Fountain Square
An Urban Village in Indianapolis

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Abstract

The subject of this creative project was the creation of an urban village in the Fountain Square neighborhood of downtown Indianapolis. The purpose of the urban village development was to draw people back into the neighborhood, an Historic District which had suffered from decades of neglect and unguided development. Fountain Square was suitable for development as an urban village due to its urban location, distinct character, historic identity, and status as a growing arts community.

The project was divided into two components, the overall design of the urban village, and the site design of the plaza where the fountain was located. The urban village design addressed large scale issues such as infill development, historic preservation, gateway creation, streetscape enhancements, open space development, and automobile circulation. The site specific design of the plaza dealt with the creation of a central open space for the village.
“The history of our nation is the history of its villages written large”

-Woodrow Wilson
Introduction

Life in an urban situation provides people with access to many varied activities and new experiences, yet many people choose not to live in urban areas because of their vastness, complexity, anonymity, and commotion. Many of these people would prefer to live in small towns because of their tranquility, simplicity, modest size, and hospitality. The purpose of this creative project was to present a hybrid design concept, that of an urban village, and to apply this concept to an existing urban situation.

Indianapolis, Indiana is like most other cities in the United States in that it suffered heavily from several decades of suburban sprawl and downtown decline. Approximately fifteen years ago, revitalization of the downtown area began and has been well received. New developments such as the Circle Center Mall, Indiana Central Canal Walk, and the Indianapolis Children’s Museum expansion are indicative of this change in attitude. The city once called “Indy-no-place” is now being nationally heralded for its revitalization efforts.

Fountain Square, located on the near southeast side of downtown Indianapolis, is a once prominent entertainment center of the city which has fallen by the wayside. In the past decade, people have been revitalizing the area as an historic arts district. The area is now home to the studios of interior designers, painters, sculptors, and photographers, among others. A large number of antique and specialty merchandise shops have also located in the area. The Fountain Square neighborhood is an ideal situation for an urban village.
Topic Area

The topic area of my creative project was the creation of an urban village. An urban village is a mixed-use pedestrian oriented development, located within a larger urban context, that has a distinct character and unique experiences within it and is capable of meeting the day-to-day needs of its residents. The term “urban village” is actually an oxymoron, but it says a great deal about the feeling people want from the places in which they live. We want places of quiet solitude and places of bustling activity. We want anonymity and intimacy. We want diversity and stability.

Urban villages can be created by following development guidelines similar to those used in traditional town planning. In the book City Comforts, David Sucher states that the three crucial patterns for developing urban villages are: to build to the sidewalk, to make the storefront permeable, and to locate parking anywhere but in front of the building (Sucher, 1995). In other words, buildings should have no setback from the public right-of-way and should have storefronts that allow pedestrians to see and travel into and out of them easily. Parking can be accommodated in one of several ways: on-street parking, pocket parking, and parking at the rear of the business.

Anton Nelessen states ten basic design principles for creating small communities in his book Visions for a New American Dream (Nelessen, 1994). These ten principles are: design for the human scale, ecological responsibility, pedestrianism, open spaces, community focus, streetscapes, variation, mixed-use, design vocabulary, and maintenance. When used in the master planning process, these ten principles can create traditional livable communities. Site specific applications of the ten principles must be integrated into future development to ensure that the community stays true to its plan.

An urban village should follow a layout similar to that of a traditional village. It should have a diameter of no more than one half mile, since this will place the village center within one quarter mile of everyone in the village. One quarter mile represents a five minute walk for the average person and is a good measure of how far a person is willing to travel on foot. Other features of the traditional village include the central open space, a dense mixed-use village core surrounded by lower density residential areas, and a network of interconnected streets aligned on a grid.
Villages should be situated such that their centers are no closer together than one half mile. A network of urban villages, when they expand into one another, become neighborhoods within a town or eventually a city. This situation once existed in most major cities across the country, but suburban sprawl development has drained the vitality out of these urban neighborhoods. Strip malls and one-stop shopping centers have all but destroyed family-owned neighborhood-oriented businesses.
Background

The city of Indianapolis was platted in the year 1821 by Alexander Ralton. The original plan was a traditional rectilinear design. The city was a rectangular grid, one mile square, with a circular node located in the center of the city at the intersection of Market Street and Meridian Street, which would have been the Governor’s Mansion. From the four city blocks adjacent to the Governor’s Mansion, four avenues were to radiate out diagonally to the rest of the city street grid. These were to be the primary arterials of Indianapolis, which would travel a distance of one and one half miles from the Governor’s Mansion and terminate at turnaround nodes.

Time and continuous development have eroded the original design intent considerably. The central node which was to have been the Governor’s Mansion instead became Monument Circle. All of the four diagonal avenues (Indiana, Massachusetts, Virginia, and Kentucky Avenues) exist, but of the four only Virginia Avenue begins and ends at the points prescribed by the Ralton Plan. Virginia Avenue starts at the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and Washington Street and extends southeast one and one half miles, where it ends in Fountain Square at the intersection of Shelby Street and Prospect Street. This gives Fountain Square critical importance as one of the few surviving remnants of the Ralton Plan for Indianapolis.

The area that would in time become Fountain Square was settled during the middle and late 1800s primarily by German immigrants, and has been the only continuously operating commercial area outside the city center since that time. The first fountain to occupy the intersection of Virginia Avenue, Prospect Street, and Shelby Street was the Subscription Fountain, which was erected in 1889 in the middle of a large turnaround for horse-drawn carts. The fountain had an octagonal base, four water basins (two lower basins for horses to drink from and two smaller raised basins from which people could drink), four dolphin masks which spouted water into the basins, and a rectangular column which was topped by the “Lady Spray”, a Classical water nymph sculpture, who was flanked by twin gas lamps. The first reference to “Fountain Square” was made around the year 1909 and the name has endured to this day. In 1910, the first theater in the area opened. This marked the beginning of Fountain Square’s rise as the entertainment center of Indianapolis.
From that point until the 1940s the area experienced rapid growth and development. From 1910 until the 1950s four theaters operated simultaneously within one block of the fountain, more than anywhere else in Indianapolis. The original fountain toppled in 1919, and a new fountain was dedicated in 1924. The Ralph Hill Memorial Fountain, as it was called, featured an octagonal base and was topped with the “Pioneer Family” sculpture. Both the Fountain Square Theater and the Granada Theater opened their doors in 1928 and marked the beginning of Fountain Square’s heyday. The Great Depression actually contributed to the further growth of Fountain Square due to the fact that theater became the cheapest and most popular form of entertainment for the average working class citizen. In the late 1920s there were four theaters operating simultaneously in Fountain Square, all within one block of the fountain.

Fountain Square continued to remain an active social and entertainment center in Indianapolis through the 1940s, but the decline was beginning. One by one the theaters closed. The true decline began after World War II when the suburb became the icon of the American Dream. People began the exodus from urban centers to low density sprawling developments along the fringe of the city. In 1954, the fountain was removed from Fountain Square as part of a road widening project to accommodate the increase in auto traffic caused by people commuting to work from the suburbs. The fountain was relocated to Garfield Park, where it remained for fifteen years. The Fountain Square theater closed its doors in April 1960, and was gutted and remodeled for a new F.W. Woolworth Company store.

In 1969, the United Southside Community Organization succeeded in having the fountain restored to its original location. Ten years later the fountain was remodeled. At this point the octagonal base was replaced by two concentric cast concrete rings and the triangular pedestrian island was added around the base of the fountain.

Growing interest in historic preservation and revitalization has resulted in the restoration of several buildings in the Fountain Square neighborhood, including the Woessner Building, the Fountain Block Building, and the Fountain Square Theater Building. The restored Fountain Square Theater Building includes a 1928 Vaudeville theater, a ballroom, two bowling alleys, a 1950s diner, and an antique shop, among other businesses and offices.
Problem

The primary problem that plagued Fountain Square was that the existing land uses and zoning promoted low density sprawl development. Development of this sort featured "box architecture" set far back from the street and expansive parking lots, typically located in front of the building. Pedestrians were all but forgotten as the development relied on the automobile as the primary method of transportation. As development of this type encroached on and occurred in the historic district, the historic character deteriorated as the overall character shifted from urban to suburban. A second effect of this development trend was that it increased the number of automobiles traveling through an already congested area.

Another problem at Fountain Square was that there were no pedestrian friendly open spaces. While the fountain had ample bench seating, it was rarely used for two reasons. The first and most obvious reason was that the fountain, along with its planting urns and benches, was situated on an island surrounded on all sides by automobile traffic. This created an unpleasant and dangerous situation. The second reason the fountain was little utilized is that it was very brutal and plain in its appearance when compared to character of the surrounding architecture.

A final problem was that the Fountain Square neighborhood failed to provide for all the daily needs of its residents. Several basic businesses were not to be found in the area, including a drugstore, family dining, and clothing stores. One business that was surprisingly absent, given the history of the area, was a movie theater. This created a situation which further increased reliance on the automobile, since the residents had to travel to other locations in the city to do daily shopping.
Literature Review

Numerous literature references were reviewed to gain a deep understanding of the issues relevant to the topic area, problem, and sub-problems. The literature analysis concentrated on, but was not limited to, the following topics:

- Suburban Sprawl - causes and effects
- Traditional European villages and American towns - characteristics and components
- New Urbanism - philosophy and principles
- Urban Villages - definition and guidelines

The term urban village is at heart a fragment of poetry. It’s a metaphor and a matter of tone. It’s a shorthand way of describing the feel we want from our cities. Certainly there are places that feel like an urban village and we can use them as benchmarks. But... we can’t build urban villages in one fell swoop; we watch them evolve out of a multitude of individual actions over a long period of time. The brilliance of the phrase is that it sums up our coexisting desire for autonomy and community. We want to have the quiet tree-lined street with quick access to the global market. We desire a place of repose as well as a place of activity. This tension in human relations with the environment is an old one. The phrase urban village is simply a way of summing it up.

-Sucher, p8

The United States has become a predominately suburban nation, but not a very happy one... The problem is not simply that a sensible person can no longer believe in the rightness of turning huge expanses of farmland, forest, desert, and other rural landscapes into additional suburbs. The problem is that the suburbs we build are fostering an unhealthy way of life... the country has suffered a bitter harvest of individual trauma, family distress, and civic decay. There is a strong connection between the ills we exhibit as a people and the suburban “communities” that we inhabit.

-Langdon, p1
Neighborhood size receives careful consideration. The goal of many traditionalists is to design neighborhoods on a quarter-mile radius, so that in five minutes a person can walk from the neighborhood’s edge to its center... If amenities such as a convenience store, a child care center, a meeting hall, and a bus stop are placed in the neighborhood’s center, five minutes of walking at an average pace will take a person from home to basic everyday services.

-Langdon, p126

Neighborhoods should contain housing in a mixture of sizes, prices, and types so that a variety of people and households can come together and rely upon one another. Varied housing makes it possible for a neighborhood to accommodate individuals in every stage of life, fostering ties between one age group or economic class and another. Small to moderate sized lots often make it easier for neighborhood spirit to arise and local institutions to flourish.

-Langdon, p236

This “integral neighborhood” is a very diverse “mixed-use” area. It’s integral in the sense that its various functions are closely linked and usefully related to one another. Homes, jobs, schools, recreation, and natural features make the neighborhood a kind of village in the city. The basics of a lively community are all here—and so is the culture of the city and all its special contributions that require a larger population base: nearby downtown, schools of higher learning, theatres, research centers, hospitals...

-Register, p23

There is a hierarchy of ecologically healthier surface transportation modes. Cars are the worst, trains, buses, and ferries better, bicycles better yet, and foot travel best. The most serious efforts then should be made then to help pedestrians, considerable efforts made for bicyclists, significant support should be provided public transportation, and strong disincentives should be applied to automobiles. The principle of diversity should moderate the transportation hierarchy. In other words, many modes should be available, with the greatest emphasis on the pedestrian and the least on the automobile.

-Register, p33
Villages are characterized by a compact nature, a distinctive and unique building design vocabulary, a community focus, and perhaps a green or common defined by buildings. Housing or offices may be located above shops. A variety of community and social facilities are present. The lowest density periphery of the village is no more than a 1/4 mile walking distance from the end of the commercial spine, community center, or Main Street.

-Nelessen, p16

Sprawl is the product of federal programs and policies and the corresponding state and local land use policies. It is an economic program of personal consumption, reinforced by court decisions. It is the result of a premeditated set of planning policies that were developed during the New Deal era in order to create consumer investment activity through infrastructure and policy incentives provided by the Federal Government...Now we see that the American dream consumes an unprecedented amount of ex-urban land, requires millions of cars, millions of miles of highways, and billions of barrels of oil.

-Nelessen, p29

Ten basic design principles to create small communities:
1. Design for the human scale
2. Ecological responsibility
3. Pedestrianism
4. Open spaces
5. Community focus
6. Streetscapes
7. Variation
8. Mixed use
9. Design vocabulary
10. Maintenance

-Nelessen, p134
Site, Setting, and Context

Fountain Square is located southeast of downtown Indianapolis. Virginia Avenue, one of the four diagonal avenues of Indianapolis, terminates in front of the Fountain Square Theater Building, at the intersection of Shelby Street and Prospect Street. The fountain that gives the area its name is located in front of the theater on axis with Virginia Avenue.

The name Fountain Square can refer to three scales of context and needs some clarification. Fountain Square can first refer to a neighborhood scale. For the purposes of this project the Fountain Square neighborhood was defined to be the area within a one quarter mile radius of the fountain. Fountain Square can also refer to the city-designated Historic District, which extends the length of Virginia Avenue from the Interstate 65-70 Interchange to the intersection of Shelby Street and Prospect Street, and one block along each of those two streets from the intersection. Fountain Square can also refer to the intersection of Virginia Avenue, Prospect Street, and Shelby Street where the actual fountain is sited.

To avoid confusion, three titles were designated to refer to each of the three respective scales. In descending size they are the Fountain Square Neighborhood, Fountain Square Historic District, and Fountain Plaza.
Goals and Objectives

The primary goal of this project was to foster a pedestrian oriented environment which would encourage pedestrian travel over automobile travel. The best way to accomplish this goal was to make the pedestrian experience as dynamic as possible. It was decided that automobile space would be minimized while pedestrian space would be maximized, allowing for the design of wide sidewalks with streetscape amenities. Commercial buildings along the streetscape should be built with no setback, thus their front facades are on the right of way, creating a strong urban character. Parking has been relocated to the rear or side of most commercial buildings, screening it from pedestrian sight. Commercial storefronts should also be permeable, allowing pedestrians to see and travel into and out of the stores easily. A final way to accomplish this goal is to utilize traffic calming techniques, such as narrowing traffic lanes and bulbing the sidewalks at intersections, creating more pedestrian space.

A second goal was to create a strong sense of place for the Fountain Square neighborhood. Sense of place refers to those characteristics and qualities, architectural and/or natural, that give a location its unique identity and distinguish it from all other places. To accomplish this goal it was necessary to determine what made the architectural and urban character of the Fountain Square neighborhood unique. New design paid tribute to the historic context of the area, and made Fountain Square an even more distinct entity within the city of Indianapolis.

A third goal was to encourage social interaction among residents of Fountain Square through design. This involved the creation of places to stroll leisurely, designed spaces where music and entertainment could occur, and the incorporation of outdoor seating liberally throughout the site.

The final overall site goal was to provide for the day-to-day functional, social, and recreational needs of the residents. This involved the creation of a central pedestrian open space linked to scattered open spaces throughout the neighborhood by the streetscapes. New housing types were developed throughout the Fountain Square neighborhood, diversifying the stock and price range of available housing. A final consideration was that within the core of the urban village, businesses which provided for the daily needs of the residents were encouraged for development.
Client/User

This project was an academic exercise; there was no specific client. However, the goals from the 1996 Fountain Square Design Competition sponsored by the Southeast Umbrella Organization were utilized for the design of Fountain Plaza.

The primary users of this project were those persons who live, work, and shop within the urban village. Since an urban village must meet the daily needs of its inhabitants, these same persons do all of these things within the village. A secondary group of users were those persons who merely pass through the site. An urban village should make an impression on those who pass through it, such that they are tempted to stop or return later.

Assumptions

- A return to traditional town/village design is necessary/desired
- Life in an urban village would be preferable to life in a suburb
- Traditional village design principles are applicable to modern cities
- People will find pedestrian travel and public transit preferable to reliance on the automobile

Delimitations

I do not intend, during the course of this project, to:

- Deal with architectural design beyond facades studies
- Concern myself with the economic development aspect of the project
Program

The design of the Fountain Square urban village consisted of two components, vastly different in scale. The first component was the planning and design of an urban village plan addressing the entire Fountain Square neighborhood, focusing on the blocks immediately adjacent to Virginia Avenue, Shelby Street, and Prospect Street. The second aspect was a site specific design of Fountain Plaza, the central open space of the urban village.

Urban Village Plan:
The urban village plan examined the entire neighborhood as a whole while focusing on the critical urban blocks adjacent to Virginia Avenue, Shelby Street, and Prospect Street. Programmatic elements of the plan included the removal of structures which were incompatible with the urban village concept and infilling of the vacant sites, changes to circulation, creation of an open space system based on the three streets, establishing gateways, and the diversification of housing types.

Fountain Plaza:
The design of the central plaza of the urban village focused on four programmatic elements. The first was the redesign of the Fountain and its immediate surroundings, such that a gathering space was created. The next element was an airdome (an outdoor theater) to celebrate the entertainment heritage of Fountain Square. To encourage social activity and vitality within the village core, an outdoor café was programmed. This was the third element and the final program piece was an outdoor reading area adjacent to the public library.
Existing Character

Commercial Areas:

The existing commercial buildings of the Fountain Square Historic District reflected a pervasive character which once typified the area. The commercial buildings were for the most part built between 1880 and 1930 and were two to four stories tall. They all had brick facades which featured limestone or terra cotta detailing in the form of cornices, lintels, columns, and relief panels.

The majority of the buildings featured large open commercial storefronts on the first floor. However, most of these storefronts had been remodeled numerous times throughout the buildings’ histories. While the remodeling of the storefronts was necessary to facilitate the needs of changing businesses, the renovations were not always sensitive to the historic character of the district. The result was at best a tasteful contrast of old and new, but at worst a glaring eyesore. Several buildings in the Historic District had their ornate facades covered over with aluminum siding, a misguided process which was intended to reduce the maintenance of the buildings. This too degraded the character of the Historic District.

The commercial buildings also had a definite rhythm of window spacing on the upper stories. Much of the decoration of the facades was located on the upper stories as well. Many buildings featured decorative window sills and lintels, transom windows between the first and second stories, and ornate cornices. The individual buildings formed a cohesive whole along each block due to the fact that the buildings had similar floor heights, setbacks, and cornice lines.

Another aspect that contributed to the character of the Fountain Square Historic District was the presence of numerous flatiron buildings created by the peculiar road layout of the area. These buildings featured angled corner entries and non-rectilinear layouts.
The Fountain Square Historic District was not without its problems, however. In addition to the "cover up" of historic facades and the loss of original storefront conditions, several modern buildings had been built in the area before it was designated an Historic District in 1983.

These buildings were low budget commercial structures constructed primarily of concrete blocks, featuring few or no windows on the façade. They were typically only one story in height and set far back from the street, making them contrast sharply with the character of the historic buildings near them. These modern buildings were scattered throughout the Fountain Square neighborhood; several were even located within the area that now comprises the Historic District. The majority of this characterless sprawling development was concentrated along Shelby Street south of Fountain Plaza and on Prospect Street east of Fountain Plaza. Buildings of this type located within the Historic District broke up the historic fabric and detracted from the urban character of Fountain Square.
Residential Areas:

The residential areas of the Fountain Square neighborhood were predominately single family detached homes located on narrow one-eighth acre lots. The real estate market in the area currently catered to dual income middle class families. The homes were typically two or three stories in height, were faced with either brick or siding, and had large front porches and fenced backyards.

The character of detached homes was interrupted however, by a four story apartment building located on Hosbrook Street, northwest of Fountain Plaza. This building was not only out of place in its location, but was also poorly constructed and locally known as a place of questionable reputation.

Also located within the residential belt surrounding the commercial district were six churches representing various religious denominations, including Catholic, Methodist, and Lutheran.
Fountain Plaza:

The blocks adjacent to Fountain Plaza contained the most dynamic pieces of architecture in the neighborhood and were also the most varied in terms of their uses. Immediately north of the plaza is the Fountain Block Building. It was constructed in 1902 and consisted of first floor retail, second floor apartments and offices, and a third floor meeting hall. The Fountain Block recently underwent a major renovation and restoration project. It currently houses the newest branch of the Indianapolis Public Library (Fountain Square Branch) on the first floor and the Fountain View Senior Apartments on the second and third floors.

Northwest of Fountain Plaza is the Sonshine Inn, a Christian coffeehouse, which sports a billboard nearly as large as the building itself. It was one of the aforementioned buildings that had been wrapped in aluminum siding which completely obscured the 1922 façade. This building had housed numerous businesses throughout its existence, including a grocery store, a music store, and a shoe store. Next to it was the Fountain Square State Bank Building, also built in 1922, which now houses the National City Bank.

Directly west of the fountain and south of the Sonshine Inn was a small parking lot which was used as auxiliary parking for the Fountain Square Theater Building. This lot was little used and represented a major opportunity for development as pedestrian friendly open space. Just south of the parking lot and southwest of the fountain is an unnamed building which currently houses the Indigo Coffeehouse on the first floor and apartments on the second floor. This building was built in 1900 and consisted of first floor retail and second floor apartments.

Directly east of Fountain Plaza is the Fountain Square Theater Building, situated at the terminus of Virginia Avenue and by far the most prominent building in the neighborhood. The Theater Building was built in 1928 by the Fountain Square Realty Company and in 1998 it was restored to near-original conditions. The Theater Building was also the most architecturally ornamented building in the area, as evidenced by the terra cotta panels in between windows on the upper floors, the string course located between the first and second floors, the Corinthian capitals atop brickwork columns, and the cornice atop the building. The Theater Building once proclaimed its name to the city by means of a huge electric sign which read “Fountain Square Theatre” in eight-foot tall light-up letters. The sign was replaced by a billboard when the theater closed in 1960.
The Theater Building currently houses the restored Vaudeville theater, a ballroom, two bowling alleys, a 1950s style diner, an antique mall, and numerous other professional offices.

The existing conditions of the Ralph Hill Memorial Fountain left it isolated on a raised triangular island surrounded on all sides by automobile traffic. The fountain consisted of two concentric cast concrete rings, in between which was a narrow planting bed. Rising from the center was a concrete pedestal, midway along which was a circular basin which caught the water from the spray jets and poured it into the inner concrete ring. Higher up the pedestal was a ring of jets which sprayed thin streams of water into the basin below. Atop the fountain was the Pioneer Family sculpture by Myra Richards, depicting a westward bound family group, facing downtown Indianapolis.

The island around the fountain comprised all of Fountain Plaza prior to this project. The island was paved with red brick pavers in a herringbone pattern. The three corners were accented by round concrete planters. Lining the sides were double sided benches which featured a narrow planting strip between the two seating areas. The existing condition of the fountain was dangerous, unaesthetic, and in poor repair.
Current Land Use

The land use zoning in place when this project began was a perfect model of what not to do in an urban village. The zoning had slated existing residential areas along Shelby Street and Prospect Street to be replaced by strip commercial development. This practice was destroying the neighborhood quality of the area as homes were replaced by low density auto-dependent commercial development. Fountain Square was becoming any one of thousands of sprawling urban strip developments across the country. Not only was the current zoning encouraging the dissolution of Fountain Square’s unique character, it was also decades out of date. Areas within the commercial Historic District were still zoned light industrial, a remnant left over from turn-of-the-century businesses.

The Fountain Square neighborhood was fortunate though in that within the quarter mile radius were located a Police Station, a Fire Department Station, and a city funded Health Clinic. Six churches constituted the other institutional land use areas within the Fountain Square neighborhood.
Figure Ground

By studying a figure ground of the Fountain Square neighborhood, it was determined that the area had the beginnings of a dense nucleus of development located in the blocks adjacent to Fountain Plaza, but beyond those blocks the development quickly lost definition. Prospect Street east of the plaza had a moderate built fabric and some definition, mostly from the residential on the south side. Shelby Street south of the plaza had a moderate built fabric along the east side of the street, but the west side had virtually no definition.

The gaps in the built fabric along Virginia Avenue in the Historic District were due to the presence of small buildings set far back from the street. These buildings were all of recent construction and of no value to the character of Fountain Square.

The pattern of residential areas was consistent throughout the site.
Automobile Circulation

The greatest impact to the transportation in and around Fountain Square was the presence of the Interstate 65 and 70 Interchange. This area, known as the "south split", severed Fountain Square from the rest of downtown Indianapolis to the northwest. Virginia Avenue, in addition to being the primary arterial of the area, was the only street which bridged the interstate, maintaining the critical connection to downtown. Shelby Street and Prospect Street served as the collectors for Virginia Avenue, funneling traffic to the downtown.

There were two public parking lots existing in the Fountain Square neighborhood, one north of the plaza and one south of the plaza.
Transit Circulation

Fountain Square was the point where three bus routes in Indianapolis intersected. This was significant in that it provided a major opportunity to reduce peoples’ reliance on the automobile. All three bus routes traveled to Monument Circle in downtown Indianapolis, and from Fountain Square the three routes diverged and went to different neighborhoods farther from the downtown.

This gave Fountain Square critical significance as a major switching point on the bus routes. It provided not only an opportunity for residents of Fountain Square to travel to other commercial areas without driving, but also provided an influx of commuters from areas farther from the city center who switched busses at Fountain Square.
**Historic Structures**

Using the Fountain Square Historic Area Preservation Plan (IHPC, 1984) as a starting point and basis for analysis, all non-residential buildings in the Fountain Square neighborhood were ranked based on their contribution to the historic character and urban fabric of the area.

Contributing structures were those which were historically significant or reflected the character of the neighborhood in their design. Non-contributing structures fell under one of two scenarios. The first was historic structures which had been renovated to the point that they were no longer recognizable as historic. Their original character had been wiped away and replaced by something contemporary. The second scenario was a contemporary structure which neither enhanced nor detracted from the historic character of the neighborhood. Finally, detracting structures were those which had no historic character, and were eyesores compared to their neighbors.

Although most of the contributing buildings were located within the Historic District, there were outliers, primarily churches. The majority of the detracting structures were located along Shelby Street south of the Historic District. It is unknown why this area retained no historic value.
Concept

The concept for this project was to redevelop Fountain Square according to an urban village model. This involved the creation of a pedestrian oriented streetscape system, a central open space, a mixed use village core, a residential periphery, and transition zones where the village core meets the residential belt along the streetscapes.

Other considerations involved the restoration of historic façade conditions on structures within the Historic District, the removal of structures which detract from the village character and the infilling of the vacant sites, the realignment of Morris Street and Shelby Street near Fountain Plaza, and the creation of an open space system.
Urban Village Plan

The urban village plan for Fountain Square addressed the area encompassed by the one-quarter mile radius from the Ralph Hill Memorial Fountain plus the commercial blocks along Virginia Avenue extending northwest to the Interstate right-of-way. Design focused on the blocks adjacent to Virginia Avenue, Shelby Street, and Prospect Street, leaving most of the residential areas to the west, southeast, and north untouched. This created a “Y” shaped system incorporating the three major streets of the village.

Major features of the design included: gateways to the village along the three major streets, an expanded and enhanced pedestrian streetscape along the three streets, a network of small open spaces, the reconfiguration of automobile circulation routes where necessary, façade enhancements and infill development of commercial buildings, and the introduction of alternate housing types including apartments, townhouses, and duplexes.
Gateways:

The Virginia Avenue gateway consisted of two major features: an entry planting design along the slopes of the interstate right-of-way and an infill structure that featured a tower that was visible from the Interstate. The Prospect Street gateway consisted of two historic commercial buildings, both built to the sidewalk, which stood out in contrast to the surrounding residential structures which were set back ten to fifty feet from the sidewalk. The Shelby Street gateway was created by the townhouses, which formed a continuous built block, and stood out in contrast to the less dense strip commercial development to the south.

Streetscapes:

The streetscape design for Virginia Avenue was the most important of the three streets because of the presence of the Historic District. The design had to be sensitive to the historic character of the area yet contemporary enough to appeal to the sensibilities of the growing arts community, which was seeking avenues of expression. Care was taken to allow for as much individualization and personal embellishment to the design as possible. While some elements were standard for the entire streetscape, such as the streetlights, others were only recommended and specifics were left to the property owner, such as

Two standard features of the village streetscape, a traffic signal and a streetlight, both with banners.
awnings and storefront lighting.

Traffic lanes throughout the village were narrowed to eleven feet in an effort to reduce the excessive speeding which formerly took place. Virginia Avenue featured four lanes of traffic, two northwest bound and two southeast bound, two eight-foot lanes of parallel parking, and ten-foot sidewalks. At intersections, the parallel parking was eliminated to a distance of forty feet from the intersection along Virginia Avenue and twenty-five feet from the intersection along the crossing streets. The space was used to create pedestrian bump-outs that featured street trees and benches and could potentially have featured outdoor dining and merchandise displays, among many other uses. Bollards served to define the pedestrian realm and provided an additional safety measure.

The streetscape along Prospect Street featured three lanes of traffic on the block between Shelby Street and Olive Street, two lanes west bound and one lane east bound, and two lanes of traffic, one lane each direction, through the remainder of the village. Prospect Street also featured parallel parking along both sides of the street and pedestrian bump-outs at intersections. Due to the width of the right-of-way on Prospect Street, the blocks east of Olive Street had a ten-foot foot grass planting strip on both sides of the street.
The Shelby Street streetscape was severely constrained by the sixty-foot right-of-way and the volume of traffic that passed through on a daily basis. Shelby Street featured four lanes of traffic, two north bound and two south bound, and no parallel parking. Sidewalks on Shelby Street were limited to eight feet due to the narrow right-of-way. Pedestrian bump-outs were likewise not an option on Shelby Street. Due to these factors, it was decided that new commercial development on Shelby Street would be set back two feet from the right-of-way, thus allowing for a ten foot sidewalk. South of Orange Street, the sidewalk was narrowed to four feet due to the residential nature of the development here. The remaining four feet accommodated a four-foot grass planting strip.
**Open Space Network:**

Since the Fountain Square neighborhood had no open space beyond a few remnant lots when this project was undertaken, it was decided to develop these remnant spaces into an open space system. Fountain Plaza formed the core of this system, the streetscapes of Virginia Avenue, Shelby Street, and Prospect Street formed the spine, and small green spaces scattered throughout the commercial and residential areas formed the rest of the system. The scope of this project left the peripheral spaces largely undefined, but it was assumed that the green spaces in commercial areas would become sitting parks and those in exclusively residential areas would become playgrounds.
Circulation:

Four major changes were made to the automobile circulation in Fountain Square. The first change was the removal of the north bound lane of Shelby Street at the intersection of Shelby Street, Prospect Street, and Virginia Avenue. This allowed the fountain to once again become part of the pedestrian realm and made it easily accessible. The next change was the reconfiguration of the Morris Street "slalom", the block between Shelby Street and Prospect Street. The "slalom" was aligned on a grid system like the rest of the streets in Fountain Square. While this did add an additional stop on the route, it had a minimal impact due to the low volume of traffic passing this way. Another change was the upgrade of the alley that extended from Buchanan Street to Hosbrook Street into a full street with two-way traffic. This created a more unified circulation system through the area and broke up an eight hundred-foot-long block along Virginia Avenue. The final change that affected automobile traffic in the village was the creation of a third public parking lot on the northwest corner of the intersection of Prospect Street and Olive Street. With the addition of this lot, the village core was flanked on all three critical sides by free public parking.
Diagram showing the buildings which are in need of façade enhancements.

One means of façade enhancement is the restoration of historic conditions. Shown is the Fountain Square Theatre entrance in 1928, 1983, and 1998.

Façade Enhancement:

Façade restoration was most important in the area encompassed by the Historic District. This was due to the fact that several of the buildings there had been renovated so many times that their historic conditions were all but gone. It was also critical that the intrusive modern buildings within the Historic District received some form of façade enhancement.

There were several routes that were taken with façade enhancements, including: restoration of historic conditions, creation of a functional “false historic” façade, and tromp-l’œil façades. Restoration of historic conditions was possible on some of the structures in the Historic District thanks to historic photographs and documentation. Creation of false and tromp l’œil façades was done only on those buildings which had no historic value. False façades were nothing more than carefully designed façades that were accurate to the time period and style of the other buildings in the Fountain Square Historic District. These were built on the front of existing commercial buildings after the modern façade was removed. Tromp-l’œil, or “trick-of-the-eye”, simply involved painting a mural of a historic commercial façade on the front of an existing building.

Tromp-l’œil painting is another means of façade enhancement. Here a mural of a historic building has been painted on a warehouse.
Infill Development:

In the design of the urban village it was deemed that certain structures did not support the type of environment which the design sought to promote. Therefore, these structures were demolished for one of several reasons. Some buildings were abandoned and condemned, others detracted from the character of the forming village, and still others were simply located in places where certain land use patterns should not have been. In total, 184,700 square feet of commercial space, both office and retail, was demolished, as was 103,000 square feet of industrial space, and 40,300 square feet of residential space, both homes and apartments.

Commercial:

Infill commercial development in the Fountain Square village was not “historic” in terms of its construction or materials, but it was consistent with the style of existing structures and harmonized well with them. Infill structures were two to four stories in height, were built to the street right-of-way, featured a high degree of façade ornament, and offered showy commercial storefronts to pedestrians. All structures had retail business on the first floor and either offices or apartments or both on upper floors. New retail and office space in the urban village totaled 205,650 square feet.
Parking:

Parking for these new structures was located either in pocket parking lots between buildings or at the back of the business, so that the storefronts could sit directly against the sidewalk. All parking lots were landscaped to break up the expanses of asphalt and were screened from the sidewalk either by planting beds or low brick walls. This served to further separate the pedestrian realm from that of the automobile and eliminated possible conflicts.

Residential:

Since the housing stock of the Fountain Square neighborhood consisted almost exclusively of single family detached homes, the introduction of alternate housing types was critical to the design of the urban village site plan. The urban village plan featured loft apartments above retail shops in the village core, manor apartments, townhouses, and duplexes.

Approximately 128,150 square feet of new development in the village core was dedicated to loft apartments on the upper floors of retail shops. Three apartment manors were designed, creating 110 rental units which comprised 93,600 square feet of apartment space. Two two-story manors were located on the north side of Prospect Street between Olive Street and Laurel
Street, while a three-story manor was located on the west side of Shelby Street at the intersection of Orange Street.

Twenty-six townhouses were located along Shelby Street, forming the southern gateway to the village. The townhouse were two stories in height, had brick exteriors, and comprised 41,600 square feet total. Five duplex units were located on the west side of Barth Avenue between Orange Street and Sanders Street. The ten units together comprised 20,000 square feet.

In addition to these alternative housing options, the urban village site design allowed for the creation of fourteen new single family detached homes in areas which were previously low density sprawling commercial developments. Some of these homes were new construction, others were moved from demolition sites. This created 60,000 square feet of new housing space that, when combined with all other new housing space, provided a total of 343,350 square feet of new residential development.
Section through townhouses on Shelby Street.

Section through a typical residential street.
Phasing

"...We cannot build urban villages in one fell swoop; we watch them evolve out of a multitude of individual actions over a long period of time."

(Sucher, 1995)

This quote summarizes one of the most important factors in the development of an urban village. Urban villages would never be successful if built with the mentality that people will flock to them simply because you built something wonderful, nor can they be built with the same attitude with which urban renewal has occurred in past decades. Actions must occur slowly over time, must involve the community, and must be market driven. It is critical not to forget that villages thrive on variety: old and new, activity and tranquility, anonymity and familiarity.

Aspects of the urban village plan were categorized to reflect the impact that they would have on the community. Those projects which would require the least amount of expenditure and provide the largest return in terms of improving the appearance and prestige of the village were given priority in development. Projects of this sort included: redesign of Fountain Plaza, façade enhancements within the Historic District, and streetscape improvements along Virginia Avenue, Prospect Street, and Shelby Street. Other projects that would benefit the village but not in such an immediate way included: changes to automobile circulation, purchasing and redevelopment of properties in accordance with the village plan, and economic analysis studies to determine how the village failed to meet the daily needs of its residents and subsequent marketing to attract such businesses to the urban village.
Fountain Plaza

Foremost of the projects discussed in the urban village plan was the redevelopment of Fountain Plaza. There were four major program elements included in the design of Fountain Plaza. These were: a redesigned fountain surrounded by a gathering space, an outdoor reading area adjacent to the library, an outdoor café, and a multifunctional airdome.

Throughout the plaza area, traffic calming techniques were utilized wherever possible. The corners of the intersections were widened to create pedestrian bump-outs. Traffic lanes were narrowed to eleven feet and radii at corners were reduced to twenty feet in an effort to force automobile traffic decrease speed. Crosswalks were composed of light colored brick pavers bound by concrete banding to contrast with the asphalt road surface.
The Fountain:

The fountain itself was redesigned to recall the historic Subscription Fountain. The new fountain was not a recreation of the original fountain, but was rather a reinterpretation. The cast stone base of the fountain was octagonal in shape and was surrounded by three steps. The base of the fountain was capped by eight bronze dolphin masks, four of which squirted water into four respective basins. Two basins were set low to recall the basins originally intended for horses to drink from. Since it is unlikely that horses will be drinking from this fountain however, the basins were expanded to create larger pools. The other two basins were smaller, set higher on the base, and provided potable water to pedestrians.

Rising from the base of the fountain was an ornate four-sided metal pedestal, consisting of two parts, the lower piece of which was half the size of the upper. The faces of the lower piece of the pedestal were relief panels that showed the four fountains which have occupied the site through time. Atop the pedestal stood the Pioneer Family sculpture, facing northwest along Virginia Avenue. The Pioneer Family sculpture was flanked by two lights reminiscent of the twin gas lamps which once flanked the Subscription Fountain. The lights provided warm illumination to the gathering space around the fountain.
View of Fountain Plaza from Virginia Avenue.
The fountain was surrounded by a circular paving pattern which was in turn surrounded on the north side by three custom benches backed by raised annual planting beds. The walls of these planting boxes were capped with cast stone and were wide enough to provide additional seating. On the east side the gathering space was defined by three Moraine honey locust trees. Between the trees were two more benches and raised planters. The paving pattern was a mixture of brick-shaped pavers, square pavers, diamond pavers, and bronze history markers. There were eight history markers surrounding the fountain which recounted the broad history of Fountain Square.

Since the fountain was now connected to the pedestrian sidewalk of the Theatre Building, it was imperative that an integral connection between the Fountain and the Theater Building be established. This connection was made by returning the theater entrance to its original location. This placed the entrance directly on axis with the sidewalk along Virginia Avenue and the Fountain. The final element of the fountain area was a kiosk which featured space for posting notices, electronic advertising, pay telephones, and a mail drop box.
View of infill commercial building on Prospect Street.
The Airdome:

The airdome was a celebration of the history of Fountain Square as an entertainment district. Airdomes, once common in the area, were open air theaters which showed movies on temporary screens in the evening, weather permitting. Three of the historic theaters in Fountain Square started as airdomes. The airdome in Fountain Plaza was bounded on the west and south sides by a six-foot brick wall which had a bench built into it. The columns in the wall bore interpretive plaques which told the story of Fountain Square’s entertainment history. The screening area, located on the north side of the airdome, consisted of a four foot wall flanked on either side by twelve-foot-tall columns. From these columns a screen was hung for movie projection.

In addition to movie screenings, the airdome was intended to be used for live performances. This was possible due to the inclusion of a raised semicircular stage area in front of the screen wall. The screen wall was capable of accommodating backdrops for theatrical performances in addition to the projection screen.
View of the outdoor café.
The Outdoor Café:

Immediately to the east of the airdome was the outdoor café. The most prominent feature of the outdoor café was the green metal pergola. The pergola provided an architectural enclosure on this formerly open corner. The pergola provided partial shade and enclosure to patrons with its grid of overhead metal trusses. Numerous hanging baskets broke up the space and added color and texture to the space.

A two foot tall seating wall defined the boundary between the café and the sidewalk. Within the café was a permanent structure used for food vending and storage of café furnishings. The café operated during the afternoon and evenings, seasonally, and provided food during events held at the airdome.

The Reading Room:

The final element in the design of Fountain Plaza was an outdoor reading space for the library. The nook consisted of a bench, which faced the library building to eliminate distractions while reading. The bench was backed by a raised annual planter which further separated the space from the busy streetscape and created a semi-private sanctuary.

Pergola and seating wall of the outdoor café.

Bus shelter incorporated into façade of infill building.
Northwest - southeast section through Fountain Plaza.

Southwest - northeast section through Fountain Plaza.
View of Downtown Indianapolis from Fountain Square.
Conclusion

This project has shown how the Fountain Square neighborhood in Indianapolis was able to shake off the vestiges of fifty years of poor, unplanned development and be reinvented as an urban village. It has shown how the ideal of the urban village was able to coexist with an historic district and the two could compliment one another. It has shown that with proper planning and design, urban villages were able to provide that mix of opposites, of familiar and strange, of private and public, of activity and tranquility, which people desire from the places in which they live.

The urban village plan for Fountain Square created gateways to this unique and vital urban village to define and distinguish it from the rest of the city. It created pedestrian oriented streetscapes along the major commercial routes and linked them to an open space system so that residents can easily and safely meet daily needs. It made a critical leap in the way that the automobile is treated in the design process by relegating it to minimal importance as a means of travel. The plan restored the integrity of the Historic District by establishing guidelines for existing and proposed development which will mesh with and enhance the District. It also diversified the housing options in the urban village to allow for a more broad spectrum of individuals, couples, and families to dwell side by side in this dynamic urban neighborhood.

The design of Fountain Plaza set the stage for future development in the urban village by creating a central open space that was sensitive to the historic character of the area but also meets the needs of contemporary users. The new fountain recalled the heritage of the site but was accessible to pedestrians in a way that no previous fountain had been. It was part of the pedestrian realm wholly, and was surrounded with places to sit, congregate, and learn. The airdome likewise recalled the heritage of the site but proved to be a place that was suitable for more than just summer evening movies. It has become a multifunctional performance space, useable day or night. An outdoor café instilled that critical activity node which was needed in the heart of the village. It provided a place to gather with old friends over a meal, and a place to meet new friends. The reading nook at the library offered a place to sit out of doors and drift into another world, or a place to simply sit and watch other people as they went about their daily lives in Fountain Square.
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