

November 4, 2009

Today I submitted my response to the City of Fort Wayne's Downtown Visual Preference Survey. I hope it helps. But as I worked through the survey, I couldn't escape a few thoughts: 1) that it seemed hastily and not very carefully created, 2) that it seemed to focus inappropriately on *style* rather than *form*, with the intention of dictating the former rather than latter, and 3) that what Fort Wayne should really be considering is not revised design guidelines but rather a new Form-Based Code (FBC).

Starting with the survey itself, I found it difficult to vote and comment in any clear and meaningful way. Surveys typically have a neutral or disinterested option. But here, I had no way of staying intentionally "on the fence". There should have been a "0" or an "NA" selection. Next, a comment limit of fifty characters was entirely insufficient. (Most of my comments were much longer than that.) Indeed, many images were so provocative they deserved at minimum a paragraph. Lastly, while I was allowed to show support for action based on a *preference*, I couldn't do the opposite based on a *disliking*. For example, if I didn't like a particular image, I couldn't support discouraging or even prohibiting it.

Next were the examples. As I said earlier, I believe the City should focus on adopting an FBC that regulates issues like building heights, orientation, setbacks, vehicle access, overall streetscape, etc., rather than considering guidelines that encourage things like materials, façade composition, details, colors, or especially favoring any particular historic style. Unfortunately, categories like "Façade Materials – Wood" do just that, as they deal much more with *style* than *form*. These categories and examples do more to reinforce peoples preconceived stylistic preferences than they do to encourage desirable forms. For instance, what other response could one have to images 13 and 14 and what other message could the planners have intended to communicate than that wood and metal are inappropriate materials for urban façades? Who would vote in the affirmative for image 13? And if nobody votes in the affirmative, well, that must mean nobody wants to see façades that utilize wood. How could the planners interpret it any other way, especially given that no attractive wood example was included? So the data collected will only suggest that wood as a façade material is undesired. Not only would that analysis be inappropriate, it would be wrong! Countless examples exist of wood – and metal and concrete and stone and glass and even plastic and grass! – being used excellently and appropriately as an urban façade material. (See appendix for examples.)

According to the [Form-Based Code Institute](#), FBC's commonly include a regulating plan and public space and building form standards, and only sometimes include architectural and signage standards. ⁽¹⁾ My concern with this survey, and also with the current [Fort Wayne Downtown Design Guidelines](#) it is meant to help revise, is that it attempts to include architectural and

signage standards, and thereby, even if ever so subtly, dictate architectural and aesthetic style. Already one sees this language in the current guidelines: paragraph 2a under the “Architectural design” section states, “*Desirable façade materials for new or renovated facades include red brick and dressed limestone, granite, and marble.*” This type of “guideline” should not exist, and I can’t imagine images 13 and 14 of the new survey are included for any other reason than to reinforce that misguided belief.

I get very nervous when I hear words like “attractive” and “sensitive” and even “appropriate” used to describe desired or encouraged or even mandated building design. Especially when coming from Fort Wayne, a city that has become increasingly conventional and fearful of innovation and creative progress over the last generation or so. Too often those are just buzzwords for “we like older buildings better than newer ones, so let’s make our new buildings look old.” That approach to architectural design, planning, and civic engagement is short-sighted at best, and destructive at worst. It is the exact opposite of what Fort Wayne needs now and in the future.

Therefore, I hope the Planning Dept. considers a Form-Based Code that will result in a diversity of architecture, materials, and uses, and avoid design guidelines that prescribe architectural and signage standards that end up discouraging architectural creativity and diversity, are difficult to apply consistently, offer too much room for subjective interpretation, and can be difficult to enforce.

Appendix A shows examples of contrasting images to the City’s originals while Appendix B shows the City’s original examples. I provide contrasting images to illustrate, among other things, just how difficult it will be for the Planning Dept. to ascertain any meaningful data from the survey. For example, if someone voted +4 (“very favorable”) for the original image 16 (“Façade Material – Stone”), the planners would reasonably assume that person appreciates stone façades downtown. However, if alternate image 23 or 24 was used instead – either of which shows an urban stone façade – would that same person have voted similarly? Given the obvious and total differences in buildings, it’s unlikely. So what would a +4 vote mean in this category? In the mind of the voter, that is? Do they like stone? Or do they just like that particular building? Or both? And how is the Planning Dept. to know? The bigger question, however, is why are they asking in the first place? Form, not style. *Form.*

Scott Greider, RA
Scott Greider Architecture

(1) <http://www.formbasedcodes.org/definition.html>

(2) <http://scottgreider.wordpress.com/files/2009/11/downtown-visual-preference-survey-sga-response.pdf>

Appendix A

Non-exhaustive comparative photographic examples with comments



1

unlike image 2, this contemporary, sparse, and stark brick façade has visual interest, dynamic composition, and human scale



2

compared to image 2, this contemporary, sparse, and stark brick façade has visual interest, dynamic composition, and human scale, and even abstract ornament



3

compared to image 2, this contemporary, sparse, and stark brick façade has visual interest, dynamic composition, and human scale



4

compared to image 3, this contemporary, sparse, stark, and long uninterrupted horizontal ground level façade has visual interest, dynamic composition, energy, and human scale



5

compared to image 6, this unique and creative contemporary window pattern is one a vibrant, renovated hotel and shows that even dated ideas can be interesting and architecturally interesting and commercially viable



6

this is another shot of image 8, which happens to be an award-winning building by an [award winning architect](#) in NYC; though I'm sure the original image was selected to illicit a negative response, Fort Wayne would be lucky to have such a building



7

compared to image 9, this image shows that a contemporary approach to awnings need not look cheap and hideous



8

compared to image 13, which I'm sure was included to illicit a negative response toward wood as an appropriate façade material, this image shows wood used being used in a contemporary fashion with contemporary detailing on an [award-winning renovation](#) of an historic downtown building



more examples of wood used in a contemporary and appropriate manner as compared to image 13

9



more examples of wood used in a contemporary and appropriate manner as compared to image 13

10



more examples of wood used in a contemporary and appropriate manner as compared to image 13

11



12



13

more examples of wood used in a contemporary and appropriate manner as compared to image 13



14



15

compared to image 14, which I believe was included to illicit a negative response to the use of metal as an appropriate façade material, these two images illustrate how a contemporary use and composition of metal can be visually interesting and humanly scaled



16



17

more examples of appropriate uses of metal as a façade material



18



19

as a counterpoint to image 15, these examples illustrate that new uses of an historic material like brick do not need to imitate old styles and detailing

other examples, of course, are Fort Wayne's very own Performing Arts Center by Louis Kahn and Concordia Theological Seminary by Eero Saarinen



20



21

as a counterpoint to image 15, more examples that illustrate new uses of an historic material like brick do not need to imitate old styles and detailing



22



23

compared to image 16, which I can't tell what response it was meant to illicit, these images show urban, contextual, progressive, and dynamic uses of stone as a façade material; simply because stone is an ancient building material does not mean it must – or even should – be used in an ancient manner



24



25

compared to images 17-19, which are perfectly respectable and safe approaches to exterior lighting, these examples illustrate contemporary approaches; possibilities in exterior lighting due to technological advances are near limitless and should not be artificially limited to past approaches



26



27

images 21 and 22 are right to address how a building approaches a street corner; these two images suggest that solutions are as varied as possible scenarios



28

Appendix B

City photographic examples

Architectural Design

1. Street Level Façade



2. Street Level Façade



3. Street Level Façade



4. Street Level Façade



5. Window Pattern



6. Window Pattern



7. Window Pattern



8. Window Pattern



9. Awnings



10. Awnings



11. Awnings



12. Awnings



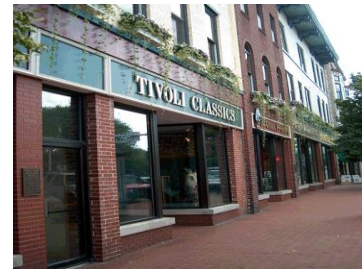
13. Façade Materials – Wood



14. Façade Materials - Metal



15. Façade Materials – Brick



16. Façade Materials - Stone



17. Facade Materials – Vinyl



18. Commercial Building Lighting



19. Commercial Building Lighting



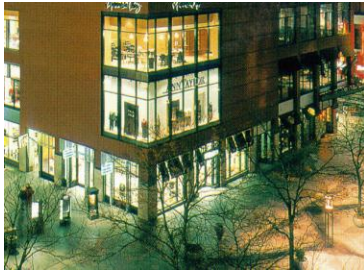
20. Commercial Building Lighting



21. Building Corner



22. Building Corner



23. Building Entry



24. Building Entry



Site Design

25. Parking Edge



26. Parking Edge



27. Parking Edge



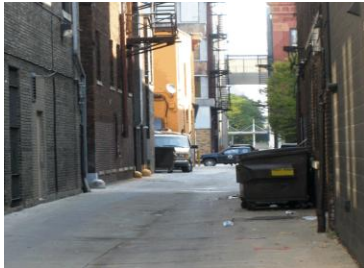
28. Parking Edge



29. Service Area



30. Service Area



31. Alleys



32. Alleys



33. Plaza



34. Plaza



Signage

35. Building Sign – Wall



36. Building Sign - Wall



37. Building Sign – Projecting



38. Building Sign - Projecting



39. Freestanding Sign – Pole



40. Freestanding Sign - Pole



41. Freestanding Sign – Monmt.



42. Freestanding Sign – Monmt.



Streetscape Design

43. Outdoor Dining



44. Outdoor Dining



45. Outdoor Dining



46. Outdoor Dining



47. Sidewalk Width



48. Sidewalk Width



49. Sidewalk Width



50. Sidewalk Width

