

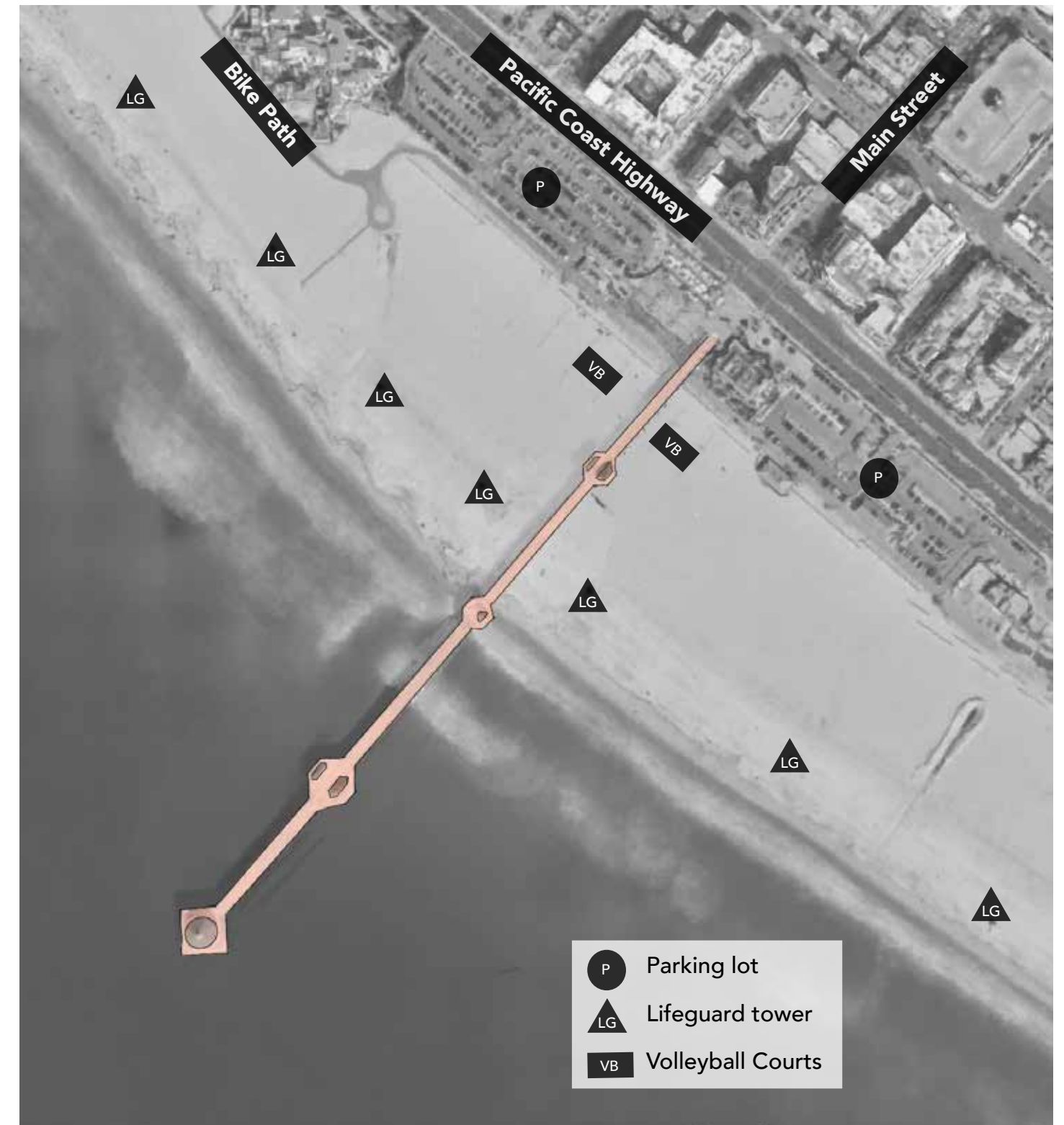
HUNTINGTON BEACH PIER

Located at Main Street & Pacific Coast Highway

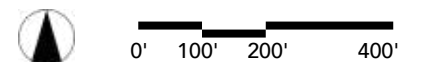
- Built in 1992 and made of concrete with reinforced steel, and coated in epoxy
- **1,850 feet long, with a deck about 30 feet above sea level**; one of the longest public piers on the west coast; pier slopes gently up toward the seaward end
- Built to withstand a 7.0 magnitude earthquake and 31 foot waves
- Popular destination for locals and tourists

I lived near the Huntington Beach pier, and have been there many times over the years. I've always enjoyed being there, whether it's going to the beach, walking on the pier, or rollerblading on the boardwalk.

Since COVID, I've thought more about outdoor places where people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities feel welcome and comfortable, and **where you don't need to have money to enjoy it as much as anyone else**. This pier is one of those places, which is why I wanted to study it.



Huntington Beach Pier





1. Exposing the underneath: the pier's support features

SPATIAL CONCEPTS [DEE]: WHAT'S UNDERNEATH

The pier's angled abutments at the seaward end give it a playful **stilt-like look**, while the wider piles along the length (which accommodate surfers) give it a sturdy feel (sketch #1). Taken together, these **support features** are not only functional, but make the pier photogenic and inviting (no fear of it being rickety).

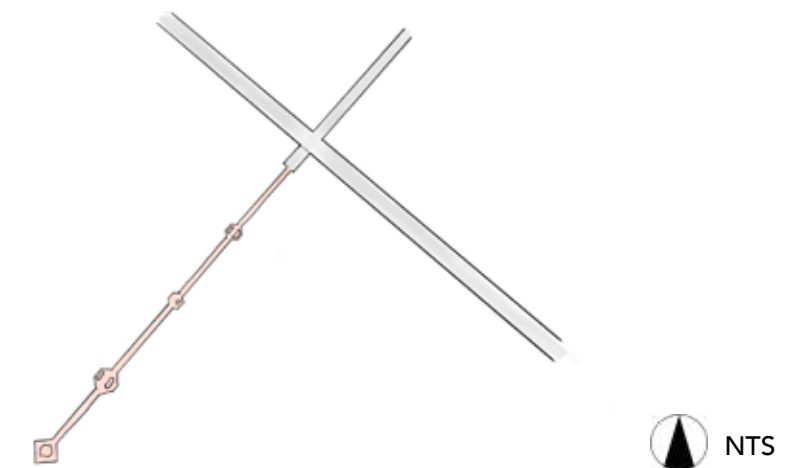
The pier's straightforward design (literally) -- **straight with 4 rectilinear platforms**, roughly equidistant from each other -- is very **legible** (sketch #2). The structures on the pier (2 souvenir shops, a security tower, bait shop, restrooms, and one sit-down restaurant) do not obstruct the view. The pier's design is **simple** (even the benches and railings are basic and unadorned - sketch #8), thereby not distracting from, and arguably adding to, the ocean views.



FORM AND SPACE [CHING]: AXIAL AND RECTILINEAR

The pier has an **axial** orientation. It is an extension of Main Street and is set about 90° with Pacific Coast Highway.

The pier is linear with **4 additive forms**: 3 hexagonal platforms and a rotated square/diamond platform at the seaward end. (Sketch #2)



2. Axial orientation; rectilinear platforms

USES AND ACTIVITIES

The pier and the area immediately around it embody quintessential, Southern California beach life: surf, sand, sun, lifeguards, bonfires, and beach volleyball (sketches #3 and 5) The pier's design is wide and long, which means there's room for **lots of people** to do what they want to do.

Beach access is free, and many families come for the **wholesome, all-day, outdoor fun**. There are bbq pits, and places to buy kites and rent bikes and fishing rods.

The pier and the beach feel expansive and generous. Only on major holiday weekends, like the 4th of July, or during surfing competitions does the area feel crowded.



4. *Access and Linkages: palm trees lining the walkway along PCH*

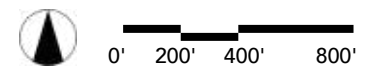
ACCESS AND LINKAGES

The pier is easy to reach and **easy to spot from a distance**. It is accessible by **foot and bike** (a bike path runs the length of Huntington Beach south toward Newport Beach), **bus** (multiple bus stops near the pier), and **car** (parking lots next to the beach and parking garages off Main St). The pier is also accessible for those in wheelchairs, as it is level with the sidewalk.

The pier ends at PCH, and the buildings on Main St are pretty low (3-4 floors) and fairly neutral/forgettable in design, so there is nothing garish or flashy to distract from the ocean and beach view. (Sketch #4)



3. *Uses and Activities: Volleyball courts*



SOCIABILITY

The pier and beach afford opportunities to socialize, **gather**, and **talk to strangers** (sketches #3, 4, and 5). Recently, I chatted with a fisherman in his 20s. He comes early and often, and catches smelt and mackerel (though fewer fish in the winter, and that day he'd been there for 4 hours and hadn't caught anything).



5. *Sociability: Watching surfers from the pier*

CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN (CPTED)

I typically come on weekends when the pier is buzzing. For this study, I was there on a Wednesday, which was much less busy and less diverse compared to weekends. I have always felt safe visiting the pier.

Comfort and Enjoyment. The pier's **wide design** and **open railings** provide a lot of visibility. A visit to the pier inevitably involves strolling, stopping, and sitting, and there are plenty of opportunities to do that. Given the generous area, you feel like you can **create your own space**-- on a bench, leaning against the railing, or under your umbrella/tent on the sand (you can create territorial boundaries).

Protection. Aside from the many **lifeguard** towers on the beach (sketch #6), there is a **security watchtower** (sketch #7), and usually two SUVs (one fire/lifeguard, the other police) parked on the pier.

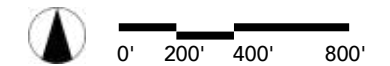
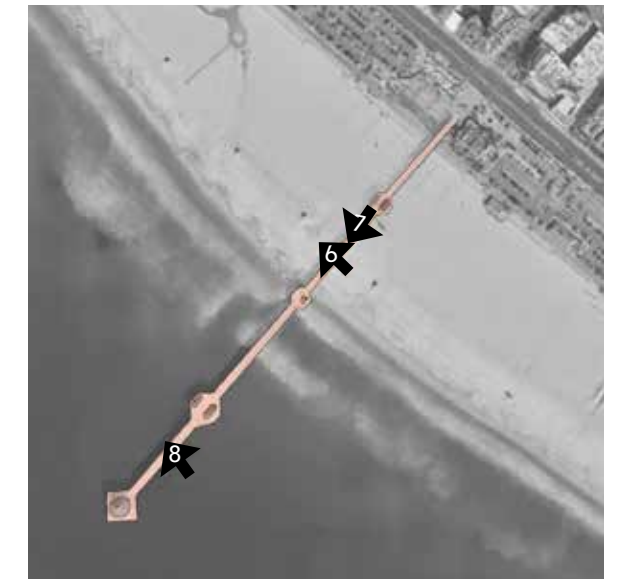


7. The somewhat forboding security watchtower

CPTED (cont'd)

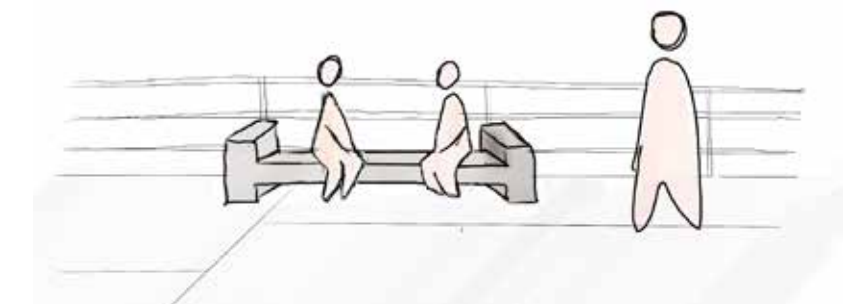
There are also bollards and changes in paving where the pier meets the sidewalk on PCH. These keep vehicles out and add to the feeling of protection and buffer.

Enjoyment. The **dense concentration of people**, (especially on weekends), the human scale of the buildings, and simply being outside in the **open air**, provide a good energy and happy vibe. Although Huntington Beach has a reputation for being a MAGA/ Trump-supporting community, the visitors are quite diverse, so a person of color probably wouldn't feel out of place or unwelcomed.



COMFORT AND IMAGE

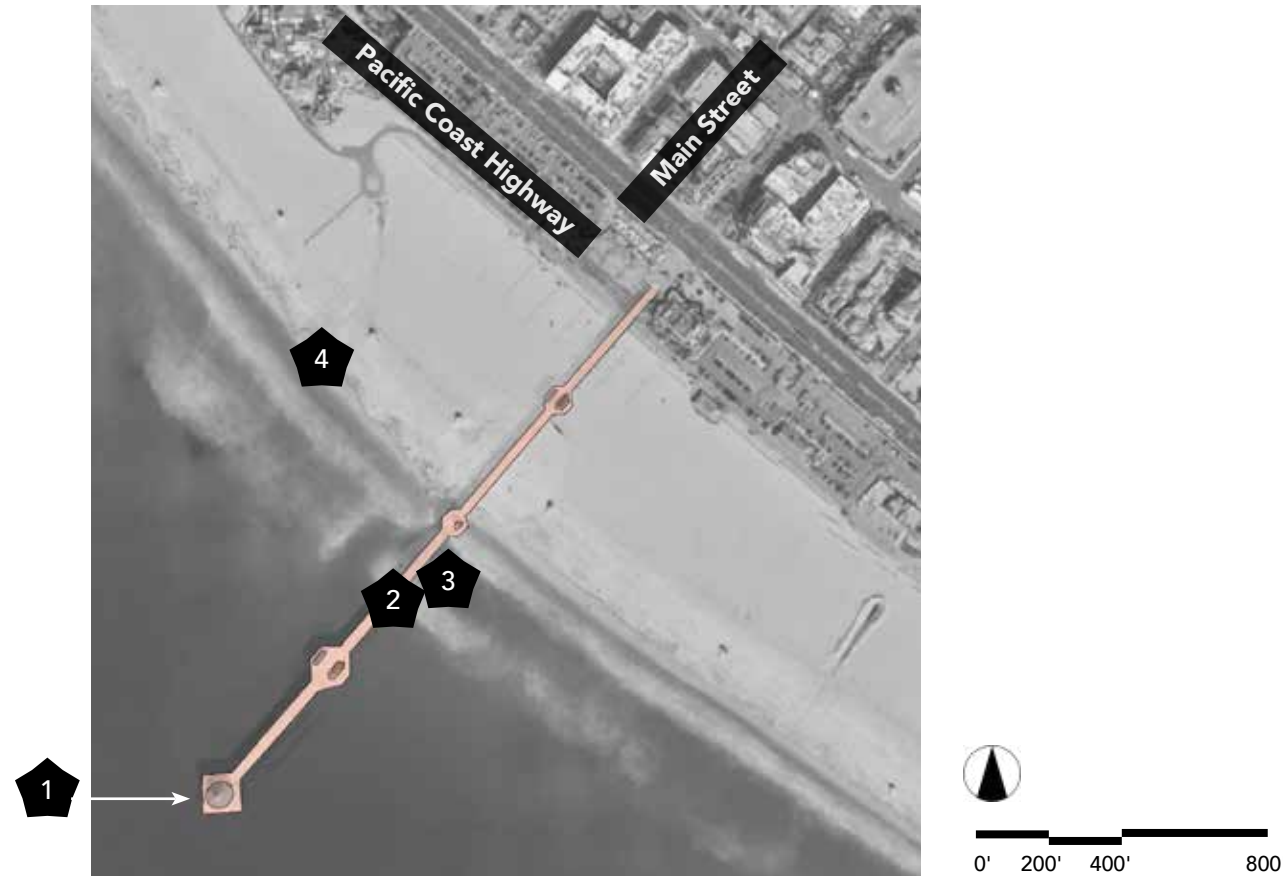
The pier is **clean and well-maintained**. There are plenty of trash receptacles and sinks with running water (presumably for the fisherpeople). There are quite a few **concrete benches** to sit on (fairly comfortable as concrete doesn't warm up or cool down much - sketch #8) and lampposts for nighttime.



8. Comfort and Image: resting on concrete benches



6. Lifeguard station



BEST PLACE TO BE ON [DATE] ... AND WHY

- 1 **February 5 at 6 pm:** **Inside the restaurant** at the end of the pier. The restaurant has 180° big picture windows, so you can enjoy the sunset while still being warm.
- 2 **April 15 at 10 am:** Assuming I've filed my taxes by then, taking a leisurely stroll **on the pier** and **peoplewatching**.
- 3 **June 22 at noon:** On a hot day, alternating between being **in the water** and **making sandcastles**.
- 4 **October 15 at 4pm:** **Playing a game on the sand**, maybe paddleball. Enjoying the sun and being active, to stay warm.

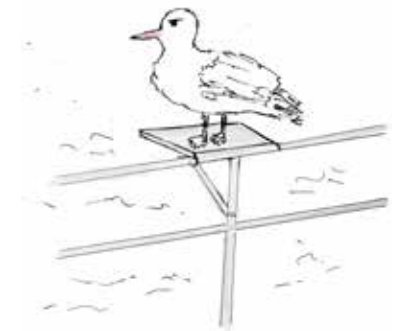
WHAT WOULD JANE JACOBS SAY?

I would suggest that Jane Jacobs would find the pier successful because its wide, open, and accommodating design allows for **mixed uses** (strolling, fishing, people watching, busking, etc). The pier is like a **blank slate**. The beach and boardwalk provide for volleyball, biking, bbq'ing, and, of course, swimming and sunbathing. There is sufficient surveillance and patrolling. The commercial development is set back and almost exclusively on the other side of PCH, so as not to obscure views and be obnoxious. There are nearby bus stops and the parking lots are reasonably priced, so financial barriers are low. There is **no beachfront housing** near the pier. Overall, it has an **egalitarian feel**.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

A few changes to the pier would be to:

- add more benches
- add more recycling receptables
- replace one of the souvenir shops with a cafe and quick-food stand



9. Seagull on a bait-cutting board

Together, this would make the pier more comfortable and encourage people to stay longer.

INTEGRATING CONCEPTS FROM THIS CLASS INTO DESIGN PROCESS

It has been valuable to learn how to dissect the different features of a site in a systematic way. When I first chose the pier, I thought its simple design would be hard to scrutinize. But it has been useful to break down the site-- for safety, access, forms, sociability, etc-- to see if (or how) the features, collectively, make the site greater than the sum of its parts.