



A CAMPUS RE-IMAGINED

ANDERSON CENTER FOR AUTISM PROJECT

SLOAN ARCHITECTS, PC





A Campus Re-imagined

*“...it felt like the switch in *The Wizard of Oz* from black and white to color. Everything came alive...”*

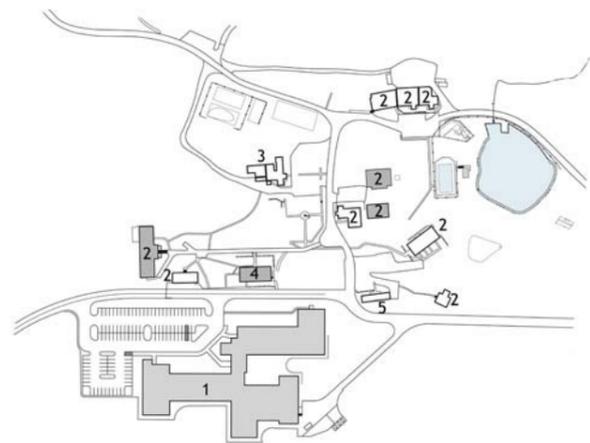
The recent transformation of the campus at the Anderson Center for Autism, in Staatsburg, New York, “felt like the switch in *The Wizard of Oz* from black and white to color,” says the school’s director of children’s services, Kathleen Marshall. “Everything came alive.” In late 2013, Sloan Architects completed the final phase of the master plan that it had developed closely with Anderson’s administration. In realizing this vision, the architects created 14 new buildings, rejuvenated and expanded three existing structures, and adaptively reused another. Their scheme mined the potential of outdoor and in-between spaces, not merely upgrading the facility to state-of-the-art standards, but also altering the character of the place as it relates to its own history, to the region’s architectural and material context, and to the landscape’s inherent features. But most important of all, the master plan and its individual buildings

re-imagined the ways students with autism could live and grow on this campus.

In the spirit of the special-needs school that Dr. Victor V. Anderson founded here with just one pupil in 1924, Sloan’s work began modestly, but soon evolved. In 2004, the Anderson Center invited the architects to submit a design for a small, prototypical family-style student home to replace its dysfunctional, institutional dormitories “It was an RFP, a request for proposals, like a mini-competition among a few firms,” recalls Alexandra Sloan, who co-directs Sloan Architects in partnership with her husband, Michael. Their extensive experience with academic buildings (for such institutions as Vassar College), childcare and early education centers (for Bright Horizons), and private homes won them the initial invitation. But their proposal so impressed Anderson’s

The Village Center
This contemporary building, rendered in traditional, local materials, successfully houses an unusual pairing; campus operations with student services.

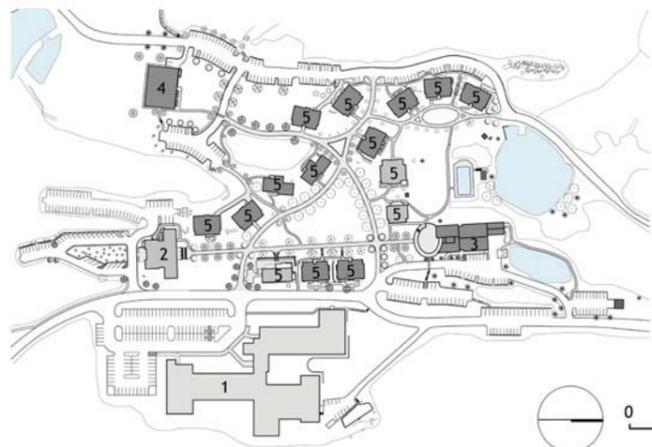




ORIGINAL SITE PLAN

- EXISTING BUILDINGS TO REMAIN
- EXISTING BUILDINGS TO BE RENOVATED
- EXISTING BUILDINGS TO BE DEMOLISHED

- 1 SCHOOL BUILDING
- 2 STUDENT RESIDENCES
- 3 OPERATIONS
- 4 SCHOOL STORE
- 5 MAINTENANCE / WORKSHOP



COMPLETED MASTER SITE PLAN

- EXISTING BUILDINGS
- RENOVATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO EXISTING BUILDINGS
- NEW CONSTRUCTION
- NEW WALKING PATHS

- 1 SCHOOL BUILDING
- 2 BUSINESS CENTER AT THE SPRUCES
- 3 VILLAGE CENTER
- 4 RECREATION CENTER
- 5 STUDENT RESIDENCES

leadership that the organization soon hired the Sloans to develop a 24-acre master plan for the campus, the core of the school's mostly wooded 150 acres.

The center had already shifted its focus a few years earlier from children with emotional disabilities to people, aged five to 21, with extremely challenging autism spectrum disorders. Still upholding Dr. Anderson's founding principles of integral living and learning for special-needs youth, the campus currently serves 125 residential and 12 day students. But by the time Sloan arrived on the scene, the school's large, aging, and impersonal dormitories were run-down (some about 70 years old), dreary, and ill suited to its designated population. The facility had undergone incremental changes, tentatively introducing a smaller, more intimate residential structure in 1994 and another in 2001, the same year Anderson replaced its old classroom building, but a thorough re-evaluation of the big picture, and its many details, was long overdue. And although those first two student "houses" were a start in the right direction, the staff learned which essentials they lacked, such as a dedicated area in each home for administering medications, a multi-purpose room for arts and crafts or other recreation, an office for residential staff, and a laundry room that could double as a place for teaching life skills. Tackling that challenge, Sloan's 2004 proposal for a prototypical student house was, as Maria Espie, Anderson's director of business affairs, puts it, "our first design to successfully integrate all those elements."



Time for a Change

The existing campus dormitories were run-down and outdated, lending for less than optimal conditions for the residents to feel at home.



Village Scape

Student Residences border the "town green" along accessible pedestrian pathways woven into the landscape.

Before putting a shovel to the ground, however, the architects turned their attention to the overall campus scheme, a process that involved a year of monthly meetings as part of the school's Strategic Master Site Plan Committee. "With our clients," says Michael Sloan, "we always seek a dialogue, a real collaboration. For us, it's about learning, listening closely to understand their needs and find the best ways to address them."

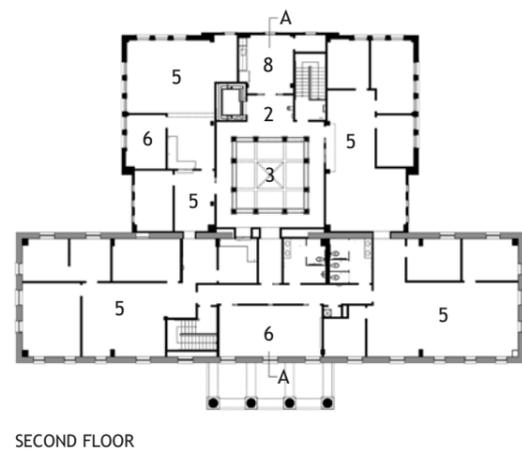
Piecemeal growth left the existing campus asphalt with parking areas right at its center. The Sloans swiftly recognized the missed opportunity there. "We became aware that people with autism can really benefit from taking strolls, for some, it's the main form of exercise," Alexandra Sloan points out, "so, we wove plenty of walking paths throughout the site, right across the middle, and kept vehicles to the periphery." Their meandering walkways are picturesque, safe, and punctuated by playgrounds. But even along the property's outer edges, the architects eliminated intrusive parking lots, instead, bringing out latent landscape features as they tucked a series of smaller parking areas into the rolling terrain, among stony outcroppings and thriving trees.

The Sloans' main master-planning strategy for the \$40 million project was to model the campus on a New England village green, fostering a strong sense of community. Like those classic, grassy town squares, Anderson's central open space has clapboard houses (the new student residences) along its edges and a handsome, civic-styled building (for administration and other functions) anchoring either end.

A Vision Realized

A proposed 24 acre Master Site Plan for the Campus at the core of the school's mostly wooded 150 acres. The campus currently serves 125 live-in residents.





- 1 PORTICO
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 ATRIUM
- 4 RECEPTION
- 5 OFFICES
- 6 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 7 TRAINING ROOM
- 8 STAFF LOUNGE
- 9 STORAGE

Business Center at the Spruces
 Interior (bottom left): A double height atrium brings daylight into the lobby.
 Exterior (below): A two-story addition at the building rear, finished in stucco, complements the bluestone and classical forms of the existing structure, while remaining distinct from it.



A Grand Entrance
 The new Portico at The Business Center at the Spruces lends a stately feel to the new Administrative Building.

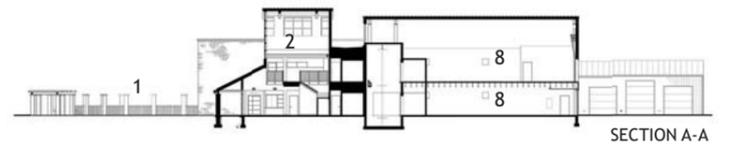


Keeping alive the narrative and textures of the school's long history, the architects advised the planning committee about which aging buildings should be salvaged, and how they could be transformed. Sloan recognized, for example, that the commanding scale and double-loaded corridors of Malcolm Hall, a bluestone-clad, 1939 dorm, was a poor fit for congenial living, but well suited to administrative functions. In adapting the building, the architects opened its core vertically with a two-story atrium, breaking up the spatial monotony, while bringing daylight and a sense of grandeur deep into the interior. They also modified the roof and entry portico, facing the green, to achieve the balance and harmony of classical proportions. Materially contrasting yet stylistically compatible, their new addition has transformed the former rear of the building into a gateway for the entire campus, the structure now has a major entrance from the entry road, as well as Anderson's central town square.

“The goal was quality Architecture with a sense of permanence”

Village Center (below):
 Its oval forecourt offers a graceful transition from the green spaces outside to the two-story atrium.

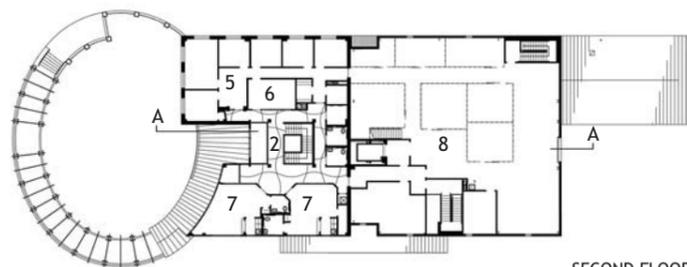




- 1 PLAZA
- 2 LOBBY / ATRIUM
- 3 SCHOOL STORE
- 4 LIFE SKILLS CENTER
- 5 OFFICES
- 6 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 7 HOSPITALITY / FAMILY CENTER
- 8 STORAGE
- 9 WOOD SHOP
- 10 GARAGE / REPAIR



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR

A Place for Families

The double height atrium is filled with ample natural light from the clerestory above.

Hospitality suites are the perfect setup for visiting families to spend quality time with the students (below).



For the opposite end of the green, Sloan designed the Village Center, a new building for campus operations and student support services. Inventive (and successful) in its mixed use, the structure also houses visiting family amenities, proposed by the architects. So, there's a welcoming forecourt with picnic tables, as well as hospitality suites, each with its own living-dining area, powder room, and kitchenette, enabling families to spend time with students in a private, relaxed, home-like atmosphere.

The unusual interface between facilities management and student services, all under one roof, provides valuable opportunities for basic job training — allowing students to learn, for example, how to organize household supplies and distribute them across campus.

Architecturally, the Village Center is contemporary, yet rendered in authentic and traditional materials that recall nearby historic Hyde Park, the birthplace and hometown of Franklin D. Roosevelt. “We built it with solid, local bluestone, not stone veneer, and only genuine stucco, three coats, and real copper, no imitations,” Michael Sloan emphasizes. “The goal was quality architecture with a sense of permanence.”

While drawing the thread of historical narrative through the campus, the architects were also instrumental in helping Anderson justify each feature of the new design, and successfully obtain



Recreation Center

This new barn-like structure offers a column free space for a wide range of activities, including exercise and parties. The veranda provides an open air great room for gross motor exercise and even the school prom.

New York State funding to implement the entire master plan. All along the way, it was essential for the architects not only to meet stringent building codes, but also to integrate the complex regulations for special-needs educational facilities. As Espie recalls, “We knew we could count on them to be thorough and get that right.”

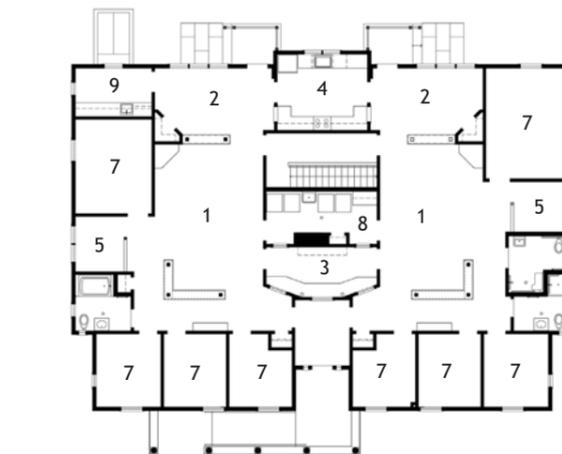
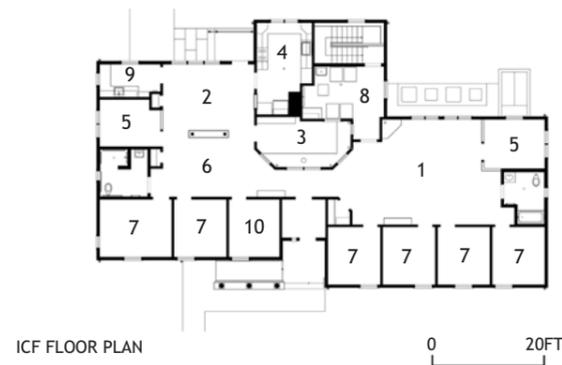
One of the great amenities Sloan envisioned, and effectively presented for state approval, was the campus recreation center, an 8,700-square-foot, barn-like building, beside a meadow near the “village” outskirts. The short walk there from the green feels remarkably like a departure from a town center to a more rural area, and that change of scene is quite intentional. “Since most of these kids never get the chance to go to summer camp,” says Alexandra Sloan, “we wanted to bring the fun of a camp experience to them.” Now, beneath a single roof that extends out over a large veranda, this low-slung structure provides generous, column-free, multi-purpose space, with its own professional catering kitchen to serve special events and gatherings. Even in rain or blazing sunshine, the veranda serves as an open-air “great room” for exercise (particularly gross motor-skill development), after-school programs, and parties or other events.

Like the recreation “barn,” the 12 clapboard student houses that Sloan designed are familiar and convivial building types. Though varied in their exterior colors, details, and facades, they are nearly identical in interior organization, a consistency devised to ease the transition and way-finding for residents as they graduate from one age-designated house to the next. For a population that typically reacts strongly to change, this recognizable aspect plays an important and calming role.

Each house (easily sub-divided, as needed, into two more intimate sides) accommodates eight to 10 students, providing

every resident with his/her own bedroom that opens right onto the communal space: a family-style, flexible-use living room with a spacious home-style kitchen and dining area. Here, students dine, like a family, in the houses where they live.

The layout, with its close ring of bedrooms and absence of corridors, contributes to spatial efficiency, as well as the sense of community, while allowing for ongoing, yet completely unobtrusive, supervision. (Resident staff oversees each house around the clock.)



TYPICAL RESIDENCE FLOOR PLAN

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 LIVING ROOM | 5 MULTI-USE | 9 NURSE STATION |
| 2 DINING ROOM | 6 CRAFTS/GAMES | 10 SENSORY ROOM |
| 3 STAFF ROOM | 7 BEDROOM | |
| 4 KITCHEN | 8 LAUNDRY | |

A Home Away From Home

The new dormitories resemble small family homes with central living and dining areas (opposite page). Well-considered sight lines and deft use of low walls, particularly in communal areas: provide for personal space, as well as ongoing, effective (yet unobtrusive) supervision.



Since people with autism tend to seek out places to be alone, the architects subtly carved out such areas, but defined them within half-walls and low bookcases, always making sure they remain part of the broader communal space. In many such ways, the design, of the houses and the entire campus, recognizes an essential balance: the school’s mission to respond to the emotional needs of children with autism, while also helping them, ultimately, become as functional, independent, and part of the larger world as possible.

And much the way the sight lines are calibrated for effective but understated supervision, the design also incorporates heavy-duty, though entirely inconspicuous, durability. As the old dormitories abundantly demonstrated, Anderson’s living spaces need to take a beating, but still remain inviting, comfortable, and easy to clean. So, with a soft touch but robust underpinnings, Sloan’s cozy interiors rely almost imperceptibly on extra-strength, low-maintenance surfaces and substructures. For example, each shining bathroom floor is actually a large, seamless, poured-epoxy tray that can be hosed down to a central drain. And underfoot in the living spaces, the warm texture that looks remarkably like mellow, aged-wood

planking is actually a resilient and well-chosen vinyl product.

In the eight years from the beginning of the master plan’s construction to its final ribbon cutting in 2013, the architects phased and carried out the work to successfully preserve the school’s safe and ongoing operations.

With the new campus now in full swing, the staff has noticed students thriving in ways that would have been hard to imagine before. “At the end of the day, we’ve always had to ask ourselves: ‘If I had a child of my own with autism, would I send them here?’” says Espie, “With the old dorms, it was, sadly, unthinkable. But now, the answer is ‘yes.’” Marshall agrees, adding, “It’s a place we can be proud of.”

Though socialization is often a real and ongoing challenge for people with autism, the Anderson Center has emerged as a school where its teens hold an annual prom (in the new Recreation Center); it’s a “village” where the children enrolled here trick-or-treat house to house (among the residential buildings) at Halloween; and a “neighborhood” where students and staff decorate each family-style home at Christmas. With the rebirth of the campus finally complete, Anderson has become a community like never before.



CONTACT INFO:
SLOAN ARCHITECTS, P.C.
42 NORTH AVENUE / P.O. BOX 373
MILLBROOK, NY 12545
(845) 677-5640
www.sloanarch.com

© Sloan Architects P.C. 2014