

THE SEATTLE PUBLIC BATHHOUSE

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ABSTRACT

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As the city's population grows and densifies, it is increasingly important to preserve public space. Seattle and its surrounding context are rich with waterfront views and access potential. Sited on the shoreline of inner Shilshole Bay, the bathhouse seeks to renew the waterfront as a public threshold between the urban and the natural.

This public bathhouse also promotes social connectivity by bringing people to the waterfront through new civic and cultural spaces. The bathhouse is a meeting place for communal activity and public well-being. Located within a civic park, it creates a space for more frequent and longer human interactions, using water as the medium for renewal and social ritual to take place.

for my grandma,
Sheila Mary Beck Hughes
06.1931 | 12.2015

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fig. 01 Kayakers on Lake Union

INTRODUCTION

As the city's population grows and densifies, it is increasingly important to preserve public space. Seattle and its surrounding context are rich with waterfront views and access potential. As a city that predominantly uses our waterways for industry and commerce, we do not always have the opportunity to take advantage of the water for public enjoyment. Although there is an abundance of ways to get on the surface of the water, whether it is in a kayak or sailboat, there are many less options for getting in the water.

This thesis began by considering opportunities to enliven the waterfront and reconnect people to the water that our city has flourished around. One way to do this is to introduce new public activity. A public bathhouse was chosen as the case study for this activity. Bathing, a social ritual found in many cultures across the world, uses water as the common ground for activity and public life. Actively participating on the waterfront promotes bathing as a civic amenity that people can personally and socially enjoy while becoming more engaged with our dynamic shoreline.

The Seattle Public Bathhouse seeks to connect people to the waterfront and its place as the threshold between the urban and the natural. It tests bathing as an opportunity to increase public activity that both renews our connection to the water at the bay and also calls attention to water systems and their importance to human life. The bathhouse program activates an underutilized portion of Commodore Park along the west end of the Lake Washington Ship Canal. The project brings civic enjoyment to the use of a commercial waterway and their potential to exist together.

With our relatively mild climate, access to the waterfront has year round potential with the bathhouse as the focus of activity. Additionally, there are many social and cultural benefits of investing in this civic project for the city. The bathhouse benefits the park by bringing an activity to the shoreline that not only activates the land above the shore, but also the beach and access to the water. Programmatically, the bathhouse relies on an intense amount of water use. There is opportunity to open a dialogue and increase awareness towards the use of water within the city as well highlight our location at the water's edge. The bathhouse engages a sequence of bathing spaces, each unique in their atmosphere, for meeting and participating in a public and social ritual. The bathing spaces also register a sense of time as the bay's tide rises and falls. Each time the bather visits the bathhouse, the experience is unique and ever changing. This lively shoreline enhances the ritual of bathing, celebrating this place.

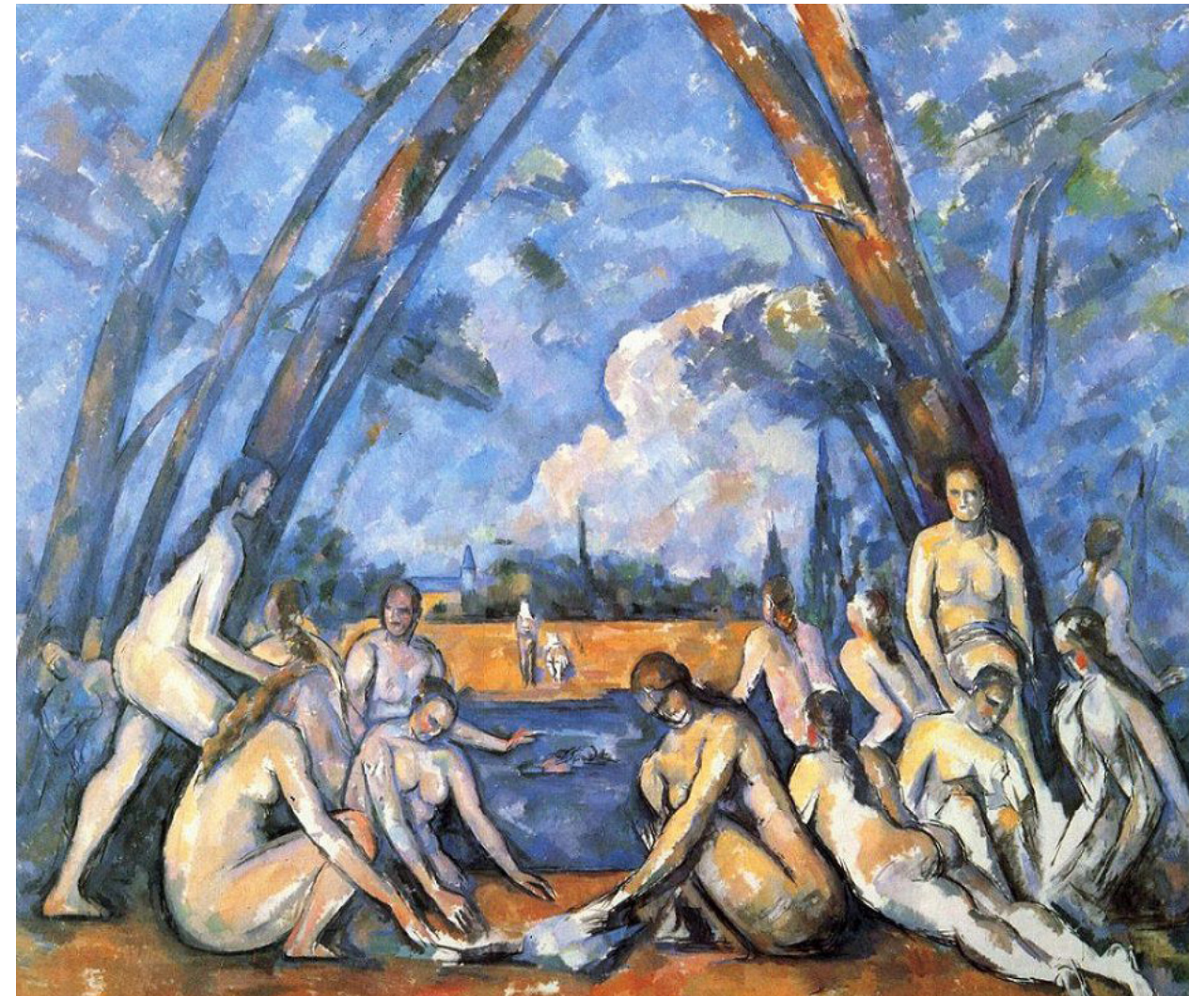


fig. 02 *The Large Bathers*, Paul Cezanne, 1906



CITIES ON THE WATER

Historically civilizations have built cities on the water. They have used water's power for the movement of goods and for building industry. As cities grow and change, so has the way they use the water's edge and human access to it.¹ Today this provides opportunity for cities to regain the public domain of these waterways and give them back to the city with a renewed sense of civic pride. New public projects are underway, reconnecting people to their waterfront. Currently working to tunnel one of its highways, the city of Seattle is reprioritizing its waterfront for people. The Alaskan Viaduct blocks downtown from the waterfront, but as part of the Waterfront Seattle project the viaduct will come down, as one of the major moves to revitalize this key destination in downtown, transforming the waterfront's priority from vehicle transportation to a people scaled vibrant civic amenity for everyone to enjoy.² With a new lens for the opportunities our waterfront brings, there is possibility to expand this reconnection throughout the city.

Shifting focus northwest of downtown to another part of the city that is currently heavily dictated by commercial activity is the Lake Washington Ship Canal. The west end is where Shilshole Bay meets the freshwater system at the Ballard Locks. The Locks are a feat of engineering and provide the ability to traffic commercial and recreational boats through Seattle. This area is both a visitor destination as well as a local commute path for bikers, it is a busy passageway 24-hours a day. Located along this commercial waterway is Commodore Park. This park focuses towards the Locks and provides a scenic promenade for visitors along the south side of the canal. There is opportunity in the park to reinvest people's participation in the water here, not only at the edge, as a bystander of boat activity.

fig. 03 Building the Locks, 1913



BATHING CULTURES

Bathing has been a part of world cultures since the development of the first cities. Dating to the 1st Century, Roman baths were a popular gathering place. The city emperor provided public baths as a way to centrally locate water use and offer a gathering place for his people. The architecture was utilitarian and took advantage of solar orientation to naturally heat the bathing spaces. Vitruvius, studying these principles, mentions siting the bathhouse to “look toward the winter sunset because when the setting sun faces us with all its splendor, it radiates heat, rendering this aspect warmer in the late afternoon.”³ The Romans utilized their immediate environment as a way of capturing heat directly where they wanted warmer spaces rather than relying solely on fuel to meet the high energy demands of the bathhouse. These early values carry through today and are precedent for using the local environment around us to serve every day functions. We can use orientation together with modern advancements in solar photovoltaic to capture heat from the sun and use it for heating water, among other energy demands.

fig. 04 Bathers of the Meiji era, Japan
fig. 05 Hamman, Slovakia, 1994, Ruth Kaplan



Another culture that traces bathing through their history is the Japanese. Tied closely with daily practices and Shintoism, the bath is much more than a place to cleanse and wash. It emphasizes the Japanese attitude towards a life of natural purity and simplicity. Japanese bathing is not about speed and efficiency, but rather a communal ritual of purification and well-being.⁴ The Sento is the Japanese Public Bath, they can be found in cities throughout the country: “public bathhouses in Japanese cities have played a role as community gathering places for the last four hundred years.”⁵ Usually open in the late afternoon through the evening, bathers enjoy a soothing and relaxed environment with friends and family after work. The bathing ritual begins with washing before entering the deep tub for soaking. After the bath, it is common to share food and drink with friends, the bathing experience is a social activity as much as it is about washing and relaxation.

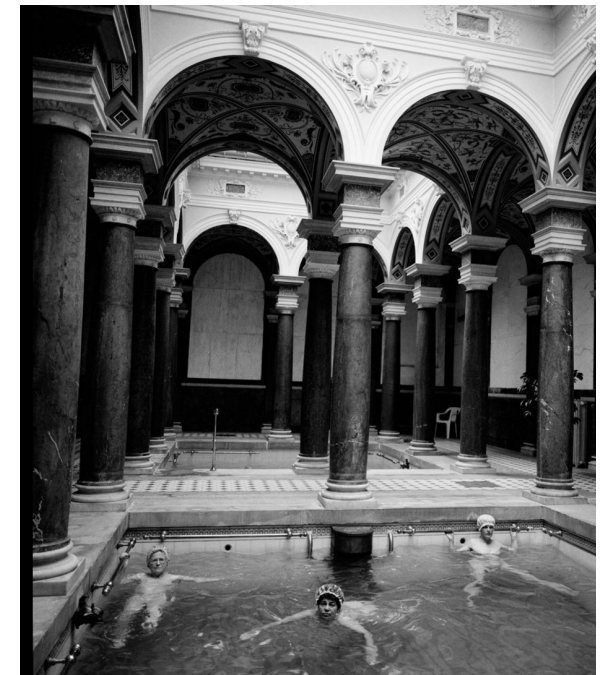


fig. 06 Hot spring, Iceland, 2002, Ruth Kaplan
fig. 07 Lukacs baths, Budapest, 1994, Ruth Kaplan

fig. 08 Hot spring, Iceland, 2002, Ruth Kaplan
fig. 09 Mineral pool, Czech Republic, 1994, Ruth Kaplan



fig. 10 A pool at Nautholsvik Beach in Reykjavik,
Massimo Vitali

Shifting focus to another region of the world where communal bathing is still ever present, the Nordic countries take full advantage of various bathing rituals. From the Finnish Sauna to the Icelandic outdoor baths, these cultures embrace bathing on a daily basis all year long. The public baths, or sundlaugs, in Iceland are the central activity of the small towns scattered across the landscape. Icelanders visit their local bath every day to relax and socialize. The baths are not only associated with abundant health benefits, similar to the Japanese Furo, they are also places of civic pride and social gathering. This culture grows up with the bathing tradition, passing it on to younger generations as soon as they learn to swim; it is a place of daily refuge and common meeting ground.⁶

“All around me was the soft white noise of a community. The conversation; the connection; the freedom, within that flurry of sociability, to withdraw and simply be within yourself.” - Dan Kois, NY Times contributing writer, Iceland's Water Cure, 04.19.2016

The sauna is the Finnish culture's bathhouse. Bathing takes the form of perspiring in a wood clad room; the dry heat bath has healing properties for the skin and personal relaxation. Finns often bath every day from childhood through very old age. In Finland, wood is abundant and historically the sauna was both built of wood as well as heated by a smoke sauna stove. Today these stoves are typically replaced by prefabricated stoves that heat faster and are safe in city environments. The sauna ritual follows steps, similar to other cultures, cleansing or showering is required prior to entering the sauna. Because of the intense heat, bathers usually sit through alternating rounds of heat and cooling. The average bather enjoys about twenty minutes in the sauna before leaving to cool off. If the sauna is next to a naturally cool body of water, bathers take the opportunity to jump in, quickly experiencing the other end of extreme temperature. It is cold and refreshing.⁷



MODERN PRECEDENTS

On a recent studio trip to Copenhagen, Denmark, I was inspired by the city's dedication to public city life. There are countless projects, with a variety of programs that support the people of Copenhagen as city dwellers. These projects provide the ability for the public to engage with their city in an intimate context. A Copenhagen based architecture firm, Gehl Architects specializes in studying and creating usable and inviting public spaces. They believe in public life in cities that is made up of 'buildings and activities that support spaces that support life.'⁸ As the firm practices design in the public realm it is important to account for the positive components that make a public space function. From the pedestrian scale to the way our senses react to our environment, these details factor into a well-designed space that people enjoy being in. Considering the 'city as meeting place' and the potential for the bathhouse to become one of many public meeting places throughout the city. This is an opportunity to make a public and social space along the waterfront.⁹ One example project that engages with these ideas is the Kastrup Sea Bath along the Øresund Sea.



As a focal point in the 2005 revitalization effort of the Amager Strandpark, in Copenhagen, the Kastrup Sea Bath brings new life to a shoreline beach that had previously fallen into neglect. The project is a jetty, extending out from the beach, to provide a protected swimming area in the Øresund Sea. The simple program includes jumping platforms, changing rooms, swimming and bathing area, as well as plenty of lounging space for sunbathing. Although swimming only happens from summer to late autumn, the bath structure is widely visited throughout the year and is a cherished part of the park.¹⁰ The ability to bathe in the natural water was the purpose of the project, the architecture not only supports this activity, but it also encourages other events such as walking along the beach promenade or lounging at the beach structure, partaking in social engagement with others who are enjoying the baths. Copenhagen is a city that supports public projects that support public life. This is just one example that activates the water's edge for people to use and enjoy as part of the public realm.

fig. 11 Kastrup Sea Bath
fig. 12 Summer day at Kastrup Sea Bath, White Architects



Cities have long been developing along waterways, using water's power for growth of industry. It is now time to revitalize these waterfronts as places for human habitation and public use. By introducing a new program at the water's edge, bathing, rich with world history and tradition, sparks activity and invites the public to participate in renewing our connection to water. As seen through many cultures, bathing is a socially engaging activity, often at the focus of daily life. The bathing experience varies throughout the world, but water is always present. It is both used for its cleansing ability but also provides a place for relaxation and gathering - it is the medium for exchange and interaction. The bathhouse becomes a meeting place in the city, taking advantage of our unique location and the powerful presence of water. As a gathering place, we reclaim the importance of water for public use and that it is an amenity everyone can enjoy year round.

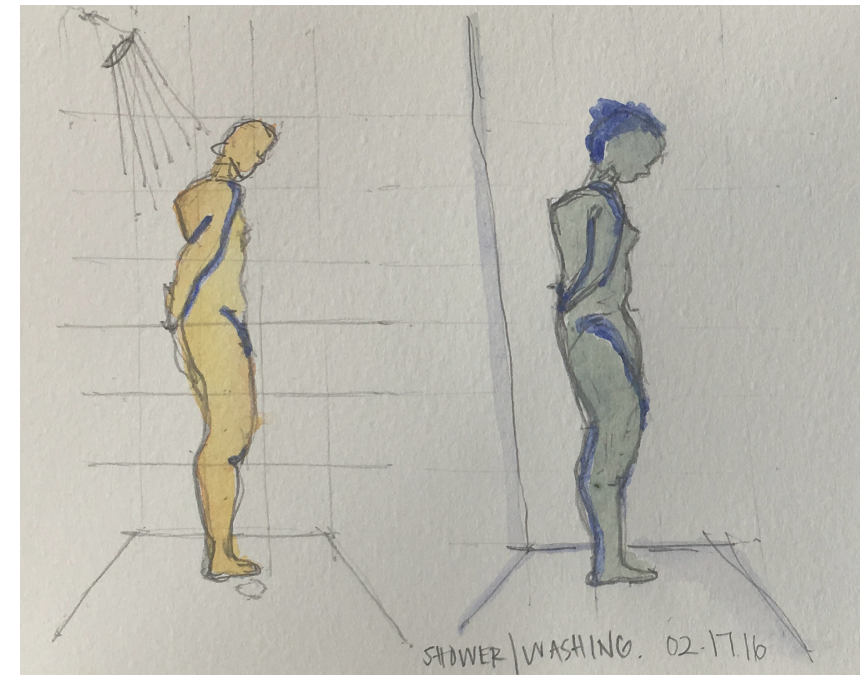
fig. 13 Process Pin-up



RITUAL OF BATHING

The bathhouse program focuses on the ritual of bathing and the support spaces it needs to create a rich and engaging bathing experience. These experiences create different opportunities for social interaction based on the design and unique atmosphere of each bath. The procession and use of the bathhouse follows a sequence of spaces beginning upon arrival. In this case study, the anticipation to begin the bathing ritual starts as visitors reach Commodore Park, before crossing under the Salmon Bay Bridge. This anticipation slows as visitors enter at the lobby and continue on to the changing spaces. Cleansing signifies the beginning of the bathing experience.

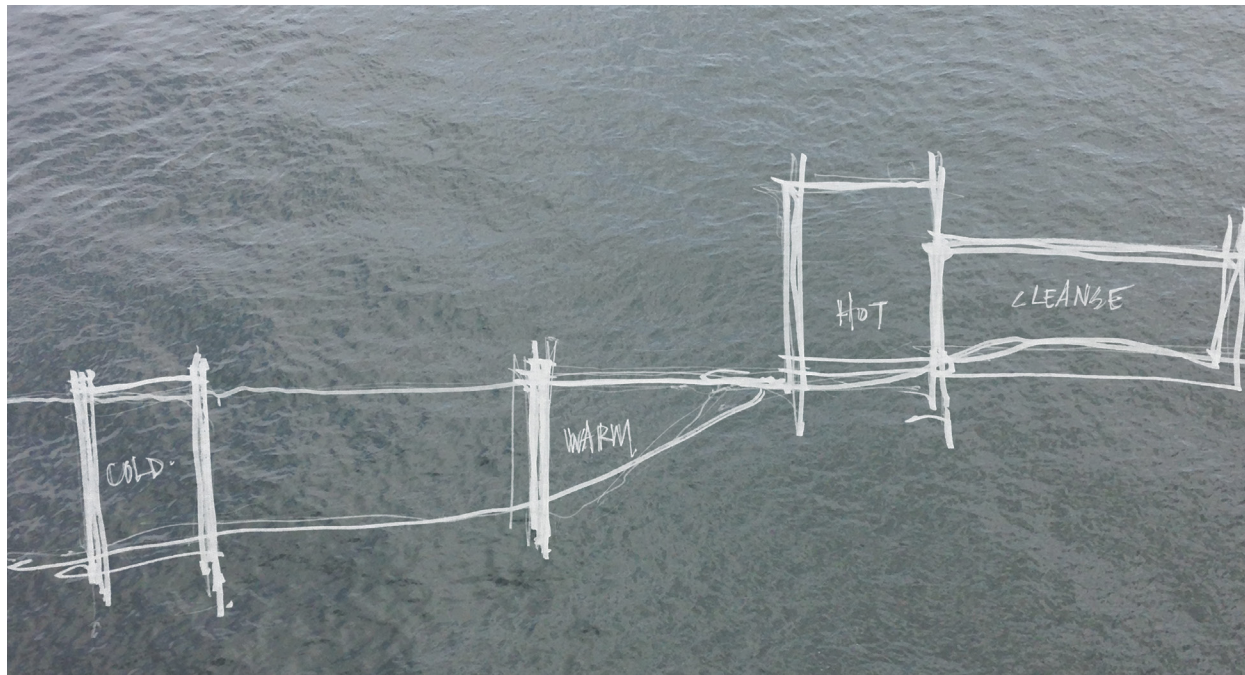
In American culture cleansing and bathing are interchangeable words for the same routine experience. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to define and understand the distinction between the two terms. Cleansing begins the ritual of bathing by washing with soap to rid oneself of outside dirt and daily activity. This experience is quick and is part of the preparation for bathing. After washing in the shower, bathers are ready to partake in the bathing sequence.



To bathe is to be enveloped by water, to soak and find renewal. The ritual is slow and should not be rushed, this allows the bathing experience to saturate; the water has properties to heal the human body and spirit. The bather must be present in the experience, both with themselves and with those around. It is a spiritual connection, a ritual connection.

Bathing is about participation in the experience and the bathhouse as a meeting place. This participation in the baths creates a more engaging public space by observing and connecting with those around. A bather may arrive to find refuge in solitude, but as they become more comfortable and invested in the experience, they share in it with others. Simply being present is a form of sharing; it does not have to be about an exchange. As bathers move through the sequence there is opportunity to become more interactive as it feels comfortable.

fig. 14 Bathing, watercolor study
fig. 15 Cleansing, watercolor study



After washing, bathers circulate between three baths: the hot sauna, the warm social bath and the cold plunge. Each bath, unique in temperature calls different senses to the forefront of the experience, engaging the bather in active and passive forms of communication with the immediate environment. This environment is the bath itself, but it is also with the other bathers in the space. The bath is a social space where a range of social activities can take place; the most informal is being present and sharing the same space with others, observing what is happening: seeing and hearing.¹¹ For example, rather than creating one large sauna, the space is split for two. This does two things for the atmosphere. One is to ensure the proper temperatures can be reached by creating a smaller space to heat. The other is so that bathers feel the intimacy of the space, it is internal and inviting to engage in making personal connections, there is a closeness here that is not the same as in the larger warm bath.

fig. 16 Bath Sequence Diagram
 fig. 17 The Hot Spring, Kokei Kobayashi, 1918



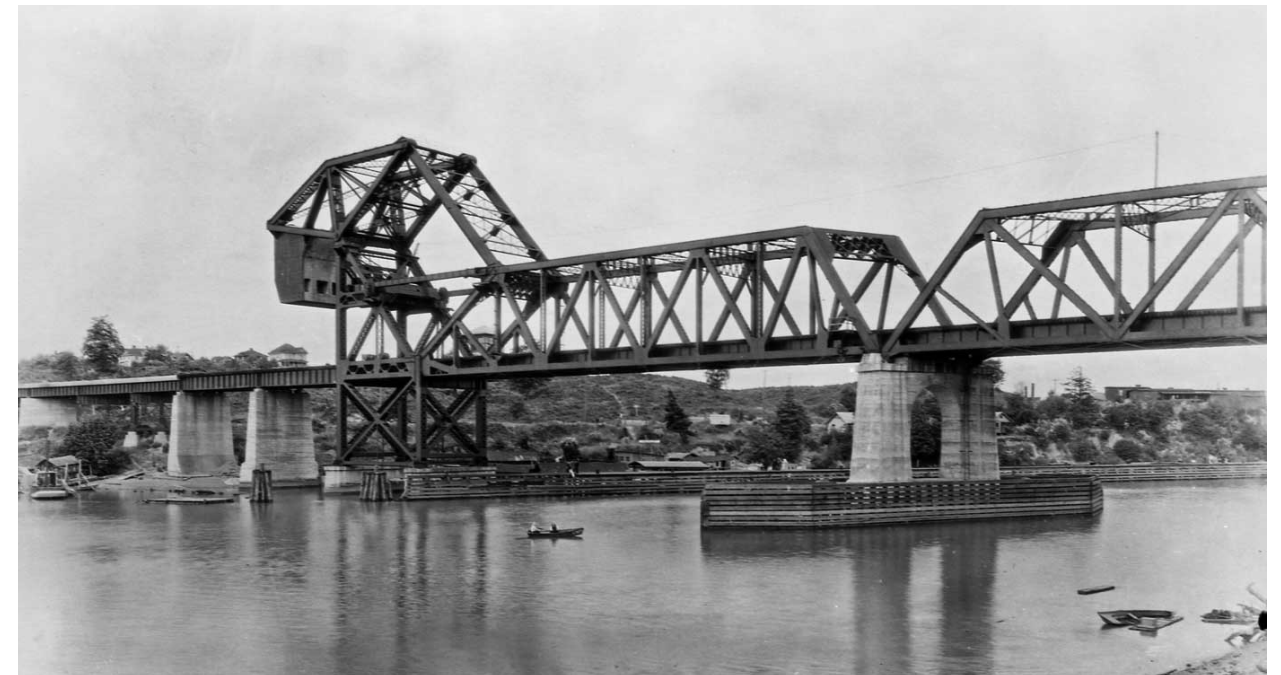


THE SITE

Seattle is a city surrounded by water. In searching for ways to reconnect Seattleites to the water, there is also opportunity to highlight the ways we already use our waterways in the city. The place where Shilshole Bay meets the Ballard Locks exists an intersection of many different systems. It is where salt and fresh waters meet, where a commercial waterway also ferries recreational boater traffic and the strength and importance of the natural surroundings meets the urban and industrial districts of Ballard and Magnolia.

Located within Commodore Park, along the south shoreline of inner Shilshole Bay, the bathhouse site seeks to activate the west end of the park. As it is today, the Salmon Bay Railway Bridge visually separates the site from the rest of the park. The site naturally slopes towards the water, and quickly begins to steepen at the edge of the shoreline. The bridge is part of the site, encouraging the public bathhouse to link back to the rest of the park. A programmatic tie between the two sides will be studied more closely.

fig. 18 Shilshole Bay
fig. 19 Salmon Bay Bridge



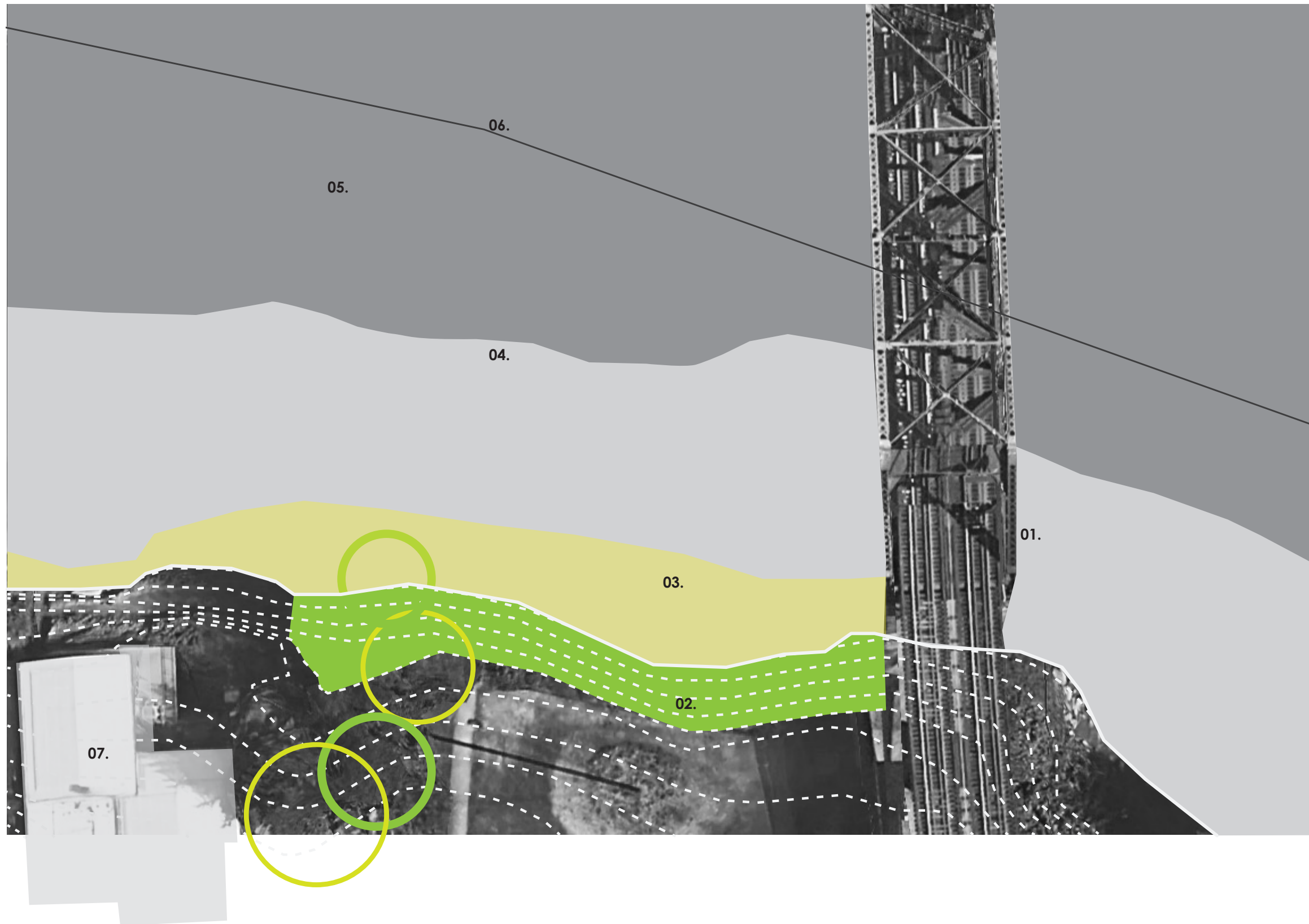
The influence of the local context for this project is very diverse, from highly engineered waterways to the east, rail line traffic above, residential neighbors to the west and the natural conditions of the waterway as it flows out to the Sound. The scope of conditions on site are dynamic and the program is vulnerable to the natural water system. The bathhouse program takes advantage of this vulnerability to integrate the bathing spaces into the local water system both with the changing tides plus rainwater collection and distribution on site. These many important systems all work within a few hundred feet of each other, it is a busy intersection of activity, one that the bathhouse seeks to advocate for while cultivating a stronger civic and human engagement at this place along the shoreline.



fig. 20 Existing Site Conditions

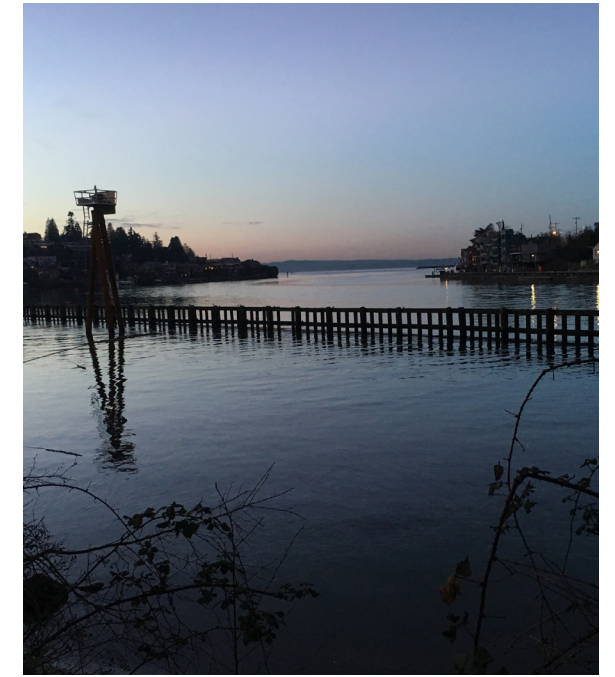


fig. 21 Context Map



- 01. Salmon Bay Bridge
- 02. Steep Slope
- 03. Beach
- 04. High Tide
- 05. Low Tide
- 06. Boat Tie
- 07. Residential

fig. 22 Shoreline Diagram



One question to ask in this exploration is: how can we grow this activity in a positive way and improve the existing conditions while providing an enjoyable place for people to gather and connect with the water? There is potential here for the bathhouse to become a central meeting place for Seattleites and visitors alike, sharing in a reconnection to the water in a local and intimate context. It is a place where civic engagement exists in an industrial, residential and natural space. Through the site, its context, and the bathing program, the bathhouse's goal is to create a place for more frequent and longer human interactions, using water as the medium for the ritual and renewal to take place.

fig. 23 Low tide, midday
fig. 24 Tide coming in, late afternoon

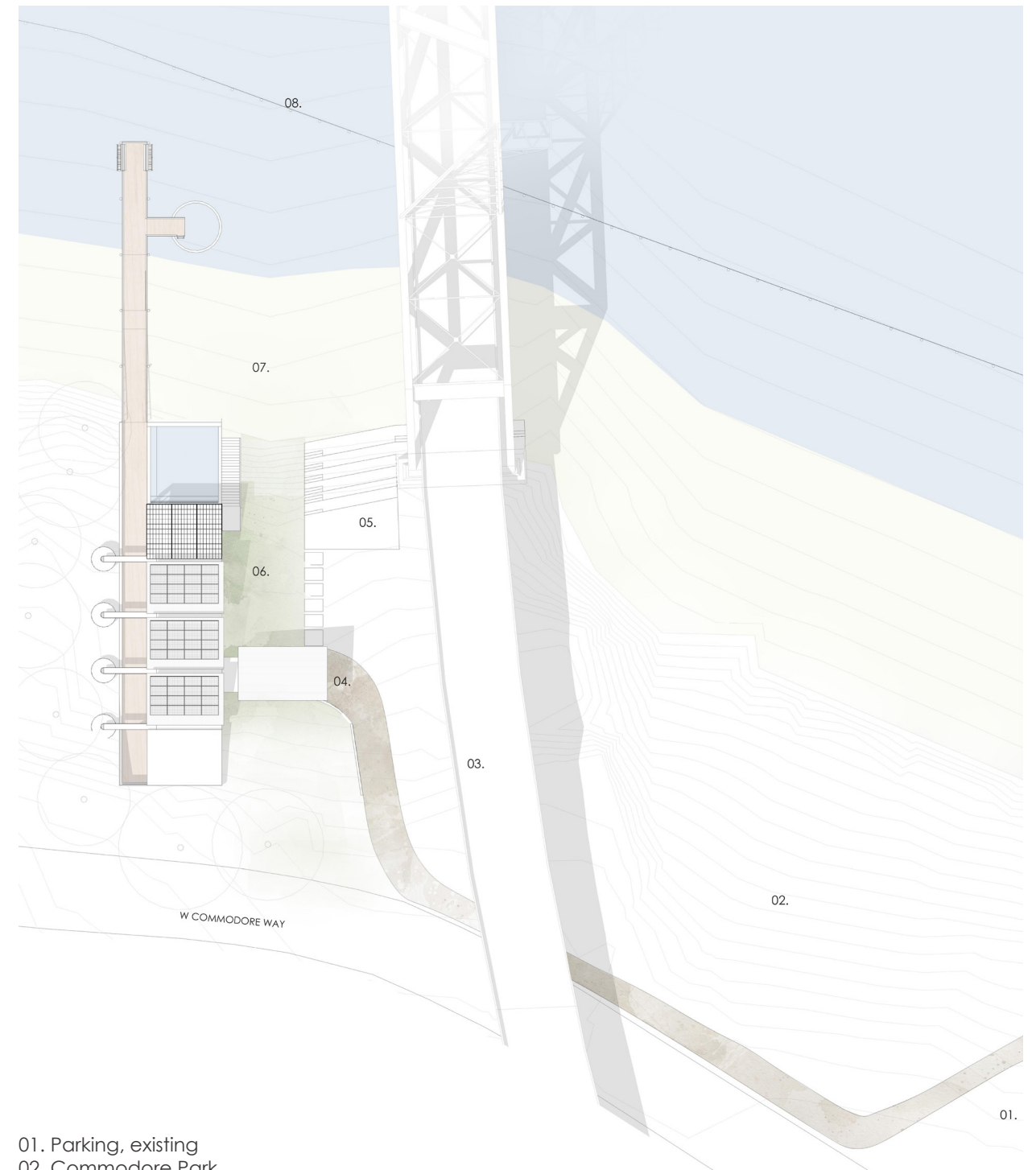
fig. 25 High tide, sunset
fig. 26 High tide, evening



fig. 27 Design Process

SITE RESPONSE

The bathhouse serves as an extension of Commodore Park by activating an underutilized area, west of the Salmon Bay Bridge. Today it is an un-programmed space and the bridge isolates the bathhouse site from the rest of the park. The challenge is to create a bathhouse that has an inviting and active character while strengthening its relationship to the bridge and the rest of the park. The bathhouse relates to the linear quality of the bridge as it extends out over the waterway. Anchored at the south end of the site, the linearity of both the bathhouse and the bridge is reinforced as they project out over the waterway. The bathhouse site also connects to the bridge through integrated public seating along one of the bridge's concrete pylons at the shoreline. The seating steps down to the beach below, inviting people from the grassy park to venture down to the beach and water at low tide. It was important to explore ways of strengthening the connection at the shoreline both within the bathhouse but also in the park. The steps and seating achieve this relationship by encouraging people to explore the shoreline during high and low tides while providing circulation and a place to rest in between.



- 01. Parking, existing
- 02. Commodore Park
- 03. Salmon Bay Bridge
- 04. Entry to Bathhouse
- 05. Public stepped seating
- 06. Constructed wetland
- 07. Beach access at lowtide
- 08. Boat tie

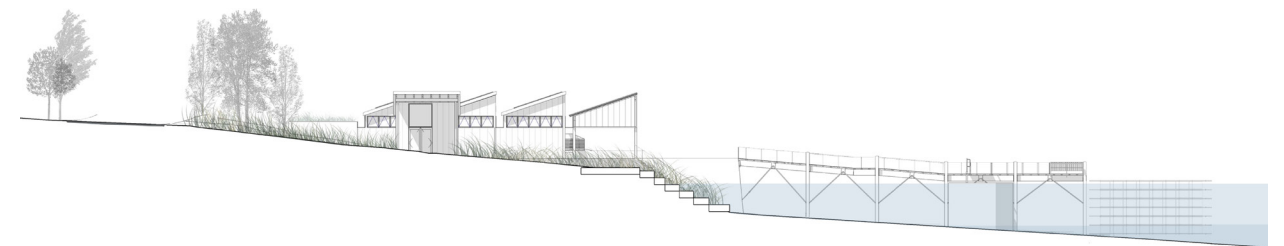
fig. 28 Site Plan



One-way the bathhouse creates a distinct focus of activity is by bringing attention to the natural qualities along the commercial waterway. The bathhouse directs views out towards Shilshole Bay and the Olympic Mountains beyond. The east side of Commodore Park focuses towards the locks and serves as an extension of the pedestrian path across the waterway between Ballard and Magnolia. By directing the bathhouse's attention towards the west, it balances the park's views towards both the industrial and natural setting. Furthermore, the bathhouse's architectural scale seeks to strengthen and stabilize this site as the threshold between industrial, residential and natural. The bathhouse relates to the industrial surroundings through the roof form, while also remaining quiet in comparison to the industrial scale of the steel bridge. This quietness mediates between the industrial scale and the residential scale adjacent to one another.

The bathhouse is organized by the procession through the bathing ritual. This procession begins with the approach to the bathhouse. There is a sense of discovery as the visitor starts on the path to the site, leading from the promenade at Commodore Park. From

fig. 29 Approach to Bathhouse
fig. 30 East Elevation



the park, views through the bridge's concrete pylons hint at the bathhouse beyond. Overhead, the Salmon Bay Bridge is a threshold to the bathhouse site, a reminder of this industrial part of the city and the commercial activity that passes through. Walking under the bridge, the anticipation builds as the bathhouse emerges into view.

The building is oriented north to south. It nestles into the landscape at the southern end of the site, which serves as a buffer between the bathhouse and W. Commodore Way. The linear qualities of the bathhouse are highlighted as the building extends out towards the water. The sawtooth roof forms end at the shoreline, allowing the pier to continue circulation, as it extends out over the water. The pier provides views of the natural surrounding as it extends out from the shoreline, as well as an opportunity to plunge into the sea water. On the east side of the building, a constructed wetland serves as a natural buffer between the programmed bathhouse and the rest of the park. This separation enhances the bathing ritual by providing a soft and natural buffer between the linear bathing spaces and the leisurely activity of the park.

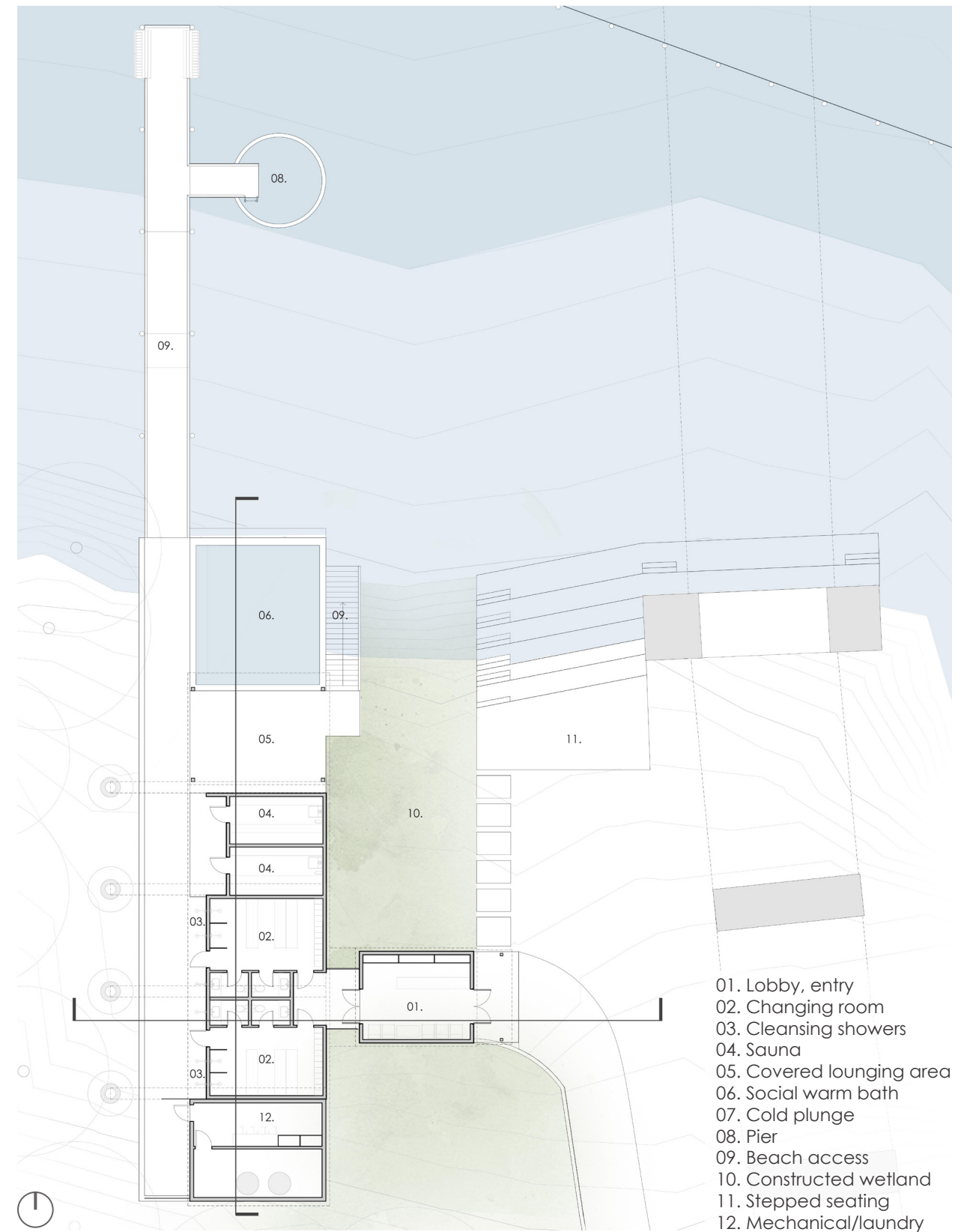


BUILDING RESPONSE

As visitors arrive, the gravel path leads directly to the entry and lobby of the bathhouse. In the lobby, the bathhouse attendant greets visitors, hands out towels and describes the baths and water use on site. It was important in the development of the program to distinguish one entry point to the building. The bathhouse is a civic amenity in the park, and although it can be discovered along the path, the entry is the threshold into the bathing experience. The lobby serves as the central location to welcome visitors to participate inside. This provides one place for visitors to gather and enter into the changing rooms before experiencing the bathing spaces.

Once inside the building, visitors change and cleanse to begin the bathing ritual. Cleansing signifies that the bather is ready to partake in the ritual by washing themselves of outside dirt, they are can now join the bathing procession. The cleansing space occupies the west wall of the changing spaces with indoor and outdoor showers. The cleansing showers serve as a threshold onto the circulation path.

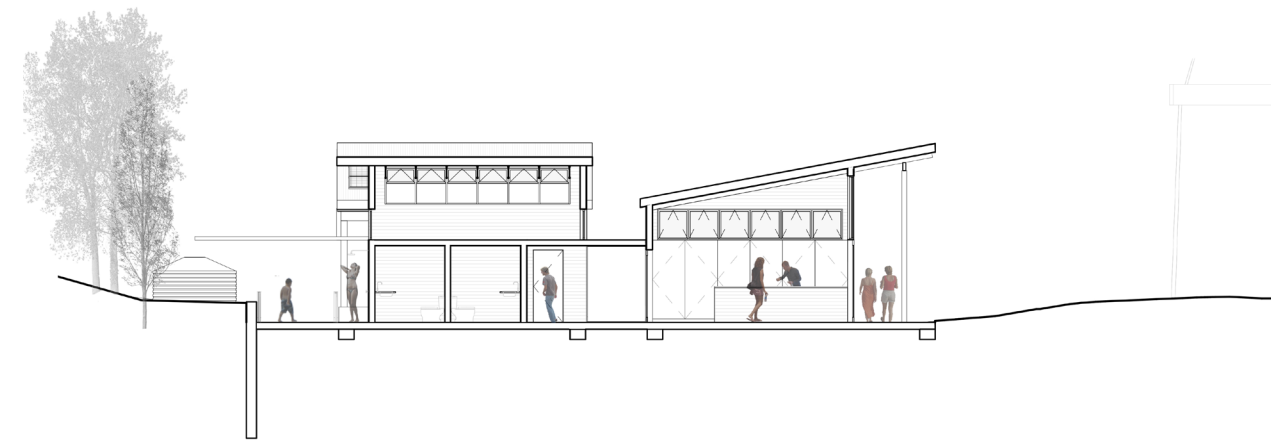
fig. 31 Arrival to Bathhouse
fig. 32 Floor Plan



- 01. Lobby, entry
- 02. Changing room
- 03. Cleansing showers
- 04. Sauna
- 05. Covered lounging area
- 06. Social warm bath
- 07. Cold plunge
- 08. Pier
- 09. Beach access
- 10. Constructed wetland
- 11. Stepped seating
- 12. Mechanical/laundry

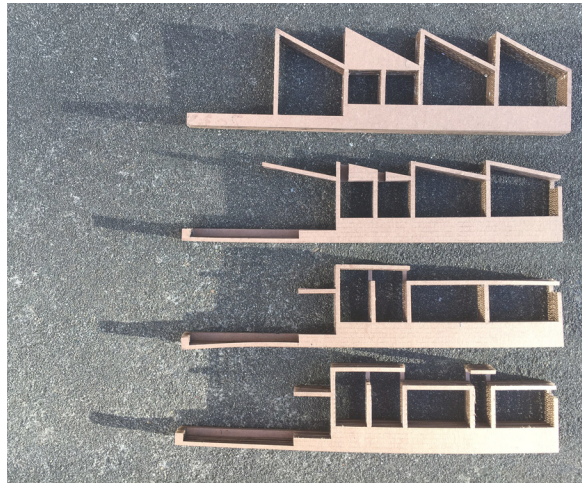


fig. 33 Cleanse
fig. 34 Transverse Section



This linear circulation path brings the bather to each bathing space. The pathway not only organizes the bather's procession, but it also brings attention to the movement and use of water on site. The bathhouse is an opportunity for humans to participate in the local water system. The program begins with cleansing people, similarly water that is collected on-site must be filtered before it is used within the bathhouse.

Overhead, the gutters celebrate water collection off of the sawtooth roofs while strengthening the linear rhythm of human circulation to the bathing spaces. The large steel gutters bring water to the rain collection cisterns that line the west edge of the path. This is an education opportunity to showcase the potential of using water that is treated on-site for the use in public buildings. It is especially important for this civic building because of the energy and water intensive program.



The roofs, sloped to the south for solar/PV, collect rainwater which is channeled to the outdoor cisterns. These cisterns are visible to bathers along the circulation path. The collected water is then pumped inside and sanitized for use in the sinks, showers, sauna, social bath and laundry. After use in the bathhouse, it becomes greywater and is filtered by the constructed wetland system before returning to the natural cycle. The ability to trace water through the building and site enhances the program's relationship to the place. Water is the most important element in this social space. It is the medium for the bathing ritual to take place. By collecting and using water on site, the design highlights and celebrates water throughout the bathing experience.

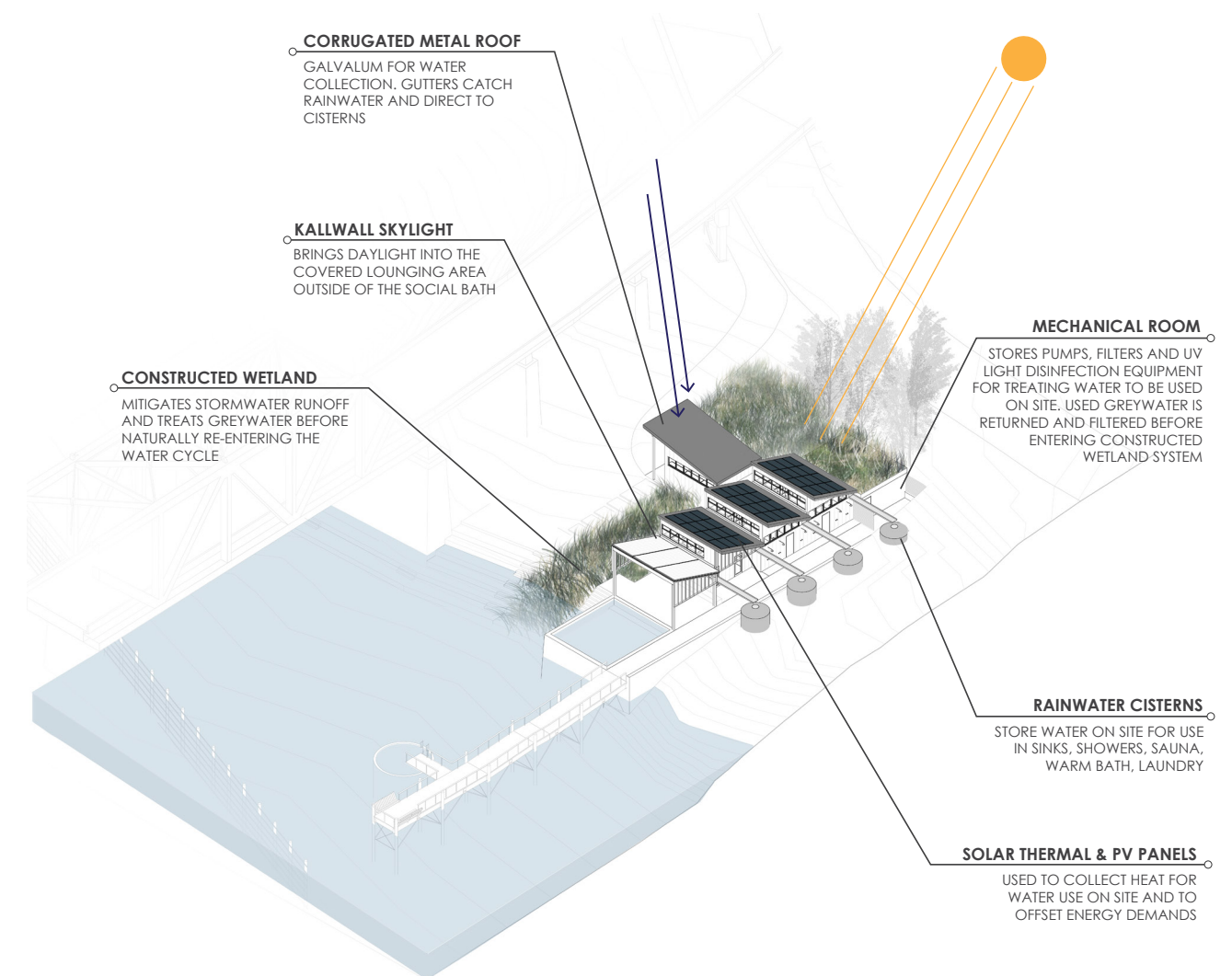


fig. 35 Section Study Models
fig. 36 Site Systems Diagram



BATHING PARTICIPATION

The bathing ritual is a participatory experience. Sharing intimate space with others, water is the common ground. The first bathing space along the procession is the sauna. In this space, bathers immerse themselves in the hot steam. The ceiling is low, keeping the warm air in. The skylights dapple light from above in the otherwise low-lit space. Bathers control the desired temperature by pouring water over the hot stones, creating the dry heat. The sauna experience is internal and quiet. Two bathers may share in a soft conversation; the atmosphere slows the senses and intensifies the feeling of sweat building on the surface of the skin. The smell of the cedar interior is strong and soothing. The bathing experience beings with relaxation and tuning the bather's sense to the immediate environment. The bather is present here, there are no outside distractions and the atmosphere encourages participation in the bathing space. This participation is about an awareness to the surroundings, observant and absorptive.

fig. 37 Sauna

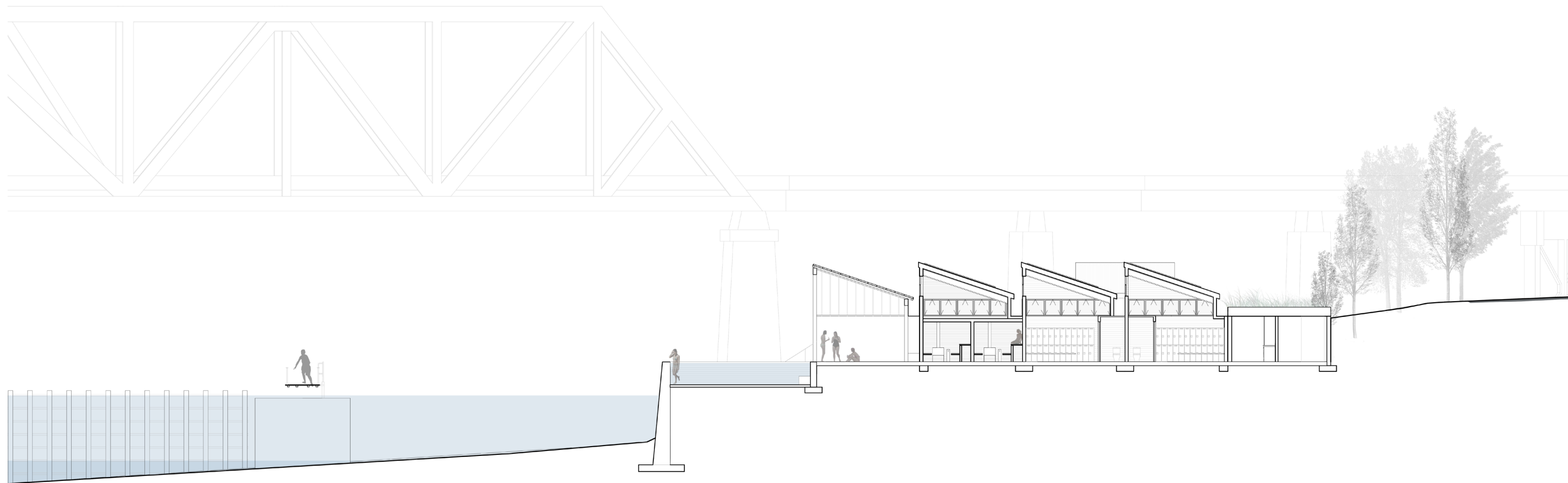


fig. 38 Site Section

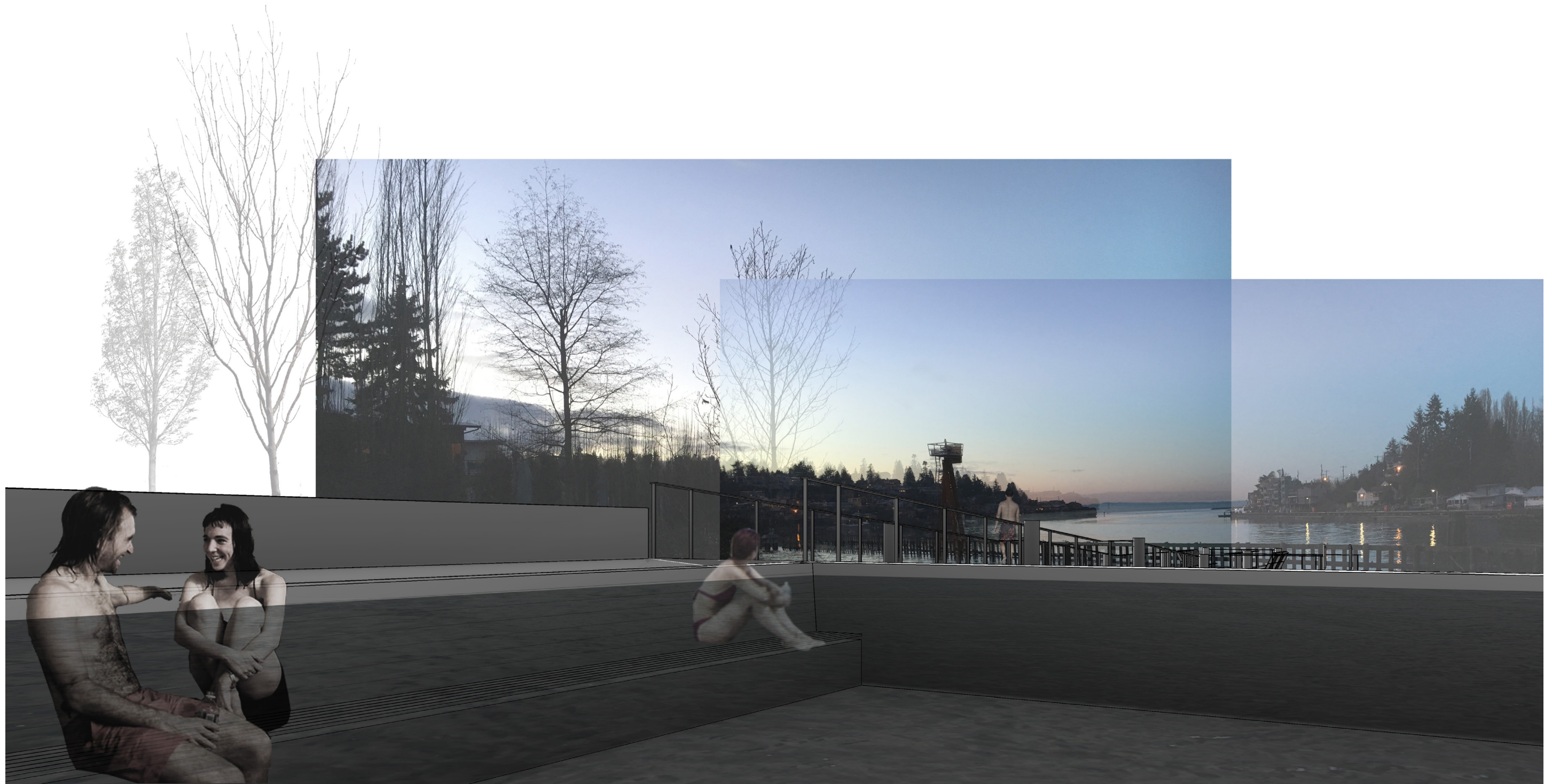
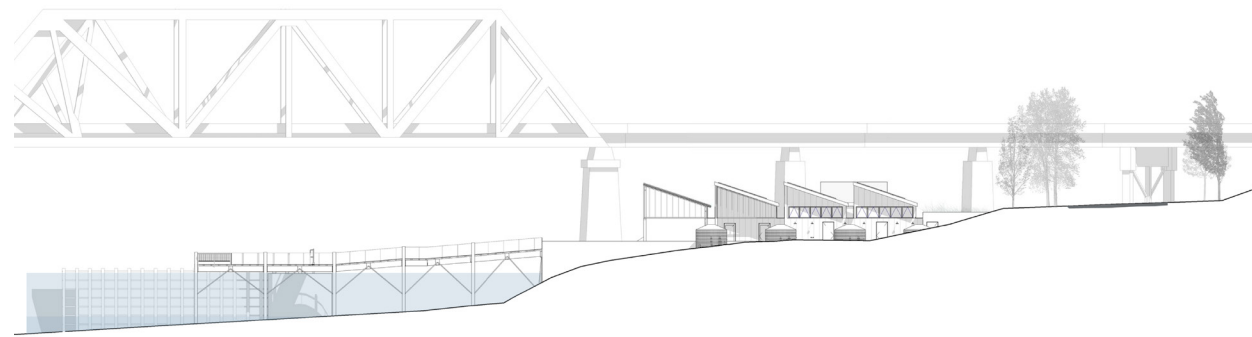
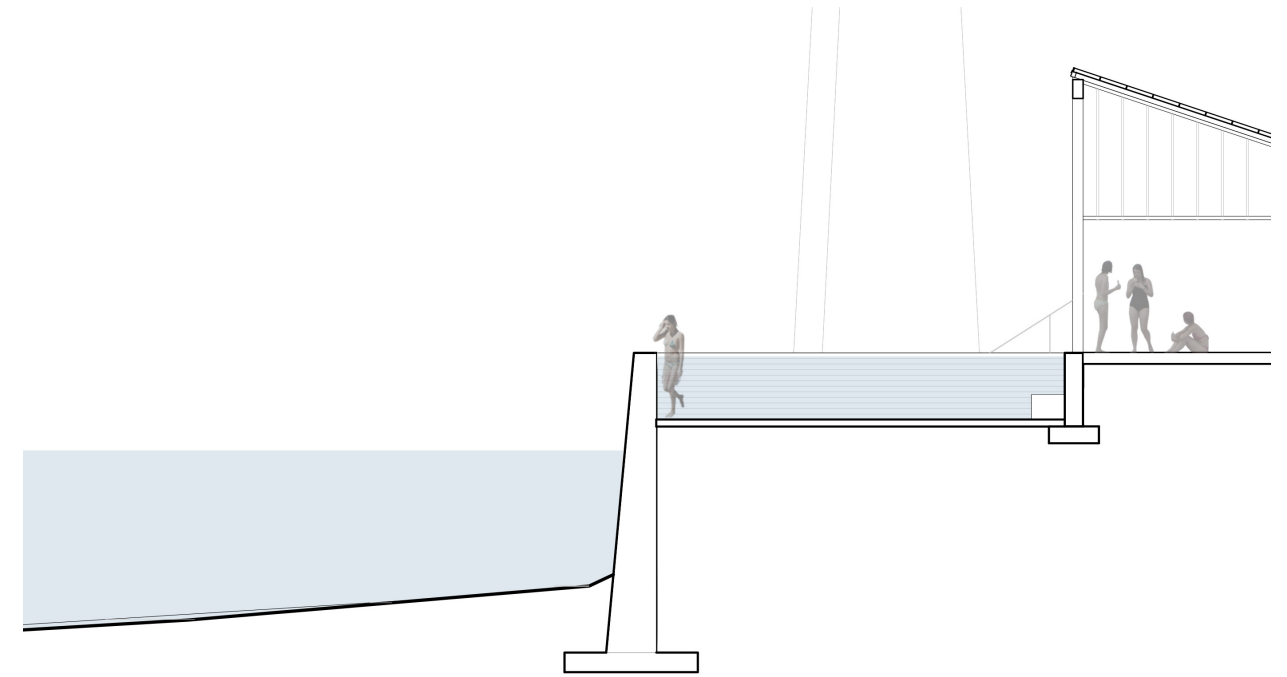


fig. 39 Social Bath



The second bath along the procession is the social bath. It is an outdoor bath and the largest of the bathing spaces. This bath encourages active social engagement with other bathers in the space. Bathers can sit in the warm bath, which is deep enough for the water to cover the shoulders. Steps into the bath double as seating. Lounging out of the bath is encouraged and there is a covered seating area for relaxing. This space is the focal meeting place in the bathhouse. There is a sense of joy and refuge in this bathing experience.

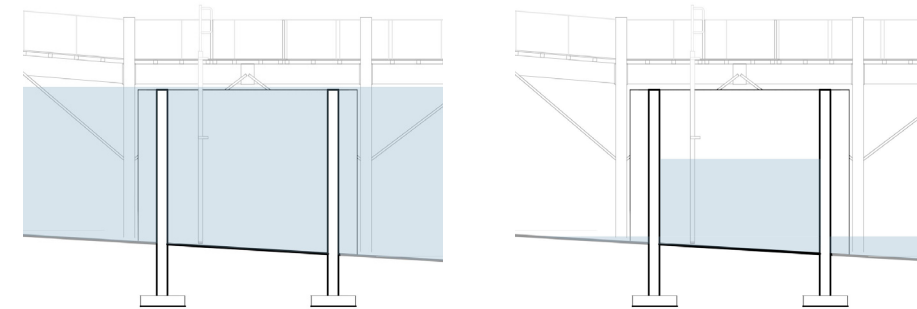


The social bath is located at the edge of the shoreline; the northern retaining wall holds steady against the rising tidal water, while preserving the warm water in the social bath, fed from purified rainwater collected on site. Bathers take advantage of the opportunity to stand at this northern edge of the bath, resting their arms on the concrete retaining wall. The experience is external and relaxed with views focused out towards the bay. Located along the shoreline, the social bath provides a place for bathers to survey the surrounding activity both within the bathhouse, but also on the waterway and in the park. There may be boats coming in to the locks or people enjoying the beach at low tide; there are a variety of activities taking place, locating the social bath as the center of activity.

fig. 40 Section at Social Bath
fig. 41 West Elevation



The third bath is the cold plunge located out on the pier. As the bath temperatures change with each experience, this is at the other extreme, controlled by the temperature of the salt water in the bay. The cold plunge is filled as the tide comes in; the rim of the bath is just below high tide. This bath excites the senses with mystery and a slight fear of the unknown dark blue water below. Bathers must take a leap of faith as they plunge deep into the bath, fully submerged in the cold salt water. The bath takes full advantage of its place, located out from the shoreline; it brings bathers directly into contact with the natural water. We realize our vulnerability to the elements, swiftly climbing the ladder out of the bath and back to the social bath or sauna. It is in this quick change of temperatures that the bather is able to fully enjoy refuge in the warmer baths. Bathers alternate between rounds of hot and cold, rejoining the main circulation path between each experience.



The bathhouse seeks to activate human participation at the waterfront. By introducing new program that provides opportunities to engage with the water and beach shoreline, a variety of experiences emerge. One way this is achieved at the site scale is the stepped seating to the beach. The steps have open public access, which means they can be used after bathhouse hours; it also activates this side of the bridge as an extension of the park. During low tide, visitors take advantage of the seating as it leads down to the beach, then as the tide starts to return, the water climbs up the lower half of the steps and the beach disappears below the surface of the water. There is a strong relationship to time and season here. The shoreline connects visitors to this dynamic place using water as the medium for bathing and the social opportunities that cultivate as a result.

fig. 42 Pier | Cold Plunge, high tide
 fig. 43 Cold Plunge Section, high tide
 fig. 44 Cold Plunge Section, low tide

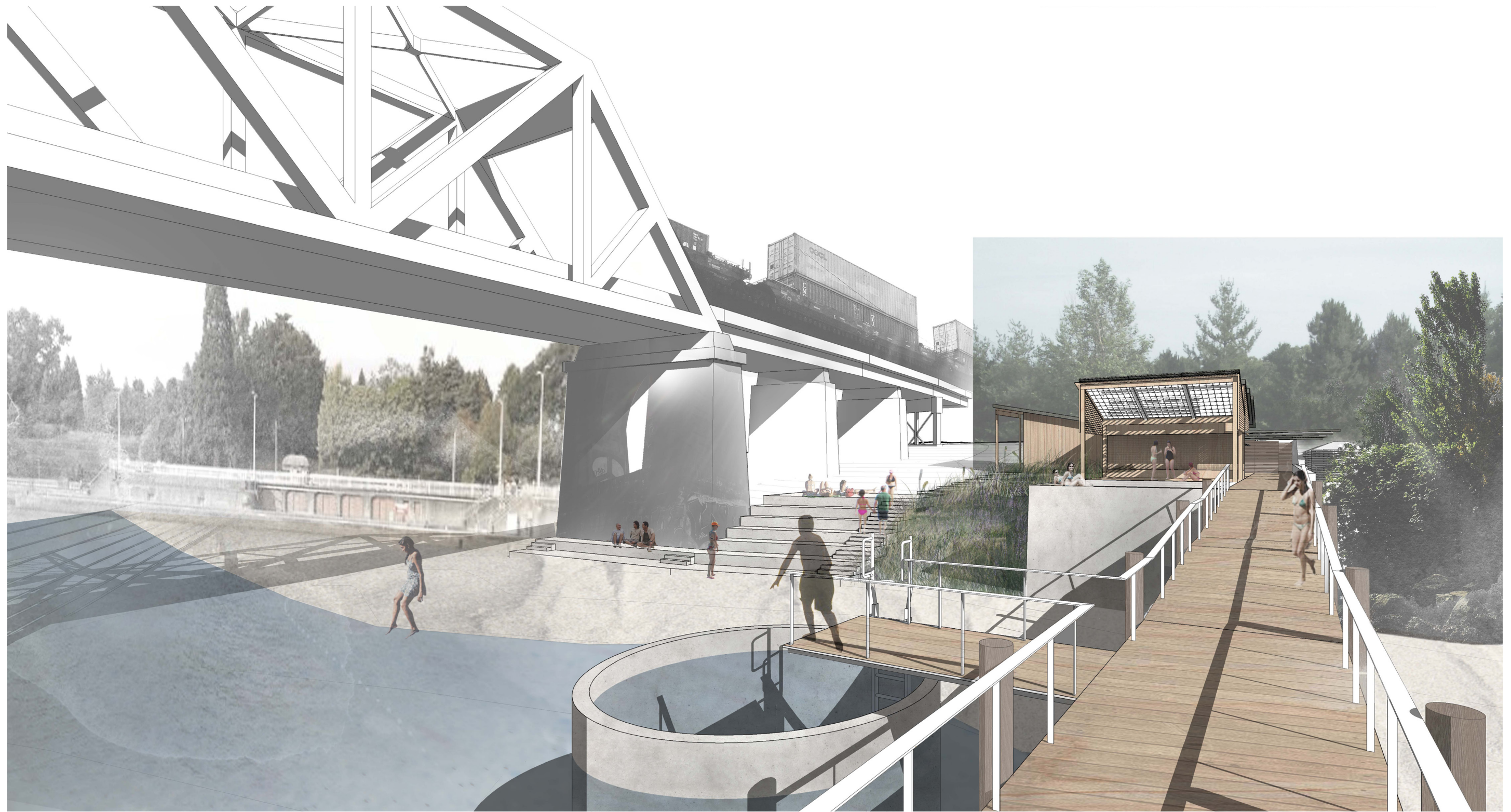


fig. 45 Pier | Cold Plunge, low tide

CONCLUSION

This thesis is an exploration of public activity in cities, using Seattle as the city of research and a public park along a commercial waterway as the case study site. The bathhouse program is used to explore our relationship to water in the city. The new public program creates opportunity for social activity at the bathhouse but also serves an extension of Commodore Park. By strengthening the activity in the park, it also strengthens this place and our connection to the waterfront here.

The ritual of bathing is a celebration of our connection to this place through water. The ritual brings participants together by strengthening social activities with water. It is the medium for the bathing ritual to take place along the shore. Bathing is about participation in the experience and the bathhouse as a meeting place. By engaging in the procession through the bathing spaces, opportunities for social exchange unfold. This social sharing is as minimal as being present in the same space as someone else, it enriches the character of social activity in the public bathhouse.

The bathhouse also connects back to the built environment by renewing the value of water in the city and bringing awareness to its importance in our society. The bathhouse program does this by slowing the bather's participation in the bathing ritual, allowing time to register at the site. This quality of time is highlighted by the tidal waters that register along the shore. The program also takes advantage of local seasons and weather patterns, harvesting water and energy as a source of replenishing the systems used within the bathhouse. The collection and use of water is celebrated in the architecture and returns to the natural system. Everything is connected and is a celebration of renewal.

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