



The American Institute of Architects

Urban Design Assistance Team
Davenport, Iowa



THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

Urban Planning and Design Committee

Report of the
URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAM TO DAVENPORT, IOWA

12-13-14 September 1970

Henry Steinhardt, AIA Chairman
George E. Kostritsky, AIA, AIP
George W. Barton

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I. BACKGROUND

Davenport is the tenth American city to be visited by an AIA Urban Design Assistance Team since the program was initiated in 1967, and the first in the State of Iowa. The Urban Design Assistance Team Program, headed by Henry Steinhardt, AIA, is a function of the Urban Planning and Design Committee. Robert S. Sturgis, AIA Chairman, a national committee of the American Institute of Architects.

What a team
is and does

Each Urban Design Assistance Team has different membership from the others; each is made up of experts in the various professional fields required by the particular problems of the city under study. Members of a team are not compensated for their service and are expected not to accept commissions. The team's functions are diagnostic and advisory rather than design. The team makes a study and presents an analysis with recommendations for action, producing what has been described as a "plan for planning".

Preparation

The idea of bringing a team to Davenport was first conceived by Louis G. Soenke, AIA, president of the Eastern Iowa Section, Iowa Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, early in 1970. Mr. Soenke made his first inquiry on 25 May, and a formal request was presented to the AIA on behalf of the Eastern Iowa Section by Roman Scholtz, AIA, on 6 July. This request was accompanied by letters indicating interest and support by the Mayor, Downtown Davenport Association, and Greater Davenport Chamber of Commerce.

Sponsorship

The team visit was sponsored by the Downtown Davenport Association, George B. Norman, President. The DDA bore the major part of the expenses, the remainder being assumed by the AIA.

Coordination

The Davenport team is the first in which the city has shared in the actual burden of coordinating the team's activities. This responsibility was carried jointly by Roman Scholtz, AIA, for the Eastern Iowa Section, and Eugene O. Johnson, Davenport City Planner, for the City. Fred J. Ebeling, of the Eastern Iowa Section, served as publicity director and Louis S. Pesses, Executive Secretary of DDA, was responsible for program scheduling.

Study Area

The area to be studied by the team was defined as the CBD (Central Business District), an area of about three dozen blocks, bounded on the south by the Mississippi River, on the east and north by the elevated Rock Island Railroad tracks, and on the west by Western Avenue.

Charge to the Team

The Eastern Iowa Section of the AIA went to some pains to delineate specific objectives for the team. These included: evaluation of the relation between the CBD and the River, especially the impact of the proposed flood protection wall; study of the proposed 2nd Street mall as related to transportation and the riverfront; review of parking and transportation problems; consideration of riverfront development; and suggestions for incentives to bring people into the CBD.

II. TEAM VISIT

The AIA Urban Design Assistance Team for Davenport consisted of:

Henry Steinhardt, AIA, chairman of the team, architect and urban designer, of Mercer Island, Washington

George E. Kostritsky, AIA, AIP, Vice President of Research, RTKL, Inc., architect, urban designer and planner, of Baltimore, Maryland

George W. Barton, President of Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc., engineer, planner and transportation consultant, of Chicago, Illinois

Survey

The team conferred at Davenport on 12, 13, and 14 September 1970. They were first briefed by DDA, the architects and the city staff, and subsequently toured the area by bus, on foot, and by boat.

Interviews

Interviews, formal and informal, were held with a large number of persons of varying positions and interest in both private and municipal sectors. These included Mayor Jebens, City Council members, Planning and Zoning Commissions, Davenport Downtown Association, Greater Davenport Chamber of Commerce, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, civic and business leaders, interested citizens, and all members of the Eastern Iowa Section, Iowa Chapter, AIA.

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Presentation

The team held a press and television conference on the final day, followed by a banquet at which it presented the report verbally. Slides were shown, most of which were prepared by the Eastern Iowa Chapter, and a tape recording was made and subsequently transcribed. The activities of the team and then its observations and proposals received wide coverage in the media.

The comments which follow are in the words of the team members individually, but the analysis and recommendations were reached jointly as a team.

III. COMMENTS BY GEORGE W. BARTON

Traffic Through CBD

When the volumes of traffic being carried on downtown streets are compared with the number of parking spaces serving the Central Business District, one is led to suspect that one-half to two-thirds of this traffic is traveling through and is unrelated to downtown.

The manner in which the traffic signals are timed gives further evidence that the CBD lies astride a natural, primary corridor of movement--one paralleling the River. In order to meet the demands of vehicular traffic, only 10-second intervals are allotted to pedestrian movement as against 30-second intervals for vehicular movement. And this is happening in an area where the pedestrian should predominate.

Need for Bypass Routes

One of the first steps to create the environment needed for downtown development should be the construction of efficient modern roadways to divert unwanted through traffic away from the downtown streets. The proposed 5th Street Bypass appears highly suited to this purpose. Being located at the north edge of the CBD it will be in a position to intercept north-south through movement, whereas a major roadway along the riverfront would tend to draw needless north-south movement into the downtown area.

Further the 5th Street Bypass in combination with the Rock Island railway tracks will form a desirable and effective anchor to the northern boundary of the CBD. In this way it will help to produce a compact growth pattern in the CBD, a functional characteristic which is essential to success of the downtown area as a center of business and commerce.

The proposed Gaines Street Freeway similarly will provide a desirable bypass and anchor for the western edge of the CBD.

A roadway along the southern edge of the CBD is needed but should be designed only as access to the business district and not as a through traffic carrier.

Gaines Street Freeway

The Gaines Street Freeway can serve many functions. It can act as a bypass to divert traffic away from the downtown streets; it can anchor the western edge of the business district and stimulate compactness in the growth of the business area; it will improve access to the downtown area, both by transit and private vehicles.

Since this freeway will be cutting through the fabric of an established urban area, special care will be required in its design so that it is fitted gracefully into its environment.

Parking System

As far as can be judged from a brief visit, the parking system appears adequate in the quantity of facilities provided. It may be, however, that the facilities are not regulated in a manner that achieves optimum utility. For example, rates charged for parking are relatively low, making it easy for the businessman and his employee to monopolize convenient space which should be reserved for patrons and customers. Study might be given to modifying the fee structure at either or both of the parking ramps to increase the hourly charge progressively in accordance to the length of time parked.

There is serious question as to the total desirability of utilizing the pricing of the parking service as a device to force the use of transit. Quite evidently there can be a relationship between the cost of parking and the use of transit, in that parking is available for 10 hours at a cost of 25¢, whereas a two-way bus ride

costs 60¢. Extreme increases in the parking fee, however, could impare the attractiveness of the central business district and possibly impede its development. This could have a negative impact on transit since transit's greatest opportunity probably lies in serving the downtown area. Thus, a policy of using parking costs as a device to force the use of transit might prove self-defeating.

The concentration of parking along the riverfront tends to draw traffic through the heart of the business district as it moves to and from its parking terminal. As the development of downtown Davenport proceeds, it may be well to distribute parking around the business district in a location where it can intercept traffic before it passes through the heart of the business district. Parking related to the proposed 5th Street Bypass would help to achieve this objective.

Transit a Necessity

It is coming to be clearly recognized that a public transit system must be kept in operation to meet the travel needs of citizens who have no alternate mode of transportation. For the foreseeable future, the transit system in Davenport will operate on rubber tires. This does not necessarily mean that the service will be provided by the same type of buses as are in use today, operating over fixed routes, and at low speeds. Many innovations are in the research and development stage which give reason for optimism regarding the quality of transit service that can become available in Davenport within the next decade.

Malls

If well done, pedestrian malls can add a new quality to the Central Business District. For malls to be effective, they must be accompanied by adequate off-street parking; alternate facilities must exist to handle the traffic diverted from the streets converted to malls; facilities have to exist to allow commercial deliveries to the buildings fronting on the new malls; the land-uses and business activity fronting on the malls should be compatible with a pedestrian environment; the malls themselves should be of high design quality.

In Davenport sections of 2nd Street and Main Street are being considered for conversion to malls. In the case of 2nd Street, careful traffic engineering study will be needed because of the high volumes of east-west traffic movement. It may be that the use of 2nd Street as a pedestrian facility must await the construction of the 5th Street Bypass and the diversion of through traffic from the downtown streets. In the case of Main Street, a more limited analysis may be sufficient to establish the feasibility of a mall. It is quite possible that a short length of Main Street can be set aside for pedestrian usage, with the intersections kept open to vehicular movement along the east-west streets.

IV. COMMENTS BY HENRY STEINHARDT, AIA

Site of the CBD

The Mississippi River, beyond its historical relationship with the origins of your city, remains the greatest asset of Downtown Davenport. You are blessed with a dramatic outlook, an unobstructed view over the river, and even a southern exposure. Public use of the river front as a recreational space, a public park, a promenade is quite limited now. A lot of space has been preempted by open parking. Seen from the river, Davenport has a noble profile, but shows us only the backs of buildings.

Street Pattern

The open, uncluttered and generally characterless look of Davenport is largely due to the unusual street pattern, with large blocks and exceptionally wide streets in a square grid. This plan yields no direction nor emphasis; it is bland and uninteresting. There is significance in the fact that in both directions, east-west and north-south, the streets are called "streets" and there are no "avenues". In most cities one expects to find wider thoroughfares paralleling each other at closer intervals, usually called avenues and lending a certain direction or thrust which is lacking in Davenport.

You should make efforts to obtain some variety and make an asset of this monotonous pattern. You might try pedestrian bridges over the streets and parking garages above the streets, and you should consider interruptions in the middle of the streets for such monuments as the Dillon Memorial.

If you build a mall, serious thought should be given to moving the storefronts out toward the center of the street to reduce the excessive width, which is not conducive to shopping.

Landscaping

These vast open streets of Davenport are pretty much devoid of greenery and shade, and as a result you have a bare, Siberian cityscape. We know you suffered a tragic loss from the Dutch Elm Disease, and you should now undertake a vigorous, planned, prolonged, annual tree planting effort throughout the city, starting downtown. Your few small, privately landscaped spaces are inadequate, some are even closed to the public, and there doesn't seem to be any place to sit down out of doors.

The Chinese Wall

The "Chinese Wall" formed by the Rock Island Railroad viaduct has been much decried, but it appears that you may have it for some years and it does not strike us as a serious liability. Delapidated as it may be, the railroad is a vital organ of the city and it effectively delineates the east and north boundaries of the CBD.

Zoning Restrictions

The team was surprised to find so few new buildings downtown. There are, of course, only a handful, some public and some private. There must be a vast reservoir of demand in Downtown Davenport for new, modern office buildings - and apartment houses, hotels, and government buildings, too - and this unsuspected demand may prove to be a great boon to redevelopment. The present height limitation is very inhibiting to developers. It is our feeling that the CBD should be densely developed, that it should grow up rather than outward, and your existing zoning works against that. We can see little reason for any height restriction, though there must be limits on bulk. We suggest you undertake a revision of the zoning ordinance.

Older Buildings

Your older buildings are frequently scoffed at and torn down. Too bad, for they offer a lot of possibilities and once demolished are lost to the future. These

older buildings have a beauty and a charm of their own - plus a craftsmanship we can never regain - and they represent the old Davenport, the early river town. This generation has no right to deprive our children and their children of these richly ornamented survivors of an earlier time.

From coast to coast the value of such old buildings is being recognized, and increasingly they are being renovated rather than destroyed. It is inexpensive to remodel them, and they make excellent shops, restaurants, offices and even residences. We urge that you discontinue the present practice of tearing down these handsome old buildings to replace them with cheap, temporary taxpayers. They offer an attractive investment possibility, an increment of a visually richer cityscape, and a proper legacy to future generations.

Signing

Ugly commercial signs are a problem in the CBD and the community would profit financially and esthetically from better sign control. When each store competes with its neighbors' signs in brightness, vulgarity and garishness, everybody loses. You would dignify your city and improve business conditions if you would accept the same discipline in signing as they enforce in the shopping centers. This can be accomplished through a strict signing ordinance.

Parking as Urban Design

Davenport has wisely adopted the sophisticated policy of building structured garages, rather than depending on open surface parking. Some of these garages are hideous in themselves and they all disrupt pedestrian flow in the downtown. People walk on the sidewalks in the CBD to look in display windows - not to stare at parked cars. Experience has shown that it is more profitable if you raise these garages up one or two floors and put rentable space and arcades underneath at sidewalk level. Both private and public sectors should make this a standard policy for Downtown Davenport.

Cityscape -
the CBD Image

The general lack of pedestrian amenities suggests that if the CBD is to become more alive you should erect more statuary, install more fountains, establish more monuments, landscape more of the open space, and also upgrade the whole range of street furniture such as trash cans, hydrants, street lighting, and traffic controls.

There isn't much evidence of any effort in the Davenport CBD to foster a local feeling or style such as we find stamped on Philadelphia, Boston, New Orleans or San Francisco. It might arise from the older buildings, or from a local material such as the characteristic brick. The development of this kind of motif or look is a gradual process and will take a continuous effort by the property owners, city and architects of Davenport. The proposal for a Design Review Board is promising and should be tried out.

V. COMMENTS BY GEORGE E. KOSTRITSKY, AIA, AIP

Opportunity for
Change

Davenport and other metro areas of similar size and character are today in an advantageous position to compete with the older, established metro areas such as Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore because planning began before the problems became severe. The problems of movement of people, the journey to work, the cost of doing business, the disposal of trash, pollution, etc. are such that decision-makers are searching for alternatives and people are looking for a better and more satisfying way of life.

New Role for
Small Towns

The smaller metropolitan areas such as Davenport have the nucleus upon which new developments can be added. The ingredients are there: (a) good schools, (b) a city government, (c) pleasant environment and (d) key industrial employment.

Above all - Davenport is far enough away from the major metropolitan areas to forge a new way of life in a growing country. There must be a concerted effort to create a total environment which will not only be more attractive, but will function better because the systems which serve the community will work together, as they will be planned together:

- (1) The systems for the delivery of medical care
- (2) Systems for the production and delivery of housing
- (3) The ways all city and regional services can be improved

Action Required

Positive and aggressive action by all elements of a community will be needed.

Those communities which seize upon this opportunity and wish to move their towns forward to up the quality of life will take action.

Sound planning at all levels will be required if positive environmental changes are to be made. They must be planned for, a mechanism to accomplish the plans must be established and finally, resources to implement the needs of a community must be allocated. It may be that new sources of revenues or methods for financing these needs will have to be created and partnerships between government and business could be one of these tools.

Critical Mass

We sense that the Davenport metropolitan area has reached critical mass where there is the strength to determine the future role that Davenport can play as a result of the national trends, and we have found that the basic improvements in transportation which Mr. Barton has discussed, will have a tremendous impact on the future of Davenport and on the role and function of the central area.

The Changing Role of Downtown

There exists opportunities that can happen if the new role of the metropolitan center is understood.

Mr. Barton discussed the Centennial Expressway and the 5th Street bypass. If these improvements are properly executed, downtown will be in a unique and focal position in the metropolitan area. It will be an area which will have maximum accessibility to the total region and its previous role as a shopping center will be taken on by other commercial areas.

In turn, downtown should, in the long run, be the focus of office space and office workers. It should be a center for financial transaction--the banks, the insurance offices, the center of legal and related activity of the courts and certainly the area in which you would expect to find city hall and other state and local governmental functions. Educational facilities could be located in or near downtown.

One of a
Kind Uses

Other one of a kind uses such as convention facilities, libraries and other facilities related to conventions would be located there.

A characteristic of the downtown would be the encouragement of uses which would create night-time activity, such as high-density residential in apartment towers, theatres, restaurants and recreational uses which would by their function and location attract the population of a metropolitan area.

The Water's
Edge

Having been brought up in San Francisco, I have always been attracted to water as an amenity. Unfortunately, many of the cities which I have lived in -- Baltimore and Philadelphia--which had the good fortune of being on the water, have let their waterfronts be ruined by misuse. Both Baltimore and Philadelphia are now in the process of spending millions of dollars to rebuild their waterfront areas.

Davenport has, in our judgment, been fortunate that the riverfront has remained open and in public hands. Therefore, now is precisely the right time to work with the Army Corps of Engineers to develop multipurpose plans which will both protect the city from floods and open up this land for a variety of public and private uses.

Some of the uses for the riverfront have been suggested in earlier reports by the Planning Commission. These have included apartments for both young and old, the provision of public space for the sheer pleasure of having this window on the water, the location of civic uses which could include a convention hall, arena and a theatre. All of these uses would require parking and this function which would be needed in an expanding metrocenter could be the base upon which these uses could be built. Certainly the design and the treatment of the wall or protective barrier needs detailed planning. If properly treated, there could be a marina and restaurants as part of the plan.

We have concluded that the water's edge, if properly planned, can serve to enhance the economic vitality of the CBD, as there is no other location in the city that has this opportunity.

We, therefore, recommend that the design for this area be placed high on the priority list of any future plans.

How can Action
be Achieved?

We recognize that you have had studies prepared by your own planning staff and by consultants--you should recognize that five years have passed since your first study of the Central Business District.

Recommendation One

We recommend that these earlier reports be completely updated and we recommend that they include the following elements:

(a) Economics

A study of the economic potential of the region focusing on the impact of this economic growth on the metrocenter. This should give a picture of growth for the next two decades in general terms and a more detailed analysis for the next five and ten years.

(b) Physical

The plan should contain the following main elements:

- (1) The design concepts which would illustrate the three-dimensional form of the city.
- (2) The distribution of uses and intensities of these uses.

- (3) Systems of transportation that would be required to both move and store vehicles and distribute pedestrians in the metro-center.
- (4) Both the costs required to accomplish the plans and the means for financing these improvements.

Recommendation Two

We have found in our discussions that there is a concern on the part of the business leadership that there is a need for a blueprint for action. We have also found that there is spirit of cooperation and a willingness on the part of the city officials to cooperate in accomplishing the actions necessary.

Action Task Force

We, therefore, recommend that the business leaders create an Action Task Force to search for means to accomplish the studies recommended. Their job would include the alternative sources of funding the required work. Their task will also include the identification of the key business and professional leaders that would be needed.