

RESULTS OF DESIGN EVANSTON'S DESIGN SURVEY

For the first time in our twenty-some year history, we in Design Evanston decided to staff a booth at the Fountain Square Art Fair last June. We thought this might be a good opportunity to take our message and ideas of public service to “the people”, particularly, and most appropriately, the arts oriented folks that would likely attend the event. In addition to displays of past Design Evanston award winners, examples of good design projects from around the world, abundant design and planning reference materials pertaining to Evanston, and the presence of Evanston design professionals available to answer inquiring questions of visitor, our booth also offered visitors an opportunity to participate in a design survey questionnaire. We theorized that this would be “the people’s” opportunity to get their message to us.

Initially, we were somewhat nervous that there would not be enough citizen interest in our questionnaires. I mean, who wants to be bothered by a bunch of pesty “design types” asking you to fill out a design survey when you are just out for a pleasant stroll through an art fair? I’ll tell you who. About 90% of the visitors to our booth. After all, this is Evanston, city of knowledgeable, opinionated, and activated residents. When asked “Would you like to participate in our design survey questionnaire?”, most people replied, “Let me at it!” And at it they went. Some people took theirs home to finish in the privacy and sanctity of their own home, and mailed it in to us later. Others labored studiously, and thoughtfully, often for more than fifteen minutes on the few inquiring questions. The questions and the resulting answers are as follows:

1. What kinds of development should be encouraged in Evanston?

Most people were of the opinion that new development should be encouraged in Evanston, particularly in the downtown. Other locations identified for development were Church/Dodge, Dempster/Dodge and Central Street. Development was seen as a way to revitalize neglected areas, expand the tax base, maintain an interesting and diverse community, and make Evanston a more engaging place to live, as well as a possible destination city for non-residents. Nevertheless, a number of other respondents felt Evanston was being over developed, particularly with condominiums high in size and price, and that many worthy people were being priced out of Evanston as a result. Market supported development was a common theme among respondents. Specifically, the following types of development were urged:

- Local Retail
- Mixed Income/Affordable Residential
- Sustainable, environmentally sensitive and appropriate.
- Public spaces, green spaces, places for people to interact
- Properly scaled to neighborhoods and sensitive to the human scale
- Tax producing

2. What new Evanston buildings do you like?

(open ended question – buildings noted were those that received at least 10 votes)

Building	location/description	# votes
Optima Towers	(orange balconies)	32
Optima Views/Borders	across from Cinema	20
None or very few	-	20
Library	Church & Orrington	19
Optima Horizons	Benson/Clark/Emerson	17
Century Theater Complex	you know	10

Reasons people liked these buildings:

Good design, quality materials, creative use of materials
Building relates to the street, fits neighborhood, good scale, pedestrian friendly
Building base ties in with the surroundings, parking attractively concealed
Ground floor retail, activates the street, keeps the downtown alive.
Bold design, daring architecture, stimulating, exciting, dynamic
Scale not overwhelming, good proportions, integrates into streetscape, uses appropriate setbacks
Respects surrounding architecture, considerate of context
Creative blend of old and new

3. What new Evanston buildings don't you like?

(open ended question – buildings noted were those that received more than 10 votes)

Building	location/description	# votes
Optima towers	orange balconies	32
Dubin Townhomes	Chicago & South Blvd.	28
Optima Horizons	Benson/Clark/Emerson	24
900 Chicago Ave.	N.W. corner Chgo & Main	19
Any new high-rise condos		17
Optima Views/Borders	across from cinema	17
Rozak-Chicago Ave.	W. side Chgo. Ave. S. of Dempster	14

Reasons for these choices:

Excessive density, too big, congested, too high, too overwhelming
Inadequate setbacks, too close to the street, cuts off light, insensitive to pedestrians
Lack of greenspace
Unattractive, unwelcoming, generic, brutal piles of cinderblocks, ugly, no attention to detail
Lack of respect for existing structures, context, site.
Lack of architectural features to create a visual interest, featureless, bland, boring
Out of character for Evanston, too contemporary.

Architecture lacks creativity, lack of aesthetic imagination
Looks cheap!

4. Who should review and approve the appearance of buildings in Evanston?

Option	# votes
Panel of Evanston Design Professionals	111
Evanston Plan Commission	62
City Council	20
Other (residents, me!)	13
City Staff	11
No one	5

Note: Many respondents felt that several groups should have this responsibility, by far the most common combination was a Panel of Evanston Design professionals and the Plan Commission. Extremely few respondents felt that design decisions should be left solely to owners and developers. Likewise, few trusted elected officials with this responsibility.

We design professionals that make up Design Evanston were extremely impressed with both the quantity and quality of the respondents remarks. Many respondents were surprisingly observant and articulate regarding design issues and responsibilities.

We were not surprised that two of Optimas buildings were both the most liked and disliked in the survey. Such is often the way with more adventurous designs (Optima Towers and Optima Views are both Design Evanston award winners). We felt most of the comments regarding future development in Evanston were right on. We were also encouraged to find that the vast majority of respondents desired appearance review by a panel of Evanston Design professionals. Design Evanston, for many years, has encouraged the city to adopt Appearance Review Guidelines and establish an Appearance Review Commission or Panel. We are encouraged that there is significant support for this among the respondents. We can only hope that these changes are instituted before more unfortunate developments contribute to the least liked list of buildings.

Design Evanston is grateful for all those that participated in this questionnaire, and we are particularly grateful to one of our own members, Jeanne Lindwall, a Planner with Camiros, Inc., for spearheading the team that prepared the questionnaire, and individually tabulating the results. We look forward to next years efforts.

Dave Galloway
President – Design Evanston

(Design Evanston is a not for profit corporation of Evanston design professionals devoted to promoting and encouraging good design in our city)