food bought at the diner.

Climate

In the wintertime (when I was there to observe), the sun rose at around 6:30 am, but was blocked by the large high-rise building to the southeast of the site until around 7:15.

It was cold every day that I was there (in November and December), with temperatures ranging from 30 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit. The wind blew generally from the southeast, and was partially blocked by the four large trees and the vegetation in the Four-Mile Run stream channel.

Existing Vegetation

Four mature Bradford Pears (one dead), three scraggly barberry shrubs, and three small ornamental trees were the main pieces of vegetation. The mature trees would provide much-needed shade in the summertime.

Project background and history

The SEEC project came about after long discussions between Arlington County and the Nauck Civic Association. The Nauck Civic Association was the primary instigator, as they had been putting pressure on the County to do something about the increasing visibility of day laborers gathering in parks and on streets nearby. The County Manager's office was finally impelled to take action, and they put Hudgins in charge of the project. In 2003, money was allocated for the construction of the facility. It was with the coordination of the SEEC staff and office that the management and programming was established (Howard Hudgins, personal communication, November 25, 2005).

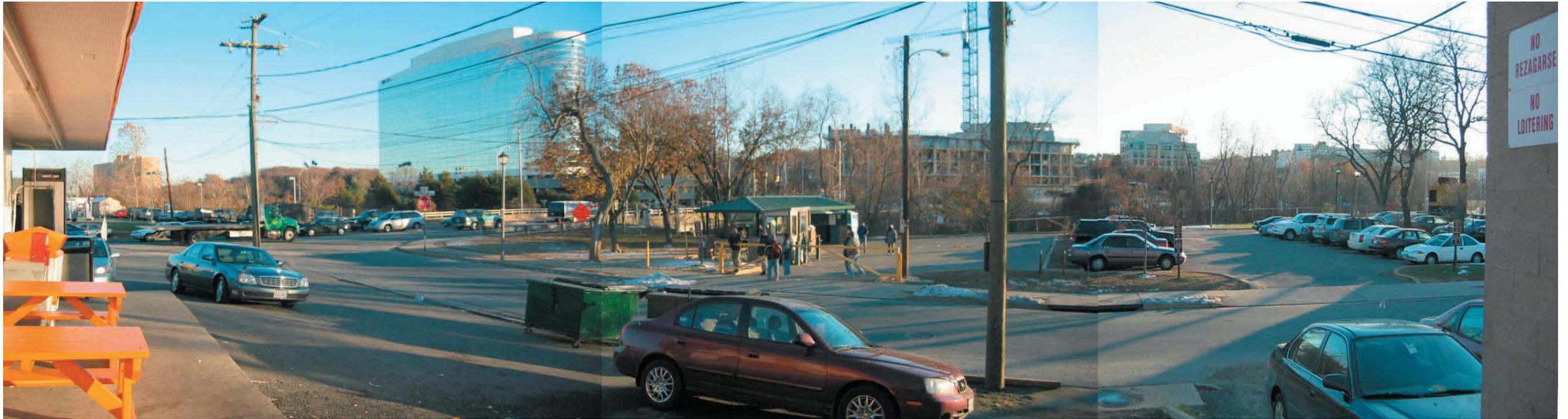


Fig. 2.3 - Photo of the SEEC day labor site from the Weenie Beenie restaurant across the street.

Role of Landscape Architects

Hudgins is a landscape architect, and he had a determining role in selecting the site and shelter. He acted as the leader on assembling the various departments and organizing subcontractors to build the pavilion. He selected the plants used, and found the pavilion structure in a catalog (Howard Hudgins, personal communication, November 25, 2005).

Program elements and furniture

The site is fairly simple. The most prominent feature is the pavilion structure itself. Besides this, there is a small shed structure (approximately 6' x 5'), fully enclosed and accessible by a locking door. It

contains a seat, a small space heater and air conditioning unit, and has windows on four sides. This shed was for the use of the on-site administrator (or *encargado*), though it was often shared with any workers who needed to go in and warm up for a few minutes.

There are two sets of metal gates on the site: one from the entrance at 27th Street, and another at the back of the parking lot, serving to divide the SEEC half of the lot from the other side, reserved for employees of WETA. These gates are simple metal tubes that could be swung open and shut and locked in place, prohibiting vehicular, but not pedestrian, access. They were always open when I was at the site. There are three trash cans on site. There are two portable toilets

at the back of the pavilion. There is a bulletin board attached to the back posts of the pavilion structure with announcements from churches and local non-profits geared towards immigrant assistance. There is also a bike rack on the site.

Maintenance and management

SEEC handles maintenance and management. This non-profit organization provides educational and informational services to immigrants in Northern Virginia. It has a contract with Arlington County for the management of the site (Risen, 2005). There are only four full-time employees. The director of the Center is Andres Tobar, who took over management several



Fig. 2.4 - Photo of the SEEC day labor site and pavilion structure.

years ago, when it was obvious that its survival was in jeopardy (Andres Tobar, personal communication, November 15, 2005).

Maintenance is handled by SEEC employees, who sweep the lot and pick up trash. The day laborers themselves often assist with these tasks, and the site was clean, except for a few pieces of litter.

Site plans

The following two maps were provided by Howard Hudgins. The first (Fig 2.5) shows the site in context with surrounding structures and roads. The second (Fig. 2.6) is a hand-drawn site plan showing the proposed design of the site. The second map shows how the design was supposed to work, with arrows

indicating the correct circulation route for vehicles. It is already apparent, however, that there might not be enough space for turning around.

Observation and analysis

This section describes my observations of the site with a look at the site users, conflicts that occur, division of the site into discrete activity zones, and a comparison to another day labor site.

I went to the site on three separate occasions to observe how it worked and how the users moved through the space. I took a clipboard and recorded the location and activities of the workers, administrator, and vehicles for several hours each visit. (See Fig. 2.7)

In general, this is how the site works. Workers register at the office, and are entered into a lottery for general unskilled labor. This gives them an equal chance at getting hired. If they have specific skills such as painting or landscaping, they are actively matched up with employers looking for such labor. About 20 to 30 laborers are placed with employers each day (about half of those who show up) (Andres Tobar, personal communication, November 15, 2005 and ABC 7, 2005).

The service may be used by anyone needing day laborers, from employers of large construction companies to private homeowners needing help with yard work or moving (ABC 7, 2005).

In practice, however, not all workers register at the office, choosing instead to go directly to the site

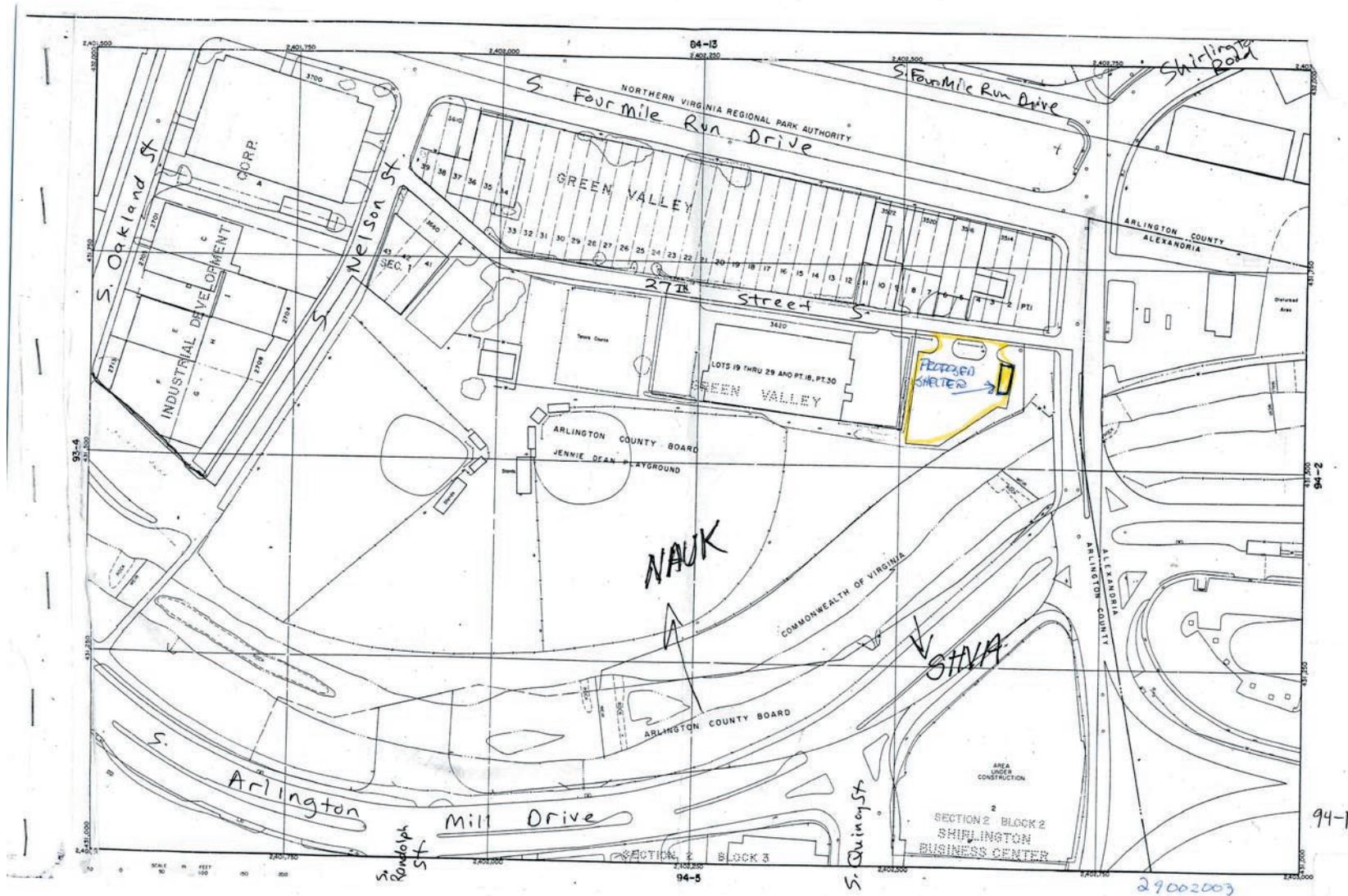


Fig. 2.5 - Original site plan of the SEEC day labor site and surrounding area (6) (Courtesy of Arlington County, VA). North is up.

(Andres Tobar, personal communication, November 15, 2005). Only 10 workers were entered into the raffle at the beginning of the day, which gave workers an incentive to show up early. It was unclear whether the raffle was performed again when all ten of those employees

had been hired.

As cars approach the site, most of the workers rush up to the vehicles, vying for the attention of the employers. They negotiate directly with the driver once they roll down their window or get out of the vehicle.

This “rush” is the most problematic element of the site, as it discourages those workers who are less aggressive, and also discourages employers who may feel uncomfortable being rushed by a large group of laborers.

Site Users

There are five user groups for the site:

1. **Laborers** (*jornaleros*) - the day laborers. Most of these are Hispanic, from many different countries.

They can be divided up into several subcategories:

1. **Skilled** – Most likely to get good paying jobs, and most likely to register at the office.

2. **Unskilled** (*ayudantes*) – Less likely to get good jobs. They need to rush cars to be seen by employers.

1. **Big guys** – Most likely to get jobs by rushing cars, since they are biggest, most visible, and look more fit for manual labor.

2. **Little guys** – less likely to get jobs by rushing, but they rush anyway. Those who show up for the raffle (*rifa*) may stand a better chance of getting hired, but the encargado must intervene for the raffle to take effect, and the hire often takes place before he has a chance to approach the employer.

2. **Employers** (*contratistas*) – These are from a wide

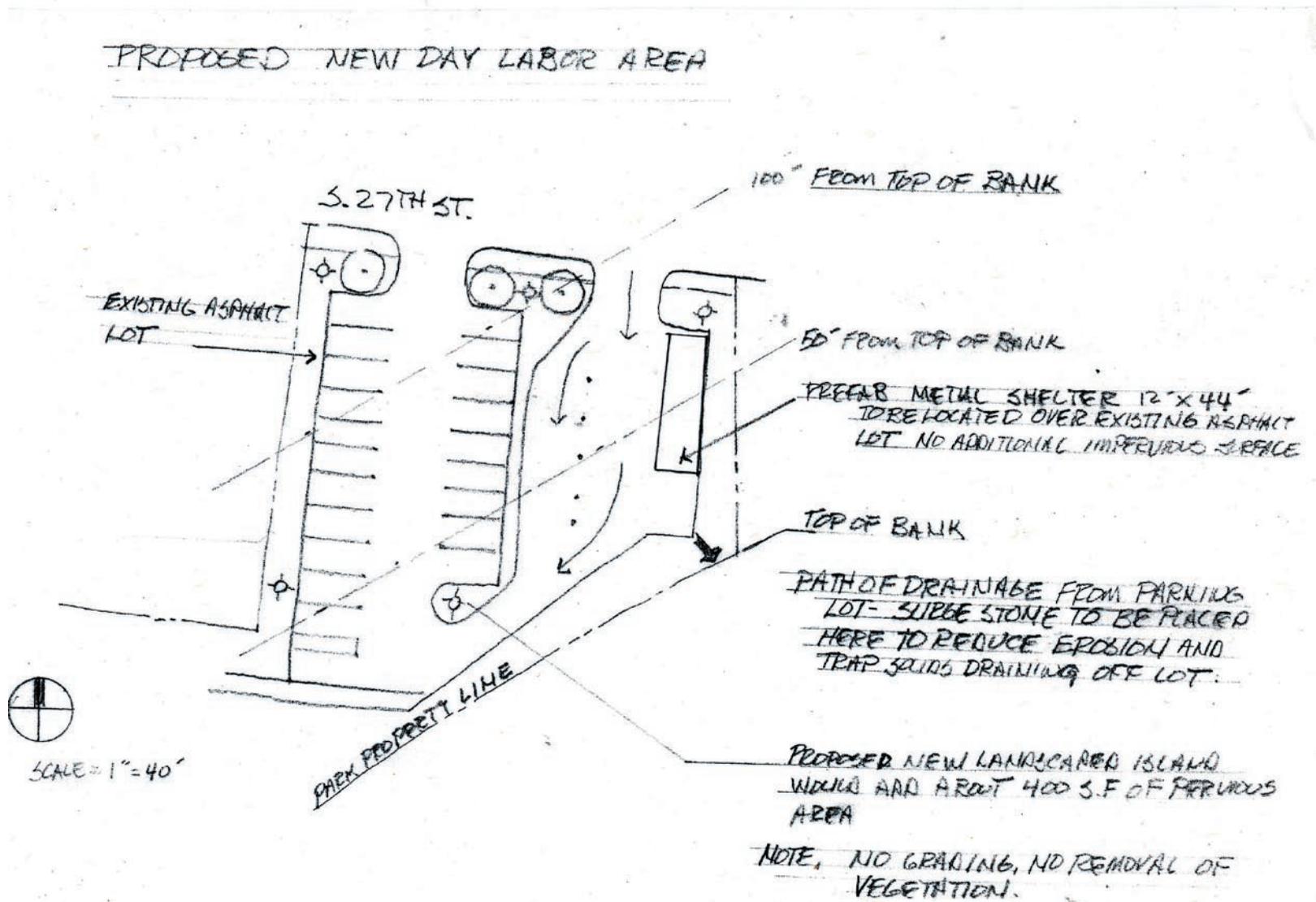


Fig. 2.6 -Site Plan of proposed program and layout. Note the setback lines ("100' from top of bank") from Four Mile Run, and the arrows showing the circulation route of entering vehicles. (7) (Courtesy of Arlington County, VA)

variety of sectors, including contractors at large construction and landscaping companies, and homeowners who need help around the house on weekends. Con-

tractors come mostly on weekdays, while weekends see the homeowners come by. Most employers drive up, though a few come on foot.

3. **Administrator** (*encargado*) – Keeps order on site; opens the shed structure, operates the raffle, negotiates with employers who need help deciding who to hire. The *encargado* talks to police and other authority figures.

4. **Accessory** – These are the visitors to the site whose presence is semi-regular and related to the site's use as a day labor center. These include the food truck and fruit truck vendors, who are at the site nearly every day, as well as a pastor who delivers coffee and donuts.

5. **Incidental** - These users occasionally pass through the site, either along the sidewalk or through the parking lot. They are people going to work, bike riders going to the park and trails, and every once in a while, people who mistake the pavilion structure and benches for a park structure, taking their food there to sit down and eat. These users were never discouraged from using the site, though they rarely interacted with the laborers and usually moved on after sensing that they were not in a regular park facility.

Conflicts and critique

By far, the main conflicts are those resulting from interaction between autos and pedestrians. This is embodied most directly in "the rush," when laborers run up to vehicles as they approach the site. (See Fig. 2.8) Sometimes there can be as many as 30 workers sur-

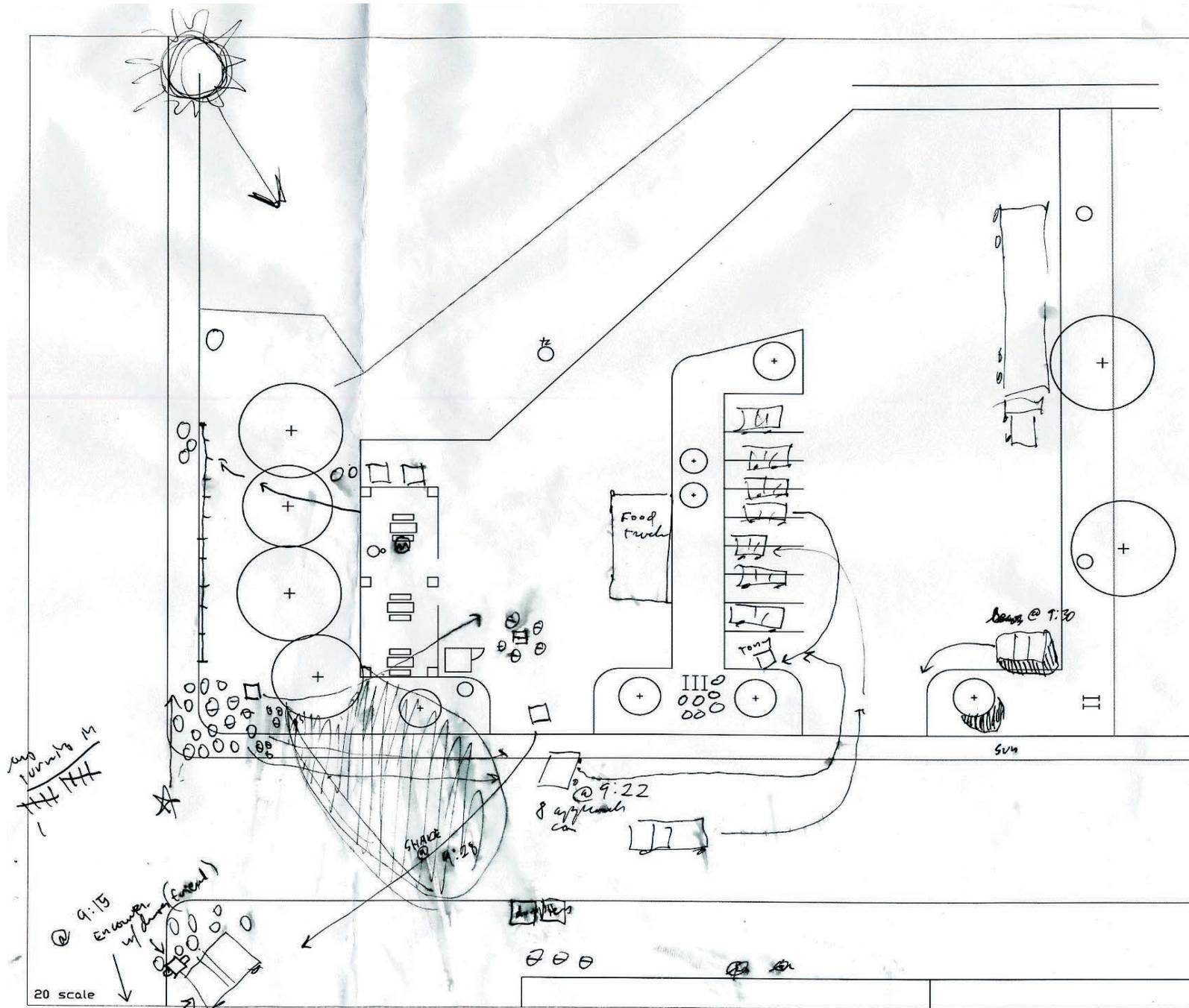


Fig. 2.7 - Example of observation sheet for SEEC case study

rounding a car, shouting and waving their hands to be chosen for work. When workers spread out and rush approaching contractors, the contractors sometimes stop halfway in Shirlington Road. They don't want to run over the workers, so they don't really have any choice. They have to stop where the workers approach them. Often when this happens, the SEEC *encargado* will come over and fight his way through the throng to the driver, where he will help negotiate the hiring.

A related type of conflict happens along 27th Street, as cars arriving for work at WETA drive past the day labor site. Laborers sometimes mistake these cars for employers, and the drivers must either "wave off" the workers stepping into the road, or drive fast enough that they don't appear to be employers. This presents an obvious risk to both laborers and drivers.

The parking lot and pavilion structure don't work together as intended. According to Howard Hudgins, the intent was that workers would wait under the pavilion structure for workers to pull into the lot. Following the painted arrows (which can still be seen on the parking lot, though faded), they would stop their vehicles only after they were completely inside the parking lot, out of the traffic of Shirlington Road and 27th Street. Once there, workers could approach the contractors' vehicles to negotiate. Workers could get into the vehicles, and the contractors would drive through the back gate of the parking lot and exit through the other curb cut, back out onto 27th Street. Vehicular circulation through the site would be one-way and orderly (person-

al communication, November 25, 2005).

Unfortunately, this isn't how the site works. Workers are so eager to get jobs that they wait on the "primary corner," the corner of 27th Street and Shirlington Road, so that they can spot contractors from far away as they drive down the road. There is competition among the workers to get to the contractors first, so they don't want to sit and wait passively. They want to be out actively watching for the contractors, and so position themselves far in front of the clump of workers so that they can be the first to make contact with the employers. This leads to the rushing behavior, and causes workers to spread out away from the pavilion.

Some conflicts come from interaction between site users and other people. I didn't see any instance

of this, but there had been reports of workers whistling at women as they walked past. The Weenie Beenie restaurant owner often has to "shoo" the workers away from the benches in his parking lot, unless they are eating or drinking something they have bought there. (There are signs posted in the lot: "no loitering," as well as the Ten Commandments in English and Spanish, which is interesting. See Fig. 2.9)

Several workers told me that the police sometimes issue tickets to them for disrupting traffic, which most of them can't pay. These incidents perpetuate distrust and fear between authorities and day laborers.

One unforeseen element was that the small office was meant to fit underneath the pavilion shelter. But it turned out to be too tall, and so it was placed



Fig. 2.8 - Sketch of the "rush," when workers approach an employer's vehicle to compete for jobs. This was the primary conflict of the site.



Fig. 2.9 -Some of the signs posted at the Weenie Beenie

right in front of it, near the parking lot entry gate (Howard Hudgins, personal communication, November 25, 2005). This doesn't seem to impede site function, and in fact, might be a benefit, since it allows for more open space underneath the pavilion for benches or gathering by the workers.

Finally, some tension exists between the Hispanics and day laborers of other ethnicities. I talked to a few black day laborers who said that while fights were very rare, there was some resentment from the blacks towards the Hispanics. The blacks have been coming here for many years waiting for work, while the Hispan-

ics are recent arrivals who have seemingly taken over the site.

Zones

After making my observations, I determined that the site could be divided into three distinct zones of activity: waiting, contact, and hiring. (See Fig. 2.10.) These were based on where the workers stood to wait for work, how they made initial contact with the employers, and where they completed the hiring by entering the automobiles.

As can be seen in Fig. 2.10, the three zones at the SEEC site overlap - there is no real separation between them. All three activities (waiting, contact, hiring) could and did occur at the same location. For example, workers might be waiting in the Weenie Beenie parking lot when an employer turns in off of Shirlington Road. The employer pulls to a stop just a few feet away, and the workers rush the truck, making first contact. So the waiting and contact zones are essentially the same. As the workers crowd around and compete for the driver's attention, the negotiation concludes (sometimes with the intercession of the site administrator) and one or more workers are hired and they get into the truck. Waiting, contact, and hiring have occurred at essentially the same location, resulting in chaos and setting up traffic conflicts.

A comparison to another day labor site in Herndon, Virginia illustrates how poorly the SEEC site functions.

3 zones: Waiting, Contact, Hiring -mixed at Shirlington, separate at Herndon

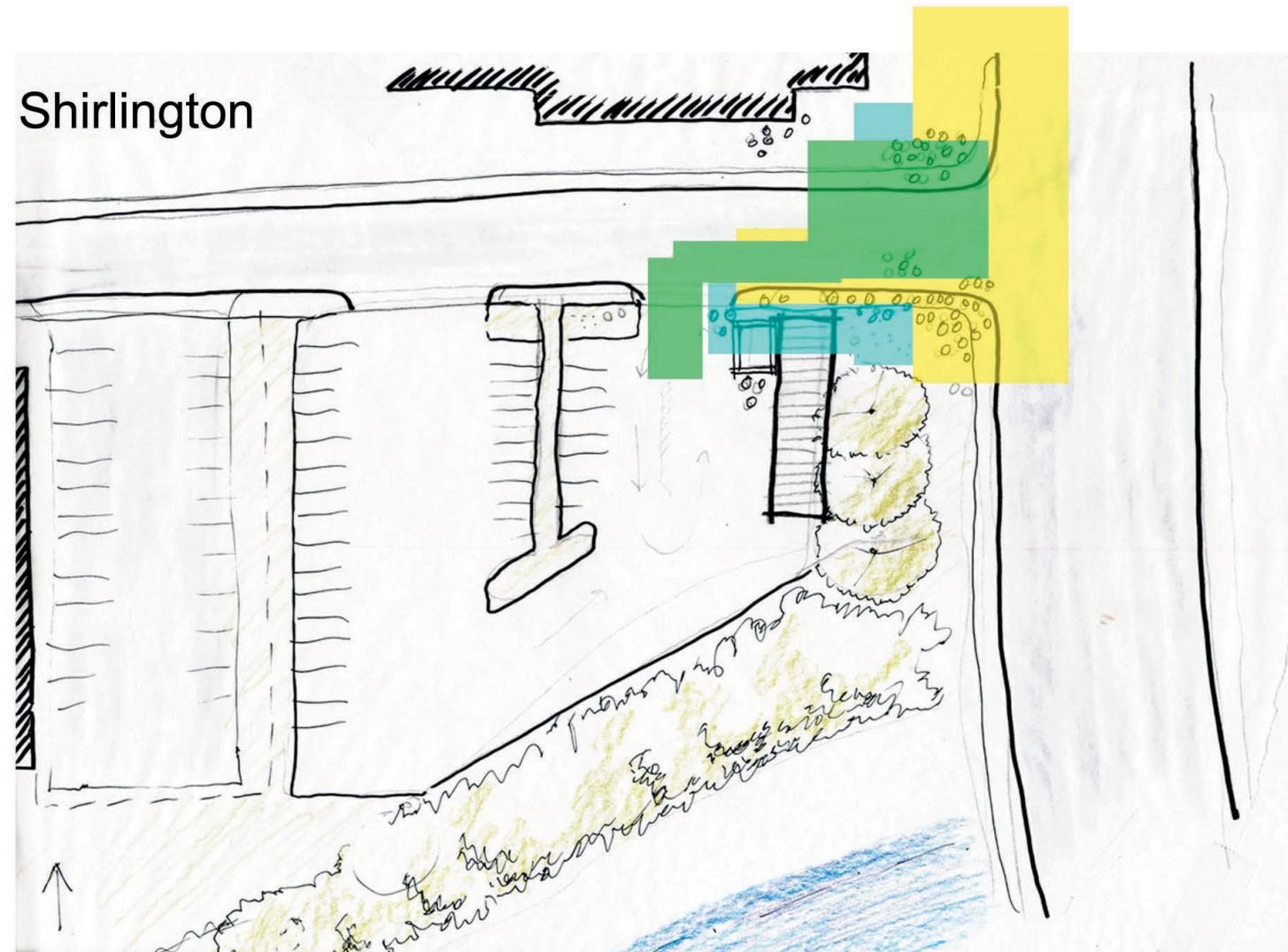


Fig. 2.10 - Three zones on the site. Day laborers are represented by the small circles. Note how the three colored zones intermingle and overlap, to the detriment of the site's efficiency and safety.

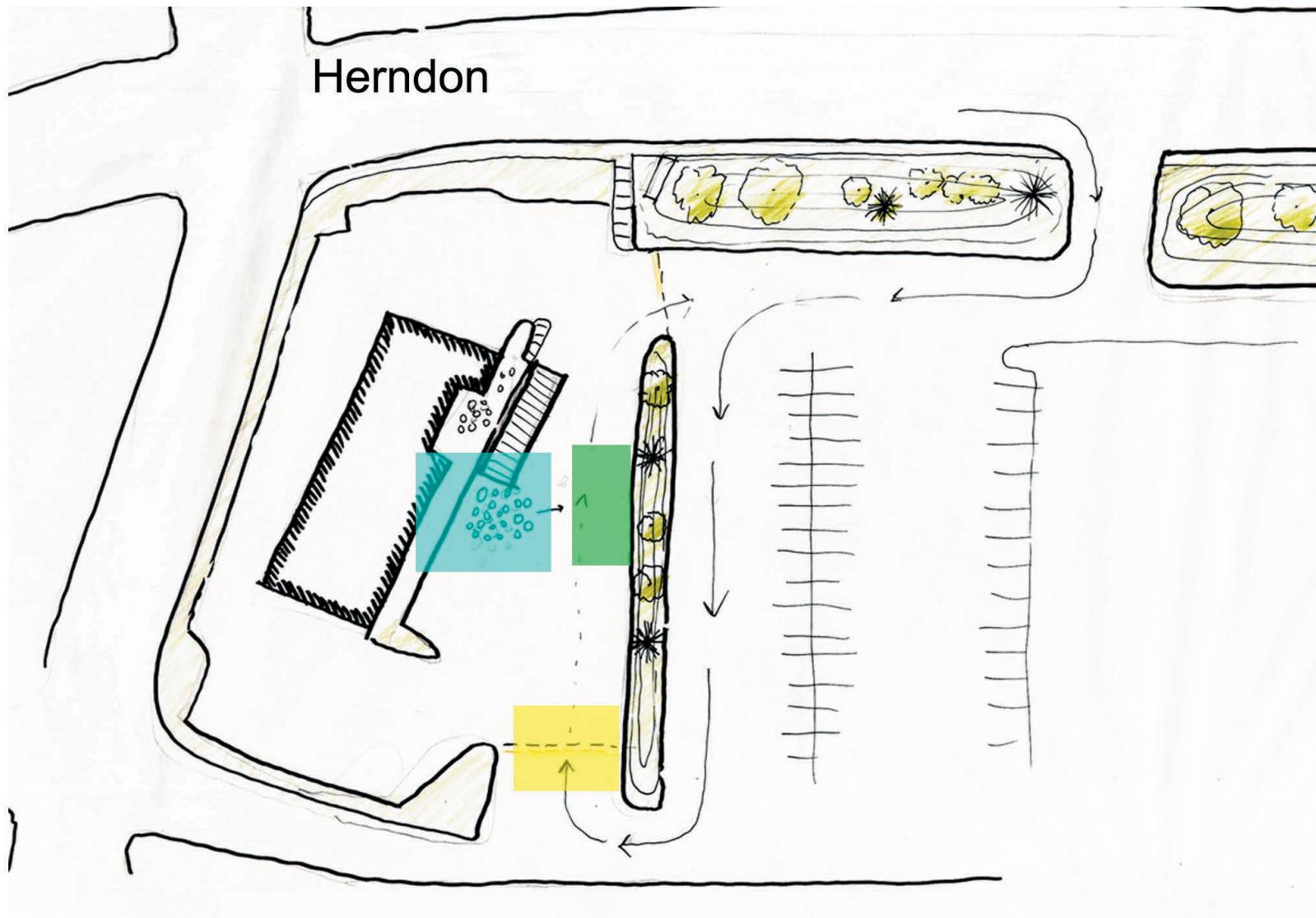


Fig. 2.11 -The Herndon Official Workers Center (HOWC) in Herndon, Virginia. Note how the three zones, which overlapped at the SEEC, are separate and distinct. This site functions better because of this separation.

Comparison

In the DC Metropolitan area, several other day labor sites have been installed or are scheduled to be opened soon. One of the most prominent is the Herndon Official Workers' Center (HOWC) located in Herndon, Virginia. This town is a suburb near the Dulles airport. The HOWC opened in November of 2005, and was the source of major controversy, attracting nationwide attention as the Minutemen targeted the site for observation and protests. Recent elections have centered on its continued operation, with plans made to relocate the site to a less suburban area.

I visited the Center soon after its opening in order to compare it to the layout and function of the SEEC. This visit proved very useful, and it was obvious that the site functioned much better than the SEEC. (See Fig. 2.11.) Like the SEEC, the site utilizes a raffle system to determine which of the workers get priority when employers approached, but there were some obvious differences which made the HOWC work better.

Management and design are the two factors of this improved operation. The most immediate management difference was that there were at least two administrators on site at the HOWC, as opposed to the one working at the SEEC. (In fact, there were three administrators when I was at the HOWC, but it could have worked with two). This allowed for greater management, and for a better utilization of the site's layout and design. One administrator was required to wait with the workers in the waiting zone (see Fig. 2.11, blue



Fig. 2.12 - Vehicular circulation at the HOWC is controlled by signage. This is where vehicles exit the site after hiring day laborers.

square), while the second stood at the contact zone (see Fig. 2.11, yellow square) and made first contact with the entering vehicles.

Another contrast was that the raffle was performed throughout the day, with only a few (up to five) tickets chosen at a time. At the SEEC, the raffle was done at the beginning of the day, and only ten lucky workers got picked. This was important because at the HOWC, the constant turnover of the raffle meant that it would have to be performed after those workers were selected. This gave the workers another reason to stay grouped around the waiting area, keeping them from wandering too far. At the SEEC, once the raffle was done at the beginning of the day, there was little reason to go back to the shed of the administrator; the raffle was done, so why not spread out and take your chance



Fig. 2.13 - The contact zone, at the other end of the site, is marked with a similar barrier and signage. .

es with rushing employers instead? At the HOWC, the raffle was much more actively managed, and served as a subtle means of controlling the spatial distribution of the workers in the waiting zone.

The design of the HOWC, particularly the elements of screening and circulation, worked much better than the SEEC. First, the site was screened from the main road by two large berms approximately six feet high, planted with small evergreens and shrubs. These blocked the view of the waiting workers, and kept them from watching the road and creeping farther up it, as they did at the SEEC site. Another berm divided the parking lot further, so that when vehicles entered, they were still screened from the workers as they approached the waiting site.

Second, the circulation of cars through the site



Fig. 2.14 - This is where HOWC employees wait to make first contact with employers.

was direct and orderly. Part of this was due to the previously-mentioned berms, but the HOWC had also made an effort to actively direct traffic in the most effective route. A stop sign blocked access to the most direct route into the site, ensuring that vehicles only entered from one direction. This predictable circulation route allowed for both laborers and administrators to relax and wait for the cars to approach them.

As the cars approached the contact zone (see Fig. 2.11, yellow square), they had to stop to speak to the waiting administrator (Figs. 2.13, 2.14). They would ask the driver what kind of workers they needed for the day, then radio over to the administrator waiting in the “blue zone.” This administrator had the complete attention of the waiting workers, and would determine (based on the raffle) which workers would be hired. As

the vehicle proceeded forward to the hiring zone (Fig. 2.11, green square), the workers were ready and walking over to meet the vehicle, where they climbed in and drove off. Workers only approached the vehicles if they had been cleared by the administrators as suitable for the employers' needs. This process seemed extremely orderly when compared with the confusing operation of the SEEC, and appeared to be much more satisfactory for both employers and day laborers.

The SEEC and HOWC can both be examined on a typological basis by comparing the day labor site with other types of space. These day labor sites don't fit into any of the categories mentioned above in the typological descriptions of public spaces, but have characteristics of many of them.

I found it useful to compare the sites with a waiting room. (See Fig. 2.15) Both spaces have the well-defined purpose of providing a comfortable setting to wait until some activity happens and the people can leave. Waiting rooms are usually indoors, with very controlled circulation. The day labor site is of necessity outdoors, with circulation controlled to varying degrees (SEEC vs. HOWC, for example). Both sites feature zones of waiting, and both have zones where hiring or some other activity that signals the end of the waiting period occurs. A waiting room often has an intermediary who negotiates this activity, and the day labor sites function better when they also have some kind of administrator.

The day labor sites I observed could be grouped

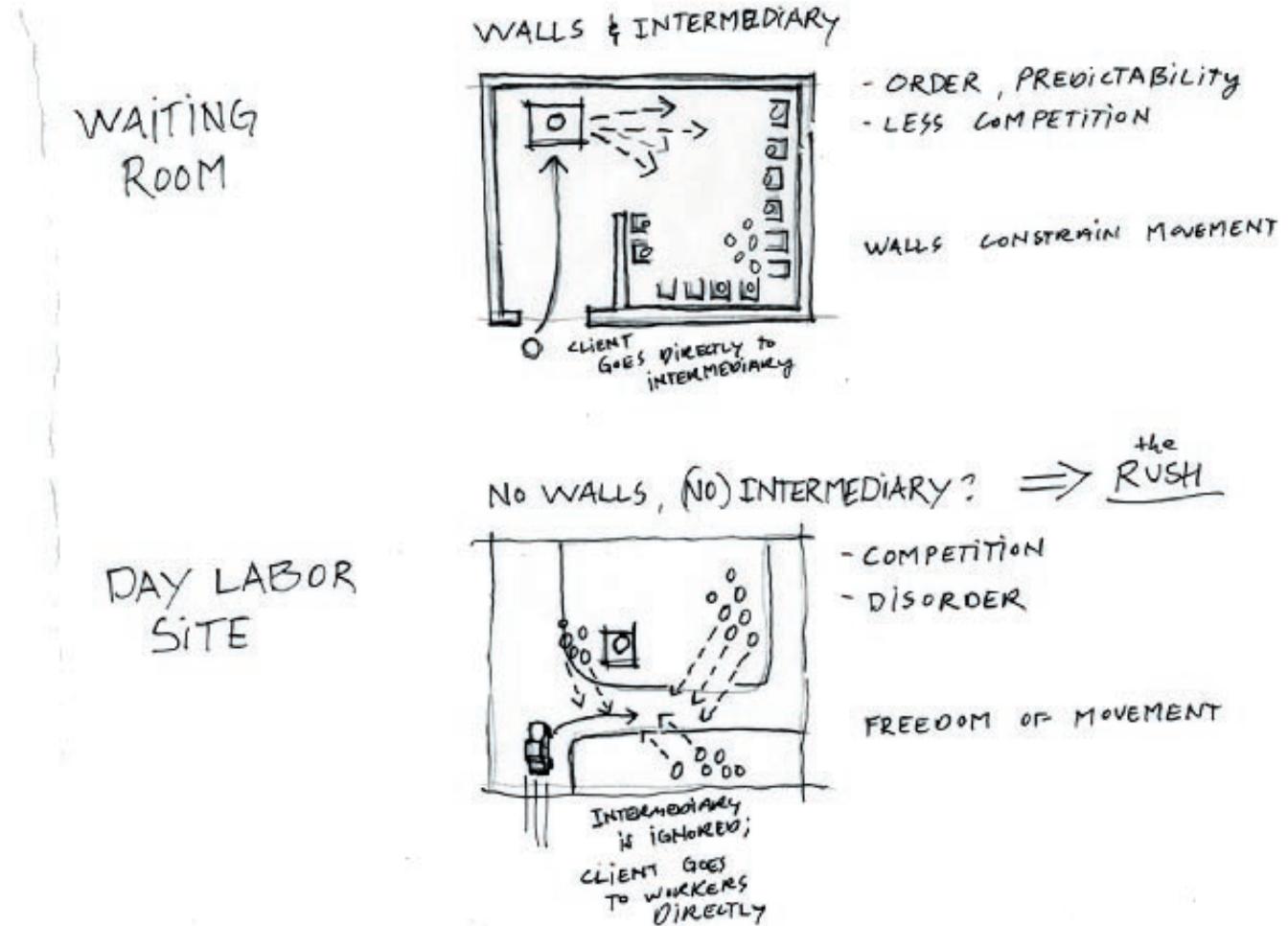


Fig. 2.15 - Comparison of a waiting room with a day labor site

into some of the typological categories described in the literature review. It's true that neither possesses the degree of spatial enclosure to achieve the status of "plaza" according to scholars such as Zucker. They might, however, fit into some of the categories outlined in *People Places*. Either site might qualify as an ur-

ban plaza or mini-park, depending upon the size and degree of hardscape and plantings found there. Both sites were definitely public, as they were sponsored by public agencies (though managed by non-profits), and did not have policies barring access to anyone. I saw people not associated with day labor passing through

the SEEC site many times (“incidental” users).

Ultimately, day labor sites like the SEEC could represent a new type of public space. In *People Places*, the authors describe a new type of public space: the communal space. This seems to be a kind of catch-all category for those spaces shared by specific groups that use an adjacent building, such as hospital gardens, school playgrounds, campus courtyards (Cooper Marcus and Francis, 1990). Day labor sites often fall into this category. The pavilion where men wait for employers is next to a building. However, it’s not next to the SEEC building. More importantly, the very identity of the SEEC is the outdoor pavilion. Without an outdoor space for waiting, there would be no reason for going there. The communal spaces described by Cooper Marcus and Francis are used often as secondary destinations; people are there because they first went to the hospital, or campus, or school. My thesis design aims to create such a space where people might go to a school building or day labor site, and simultaneously be occupying a more traditional neighborhood plaza as an accessory use.

Comparing the day labor sites to other types of public spaces is helpful in that it provides greater understanding necessary for my thesis design. Both sites could be reconfigured (likely at some cost and public opposition) to become neighborhood plazas. There is no reason to do this, as neither site was intended to serve such a variety of users. However, my thesis is to design a place that combines the functions of both

neighborhood plazas and day labor sites, and comparing these places to existing types gives me greater understanding of how this might be accomplished.

Recommendations

After observing both sites, I felt more qualified to make recommendations for the design of a new day labor site. This list is based on my own observations, conversations with the laborers using the sites, as well as those involved with their management and design.

Long road frontages

Workers said things were better when they could string out in a long line on Four Mile Run Road. A long frontage could improve the rushing by providing a more obvious cue to the laborers of how to arrange themselves while waiting for vehicles. However, the long frontage needs to be on secondary road, so it won’t disrupt traffic on the primary road (Shirlington Road).

Unobstructed, long views

These allow workers to see employers coming from a long way off. This is why the primary corner is so popular: it allows workers to see a long way up the street. As expressed in the theory of prospect and refuge, a long view is a view of the future, allowing people to see what lies ahead. For the workers, a long view lets them determine when an employer is arriving, and

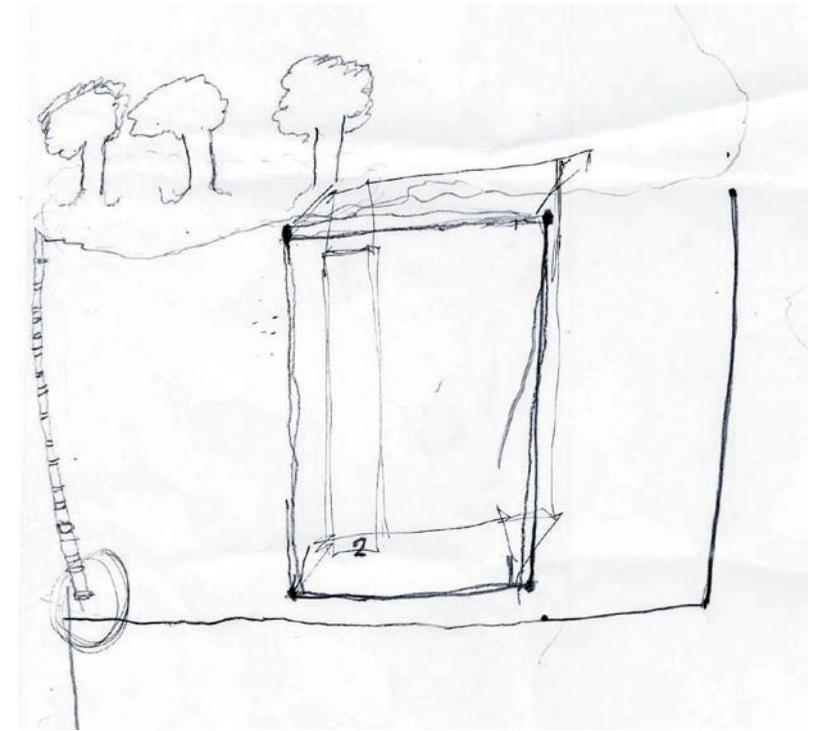


Fig. 2.16 - This drawing was done by a laborer to show what would make a better day labor pavilion.

whether it is someone they already know and should try to approach. I witnessed the value of long views many times, and heard directly from the workers how much they valued this. One even drew a picture of what an improved day labor site would look like, which included a second story “lookout.” (See Fig. 2.16).

Windbreaks and screening

This is a factor in increasing worker comfort. Trees could be good for this, though the ones on site weren’t adequate. Trees can also function as screening, which serves the important function of revealing views of approaching vehicles. Screening is the op-

posite of the unobstructed long views previously mentioned. When used together, screening and long views can help direct attention and circulation of workers and vehicles.

A place for the vending truck – Every day, a vending truck comes to the SEEC and HOWC sites for about an hour. At the SEEC, it parks in the lanes originally intended for employers to enter the site. While this works well for the workers and gets the truck out of traffic, it might be better situated elsewhere. An optimal location would be close to the waiting zone, but not blocking employers’ vehicles or workers’ views of the contact and hiring zones.

Reduction in “rushing”

This seems to be the main complaint by the workers, referring to the rushing behavior. This is an obvious recommendation, yet it’s the most difficult one to address succinctly, as it depends upon several aspects of management and design. It was ironic that while it was the main complaint by the workers, most of them participated in it. Since it was the only way to secure employment, they were forced to participate. This seemed to me an indication that the structure of the site significantly determined the behavior of the workers, who seemed to be stuck in this negative pattern of use.

Visibility

One of the most important lessons the SEEC and HOWC pavilions show is the fine balance of visibility. Neighborhood residents don’t want to see the day laborers, and they don’t want to see evidence of their presence. However, the sites must be advertised enough so that employers know where they are, or no laborers will assemble elsewhere.

One of the reasons the SEEC has been successful, according to Howard Hudgins, is that the site is just visible enough. It’s close enough to the road so that workers are visible to employers, but not so visible so that neighbors are bothered by the sight of the workers. It enjoys a historic association with the Weenie Beenie, which acted as a non-formal day labor site for years. The SEEC managed to secure an adjacent site, pulling in workers who were already going to the Weenie Beenie to wait for work (personal communication, November 25, 2005).

The HOWC is advertised mainly through signage and word of mouth. (See Fig. 2.17) The sign is in a somewhat visually-cluttered environment, but this isn’t as much of a factor since employers and laborers likely hear about the center through word-of-mouth or other means. The key factor of the HOWC is its degree of “hidden-ness:” it’s screened from one street by a large berm, and from another by a building.

It is difficult to make a definite recommendation on how to make the day labor sites just visible enough to be functional. Too much visibility will lead to com-



Fig. 2.17 - The entrance to the HOWC pavilion is advertised with signage.

plaints by neighbors, while lack of visibility might reduce the site’s use by workers, who need visibility for the site to function. This problem will have to be addressed based on the context of the particular site in order to achieve the right balance.

Significance and uniqueness of project

The SEEC pavilion and office is at the forefront of the social and political debate over illegal (and legal) immigration. Such efforts to accommodate a marginalized population are certainly progressive. The fate of the SEEC and HOWC will influence the creation of similar centers in the DC Metro region, and will likely serve as test cases for other cities and regions.

