

# CENTRE COURT APARTMENTS STATE COLLEGE, PA

---



**Anthony Dente**  
**Thesis Proposal**  
**Advisor: Ali Memari**  
**12/18/07**

## **Executive Summary**

---

### **Building Description**

The Centre Court Apartments stand at 67.5' and contain five levels of student housing atop two levels of parking, intermixed with lobby and commercial area on the ground floor. The building is wrapped with load bearing CMU hollow core blocks that also act as the lateral resisting system of the building. The floor slabs are made of 8" pre-cast hollow core planks, which bear on the CMU exterior walls, and a series of wide flange beams that distribute the load to the concrete columns, which lead to the spread footing foundation below.

### **Proposal**

The main problem that will be addressed in the alternative design of the Centre Court Apartments is the environmental impact of the materials in the building. The main areas of focus will be the structural system and the building envelop, with an overall environmental evaluation and adjustments of the building as a whole. From a structural engineering standpoint, materials that are renewable, have low embodied energy, and/or are made with recycled content are the most preferred building elements. The majority of the materials in the Centre Court Apartments do not follow this philosophy, which is the motivation behind the proposed alternative design.

With the growing interest in green building across the industry, distinguishable green projects are in a prime position to gain public attention. The nature of building green offers direct examples to building occupants of how caring for the structure they inhabit will benefit them. Both of the above topics would directly benefit a structure such as the Centre Court Apartments.

### **Solution**

The exterior walls will be designed with pre-cast, non-load bearing straw bale wall assemblies, which will bear on two-way flat plate slab with a concrete lateral resisting frame system, all specified with high fly ash content replacing up to 50% of the Portland cement.

### **Breadth Topics**

An architectural breadth will cover all design adjustments that will take place due to the replacement of all CMU walls with the 12" straw bale wall assemblies which causes the need for a column grid across the building that previously did not exist. A breadth in Building enclosures will also be conducted in order to design the precast system and model the schedule and cost comparison of the alternative method against the existing design.

## Contents

---

Intro .....	3
Background .....	7
Problem Statement .....	7
Solution Method .....	8
▪ Breadths .....	9
Tasks & Tools .....	11
Schedule .....	12
Conclusion .....	13

---

## Intro

---

The Centre Court Apartments are located in the borough of State College, Pennsylvania and were designed by Frederick J. Fernsler, AIA with Jesse Smith, PE as the structural engineer. L. S. Fiore Construction was the general contractor on the project that completed its 16 month construction process in August 06'. The total cost of the project was \$13.6 million, which includes a large addition to an adjacent building that will not be covered in this report. The building stands at 67.5' and contains five levels of student housing atop two levels of parking, intermixed with lobby and commercial area on the ground floor.

---

## Existing Structural System

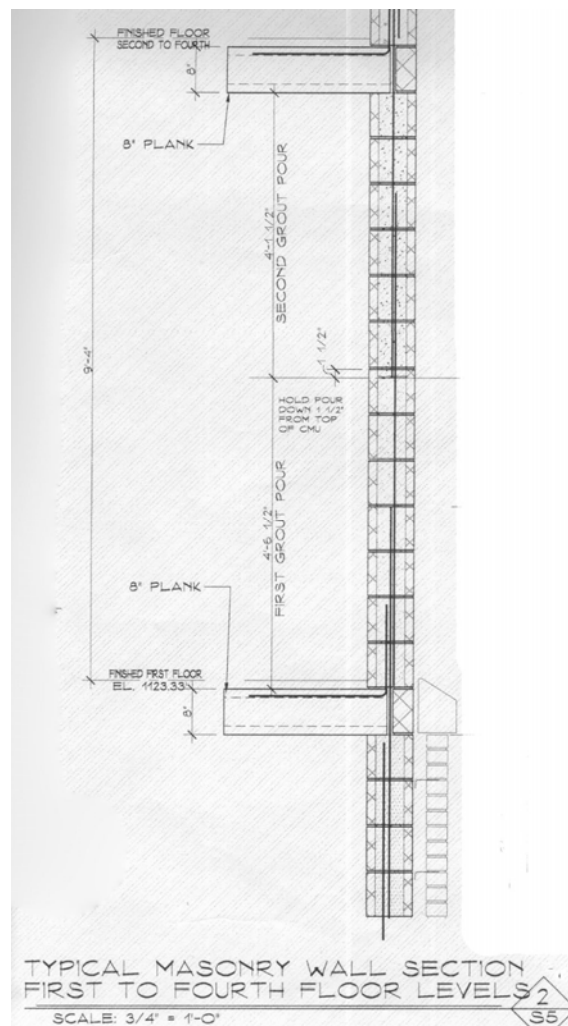
---

Listed below are the prominent structural elements contained in Centre Court Apartments:

- 8" CMU exterior above grade and 10" CMU exterior below grade
  - Load bearing units conforming to ASTM C90
  - Net Compressive Stress = 3000 PSI
  - Above grade CMU's contain Dur-O-Wall every other course
  - Block cells with bars are grouted a minimum 2 courses below plank bearing
- 8" pre-cast hollow core planks
  - Conform to latest edition of ACI 318
  - Steel bearing will contain weld plates spaced 4' O.C. max.
  - $f'_c=5000$  PSI
- Steel beams and columns
  - Typical beam sizes: W12 X 26 and W14 X 43
  - Grade 50 or ASTM A992
  - Fabricated and erected in accordance to the latest edition of AISC specifications.
- Concrete columns, footings, and slabs
  - Mixed and placed in accordance with ACI 318 "Building Code Requirements for Concrete"
  - Footings and slabs  $f'_c = 3000$
  - Columns  $f'_c = 4000$

## Lateral System

The lateral system is comprised of the 8" and 10" CMU walls that wrap the main elevator and stairwell cores. The top two stories of CMU's are unreinforced. Further down the structure, the blocks are grouted where the #5 bars are present until you reach the bottom two floors that are grouted solid. (see section below)

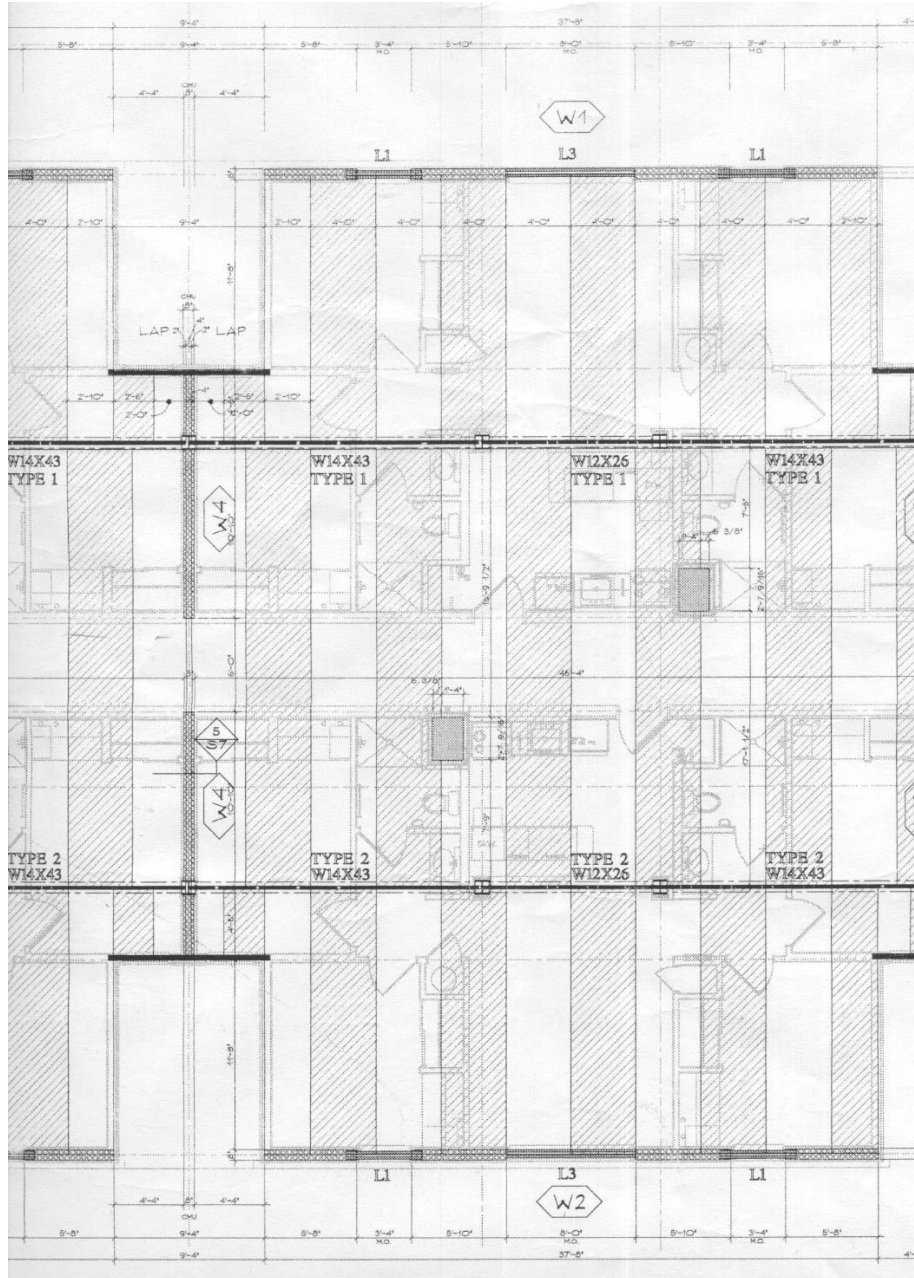


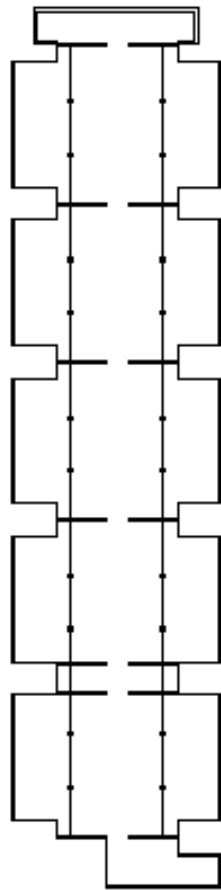
## Gravity System

The vertical loads of the building are also carried to the footing by the CMU system, wrapping the exterior of the structure for much of the structure. The 8" precast hollow core planks distribute the floor loads to the blocks on the exterior of the building and a girder to column grid in the interior of the structure. The typical beam sizes are W12 X 26 and W14 X 43, which distribute the load to a series of W14 X 90 columns that then carry it to the 6' X 8' concrete footings below. (see typical structural bay on the following page)



### Existing Structural Plan





8"CMU Exterior  
TYP INT BM SIZES  
14X34 & 12X26

### Codes and References

---

- The International Building Code 2003
- The American Concrete Institute
  - Section 530.1: Masonry
- The American Institute of Steel Construction
- CRSI 2002: Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute
- United Steel Deck Design Manual 2002

---

## Problem Statement

---

The main problem that will be addressed in the Centre Court Apartments is the environmental impact of the materials and systems in the building. With green building becoming more of an easily obtainable goal for owners, builders, and designers alike, it is important to not overlook any steps that can be taken to make our buildings more efficient, create less waste in construction and destruction, and use materials that have been created in the safest and most environmentally friendly way as possible. Of the 4,859,000 buildings in the United States, the USGBC has calculated that they account for the following as compared to the US as a whole:

- 65% of electricity consumption
- 36% of energy use
- 30% of greenhouse gas emissions
- 30% of raw materials use
- 30% of waste output (136 million tons annually)
- 12% of potable water consumption.

The marketability of the USGBC's LEED ranking system is growing stronger everyday and is easily visible by last year's 12,685 and over 42,512 LEED Accredited Professionals worldwide. Such an acknowledgement would place the Centre Court Apartments on a higher pedestal than its peers and would set precedence for all future downtown apartment buildings for the borough of State College, Pennsylvania. Public relations aside, the USGBC has calculated that LEED-certified projects:

- Lower operating costs and increased asset value
- Reduce waste sent to landfills
- Conserve energy and water
- Are healthier and safer for occupants
- Reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions
- Qualify for tax rebates, zoning allowances, and other incentives in hundreds of cities

The alternative construction method presented in this thesis will not attempt to make Centre Court Apartments gain a LEED Certification, but will lay out the guidelines to become LEED Certified because it will help the building become more environmentally friendly. Owners and occupants of sustainable buildings understand their role in the everyday living and breathing of the structure they inhabit. By having such constant reminders of the role you have in the functions of the building and it's impacts on your health can help to make an often times neglectful student population more conscious of the how they can help. Such a building could also attract a populous of more aware caring occupants that would prefer to live in such an environment.



---

## Solution

---

### Structural

From a structural engineering standpoint, materials that are renewable, have low embodied energy, and/or are made with recycled content are the most preferred sustainable building elements. Due to the 67.5' height of the Centre Court Apartments, use of load bearing natural structural elements such as straw bale are prohibited by code and the bearing ability of the bales, therefore a non-load bearing straw bale wall assembly will be used. Traditionally this post and beam system is done with timber framing. Chapter 5 of the IBC 2006 height restrictions bans the use of timber frame, so a redesign of the CMU and hollow core slabs system will be done with a concrete frame and shear wall gravity and lateral resisting system with two way flat plate slabs. A high volume of fly ash or class C pozzolans, which is a waste product from coal burning power plants, will be incorporated into the concrete design mix, replacing up to 50% of the required Portland cement. Not only does this create a safe, alternative use of contaminates from the power industry, but Portland cement is the most toxic and energy intensive ingredient in concrete due to the need of being heated to 2700 °F.

### Breadths

#### Building Enclosure

The straw bale walls will be built on end with a width of 12". In this orientation, the bales have better thermal qualities and their structural value is not compromised because the entire load of the building is being carried by the concrete system. Because concrete columns will be used in place of timbers this creates relative stiffness issues with caring a uniform stucco covering to protect the bales from moisture damage. Therefore the slab will extend past the frame and bear the panels completely out of the plane of the columns.

Straw bale construction on a story level of 67.5' is not a very convenient task due to the unique nature of constructing a straw bale wall. The walls will be pre-cast either on site or offsite locally, and shipped in using methods similar to those of pre-casting straw bale companies around the globe. It also goes without saying that a wall assembly such as this is not a common practice by most local contractors or estimators, therefore, a simple cost breakdown and comparison of only the structural and enclosure system will be conducted against the original. A Microsoft Project schedule will be drafted to outline the feasibility of constructing such a system.

The Straw Bale wall system is acceptable and able to be permitted for the reasons that follow. Although Pennsylvania does not currently have a Straw Bale Code, two states, ten counties, and 6 cities do and are often referenced by building officials in areas that lack one. The most commonly referenced code is the California Straw Bale Code HS18944. This code states that for load bearing walls the height to width ratio of the walls shall not exceed 5.6:1. The new straw bale draft addition to the California Building Code requested by the California Department of Housing and Community Development,

---

and many other straw bale community members recommend a 6:1 ratio unless the wall is reinforced laterally at or below the height limit. The Bales will bear on the slab of each individual floor making the wall height a maximum of 9' and with the on-end bale width of 14" the ratio would be 7.7:1. Therefore a glulam beam will be sized accordingly to resist out of plane loading.

### **Architecture**

These straw bale wall assemblies will take the place of all CMU enclosure walls in the building, which will cause a need for alterations to the architectural layout. Due to the stucco finish that already exists on the exterior of the building, no large aesthetic changes will need to be conducted.

The addition of a column grid to replace the load bearing CMU system will also create numerous architectural changes in particular in the parking garage and dealing with parking capacities in the local zoning code. Parking will also be affected by the building being extended to accommodate for the increased wall width of the straw panels.

A LEED evaluation of the redesigned building will be conducted if time permits.

## Tasks and Tools

---

### Task One: Structural

1. Calculate new dead, live, and Lateral loads in accordance with IBC 2006
  - a. Investigate High Fly Ash Concrete design
  - b. Investigate that the 2 Way Flat Plate system is the most economical
2. Size all members in accordance with ACI 318-05
  - a. Slabs
  - b. Columns
  - c. Lateral Frames
3. Model on ETABS
  - a. Compute story drift
  - b. Compute torsion effects

### Task Two: Sustainability Breadth

1. Preliminary LEED Analysis
  - a. Analyze existing structure
  - b. Establish obtainable points
2. Analyze under floor air distribution
  - a. Effects on the HVAC system
3. Analyze Photovoltaic array on the roof
  - a. Effect on the Electrical system
4. Perform detailed LEED evaluation
  - a. Create energy model on E-quest (if time permits)
  - b. Perform full LEED credit evaluation for new obtainable points
5. Architectural adjustments
  - a. Adjust typical floor plans to new wall layout
  - b. Draft straw bale to concrete details and specifications

### Task Three: Construction Management Breadth

1. Investigate Straw Bale wall system
  - a. Cost and process of prefabricated wall system
  - b. Local cost and availability of Bales
2. Perform Cost Analysis
3. Create Schedule in Microsoft Project



---

## Conclusion

---

All economic benefits aside, it is not to be forgotten that the main objective of this thesis is to show a route that could be taken in order to assume responsibility as an owner, builder, or designer for the environmental impacts of a structure you have a hand in creating. In the environmental crisis that our planet is currently undergoing, we can no longer go about any daily activities in our lives and believe that due to comfort in an old method or upfront costs that we aren't contributing to the problem. With the industry fully recognizing the feasibility of building green, although this alternative design may be an extreme example, a sustainable building can be a very natural shift in the way we build.

The alternative method represented in this thesis is being investigated in hopes to offer a clear cut example that thinking innovatively and thinking green will not only benefit the species and eco system we exist with in communion, but also will aid the goals of the project as well. Building sustainably doesn't have to cost more in the long run and will add satisfaction to a project that is truly genuine and irreplaceable.