N-Circle Railroad Update 42 – October 25, 2026

Building Micro-Scenes for a Church and Two Restaurants

This Update describes the continuing development of “Micro-Scenes” for the N-Circle layout, as discussed previously in Update 34, which described the general approach and includes a list of existing and planned micro-scenes.

I first developed a small micro-scene around the recently completed Parkway Diner from Update 41, then a larger scene around the Brick Church also recently built in Update 40, updating the original temporary scene with the Old South Church from Updates 26 & 27 and finally a scene adding patio seating in front of the Old Fire House Restaurant from Update 8.

I developed all three scenes to an evolving “standard” for the N-Circle layout, on rectangular plates of 1 mm thick white styrene, so adjacent scenes will be at the same height and where a scene ends at a street, the 1 mm height approximates a 6.3-inch curb height. The sidewalk width on the Post Office and Small City Park micro-scenes in Update 34 is 11 mm, which is a scale 5 feet, 9 inches, so I used the same here, with similar Tamiya “Medium Grey” paint, for consistency when panels may be placed adjacent.

I am not sure where these scenes will be used on the layout ultimately, so I did not attach the buildings. If I need to fit the structures into a different area on the layout, I will be able to re-use them on a new styrene panel.

Doing all three scenes at the same time was much more efficient than if they were done separately, as they used common paints and materials. All three scenes together took about 17 hours over 33 shared sessions. A bit of that time was for detailing outdoor furniture from multiple sets that were not all used here but will be stored away in a Details box for future use.

Adding Scenic Details Around the Parkway Diner

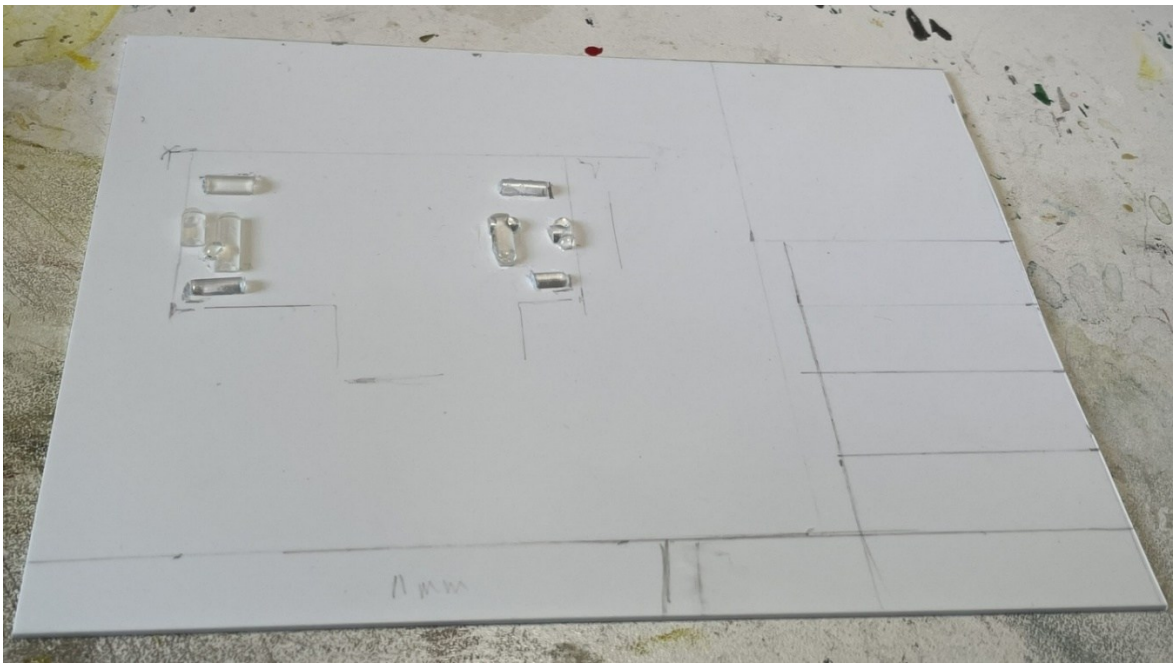
I wanted just a small micro-scene panel around the Parkway Diner, as it may get moved around the layout over time. The building is 80 mm long and 70 mm deep, from the front entry way to the end of the rear steps. For there to be a pathway to the rear steps, there had to be another 10 mm or so on the rear and another 35 mm on the front for the sign overhang and another 11 mm for a sidewalk. So, the whole panel needs to be at least 125 mm deep. I wanted a small parking area, N-scale parking spaces are about 16 x 44 mm, so these added to the width of the scene.

The diner will not be attached to the panel, and the interior and roof are not attached to the walls as described in Update 41, so this structure can be modified in the future, possibly adding lights to highlight the interior.

The bottom of the structure is open, so four pegs in the corners will hold it in alignment. As with previous structures, I cut the pegs from sections of plastic styrene sprues, which could be glued to the base with styrene cement. The opening is 65 x 28 mm; the alignment pegs on the base fit just inside these dimensions.

After measuring everything out, the styrene sheet is 165 x 125 mm. This photo shows the sheet marked up for the position of the building with the sidewalk and parking around it, with the pegs glued in place for aligning the building to the base. I added a couple of more inner pegs to align the interior centered end-to-end.

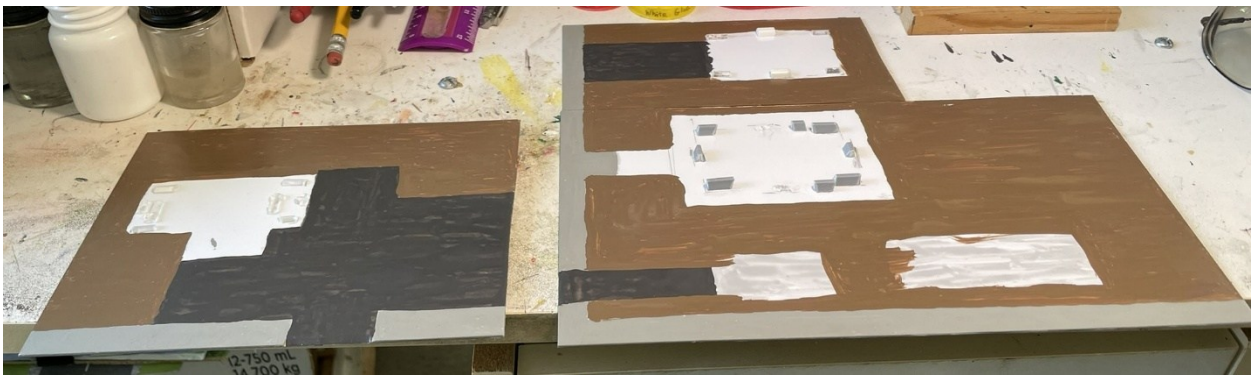
N-Circle_26-09-08_Parkway_Scene_Cropped



I then filed a beveled edge in the styrene where the driveway crosses the sidewalk, so the outer edge is at street surface level.

I applied Vallejo grey primer over all areas to be painted on all three micro-scene panels in this report, then started by using Tamiya “Medium Grey” for the sidewalks and Polly Scale “UP Dark Grey” for the driveways on all three panels. With these areas defined, I then applied a coat of Tamiya “Flat Earth” on all the areas around the buildings that will be covered with green grass ground foam. The brown provides a more realistic background for any gaps in the grass than the styrene plastic white. Here we see the completed painting on all three panels before adding ground cover and details. Note that there is no need to paint under the buildings, just make sure the paint extends under their edges so there are no gaps.

N-Circle_26-09-11_Three_Scenes_Cropped



To add the block dividing cracks in the concrete sidewalks I used a standard #2 lead pencil and a clear glass plate as a straight edge. The glass allows you to see the underlying sidewalk as you approach driveways, curbs, etc. A light touch with the pencil creates a visible but not too dark line.

The ground cover for all three panels was attached using Woodland Scenics Scenic Cement and standard techniques for scenery, using Woodland Scenics earth and green turf blends around the buildings and a few clumps of green scenery foam for shrubbery.

Note that when adding grass around the base of a building, the scenery cement will seep under the edge of the building and glue it to the styrene base, even for those buildings in this article that were intended to be removable. With gentle prying it was possible to loosen and remove them, but be aware of this if you plan to be able to remove your structures and go easy with the scenery cement around them.

There have been countless articles written about how to do striping on model railroad layout roads. But here is the technique I used for the parking lot stripes, using two small, stacked glass plates and a micro-brush. With the upper plate overhanging the lower, you can run the brush along its edge without the paint smudging under the bottom guide plate.

N-Circle_26-09-26_Parkway_Scene



Note the marked locations of the stripes on the underlay paper, to align the plates to.

This technique worked okay, but I had had too much paint on the brush a couple of times, so it blossomed and I had to go back and touch up the edges of the lines with the asphalt color afterwards. So, they are “okay,” but not as straight and true as the stripes on my PowerPoint scenery panels!

I made bumper stops for the ends of the parking spaces from sections of trapezoidal-shaped styrene kit sprues painted grey, then glued to the parking lot. Much less expensive than 3-D printed bumper stops on eBay!

I used a small plastic ring painted grey concrete color for the signpost base, with a drop of white glue in the center to hold it. I then superglued the sign supports to the entryway roof. Hopefully this fragile structure will be robust enough to stay in place on the layout.

I decided to use the telephone booth that came with the Diner kit. Against the building, its imperfections are not too apparent.

These three micro-scene panels provided opportunities to put to use many of the “someday” detail parts accumulated in my details parts boxes. For example, a pewter metal propane tank placed behind the diner to fuel the grills.

Web research revealed that dumpsters were developed in the 1930s, so I permanently attached one on the edge of the parking lot – it would be reasonably appropriate for either 1950s or 1980s operating sessions on the N-Circle Railroad.

The tables and chairs and chairs for outside dining came from multiple 3-D printed sets. Dots of white, red, green and yellow applied with a wood toothpick are intended to look like food plates on the tables. Yes, there are vegetables served at a diner!

Watering trough planters like in front of the prototype diner are left over from the N-Circle’s farm scene. Dots of white, red, and yellow paint applied with a wood toothpick on the green foam shrubbery glued into the planters serve for flowers.

This scene provided an opportunity to use some of the seated and standing Noch and Peiser people figures that were finished in Update 36.

The small Woodland Scenics deciduous tree on the side lawn was attached by drilling a hole in the panel for the nub on the base of the trunk then supergluing the tree directly to the panel. The gravel path from the rear door allows for bringing supplies into the kitchen and garbage out to the dumpster!

In this set of close-up photos of the finished panel from all sides we see all the detail parts in place.

N-Circle_26-10-22_Parkway_Scene_1_Cropped



This angle provides a better view of the custom sign in place.

N-Circle_26-10-22_Parkway_Scene_3_Cropped



This rear view shows the gas tank for the grills and the pathway to the rear door.

N-Circle_26-10-22_Parkway_Scene_4_Cropped



N-Circle_26-10-22_Parkway_Scene_5_Cropped



This last shot provides a close-up view of the happy diners seated outside on a beautiful day!

N-Circle_26-10-22_Parkway_Scene_6



The scene has been placed on the corner of Home Avenue and Park Street for now, and the Old South Church will go into storage, as this is the only place the diner panel will fit in the current configuration of the layout. It is not a great location, facing the access road to the freight yard and too close to the home behind it - it will find a better location in a future re-configuration of the layout.

N-Circle_26-10-25_Parkway_Scene_1_Cropped



N-Circle_26-10-25_Parkway_Scene_2_Cropped



Adding a Wedding Scene in Front of a Church

The east side of Church Avenue is 220 mm long, from the Park Street curb to the edge of the Wanye Feeds parking lot. Within this space we have the Firehouse Restaurant, the Brick Church and the rectory house with garage.

The restaurant is 48 mm wide, the church is 70 mm and the rectory is 45 mm, which sum to 163 mm, so they all will fit, with some realistic spacing between them and allowing for an 11 mm sidewalk along Park Street.

The Church Avenue east side depth, from street edge to the edge of the module/scenery Panel 1 is 340 mm. The Evergreen Scale Models white styrene sheets I have been using are = 6 x 12 inches = 152 x 304 mm.

I want the church and restaurant scenes to be on separate panels, as the restaurant may be moved to a different location on the layout at some point.

After measuring and sizing, I went with a styrene sheet 140 x 250 mm for the church scene – this will contain the depth of the scene from encroaching into the park area to the east.

The church has a large opening in the bottom to accommodate four corner alignment pegs. The house only has one round opening in the center of the bottom and the garage has no openings in the bottom, So I will just attach these two with double-sided tape, to allow for possible future removal to place them on an updated micro-scene base.

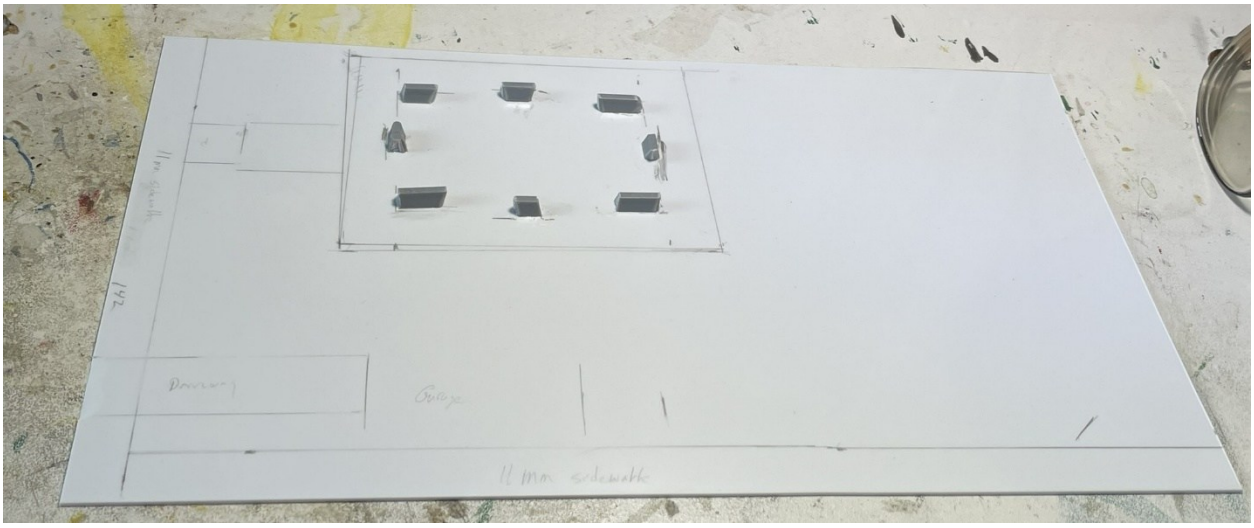
Here we see the initial mapping out and marking up of the placement of the church, rectory and garage on the church panel, with the Firehouse Restaurant placed next to it, to determine how this placement on the east side of Church Avenue will look.

N-Circle_26-09-05_Church_Scene_1



This next photo shows the sheet marked up for the position of the three buildings with the sidewalk and driveway sketched out for later painting and the pegs glued in place for aligning the church to the base. My initial four corner pegs were too far inwards, so I added four more centered on each side to produce a tighter fit. I didn't want the pegs to be so tight that it would be difficult to fit the structure over them, but the initial set would have allowed too much movement of the structure in the scenery to be placed around it.

N-Circle_26-09-08_Church_Scene_2_Cropped



After the above pegs were dry in position, I did another test fit and found that the added side pegs were right under a crossbar that goes across the opening in the bottom of the church that I had forgotten…so…pried them off with a hobby knife and reglued them closer to the corners…!

A recurring theme in these N-Circle Updates: "Double-check the alignment and measurements of everything before gluing!!" A lesson that I never seem to learn, hoping you will do better!

After this minor diversion, I filed a beveled edge in the styrene where the driveway crosses the sidewalk to the garage, like with previous panels.

As described above, I applied Vallejo grey primer over all areas to be painted on the three micro-scene panels in this report, then followed the same process for painting the sidewalk, driveway and earth under the ground cover.

I used the usual Woodland Scenics ground foam and Scenery Cement for the grass on the lawns and included a dirt walkway from the rear door of the church around to the front of the rectory, then added clumps of shrubbery around the base of the church to hide those gaps in the foundation confessed to in Update 40!

Digging into the Details boxes again, I added a 3-D printed picnic table on the back lawn and a 3-D printed air conditioner in an upstairs window of the rectory.

As discussed in Update 40, I did not use the sign from the church kit, but built a custom sign for this micro-scene, to model the sign in front of the church here in Essex, seen in this photo.

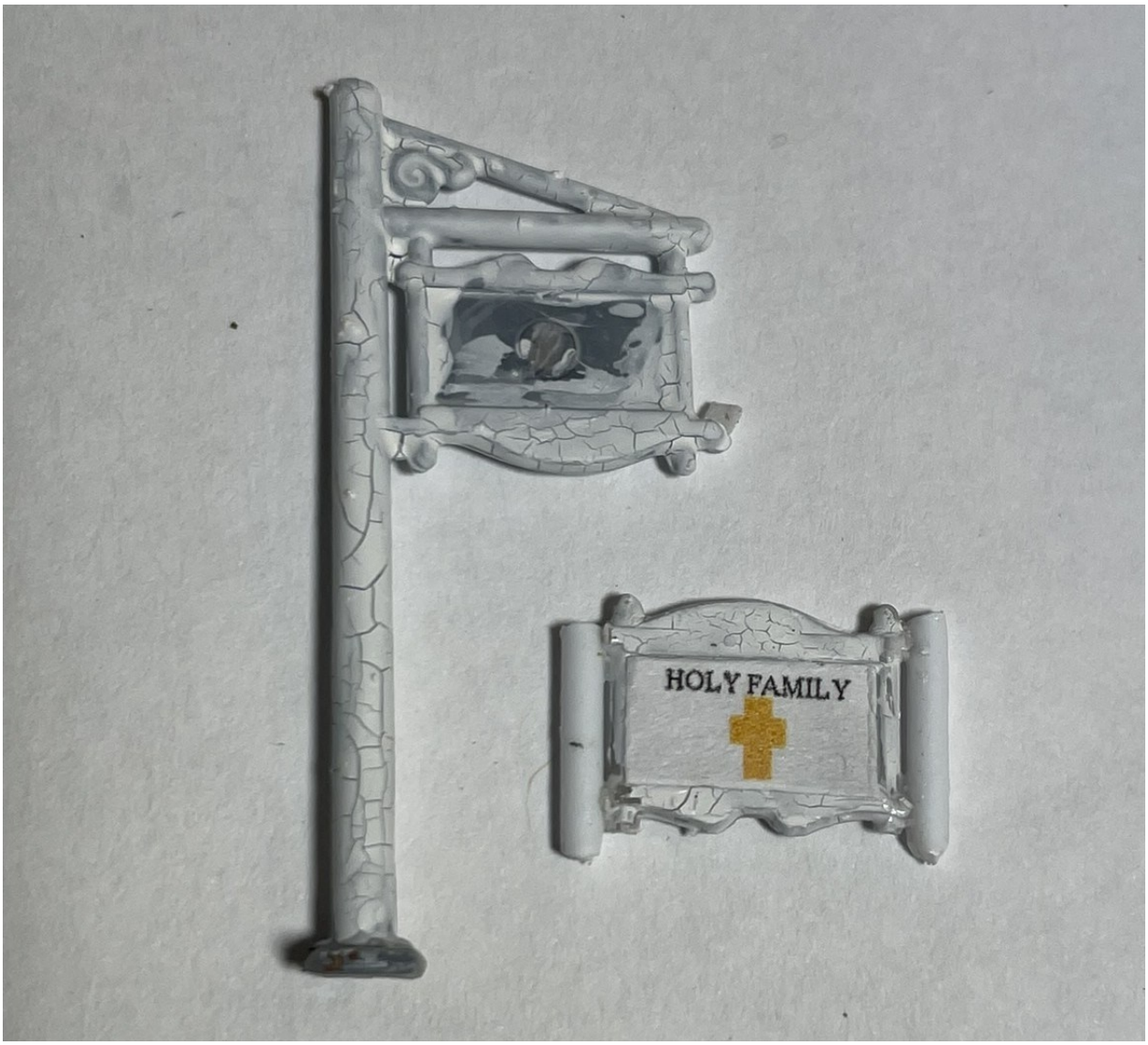
HolyFamilyChurch_Essex_Sign_1



I found in my Details box a plastic sign on a tall pole which is a similar shape and size to the desired prototype. I cut it off from the pole and glued short white round posts to each side to create a lawn sign. I then made a 4x8 mm sign in PowerPoint, printed it on white paper and glued it to the sign. This structure did not require making a custom decal.

Here we see the final sign next to another copy of the original sign for reference. Note that I did not include the “Catholic Church” lettering - in N-scale, it would have been impossibly small, smaller than my printer’s smallest font and smaller than anyone will ever be able to read when in place on the layout.

N-Circle_26-09-27_Church_Scene_Cropped



I decided to add sections of low picket fence from a Preiser styrene plastic kit around the back and side of the panel to provide separation from the adjacent park and Firehouse Restaurant. The fence was made with dark green plastic, which I painted first with grey primer, then with white. One small challenge – the paint will web in the narrow spaces between the pickets – I cleared them by blowing a quick, sharp breath through them. This fencing only has very short posts extending below it to insert into holes in the base, and I had already put down the grass ground foam. Therefore, I just superglued it to the surface - a few clumps of shrubbery attached with white glue to the ground and the fence will help hold the fence upright over time.

I added a large Woodland Scenics deciduous tree to the backyard, like used in previous N-Circle micro scenes. These trees have a peg in the bottom which can be used to fit into a separate base piece which comes with the tree. However, the base is a bit oversized, so I drilled a hole in the panel and superglued the tree directly to the panel, after trimming off the peg with sprue cutters to the length of the thickness of the styrene panel.

I created a wedding scene on the walkway in front of church using wedding figures from Merten. They have a large base under the feet which while this would make them easier to attach upright, they were a bit unsightly, so I trimmed them back with plastic sprue cutters, then touched up the exposed white edges with grey paint to blend into the underlying sidewalk.

I added two photographers from my figures box but did not add a large number of people on the sidewalk as would be expected for a large wedding – the viewer will just have to use their imagination…! The figures were attached with superglue.

Here is a series of photos showing the completed micro-scene up close.

N-Circle_26-10-18_CityPark_Scene_1



This closeup shows the wedding party on the front sidewalk. The bases on the Merten wedding figures are visible, but removing them completely would have made it difficult to keep them upright with no support.

N-Circle_26-10-18_CityPark_Scene_2



This corner view shows the custom sign on the front lawn.

N-Circle_26-10-18_CityPark_Scene_3



This side of the scene will be partially obscured by the adjacent Old Firehouse Restaurant scene, so I did not add many details.

N-Circle_26-10-18_CityPark_Scene_4



And finally, this rear view shows the gravel path from the back door of the church with the added fence, picnic table and shade tree. The gentlemen holding the Good Book added in Update 40 is still standing on the back porch – not sure why he is not participating in the wedding!

N-Circle_26-10-18_CityPark_Scene_5



In this final photo of the church scene on the layout, yes, there is no parking lot for such a large church, just a few curbside parking spots. This is a pervasive problem all around the N-Circle layout – too many buildings that I want to include in the compressed space of a small layout! But the added ground cover and details make a more interesting scene than the original placement on the PowerPoint panel in Update 40.

N-Circle_26-10-25_Church&Firehouse_Scene_2_Cropped



Adding Outdoor Seating in Front of a Restaurant

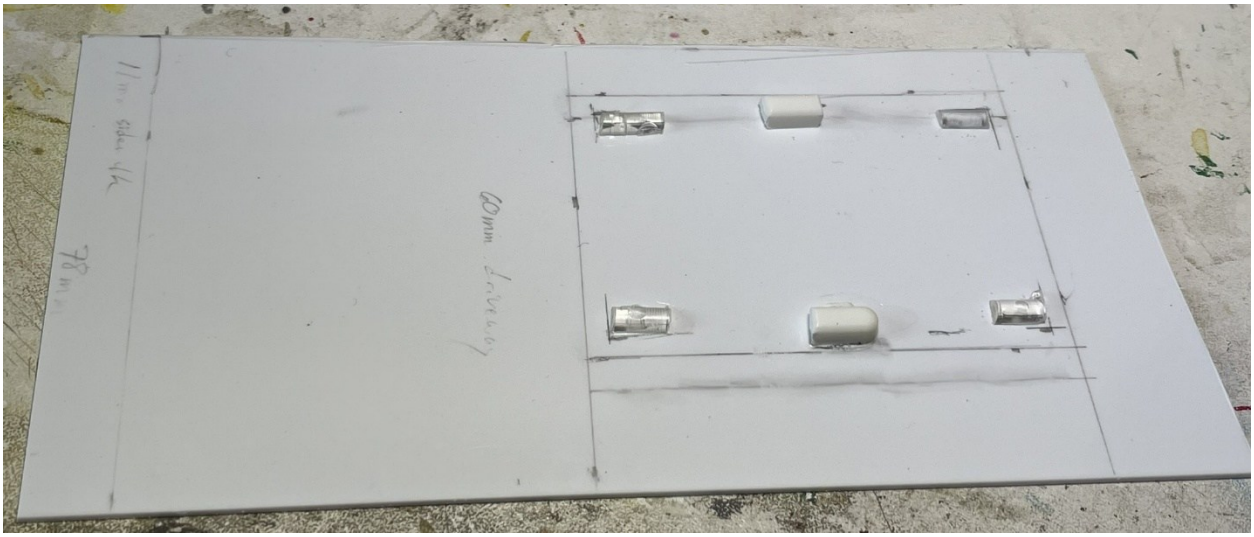
The Old Firehouse Restaurant built in Update 8 has been on the northeast corner of Church Avenue and Main Street next to the Wayne Feeds mill on the layout for a while. But I have always envisioned setting it back from the street and adding outdoor seating in front. As a firehouse, it would have had a large driveway in front when it was built

While there is quite a bit of space between the rear of the restaurant and the park in its current position, I did not want the panel to be too deep, allowing the restaurant to be placed elsewhere. There is no door on the rear of the building, an old loading door is boarded up, so there is no need to model a loading or parking area behind the building.

The structure is 48 mm wide by 74 mm deep. Allowing for an 11 mm sidewalk and a 60 mm (32-scale feet) driveway in front, I converged on a styrene sheet 77 x 150 mm. The 77 mm summed with the church panel 140 mm width is 217, the 220 mm length of Church Avenue as discussed above. And the 150 mm depth is 100 mm shorter than the adjacent church panel, which will allow some park scenery to extend into this area.

The restaurant has a large opening in the bottom to accommodate four corner alignment pegs. This photo shows the sheet marked up for the position of the building with the sidewalk and patio area in front, with the pegs glued in place for aligning the building to the base. Like with the church above, my initial four corner pegs were too far inwards, so I added two more centered on the long sides to produce a tighter fit.

N-Circle_26-09-08_Firehouse_Scene_2_Cropped



I did not file down the styrene edge where the original fire house driveway would have crossed the sidewalk – the city rebuilt the sidewalk after the fire house was converted to a restaurant some years ago, after they built the new fire station on Main Street in N-Circle Update 7!

As described above, I applied Vallejo grey primer over all areas to be painted on the three micro-scene panels in this report, then followed the same process for painting the sidewalk, driveway and earth under the ground cover.

I used the usual Woodland Scenics ground foam and Scenery Cement for the grass on the lawns as described for the two scenes above.

Before adding the ground details around the building, I also added a 3-D printed air conditioner in an upstairs window – there are apartments above the restaurant. The tables and chairs and seated figures and waiters came from the Details boxes, as discussed for the Parkway Diner scene above. And again, dots of white, red, green and yellow applied with a wood toothpick highlight food plates on the tables. And more planters with painted colored flowers in front.

Here is a set of photos showing the finished scene from all sides. We start with more happy diners seated outside on a beautiful day, while an attentive waiter waits by the door! It's pretty tight to get by the outside diners if you want to dine inside today!

N-Circle_26-10-22_Firehouse_Scene_1_Cropped



These next three shots show there is not much on the sides or rear of this narrow panel, I just added the one air conditioner in the upstairs window.

N-Circle_26-10-22_Firehouse_Scene_2_Cropped



N-Circle_26-10-22_Firehouse_Scene_3_Cropped



N-Circle_26-10-22_Firehouse_Scene_4_Cropped



As planned, the micro-scene was placed next to the church scene on Church Avenue, as was shown above. This additional view from the North highlights how this scene integrates with the adjacent church scene. It looks like both the church and the firehouse were built with bricks from the same brick company in the same time period.

N-Circle_26-10-25_Church&Firehouse_Scene_4_Cropped



These three micro-scenes together took about 17 hours to complete over 33 shared sessions. Building all three at the same time was way more efficient than doing them separately – I painted sidewalks and driveways on all three at the same time, opening and mixing paints only once, as well as preparing cement and tools for applying ground foam grass, shrubbery to be shared across the three. Individually the three scenes took about 5 to 6 hours each, as they were of similar complexity.

While these scenes might not be called craftsman-level quality, they provide nice upgrades to three areas of the N-Circle layout.