Development of the site and schematic understanding of how the program might lend to the ‘building of the block’ could take many shapes. Understanding the perimeter of the block and creating an edge is the most important consideration in one design. Attempting to create a second public lawn for the Courthouse and the new county complex drove another design solution.

The strongest schematic design involves stretching out the programmatic requirements into a series of individual single-story buildings, effectively providing a permeable edge as is seen typically along the Edenton blocks. This idea is a strong reaction to the programmatic needs and allows for flexibility owing to the different kinds of services to be provided.

Consideration is given to the types of services to be provided at the county complex. The more restrictive functions should be adjacent to the existing Courthouse and given a dense form. The more open and publicly accessible functions would then put at the opposite end of the block with the intermediate services filling-in between the two. This produces descending building mass from the existing Courthouse to the opposite end of the block.

The rear Courthouse public lawn is a less formal lawn and primarily for the interaction of the community. This develops as a device of giving the Courthouse a proper urban articulation, providing an edge to the rear of the Broad Street shops.
Further development of the site leads to the recognition of the three distinct forces acting on the site simultaneously. These include the urban edge at the commercial buildings, the edge at the new public lawn, and the edge at residential block.

The new complex serves to rebuild this urban block except for the commercial buildings along Broad Street. This includes the renovation of an existing building at the corner of King and Broad Streets. This will serve as a sign along the most public avenue for the complex beyond. To the rear of the new complex, a service road is provided as a breathing space not unlike that typically found at the center of typical urban blocks.

The front edge of the new county complex buildings is further reinforced by the creation of a public porch paralleling Court Street. The new buildings are held away from the existing residences to allow the difference in scale and function to be buffered by the new public lawn and porch.

The buildings of the county complex begin to take on specific binding characteristics. These are drawn from the examination of the typical urban edge condition. Each is separated from the other by equal distances, and the sides of adjacent buildings are buffered in their mass. Also, several walks are provided across the new public lawn from the public porch to Court Street.

Images:
(above) Site plan developed on 01.08.91.
(below left) King Street and Broad Street, photo by author.
(below center) View along Broad Street, photo by author.
(below right) View along Court Street, photo by author.
The existing lawn at the front of the Courthouse is a relatively flat and wide space. It is edged with great trees, bordered by the Albemarle Sound to the south and dominated by the Courthouse to the north. Large antebellum houses march along in regimented step at the east and west.

The lawn steps down gently to the waterfront from the Courthouse. The terrain is relatively flat in sections while steeper regimented grade changes occur at intervals.

The new public lawn is more introspective, high at each end and low along the middle. It follows the existing topography of Court Street. This lawn is to be the place of collection and focus. Long stairs are provided at each level change of the lawn, providing a series of plazas separated by constructed edges.

Images:
(above) Site model developed on 02.05.91.
(center) Site section sketch along the fore and rear Courthouse lawns.
(below) View of existing public lawn from steps of Courthouse, photo by author.
The combination of the new public lawn with the public porch is to be a designed experience. It is intended to translate the typical residential construct of road-sidewalk-lawn-steps-porch into something with urban scale.

The articulation of the steps by which one moves from the lawn to the porch and the alignment of the walks to the buildings of the new complex are important design considerations.
The public porch reflects the individual residential porch in purpose and position. Drawing from the string of residential porches which line most all of the towns’ streets, this structure also serves as an airy buffer between the public lawn and the public buildings it fronts. Light gauge steel framing and metal roofing make the structure as unimposing as any of the painted wood framed porches at the neighboring houses.

The length of the porch is unchanged except for articulations at the public through-ways between the buildings. These are intended to recall the typical pronounced breaks found between the house porches along the streets. These breaks relieve the continuous ribbon of porch structure and define for the community patron areas where one might pass through to the parking level and service road.
At King Street adjacent to the existing Courthouse, the new project draws back and avoids spacially compressing the existing structure. The remaining open space is labeled as the Courthouse Plaza.

The existing County Services four-story building that houses many of the services that are to be moved into this proposed project currently occupies this site. This existing building has nothing to do with the context or scale of this town. Also, it is so close to the existing Courthouse so as to draw away from the Courthouse’s grand formal position at the head of the existing public lawn. In this proposed project, the existing County Services building is to be razed.

Images:
(above left) Perspective sketch of the Courthouse Plaza.
(above right) Photo of the existing Courthouse and existing County Services building as seen along King Street - view west.
(center left) Perspective sketch of Courthouse Plaza from the south.
(below) Sketch of new and existing Courthouse elevations along King Street.
Steps are provided to connect the open public communal lawn to the public porch, which then connects to the public buildings. Similar to residential porch steps in the community, these steps soften the threshold from the community public lawn to the porch.

The steps are designed to provide access, but not to promote division. Monolithic steps fronting Court Street could serve to elevate, and visually separate, the porch from the occupants of the public lawn. This is not the design intent here.

Images:
(above left) Perspective sketch at the lawn/porch steps.
(above right) Photo, by author, of existing house along Court Street.
(center left) Perspective sketch at the lawn/porch steps.
(below) Axonometric sketch of steps at edge of public lawn.
With the elimination of the existing parking lot, underbuilding parking is provided along the length of new structure. Accessed from Court Street across the lowest part of the new public lawn, the parking area is intended to be obscured, but not buried.

In fact, this programmatic issue afforded purpose to the regionalistic detail of elevating houses and public buildings. While this is usually done with a raised perimeter masonry foundation walls, these buildings are supported on precast concrete columns and beams to allow free flow of traffic. Exposed low concrete masonry retaining walls provide symbolic connection to past building practices. Open spaces between the buildings’ bases and these low walls allow natural light to penetrate into the parking area.

Images:
(above left) Section sketch at typical building/parking area condition.
(above center) Section sketch at building steps of typical building/parking area condition.
(above right) Aerial photo of existing parking lot.
(center) Schematic plan of the parking area below the new buildings.
(below) Schematic section through buildings and parking area below.