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THE NEGLECTED RIVER:rediscovering an Asset

A Riverfront Development
For
Lawrenceburg, Indiana

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May 22, 1987
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ABSTRACT

This project explores the possibilities of small communities attaching and using the river as a source of community development.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is dedicated to Earl and Mary Mann, whose encouragement and financial support got me through.

A special thanks to Harry Eggink and Michel Mounayar whose patience and enthusiasm made this possible.
SPIRIT OF THE PROBLEM

Historically, rivers were an important source of life for many cities, towns, and settlements. The flowing water meant food, transportation, news, and goods from the outside world. The rise and fall of water marked the seasons, and brought rich soil for farming. As a source of spiritual inspiration, the river has a history of more than four thousand years that continues to this day.

As technology developed, the need for the river as part of a city diminished. Better roads, and eventually trains and automobiles, reduced reliance on the river for transportation. Better farming methods reduced the importance of rich bottomlands. Communication no longer depended upon a physical message passed from hand to hand.

As technology developed further, the river was not an asset and a link, but a liability and a barrier. Floods caused property loss and loss of life. They hindered land travel and separated places. In too many cases the river also became an open sewer, carrying the waste and refuse of industry and city alike.
But technology has taken another step forward. Flood control has reduced the severity of the rise and fall of many waterways. Spanning a river has become easier, and modern materials can withstand the water's wrath. Concern for the environment has produced solutions to the problems of waste management and chemical dumping. Water travel is also easier, since many new vessel designs do not depend upon good weather and are not affected severely by turbulent water. Pleasure boating is also commonplace, and is a growing industry since many people own their own craft.

It is in this spirit that the project is undertaken. The spirit that views rivers as an asset to city, to business, and to individuals. This asset provides opportunities that communities should strive to take advantage of, or risk losing their existence to those that do.
TRENDS IN THE CLIENT'S FIELD

Lawrenceburg, like many cities that have a waterfront, is becoming aware that this waterfront can be used to its advantage. In Lawrenceburg's case, there is an excellent opportunity to capitalize on the leisure and entertainment possibilities of the river.

Proximity to Cincinnati not only means a large population pool from which to draw, but lack of such facilities downriver means that Lawrenceburg is a gateway between the city and its more rural and scenic neighbors.

The availability of activities gives a city an advantage in the market. People and businesses are more likely to locate in a place that has developed the opportunities it has available. Lawrenceburg has the resources and market potential to become a new example of a successful river city.

Lawrenceburg's economy already has an abundance of general retail development, but there is room and a need for specialty retailing. There is a need to capture the professional client and to bring people downtown for entertainment and cultural activities.

The project must activate and encourage development in a positive manner. The city must activate and connect to the river without destroying the benefits of its existing character.
CLIENT BACKGROUND, HISTORY, AND PHILOSOPHY

Lawrenceburg was founded in 1802 along the northern bank of the Ohio River. Laid out by Samuel Vance, James Hamilton, and Benjamin Chambers, Lawrenceburg was one of the first towns settled in the Indiana Territory.

By the mid 1830’s Lawrenceburg was an aggressive and thriving commercial center and the major link with the rest of the country was the Ohio River. The town’s early development paralleled the river and then grew outward away from the river. Most of Lawrenceburg's architectural character is derived from this early growth, up to the late 1880’s.

In the late 1930’s a levee was constructed after a number of costly and devastating floods. The levee eliminated the town’s river economy, and halted continued growth. Lawrenceburg turned to the railroads and highways for transportation and links to the outside world.

Lawrenceburg is located about 25 miles from the heart of Cincinnati, Ohio, and most of Lawrenceburg’s social and economic connections are with the larger city. Television, radio, and newspapers (excepting a biweekly journal) are Cincinnati based. I-275, the interstate loop that circles Cincinnati, passes through the extreme eastern edge of the city, about three miles from the central business district.
The central business district has, from a building inventory perspective, a relatively strong image. Functionally, however, it is defused. Various other locations are now competing with the Central Business District, pulling business and money away from the downtown.

Over the past decade, the city has become aware of itself and the need to enhance its image. The formation of a revitalization committee and a city development corporation are two examples of this concern. The city and its businesses are beginning to realize that they can no longer just satisfy needs, but must maximize on potential and growth.

Although the city is concerned with preserving its heritage and maintaining its character, it should not be content with becoming a tourist attraction. There are many areas of development on which Lawrenceburg can capitalize to insure its future as a prosperous community.
PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. Activate the spirit of leisure which the Ohio River can provide and the town presently lacks
2. Provide reconnection to the Ohio River as a source of activity and business
3. Serve as a catalyst for attracting a larger market
4. Create a water entry and gateway to Lawrenceburg
5. Reduce the impact of the levee as a barrier

Objectives

1. Provide reconnection to the Ohio River as a source of imagery for the city
2. Encourage linking of the riverfront with Central Business District
3. Reinforce activities in major portions of the river’s edge
4. Encourage pride in downtown and its image
IMAGES ON THE SITE
MAJOR CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS

1. Existing Separation Between River and City

The levee, which was built in the late 30's, forms a barrier not only physically, but mentally as well. It is unlikely that the levee will be removed in the foreseeable future. This levee is the main cause of separation.

2. Distance Between River and Structures of the Central Business District

The levee and its wall-like effect have moved the main activities of the Central Business District away from the river. One must not only walk up the levee to see the river, but first walk to the levee from the C.B.D.

3. Lack of "Place of Attachment"

The river, being a linear element, can be accessed anywhere along its length. The city, however, does not address the river at all. The most advantageous place is where Walnut St. terminates at the levee.

4. Lack of Density

The project must create a desire for density along the river. It cannot rely on existing conditions for life.
Choosing what was to happen in Lawrenceburg was important. Proposing just a park or marina would not bring enough people to the river. Large scale development, however, would be out of context with the scale of Lawrenceburg and not sympathetic with other structures of the Central Business District.

Restaurant = 6000 sq. ft.
Pub = 3000 sq. ft.
Nightclub = 5800 sq. ft.

With the definite need for entertainment as well as a need to attract the professional business client, a restaurant and a pub would do well. A nightclub, which Lawrenceburg presently lacks, in combination with the restaurant and pub, would help draw people from surrounding areas to the heart of Lawrenceburg.

There is presently an historic hotel one block from the levee. Although it is a small one, this hotel could provide overnight lodging for business clients as well as out of town recreational users.

River Marina

Taking advantage of recreational users of the river is also an important goal. There is a boat launch a couple of miles down river, and in good weather water skiing, fishing, and other pleasure boaters are constantly passing Lawrenceburg going both up and down river. A marina would provide a place for these boaters to stop so that they can use Lawrenceburg as a port for supplies, food, and entertainment.
Riverboat Dock

Riverboats and party boats from Cincinnati still ply the waters of the Ohio. These boats are a source of people looking for entertainment along the river. Floating restaurants that are built on barges are another type of activity that is common on other areas of the river. A place for these restaurants as well as a dock for riverboats would help create variety and increase the density of activities along the riverfront.

Paved River Walk

A disadvantage of the site now is that there is no easy way for people to walk close to the water. The edge of the river is often muddy or overgrown with weeds. A paved surface close to the water's edge would give people a chance to walk next to the river.

Controlled Water Areas

Small parks, playgrounds, and green spaces could take advantage of controlled water as a source for fountains or wading pools, and even ice skating in winter.

Lawrenceburg also needs to draw people to the downtown to live. People moving into the city view the downtown as an undesirable place because of the downtown's present condition. Bringing water into the city would give apartments and dwellings a major advantage because of the water frontage. A boat owner could keep his boat in the water behind where he chooses to live.
THE LEVEE

Lawrenceburg's levee is a solution to a problem that all towns along major river's face; the problem of floods. Some towns choose to erect walls, some back away from the river, some leave the edge for industry and warehouses. The levee as a solution creates several unique problems, as well as the chance for unique solutions.

As an element, the levee reinforces the river's edge. It becomes a riverbank where before there was none. It becomes a visual element that takes plane of the water and extends it vertically, forming in effect a river "corridor".

Because the levee is an earthen one that is covered with grass, it becomes a piece of the landscape that has been sculpted. It is an element, a form to be manipulated. It is a backdrop, a platform, and a path. Even though it is presently a barrier between the downtown and the river, it gives the opportunity to be selective about where and how the river and the city connect.

The end of Walnut Street is the best place to make the first cut in the levee. It provides a continuation of the main axis of the business district. Going through the levee here gives the street a destination and a vista. It gives those downtown an the chance to realize that there is something beyond the levee. On the river side, it lets river traffic identify an entry to Lawrenceburg. This is important since the present condition denies any entry, and hides Lawrenceburg from view.
Two other cuts in the levee would provide a chance to actually bring water into the city in a controlled way. Since the level of the river is variable, locks would control the level of water in the city to keep it relatively constant. Flood gates would prevent flood waters from entering the city should high water, like that of 1937 occur again.
THE RIVER'S EDGE

The edge next to the water is currently undeveloped. If it is not muddy, then it is overgrown with weeds, and very few people will dare to approach the river because of the inconvenience.

A developed edge to the river is necessary. The chance to approach the river, to walk along it, is necessary. Such an area would give people the opportunity to be on level with the river. It would provide the opportunity to fish, to sit, to experience the river from the bank, which is not always possible now.

A developed edge along the river must be able to withstand the seasonal changes in the river's height. This means not just in materials, but also in it's function. A change in water height should not mean that people cannot get to the water's edge.

The edge also is also a place for boats. The edges along the river are for the larger boats, the barge-restaurants, the riverboats, and the party boats. These boats need an edge so that people can get to them, no matter what the water's height.

Because of these criteria, three responses to the edge were developed. The first was that the buildings would rest on leveled areas of the levee. These leveled areas and their stone retaining walls would form the edges along half of the site.
The second response was to develop, with the marina, a promenade that stepped on both sides toward the water. This allows the rise and fall of the water to merely cover or uncover the steps, so that people can approach the water at water level. This is also where the barge-restaurants dock, making them accessible at all times.

The third response, where the floating docks meet the levee, was to build the walk above the seasonal flood line of the water. The result is that the levee is carved out. This is in contrast to where the buildings have been added on.
THE STRUCTURES

Buildings along the edge, especially between the water and the levee, deal with several variables. Since there is not a flat area between the two, they are either in the river or on the levee. As the structures back away from the river, they must deal with a higher and higher levee.

Any structures along the levee become added sculptural elements along the sculptural element of the levee itself. They can run along it, they can cap it, they can protrude or carve into the levee, or they can even be unattached to it so that they don't violate it as an element.

These structures were conceived as separate elements, forming by their location and arrangement a complex along the river. The identity of each building is separate, yet they relate to each other spatially and aesthetically.

They are arranged to form a series of open and closed spaces as one travels from the cut in the levee to the end. These space serve to make the site a series of different experiences rather than one that is understandable immediately upon seeing.
After one passes through the levee, there is the continued vista across the river, but one is forced to make a decision on path. To the left is the "street" along which the structures occur. To the right is the levee extending into the distance. To continue ahead, one must make the level change from entry to river level by going down a series of steps that become the river promenade. It is along this promenade that the barge-restaurants will dock.

If one turns towards the structures, one walks toward the nightclub with the restaurant and the nightclub forming walls to either side. Then, the path opens onto plaza that acts as the entry plaza for the nightclub and terminates the path. To continue on, there is a lower plaza to one side that faces the river, and becomes the starting point of a long paved walk which is for the docking of riverboats.

The structures themselves, to fulfill different programs, take on different forms, using materials and methods of construction to visually unite them, so that each structure has an identity, but is clearly part of the whole.
The restaurant places the dining in three structures that are out over the water. They are reminiscent of the silos that were used for grain and coal, but not an imitation of them. They are divided into two levels, and separated by the steel structure that supports the building and creates outdoor terraces for dining. The dining areas, which are sheathed in glass, read as a complete but transparent form. The service part of the building is runs along the levee side of the building. It is half a level between the dining levels, and becomes the structure to which the dining towers attach.

The pub, which is located on the top of the levee does not violate the path that is created by the flat top of the levee, instead, it steps to one side. This structure, the simplest of the three, becomes a simple shed like building divided into three parts; service, bar and booths, and open tables. The structure, like the restaurant, is supported by steel on the exterior. It is not, however, all glass. It is made solid by masonry infill of a course texture to reflect that of the stone used to support the different levels of the site. The walls of the table area, however, are metal overhead doors that can be raised when the weather is nice.

The nightclub is the most formal of the structures. It addresses the river by not only by facing it, but also by providing a "front door" and "front porch" to the river. The exterior steel structure forms the columns of the "porch" and defines the buildings territory.
THE MARINA

The need for a marina created the opportunity to capture a piece of the river as well as recreational boaters. Some of the marina could be used for long term boat docking, while other parts of it could be short term for those that are stopping in Lawrenceburg on their way up or down the river.

The marina was conceived as a piece carved out. It actually cuts into the levee, forming a safe port for boaters. It is protected from the current by an arm that extends out into the river partly encircles the marina, leaving one end open for access. This arm becomes the stepped river promenade that the barge-restaurants attach to.

To accommodate the change in water level, the docks are floating docks reached by a walk along the levee. The walk is high enough to be out of most river changes. In case of extreme high water, the docks can be pulled out of the water by tension cables that are supported by a tower. This keeps the docks from washing down river.
THE RIVER INSIDE

Allowing the river to intrude into the city creates the possibility of controlling the water close to where people work and live. Off of the main street that pierces the levee, the area is mostly residential. Having the water behind apartments and houses would draw to live in the area. Since Cincinnati is close, a person could work in the city, and come home to go boating, fishing, or just to sit on a balcony and enjoy watching.

A walk along the edge of the "lagoon" lets people make use of this edge. This would include biking, walking, fishing, jogging, and similar activities. Even small sailboats could travel around in this lagoon. A couple of building lots left empty would become small parks for children to play and small fountains could use the river as a source of water.

The "lagoon" also provides a save place for boats to be sheltered in times of flood and fast water. The barge restaurants could be pulled inside the floodgates, as well as other small vessels docked on the river.

In the winter, there could be a shallow area that would be allowed to freeze for ice-skating and hockey. If the lagoon were allowed to freeze, ice fishing would be a possibility, as well as the chance to skate from one section of town to another.
CONCLUSION

The possibilities for a city in Lawrenceburg's location, economically, geographically, and socially, provide opportunities that can overwhelm the architect. One must keep in mind the scale of the town, and its heritage. The river historically generated problem-solution architecture. Sometimes, however, the solution can overwhelm. This is the case of the levee. It could also be the case in trying to put more on the river than the town can presently support. At the same time, one must be careful not to underestimate the possibilities.

The city needs business. The Ohio River remains a source of development for cities that have the vision to realize it.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


