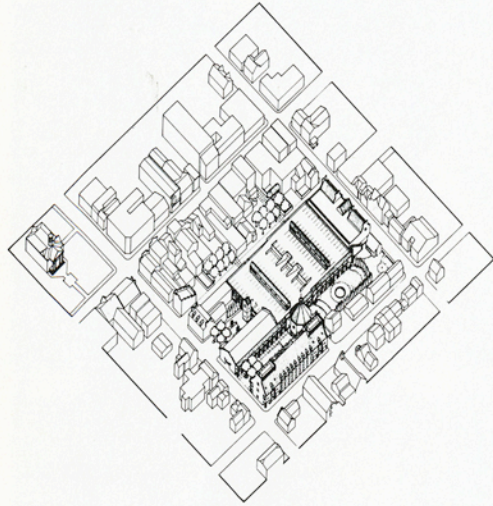


TOWN CENTER



ABOVE: Leesburg Government Center is organized around greens facing north and south; block on western edge contains town offices; parking occupies south-eastern portion of site.

FACING PAGE: Octagonal tower forms centerpiece of government center, which was built as the result of a national design competition.

Tucked among the two-story, 18th- and 19th-century buildings that form the historic core of a quaint Virginia town, the Leesburg Government Center is a testament to sensitive urban design and formal contextualism at its nonliteral best. The center's unobtrusive siting, small-town poetics, and uncluttered streetscape have been lauded by juries at every turn: first by the panel that selected the scheme from among 201 national design competition entries in 1987, and later by the jury that honored it with one of the AIA's inaugural Urban Design Awards in 1992.

The kudos belong to Hanno Weber & Associates of Chicago, architects who produced a work of austere clarity from a competition brief overrun with complications. Among the hurdles were an oddly shaped site that already contained a motley assortment of buildings—some of historic value, some not—and an eyesore of a parking lot. Added to the problematic but highly visible site was a demanding list of objectives that focused on creating a symbolic town center by consolidating town offices without destroying the scale of the surrounding historic district. Other requirements included providing parking for 320 cars, maintaining pedestrian paths through the site, and creating new urban spaces.

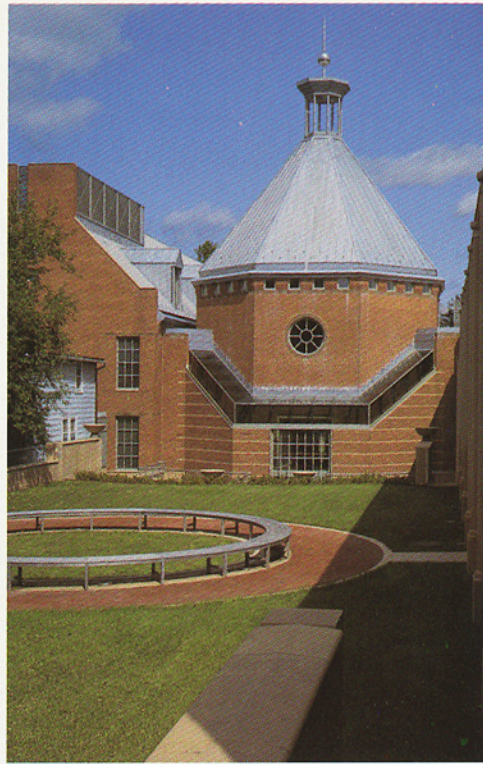
The winning scheme successfully reconfigured the pieces into a simple composition that is artful and pragmatic, and recognizes the importance of Market Street as a civic corridor linking the town complex with the Loudoun County courthouse a block away.

The stroke of inspiration is an octagonal tower that houses a ground-floor lobby and second-floor public meeting room. Conceived by Principal Weber as an "object" building set apart from the street by a narrow green and framed by rhythmic facades, the tower's prominence and heft render it the heart of the center. Its position in the center of the block also allows it to serve as a linchpin around which the other elements are organized.

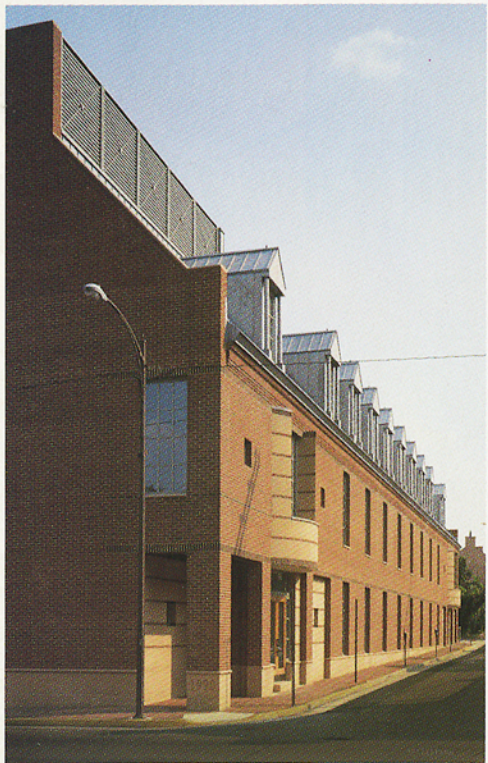




ABOVE: Architect Hanno Weber's plan for the government complex yielded many dividends, including a neatly defined urban plaza facing busy Market Street.
BELOW: The center's three-story office building re-creates the urban edge along Wirt Street.



ABOVE: To the rear of the site, the architect inserted a quiet, terraced green. Skylights illuminate a staircase that wraps the tower.
BELOW: Parking garage entry steps back from Market Street to reinforce pleasing rhythm of solids and voids along the street edge.
FACING PAGE: Curved bay above Wirt Street entrance is designed as a large window box for hanging vines. Dormer, like roof, is fabricated of sheet metal. Rooftop louvers conceal mechanical systems.



Grafted directly onto the tower is a three-story block of town offices, which reestablishes the street edge along the western side of the block and authoritatively anchors the street corner, with a masonry facade and "chimneys" echoing the architecture of nearby buildings. To the east, opposite the block containing town offices, Weber designed a two-story arcade that mirrors the proportions of the office facade, screens the unsightly side wall of the adjacent Tally-Ho movie theater—one of the site's precious givens—and defines one boundary of the center's cozy town green. The arcade continues past the tower to create the edge of a second green at the rear of the site. Behind the arcade, Weber concealed a two-level parking garage within the rising slope of the site and behind existing buildings.

For all the right-mindedness of the center's buildings, the complex would be incomplete without its restrained open spaces. The front and rear courtyards serve a double mission, separating the office building, tower, garage, and adjacent structures and connecting them at the same time. The greens serve as places to meet, and more important, are integrated into town life by a variety of pedestrian paths.

The intellectual treat of Weber's urban design scheme is made all the more stimulating by his sometimes quirky architectural hand. Modern influences on the complex appear in the urban scale and in the spatial concepts of the plan.

Centuries of tradition in Leesburg inspired Weber to anchor other details in Classicism but render them with a contemporary twist. Engaged columns and architectural trim are handled like stone, yet are fabricated of salmon-toned precast concrete. Dormers are fabricated entirely from sheet metal, and square windows ring the pitched ceiling in the town council chambers. Public spaces inside the building are replete with moldings and mullioned windows, but the moldings are sleek, simple curves, and the mullions secure translucent partitions separating circulation corridors from office space.

Despite budget constraints, the architect's restrained colors, well-considered details, and judicious application of high-grade materials conspire to give the Leesburg Government Center a sense of importance and permanence. As a bonus, Hanno Weber's perceptive response to the delicate townscape reinforces the notion that an institution born of the people can, in turn, serve them well. And for once, the platitude fits the place. ■

—Vernon Mays

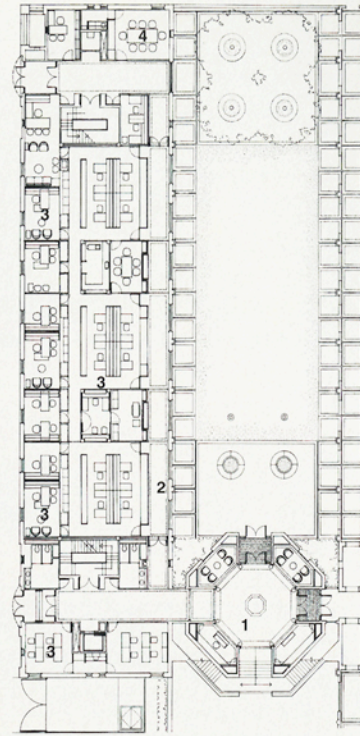




ABOVE: Main public entrance leads into spacious lobby on first floor of octagonal tower, offering a view of the parklike green to the south.

BELOW: Access to the various town departments is along a pedestrian concourse that faces the town green; interior details such as paneled wainscot and patterned linoleum floors evoke Leesburg's architectural traditions in a contemporary context.

FACING PAGE: Colonial Virginia's civic symbols are most energetically reinterpreted in the town council chambers, which feature raised paneling, circular windows—a reference to the Colonial Williamsburg Capitol—and high square windows that Weber likens to cornice details.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- 1 RECEPTION
- 2 CONCOURSE
- 3 OFFICES
- 4 CONFERENCE ROOM



EAST-WEST SECTION

**LEESBURG GOVERNMENT CENTER
LEESBURG, VIRGINIA**

CLIENT: Town of Leesburg, Virginia

ARCHITECTS: Hanno Weber & Associates, Chicago, Illinois—Hanno Weber (project principal); Kathleen D. Hess (project interior architect); Christopher D. Hale, Joseph Heinowski, Yon Jung, Gregg Loescher (project architects); Kaitlin Drisko, Gary Jaeger, Thomas Mozina (project team)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Hanno Weber & Associates

ENGINEERS: Tylk, Gustafson & Associates (structural); Mid-Continent Engineering (mechanical/electrical/fire protection/plumbing); S.D.I. Consultants (civil)

CONSULTANTS: Yerges Acoustics (acoustics); Jerry Kugler Associates (lighting); Rainbow Custom Woodworking, Taylor Ramsey Furniture, Chasen's Business Interiors (furnishing contractors)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Manhattan Construction Company

COST: \$10.7 million

PHOTOGRAPHER: Steve Hall/Hedrich-Blessing, except as noted

