A Connection for Elkhart.

Thesis Project by
Gregory B. Saal
Ball State University
May 5, 1989

Commitee Members
Alfredo Missair, Chairperson
Michel Mounayar
Whitney Gordon
INDEX:

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 2
CENTURY CLUB PHOTOGRAPHS 3
THESIS STATEMENT 4
BUCKLEN OPERA HOUSE PHOTOGRAPHS 5
BUCKLEN HOTEL PHOTOGRAPHS 6
CONTEXTUAL MAP 7
CONTEXT ANALYSIS 8
DESIGN OBJECTIVES 9
PROCESS/ISSUES 10-11
CONCLUSION 11
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY 12-13
But as when
the Bird of wonder dies, the maiden Phoenix,
her ashes new create another heir,
as great in admiration as herself...
Special thanks goes out to the following people for their support, love, and belief in my ability as a student of architecture and life.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Saal:
    For their unselfish love and support of my ideas about architecture, Elkhart, and education. Without them, my education might not have been possible.

Alfredo Missair:
    For his support, critical analysis of ideas, and constructive criticism at times when I needed it most.

Michel Mounayar and Whitney Gordon:
    For taking time out of their busy schedules to offer criticism at times when I was lost and needed their direction.
Century Club
Main Street, downtown Elkhart
before demolition

site of Century Club
Main Street, downtown Elkhart
after demolition
**Thesis Statement:**

The physical and historical destruction of a city's core or heart is not a new problem and is, or has been, shared by practically all cities throughout the world. The city's heart becomes bastardized by an apparent need to modernize without respect to its history. Often the end result of this modernization is a city that has lost its historical foundation and, therefore, becomes "unrecognizable" to its most important resource—its people. This thesis is a reaction to the physical and historical destruction and rehabilitation of the city core of Elkhart. It is intended to enhance and test, with respect to history, the rehabilitation of Elkhart, its citizens, and my beliefs about what Elkhart is and what it should be.
We announce, now, as part of the overall plan, that the Bucklen site become a landscaped parking lot to further spur development in this area.
Bucken Hotel
corner of E. Jackson Street and Main Street, downtown Elkhart
before demolition

site of Bucklen Hotel
now present site of Citizens Northern Bank
NOTE: The dark area represents my site and its relation to the city of Elkhart.

NOTE: The areas in black are areas to be developed under the Phoenix Project.
Context Analysis:

A. Social/Cultural

Elkhart was founded in 1829 by Dr. Havilah Beardsley. The city derives its present name from an island at the confluence of the St. Joseph and Elkhart rivers. A Potawattomi Indian legend had it that this sacred island of peace is shaped like the heart of an elk. Elkhart's two rivers became a shipping and commercial center for many local area wheat farmers. The rivers were also used to ship lumber through Elkhart to satisfy a growing demand for the furniture and paneling markets in America and Europe. Also important to the growth of Elkhart was the introduction of the railroad in 1851. The trains brought with them industrial growth and entrepreneurship to the downtown. In 1933 Elkhart became a center for manufactured housing and recreational vehicles. These are just a few things that have contributed to the growth of Elkhart; the city is also internationally known for the manufacture of musical instruments, mobile homes, and pharmaceuticals.

B. Site Analysis

The site I have chosen for my thesis is located about two blocks east of Main Street and borders the Elkhart River to the west. The site covers approximately 19.3 acres of land that was, from about 1850 to 1875, the industrial center of Elkhart. The site presently houses numerous commercial businesses, a few industrial warehouses from the turn of the century, and some residential housing along Clark Street. The site appears to me as the next logical focus in the rehabilitation of Elkhart. It is an "eyesore" in the downtown but has potential to become an anchor for the continued economic, cultural, and architectural rehabilitation downtown. There are numerous amenities located within walking distance from my site that can easily support its redevelopment. Among the amenities are: five parks in or near the downtown, many of Elkhart's finest restaurants, the YM/YWCA which is located just north of my site, a daycare facility next to the YM/YWCA, the Midwest Museum of Modern Art, the main branch of the public library, five major banks, three major grocery stores, three drug stores, and many proposed changes of the Phoenix Project.
Design Objectives:

"A useful image of the city is of a palimpsest. Consider a writing surface, a tablet on which various text have been written over the centuries. Earlier words and lines have been erased, but their vestiges remain, shaping the present document, additions either enrich the past or try to obliterate it" (Geddes, 74). I believe Elkhart has recognized her palimpsest; however, I do not think she fully understands it. Elkhart has adopted a very ambitious program for the redevelopment of her inner core with the Phoenix Project; however, I feel that if the ideas of the Phoenix Project are not unified the desired result will be less then tangible.

Elkhart's redevelopment plan speaks of three areas which I feel are important: its citizens, the city core or heart, and water. For myself these three areas represent Elkhart's heritage. I feel a connection needs to be made between Elkhart's redevelopment and her heritage. This connection should be one of good urban design through architecture, and the relationship of its citizens, the city core, and water, of which, all have played a vital role in Elkhart's heritage.
PROCESS/ISSUES:

The research and subsequent project that has lead me to the writing of my thesis book was based upon an immediate need to understand my proposed physical and theoretical connection. As I mentioned earlier, my connection lies in the relationship of man, city core, and water. I have, therefore, used the information presented below as a base proposal for the continued study of my connection in terms of its application for the city of Elkhart.

It has become apparent to me, through my research, that a few crucial ingredients that once made cities successful, healthy places to live and interact have been forgotten. Elkhart is no different. The city is once again getting her downtown back on its feet; however, events held downtown only bring seasonal life to the city. The Phoenix Project has added a civic plaza downtown, Main Street redevelopment, and riverfront redevelopment. All of which have added much to the beautification of the city. About six years ago, urban planning had become a topic of discussion in Elkhart rather than a tool in the development and rehabilitation of the city. Urban planning cannot be singled out as the sole perpetrator of the deterioration of the city. Numerous factors contributed to Elkhart's problem: urban sprawl, the automobile, lack of understanding about the downtown, poor politics, and hesitation on the part of the city's people were just a few of the contributors. Many of a city's problems are no longer academic and only through community commitment, a complete understanding of a city's problems and positive, aggressive implementation of ideas can a city begin to rehabilitate itself.

A city is constantly in transition so long as people live in it and use it(Colean, 5). The key word in that sentence is people and their interaction with a city. With Elkhart's seasonal events, the city, for the most part, only has seasonal life. It is my belief that the city needs to reattract retail and develop more housing downtown. The pedestrian no longer plays a vital role in the city. The automobile has invaded the city and allowed man to exceed the physical limits of the city. Fortunately, Elkhart has only suffered minor damage from this because of limited area for "strip" development and lack of interest in the malls. Elkhart still has a problem with the automobile. The city has become, so to speak, another "fastfood"
convenience which is experienced from the seat of an automobile. The street, which once belonged to the pedestrian, has been over run by the automobile. Elkhart's automobile problem is not as bad as other cities; however, there are no real pedestrian streets. "The convergence of cars, trucks, and buses in urban centers has resulted in vehicular hell. Amidst the chaos one easily forgets that cities exist for the care and culture of people, not the passage of motor vehicles" (Breines and Dean, 32). What is a street? A street is a communal outdoor living space and should be a place for human exchange and artistic enterprise (Breines and Dean, 34). Elkhart is slowly achieving a communal outdoor living space for human exchange and artistic enterprise, but it is still a seasonal thing and not a "common" occurrence. Geddes argues that the enclosed outdoor street is the "true" locus of public life (Geddes, 75).

The final aspect of my connection is water. Although not indigenous to all cities, water possesses very powerful and mystic qualities. Elkhart has talked about "again turning to face the rivers once a source of life and power for the city." Elkhart has began to use the river as a pedestrian area and as a focal point for the downtown. The rivers could be settings for business, housing, shopping or recreation with a magnetism unlike any other location in the city... (Brenn and Rigby, 6). In a vibrant, healthy city, a source of water can become the focus of a city. I also believe that waterfront development can serve as a catalyst for the development and rehabilitation of a city.

The development of my thesis project has been very enjoyable. I thought that I could solve all of Elkhart's problems with one project. Well, it became a humbling experience. I do feel that my project would help the city in its development and would greatly reduce seasonal life in the downtown. My thesis project is only a beginning for myself and, hopefully, the continued development of downtown Elkhart.
State of Research:


*(This book speaks generally about a healthy urban environment for the success of urban waterfronts. The book begins to detail do's and don'ts for waterfront development and how resources may be obtained for the implementation of these ideas.)*


*(I found this book useful because it established guidelines for the formulation of pedestrian oriented cities. It speaks of the relationship of the pedestrian to his environment in terms of street and human scale.)*


*(This almost seemed like an obsolete source to use; however, I found it interesting that many of the ideas about city planning recurred in some of my more recent sources.)*


*(This was a very well written article. Geddes talks about rehabilitating the city with respect to its history. The article continues by saying that the success or failure of redevelopment lies in the understanding of a city's history.)*


*(I chose to look at Krier because of his utopian, almost radical, ideas about the city. Krier's theoretical ideas are a necessary balance to the more traditional ideas of urban planning.)*


*(This book is a useful resource; it defines sixty-five ingredients that contribute to the success of, in some cases, failure of a city.)*