A RURAL DESIGN STUDIO: Mosier Community School
FALL 2009

The studio project is to develop proposals for additions and renovations to the Mosier Community School. Mosier is a town, population 430, along the Columbia River between Hood River and the Dalles. The school, built in 1924, operated as a K-12 school for many years, and then became an elementary school. As part of the Dalles School District, it was threatened with closure. Mosier’s citizens responded, knowing that the school was at the heart of their community, and in 2003 they won for the school a new lease on life – as a charter community school. The school has received awards for educational quality, and its census is steady and growing. The School District has realized Mosier School alleviates current overcrowding in the Dalles. This studio has been awarded studio enrichment funding generously donated by Jerry and Gunilla Finrow and is sponsored by the Mosier community group “Kids’ First”.

Project
The Community School proposes to expand its facility to include classrooms for 7th and 8th graders and to add community space – a library and common rooms that will be resources for both the town and the school. The existing 1924 building will need a thorough renovation as well. The project design will emphasize two things:

• Innovation in school design
Research by Barker in the 50’s and new research in the last 10 years emphasize how small schools are more effective, because staff and students know each other and students participate in all activities. What does this mean architecturally? Research of case studies and field visits will inform explorations to design a cutting-edge school.

• Innovation in sustainable strategies
The school is engaged in an environmental curriculum, has installed solar panels on its grounds and cooperates with the community college in the Dalles that offers the only certificate in energy and wind technology in the nation. Any new design proposal needs to make environmental considerations that are integrated into the curriculum tangible to the students and also aim to produce a net zero building. Design explorations will include siting and orientation, passive / active energy systems, materials and landscaping.
Site
Mosier Community School is located at the western end of Main Street in town. David Povey, emeritus faculty from PPM, lives in Mosier and has been involved in a study on the Mosier’s Main Street that will be available in fall 2009 as a resource for the studio. The expansion will consider alternative sites: 4.5 acres the school already owns on the hill behind it to the south, the current school grounds and two adjacent sites to the east. Building in town means children are part of the life of the town, not isolated on outlying tracts of land. When I was taking photographs of the school, a woman stopped her car to ask me what I was doing. She told me she was a retiree, who had just moved to town, and the evening before she had gone to the school play, which she loved. Local commerce is supported with a school in town, because of the ease of doing errands or stopping for refreshments on multiple trips to and from school. Vehicle miles traveled are reduced – fossil fuels conserved – carbon emissions reduced – because children and families can walk or bike to a central location. Opportunities for exercise and its contributions to the overall health of the public also increase.

Draft studio schedule – fall 2009
- Sept 30, 2009 introduction – studio begins
- October 2-4, 2009 Field trip to Mosier (Friday 1pm-Sunday 9pm) (funded by Finrow grant and lodging, breakfasts and dinners hosted by “Kid’s First”)
  - Orientation to town – bicycle ride? | presentation by David Povey
  - Orientation to school – administrators, staff, students
  - Town and site investigations
  - Visit to middle school in the Dalles (BOORA Architects)
  - Charrette workshop – students and community members
- October 24-26, 2009 Field trip to Portland for school case study visits (funded by Finrow grant)
- November 6, 2009 (1-5pm) Midterm review in Eugene
- December 3, 2009 (2-6pm) Final review in Eugene
- December 5, 2009 (2-4pm - Saturday) Open house in Mosier – display of student projects for community feedback
- Reproductions and CD made of student projects for Mosier Community School (funded by Finrow grant)

Instructional Methods
Emphasis will be on a mutually supportive studio environment. Studio work will begin with conceptual design and research investigations and continue into design development, recycling to hone ideas and explore appropriate expression. Work must be developed and shared in the Lawrence Hall studio throughout the term. Required field trips, sketch problems, precedent studies of schools and other appropriate building examples will enrich individual work in developing design proposals. Because this studio is sponsored by a community organization, there is the opportunity to work with real people on a real problem that is significant to their town. Required field trips will be hosted by the Mosier Community and funded by generous studio enrichment support by Jerry and Gunilla Finrow. The Finrow monies will also support putting together a document of student projects and research for the Mosier community and each studio participant.