

**APPENDIX B**  
**VISITOR CENTER**  
**DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

## **Introduction and Summary**

**This Appendix provides background on the development of the visitor center component of the Thames Maritime Heritage Park. The following is a summary of work which gives a framework for Visitor/Travel Information as it relates to the development of the Visitor Center. It also describes other characteristics that will provide for the most effective development of the Visitor Center, and discusses the Visitor Center Plus concept.**

## **Travel Information Components**

**In reviewing information program components, it is desirable to sort out the relevant factors which go into the trip decision process and the visitor search for information. The following section of this memo reviews the following items:**

- The trip decision process;**
- Segmentation of markets for information;**
- Traveler information needs; and**
- Traveler information sources.**

## Trip Decision Process

Information seeking patterns relevant to particular trip decisions depend primarily upon the level and extent of applicable prior knowledge or experience. Where prior knowledge is great, information seeking is relatively limited. Conversely, for new experiences, there may be relatively extensive searches for information. This pattern reflects a travel behavior learning process important to designing and evaluating potential roles of information system components and the role that the Heritage Park Visitor Center may play in that process.

In attempting to model the tourism decision process, three basic types of behavior must be described. These relate to the number of experiences an individual has had with a particular area or region. The first type of behavior, Extensive Problem Solving, is in the early stages of the learning process and is characterized by a relatively extensive search for tourist area information and a clarification of alternative routes/transportation modes. In this sense, it is represented by a greater amount of thinking about the trip, a relatively high latency of response (i.e., more time between the initial thought of the trip and making the decision), and by greater numbers of factors influencing the decision.

**Trip Decision Process (continued)**

**In the second type of behavior, Limited Problem Solving, information gathering is more limited, and generally consists only of considering new alternatives that have been brought to the users' attention. At this stage, the user is not searching for alternatives, however, and is more probable of repeating a previous trip, does less thinking about the trip, and acts in a shorter time frame.**

**The final decision process phase, Automatic Response Behavior, is where actions are more or less automatic responses to some sort of external stimulus to take a trip. In this stage, there is no real consideration of alternatives, trips may be "spur of the moment," and actions are probably similar to those taken many times before. The weekend trip to an attraction or recreation area triggered by a nice day is typical of this type of decision process.**

**To put these concepts in perspective, a few analogies are appropriate with respect to deciding on a tourist area. The following continuum is representative.**

## **Trip Decision Process (continued)**

### **Decision Process Analogies**

#### **Phase 1: Extensive Problem Solving Trip to Entirely New Tourist Area:**

Visitors generally don't know what to expect in terms of facilities, activities, climate, and so forth. Analogies would generally be long distance trips away from home area (or any first visit to the region).

#### **Phase 2: Limited Problem Solving Visited General Area Before:**

Tourists know somewhat what to expect but may need specifics on location of facilities and special characteristics. An analogy might be trips to other states within a region or other attractions within a state.

#### **Phase 3: Automatic Response Behavior Visited Specific Site Before:**

Little information is required except for describing special events or new developments. Dissemination would generally have to be en route or on-site. Analogies are repeat trips to resorts and other area sites.

### **Trip Decision Process (continued)**

**Within this framework, several basic concepts impact the decision-making process. These include, first, a measure of individual drives or needs (state of goals) as derived from physical, economic, and social/cultural considerations. These may relate to the type of recreation a person desires, family budget, group participation factors, and so forth.**

**The second concept, cues, determines when a person begins to decide to take a trip and provides the mechanism for influencing the decision process. In this regard, there are triggering and non-triggering cues. The triggering cue "kicks off" the decision process and may be represented by a large number of possible factors such as promotion of a region or site in a newspaper or magazine article, waking up to a nice day, deciding to visit relatives, being told about recreation areas by a friend, and so forth. The non-triggering cues are of two kinds: information and alternatives. These cues again may refer to advertising or articles, brochures, handouts, conversations, and so forth. Alternative cues relate to the set of tourist opportunities available and include whether desired activities are available, the quality of activity as measured against meeting the individual's needs, and the cost of the alternative.**

### **Trip Decision Process (continued)**

The decision process then is kicked off by the triggering cue. In the case of a first-time visit to a tourist area, the individual will seek to clarify the available alternatives (Search for Clarification of Alternatives). The amount of effort spent in clarifying the decision is determined by the Classification of the Trip Decision. In this sense, the more important the decision (Is it the Annual Vacation?), the amount of time available (next week-end rather than today), and the difficulty of the evaluation (Is this like anything I've done before?) are directly related to the amount of effort. The actual clarification process consists of information seeking from personal and impersonal sources. Personal sources include friends and neighbors, community or peer group leaders, travel agents, visitor center personnel, and all other "face to face" or telephone conversations. Personal sources of information are generally significantly more important than impersonal sources in that they permit feedback of ideas, greater resolution of concerns, and dissemination of directly relevant materials.

Impersonal information sources include such elements as newspapers and magazine articles, mass media, direct mail, handouts and brochures, billboards, short range radios and so forth. These information sources may also serve as triggering cues, but are usually insufficient to initiate action without some sort of personal confirmation. Exceptions to this rule can occur when an individual has learned to "trust" one of these impersonal sources of information. For example, government publications and popular guidebooks typically receive high ratings of credibility while travel advertisements and commercial folders are often viewed with skepticism. The cachet of the attraction may also be critical (it is a national park, for instance).



### **Trip Decision Process (continued)**

**The information seeking process is finally modified by the individual's own perceptual bias through which the user interprets the information received. This is then evaluated in terms of any predisposition toward the tourist area and finally a trip choice is made. After the trip, the user evaluates the experience as to whether it met his/her needs. This resets the perceptual bias through which future trip decisions will be evaluated.**

**The prior discussion briefly describes extensive problem solving, the most complex of the decision processes. In the second category of the decision process, Limited Problem Solving, there is significantly less information seeking, and the potential user is more concerned with technical details about the alternatives which are perceived to be available. Such details include the availability of services (Is there parking available? Where? Do I have to have a reservation for a camp-site?), quality of service (speed and congestion of access route, crowdedness of area, weather, and so forth), and price (entrance fees, accommodations, total package). Upon determining the alternatives available, they are evaluated via the perceptual bias and predisposition framework outlined above.**

**In the simplest decision process, that of Automatic Response Behavior, the individual makes the decision almost instantaneously upon receiving the triggering cue. Typically, this represents repeated behavior, and may include the "traditional Sunday drive to the park" or repeated visits to a particular site. The important point is that in this stage the individual does not think to consider alternatives unless they are brought to his/her attention via non-traditional information programs.**

## Market Segmentation

Significant market segmentation is reflected in terms of tourist information gathering patterns. From a design standpoint, the concept of market segmentation enables information programs to be structured to meet the needs of identifiable groups. To this extent, proposed systems can be analyzed and evaluated in terms of what market they are attempting to serve and whether sub-elements within a system can be modified to meet particular market needs.

**Market Segmentation (continued)**

**It is useful to identify the major markets for tourist/traveler information as follows:**

**By Sector Type:**

**Tourist and Travel Trade (airlines, tour packages, hotel, camping, visitor center personnel);**

**Consumers/Travelers -- outside of the region (pre-planned, impulse);**

**Consumers/Travelers -- resident of the region (pre-planned, impulse).**

**By Trip Sequence:**

**Pre-trip;**

**En-route;**

**At destination point.**

**As described in the following text, each of these market segments have different information sources and needs, and are of varying sizes and magnitudes.**

## Traveler Information Needs

Considering the information needs by type of trip, prior research into tourism travel has shown that time and distance requirements are principal factors in determining the amount of effort an individual will expend to gather information and clarify alternatives. Other things being equal, information gathering is significantly more extensive for trips over two hours (100 miles or more) than for shorter day trips (less than 100 miles). By stage of trip, the various information programs can be identified as relating to trip planning, en route, and at destination purposes.

The basic types of tourist information needs by trip sequence are as follows:

### 1. Pre-Trip Information Needs

General Conditions  
Attractions/Events  
Accommodations  
Routing Information  
Sources of Information

### 2. En Route Information Needs

General Conditions  
Attractions/Events  
Accommodations  
Routing Information  
Sources of Information  
Service Facilities Location (gas, etc.)  
Travel Information (weather, congestion)  
Credit Card Information  
Emergency Aid (medical)

### 3. Information Needs at Destination Point

General Conditions  
Attractions/Events  
Accommodations  
Routing Information  
Sources of Information  
Services Facilities Location  
Travel Information  
Credit Card Information  
Emergency Aid (medical)  
Hours of Operation/ Attractions  
Entrance Fees/Attractions  
Public Transportation Availability  
Calendar of Events (detailed)  
Language Assistance  
Congestion/Waiting Time

**Traveler Information Needs (continued)**

**There is little hard empirical data on the nature of information needs, but discussions with personnel at visitor centers indicates that for the en route traveler, the most often asked questions relate to directions and requests for maps. Many of those asking for directions do not have a destination in mind, and consequently the visitor center also often acts as a tour planning resource with visitor center personnel suggesting things to do in the community.**

## Traveler Information Sources

Overall, the most common means of learning about tourist opportunities is through friends/word of mouth, followed by maps, handouts/brochures, magazines, and newspapers. For long distance travel, travel agents also become an important information source as do oil company/auto club trip planning services.

Shown throughout the experience with visitor information is the strong reference to personal information sources as the most promising method of influencing tourist behavior. Impersonal sources may trigger some awareness of alternatives, but generally are insufficient to change trip patterns. Typical examples of relevant personal and impersonal sources of information are listed below:

### Personal Sources

- Experience of Personal Contacts  
(friends and neighbors)
- Visitor Centers
- Personal Inquiry Systems  
(WATS lines)
- Local Community Personnel  
(gas station attendants, waitresses, etc.)

### Impersonal Sources

- Media (radio and TV)
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Maps, Atlases
- Brochures/Handouts
- Direct Mail
- Highway Signing/Billboards
- Telephone Book
- Posters

## Outlets Offering Direct Personal Contact

This category includes manned facilities where specific questions can be asked and addressed on a person-to-person basis. Such activities include "walk-in" visitor information centers, booths, and counters as well as staffed tourist information telephone lines.

**"Walk-in" Facilities** - This category includes all staffed facilities where face-to-face contact with the tourist is possible. The major advantage of this type of facility vis-a-vis telephone centers is the introduction of the visual element (i.e., the tourist can see first-hand as well as hear all types of tourist information and messages). Maps, brochures, and other literature can be given out immediately and the visitor is exposed to a maximum amount of information in this literature and on displays without unnecessarily tying up staff time. These facilities primarily provide information en route to or on arrival at tourist destinations and as such, are typically located at major gateways to areas, along principal travel corridors and at tourist destinations. These "Walk-in" facilities fall into two general types:

**Educational/Interpretive Visitor Centers** - With cultural, historical, and/or natural science exhibits as a primary component and a secondary role of providing general information services.

**Visitor Information Centers and Booths** - This broad category of "walk-in" facilities emphasizes the public service aspect and dispenses information that the visitor might need during his travel and on arrival at his various destinations. Types of information given out include directional guidance, trip planning, situation reports, suggestions of places to visit, possibly assistance in finding accommodations either through a "quasi-reservations" system where rooms are found for the inquiring tourist and reserved until specified time or simply an accommodations referral system where the tourist is referred to a published accommodations guide. The main elements of successful operations of this type facility are an informed staff and map and brochure dispensing components.

## Visitor Center Configurations

The following describes the various visitor center functions and potential configurations. These can be considered as additive.

Functions	Facilities	Other Considerations
Basic Visitor Information	Brochures	Can be manned or unmanned; can be a very small facility.
Basic Visitor Services	Toilets Telephones Reservation systems	Manned facility.
Visitor Orientation	Film or other entertainment Changing exhibits Bookstore/retail sales Food services	Focus on total attractions in area - keyed into other attractions but serving them.
Visitor Attraction/ Interpretive Center	Themed attraction/ interpretive content	This is generally where there is not another major attraction in the area. Availability of information secondary to major attractions.
Community Resource Center Component	Basic visitor services and orientation plus community rooms/auditorium	Developed particularly with "Heritage" type attractions. Use by Chamber, Civic clubs, etc.
Transportation Center Component	Centralized parking area, garage Bus terminal	Developed in particularly congested tourism areas, such as Newport, RI.

The relative sizing of the facilities will depend upon a number of factors.



### Visitor Center Configurations (continued)

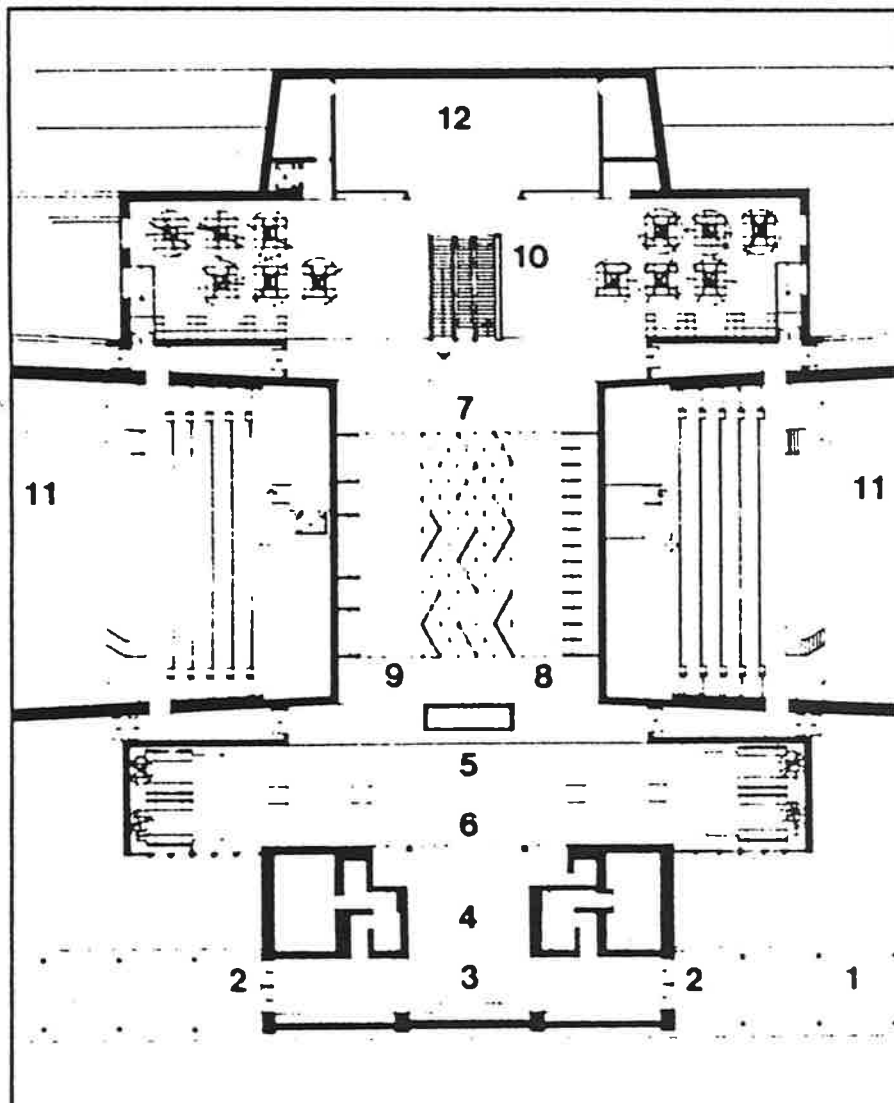
The Visitor Center in Charleston, South Carolina is an interesting prototype project. Revenue to offset operations is derived from the gift shop and the theater presentation. Orientation and exhibits are blended into one visitor experience. Interpretation and detailed presentation are left to be discovered in the City and region. All elements are planned for the visitor's clear orientation. The major components of the project are:

1. Local crafts welcome visitors at an indoor/outdoor entrance area;
2. A giant map of the peninsula is combined with historic views of the city;
3. A two-minute video wall exhibit presents a sense of Charleston's diverse activities;
4. A visitor planning area -- visitors may stop and leisurely plan their visit;
5. A theater/film presentation of Charleston.

The project basically supports its operations through retail sales and a modest fee on the theater presentation.

Another example is shown in Figure B-1, which is the Visitor Center at Colonial Williamsburg. This visitor center serves many purposes, including ticketing for the various venues within Williamsburg, and shows a high-volume layout.

Figure B-1 Colonial Williamsburg  
Visitor Center



- 1 Arrival
- 2 Entry
- 3 Map and Model
- 4 Welcome
- 5 Multi Screen Show
- 6 "How to" Kiosks
- 7 Ticket Queue Exhibit
- 8 Tickets
- 9 Reservations
- 10 Theater Queue
- 11 Theater
- 12 Bookstore

### Visitor Center Configurations (continued)

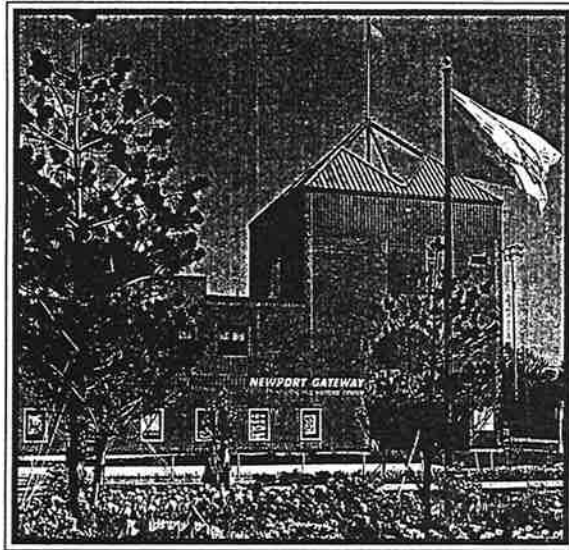
Figure B-2 shows another example in Newport, Rhode Island. The Newport facility opened about five years ago, and is operated by the Convention and Visitor Bureau. Revenue source for the operations is primarily bed tax. Other characteristics:

1. Uses include terminal area for commercial intercity buses, local buses, motor coach buses, tour buses. Also auto rental tenants and local tour groups selling tickets. Can also buy tickets to attractions.
2. Short film (7 minutes) on attractions and very large aerial oblique showing locations of attractions, etc.
3. Public parking both in garage and in at-grade lot.
4. Hotel reservation phone bank also (similar to what you see at airports).
5. Total project probably takes up 5-10 acres.

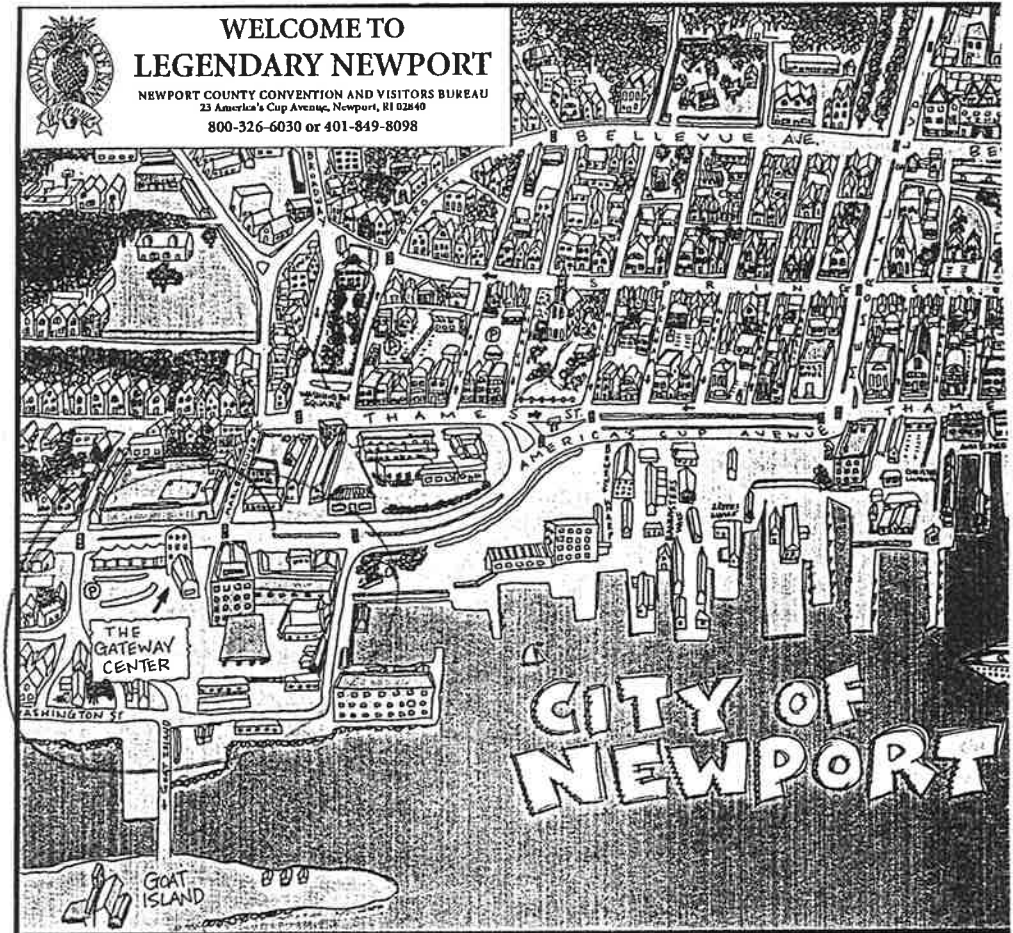
Figure B-2 Newport Visitor Center

# NEWPORT GATEWAY VISITORS CENTER

Located in the center of historic Newport within walking distance of hotels, shopping, attractions and restaurants.



- \* Open and staffed seven days a week
  - \* 16-screen audio/video presentation on Newport County
  - \* Free brochures and maps of local attractions, accommodations, restaurants and events.
  - \* Ticket sales for attractions/events/tours.
  - \* Public restrooms/telephones/vending
    - \* Administrative Offices
- Newport Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Newport Scenic Tours  
Viking Tours of Newport



## Thames Maritime Heritage Park Visitor Center

### 1. Visitor Utilization (Attendance).

Peak daily attendance (planning factor) may be estimated at 1 percent of annual attendance. If we assume annual visitation of 150,000, for instance, then the planning day would be 1,500 visitors. If the annual visitation is 200,000, then the planning day would be 2,000 visitors.

### 2. Visitor Length of Stay.

The length of stay and hours of operation are the key variables in sizing the Visitor Center. Maximum accumulation at a 15-minute length of stay results in an in-house population of 100 to 125 people, suggesting a + 6,000 square foot public area facility. A 30-minute stay results in an in-house population of 225-250 people, suggesting a + 12,000 square foot public area facility. At a 45-minute length of stay, this will rise to 300-325 people, or + 16,000 square foot public area facility. Based on the visitor center profile outlined in Chapter 4: Visitor Center Strategy, a length of stay of 30 to 40 minutes will be the typical visitor length of stay.

### Thames Maritime Heritage Park Visitor Center (continued)

#### 3. Current Space Plan.

The current estimated space program for the Visitor Center is:

	Total Space	Percent
Exhibits	3,760	27%
Theater	1,540	11%
Gift Shop	550	4%
Information	1,475	11%
Open (public)	575	
Offices	900	
Multi-purpose room	325	2%
Oral History	335	2%
Support, Circulation	5,750	42%
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>13,735</b>	

**Source:** Based on preliminary visitor center design by Richard Sharpe Associates.

In this plan, the visitor public spaces are estimated at about 8,500 to 9,000 square feet.

### Thames Maritime Heritage Park Visitor Center (continued)

#### 4. Suggested Space Requirements/Visitor Center.

The following range of space requirements for the visitor center should be considered in the schematic design and within the budget framework of the project.

	Low	High	Average
Visitor Information	500	750	625
A&T Info System Kiosk	25	35	30
Visitor Planning	300	500	400
Visitor Services	300	500	400
Theatre	1,200	1,800	1,500
Interpretive Exhibit	5,000	6,000	5,500
Showcase Gallery	1,000	2,000	1,500
Classroom / Multi-purpose	300	400	350
Gift Shop	500	1,000	750
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>9,125</b>	<b>12,985</b>	<b>11,055</b>
<b>Support Space (45%)</b> Offices, Circulation, Toilets Storage, etc.	<b>4,106</b>	<b>5,843</b>	<b>4,975</b>
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>13,231</b>	<b>18,828</b>	<b>16,030</b>

Source: Office of Thomas J. Martin.

## Visitor Center "Plus"

Potential options for the Visitor Center Plus are as follows:

1. A much larger museum component, sponsored probably by the New London County Historical Society. A project of 20,000 square feet of exhibit space would generate a building requirement of 30,000 square feet. Estimated building cost could run as follows:

Building shell @ \$100/sq.ft. =	\$3,000,000
Exhibitry @ \$250/sq.ft. x 20,000 =	\$5,000,000
<b>TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST:</b>	<b>\$8,000,000</b>

The net additional cost would be less if the visitor center were reconfigured into this format. The total estimated project cost of the Visitor Center, however, would rise considerably.



**Visitor Center "Plus" (continued)****2. Interactive theater/special effects theaters - there are many different systems; two are illustrated below.**

**A. IMAX/OMNIMAX - Typically, an IMAX motion picture projection system is leased from Imax corporation. The IMAX system includes projector, screen and sound system. The IMAX DOME (OMNIMAX) system includes projector and Sound System. There is an initial payment required as well as an on-going royalty on admissions toward an annual minimum. The total project cost, including the projection system but excluding land cost, could be in the range of \$5,000,000 to \$7,000,000 (U.S.). An independent architect has developed a design for a lower cost building structure. If this is appropriate for a particular project, the total cost could be in the range of \$3,000,000 to \$5,000,000 U.S. The scale of an IMAX theater is given in Figure B-3.**

**B. Showscan - An alternative to the IMAX is the Showscan series of theaters, which range from the specialty theater which will seat up to 500 in a conventional type theater, to the HD Simulation theater. This theater fits into a 2,100 square foot (12' high) space (see Figure B-4), and seats about 25 in a high impact format.**

**OTJM File 116appeb. 10/25/93**

Figure B-3 IMAX

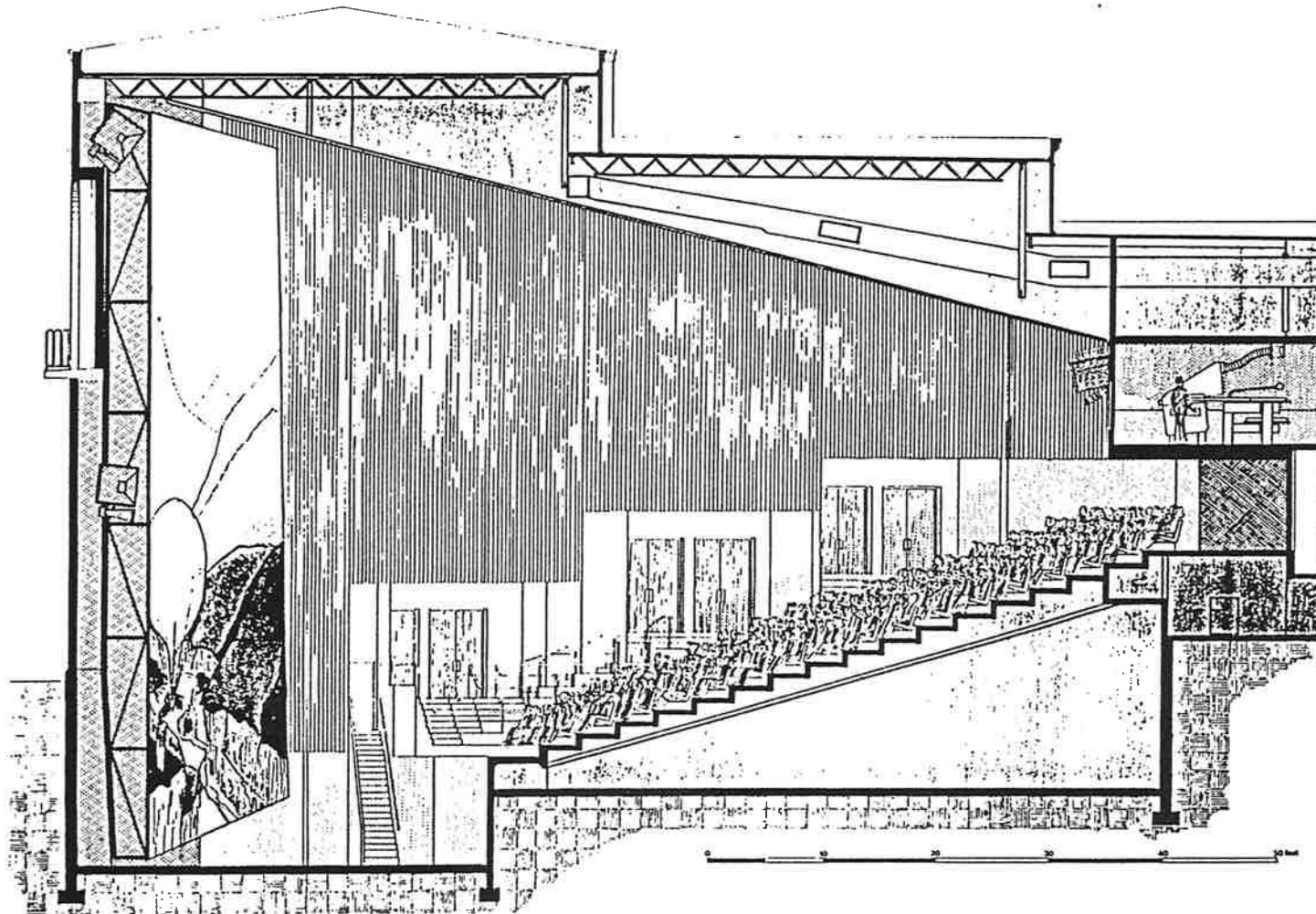
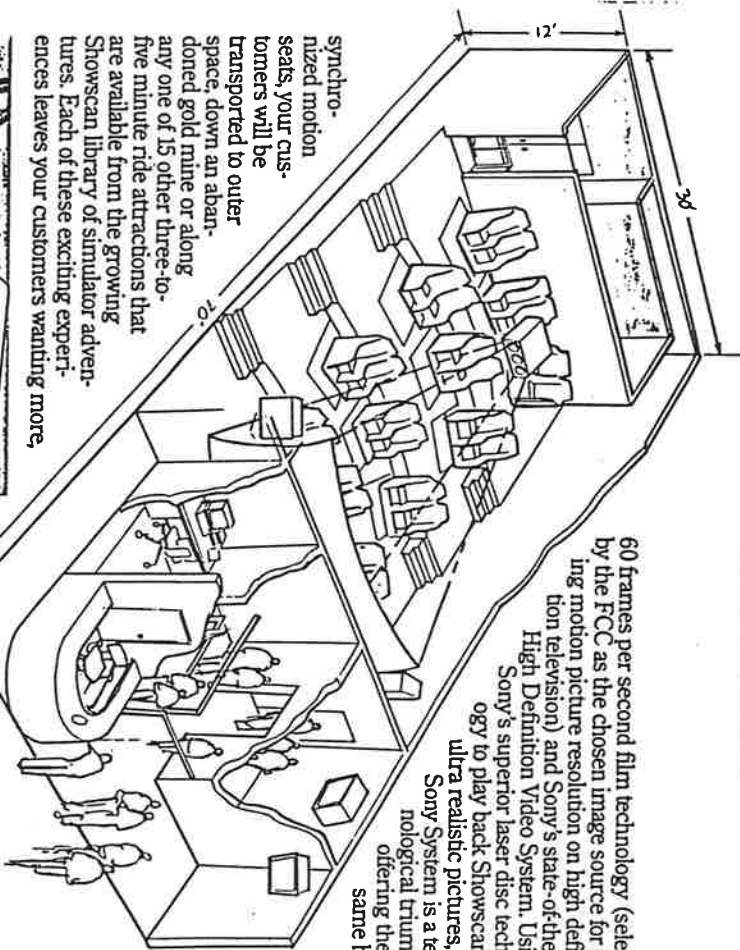


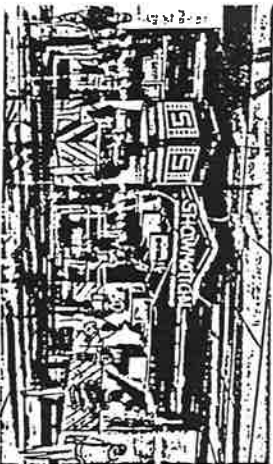
Figure B-4 Showscan

# PERFECT FIT.



60 frames per second film technology (selected by the FCC as the chosen image source for testing motion picture resolution on high definition television) and Sony's state-of-the-art High Definition Video System. Using Sony's superior laser disc technology to play back Showscan's ultra realistic pictures, the Sony System is a technological triumph offering the same high-

synchro-nized motion seats, your customers will be transported to outer space, down an abandoned gold mine or along any one of 15 other three-to-five minute ride attractions that are available from the growing Showscan library of simulator adventures. Each of these exciting experiences leaves your customers wanting more,



*An exciting mall/facade attractor created in a Showscan® HD Simulation Theatre, bringing them back, time after time. Which will generate more traffic for all of the other tenants. They'll believe they're really there, thanks to the patented Showscan® hyper-realistic 70mm,*

impact, color-rich visuals of Showscan's full size simulators in a 12-foot tall version that will readily fit into your existing space. It is also low maintenance, adding to the economy of the attraction.

With Showscan's action seats, multi-channel surround sound system and all of the incredible adventures playing on Sony's High Definition equipment, you'll attract the entire family and fill your theatre every six or eight minutes.

To find out how a ShowMotion® High Definition Simulation Theatre can be tailored to your mall and your budget, just call Showscan. We'd love to show you how it'll fit them both perfectly. **SHOWSCAN®**

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