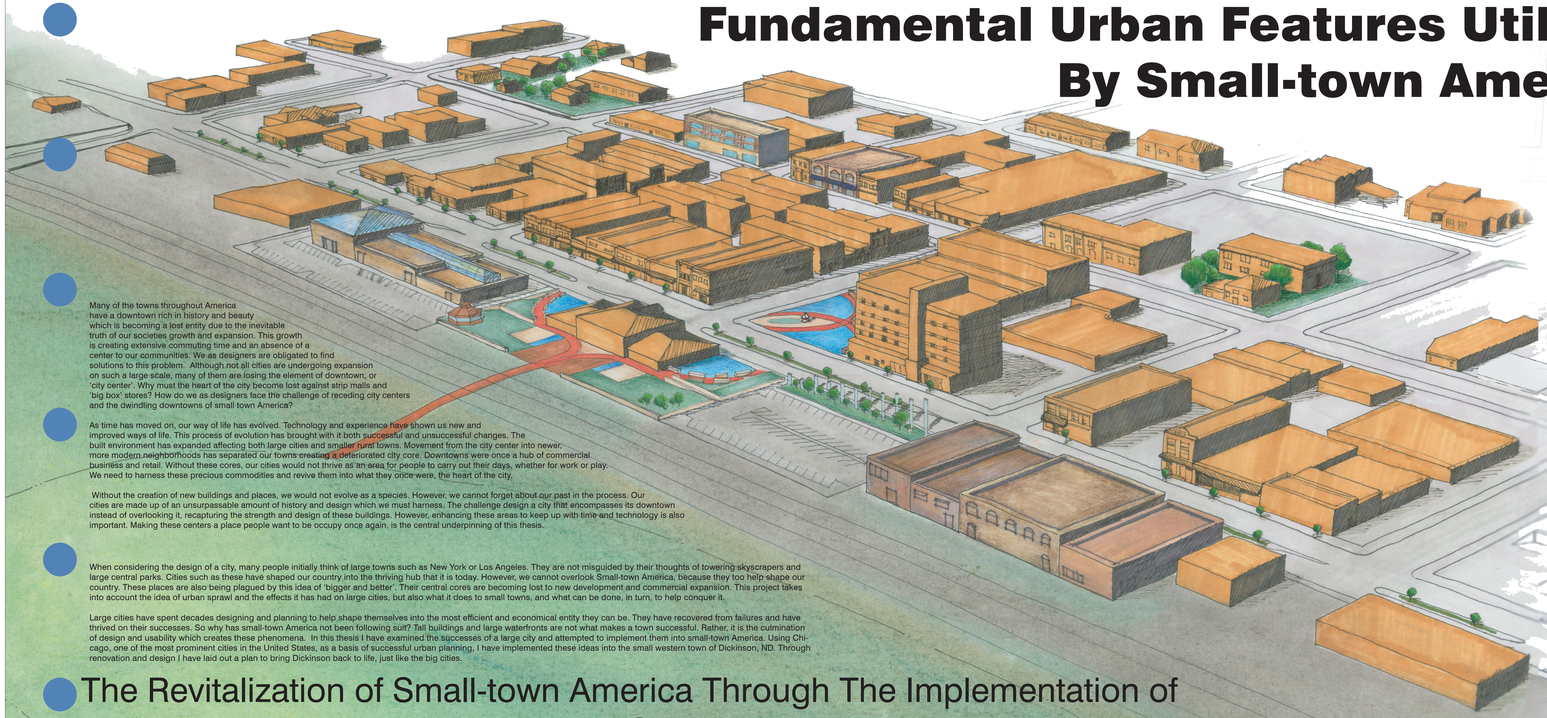
Fundamental Urban Features Utilized By Small-town America



Many of the towns throughout America have a downtown rich in history and beauty which is becoming a lost entity due to the inevitable truth of our societies growth and expansion. This growth is creating extensive commuting time and an absence of a center to our communities. We as designers are obligated to find solutions to this problem. Although not all cities are undergoing expansion on such a large scale, many of them are losing the element of downtown, or 'city center'. Why must the heart of the city become lost against strip malls and 'big box' stores? How do we as designers face the challenge of receding city centers and the dwindling downtowns of small town America?

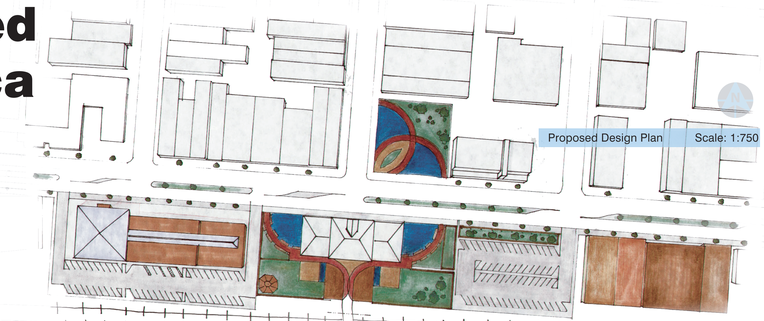
As time has moved on, our way of life has evolved. Technology and experience have shown us new and improved ways of life. This process of evolution has brought with it both successful and unsuccessful changes. The built environment has expanded affecting both large cities and smaller rural towns. Movement from the city center into newer, more modern neighborhoods has separated our towns creating a deteriorated city core. Downtowns were once a hub of commercial, business and retail. Without these cores, our cities would not thrive as an area for people to carry out their days, whether for work or play. We need to harness these precious commodities and revive them into what they once were, the heart of the city.

Without the creation of new buildings and places, we would not evolve as a species. However, we cannot forget about our past in the process. Our cities are made up of an unsurpassable amount of history and design which we must harness. The challenge design a city that encompasses its downtown instead of overlooking it, recapturing the strength and design of these buildings. However, enhancing these areas to keep up with time and technology is also important. Making these centers a place people want to be occupy once again, is the central underpinning of this thesis.

When considering the design of a city, many people initially think of large towns such as New York or Los Angeles. They are not misguided by their thoughts of towering skyscrapers and large central parks. Cities such as these have shaped our country into the thriving hub that it is today. However, we cannot overlook Small-town America, because they too help shape our country. These places are also being plagued by this idea of 'bigger and better'. Their central cores are becoming lost to new development and commercial expansion. This project takes into account the idea of urban sprawl and the effects it has had on large cities, but also what it does to small towns, and what can be done, in turn, to help conquer it.

Large cities have spent decades designing and planning to help shape themselves into the most efficient and economical entity they can be. They have recovered from failures and have thrived on their successes. So why has small-town America not been following suit? Tall buildings and large waterfronts are not what makes a town successful. Rather, it is the culmination of design and usability which creates these phenomena. In this thesis I have examined the successes of a large city and attempted to implement them into small-town America. Using Chicago, one of the most prominent cities in the United States, as a basis of successful urban planning, I have implemented these ideas into the small western town of Dickinson, ND. Through renovation and design I have laid out a plan to bring Dickinson back to life, just like the big cities.

The Revitalization of Small-town America Through The Implementation of Urban Fundamentals Used in Large Cities. A Thesis Project By Traci L Fisher



Proposed Design Plan Scale: 1:750

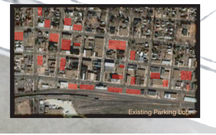
Existing Park North of Depot

Business North of Depot on Villard Ave

East Side of Depot

West Side of Depot

The Rock on First Ave N



Existing Parking Lot

Looking West Down Villard Ave

Looking East Down Villard Ave

Located in southwestern North Dakota, Dickinson was established along the NP rail line in 1882. Like many of the towns around it, the railroad played a large part in Dickinson's development. The depot became a centralized structure that held the town together. Villard Avenue, which runs along the tracks, thrived as businesses and industries grew along it. Today this commercial area still exists, creating the central core of the town. But like many towns, time and development have changed this area from what it once was. Expansion to the northern part of town has taken away from much of the newer commercial development, and industries have migrated to the outer limits of the town. Over the years attempts at reclaiming this area have been implemented, but most with no prevail.

This project has taken into account the area surrounding the depot from 4th Street North to Broadway Street, and from about 5th Avenue west to 4th St East. Most of the commercial area is located in this area, which was the main focus of this project. The area on the south edge of Villard Avenue has become dilapidated over time, consisting of vast expanses of parking lots, which are underutilized. Much of the businesses lie along the northern edge of the street, with both old and new development. First Avenue North has become a secondary commercial drive and plays a large role in the core of Dickinson.

Like many small towns, the majority of the original town buildings still stand, but have either deteriorated or have been overlaid with faux exteriors. The streets are wide and accessible for vehicular traffic, but little has been done for the pedestrian. A park/plaza was incorporated on the corner of Sims Street and Villard Avenue but the lack of use has made it ineffective. Over time, street trees and concrete benches have been added to several of the streets, especially around the business area, but these too have had no success.

Renovation

1944

100 n State St -- Today

1946

1811 N Howe St -- Today

Then

1337 Dearborn -- Today

Design Implementation

Historically
- Accessibility
- Diversity of Uses
- Concentration and Intensity of Use (Streetscape, Human scale)
- Organizing Structure

Regeneration Principles
- Promote Diversity of Use
  - Variety of Business and Leisure
  - Office, Residential, and Entertainment
  - Linkages
- Encourage Compactness
  - Critical mass of activity easily accessible by foot
  - Fill in gaps, even relatively small ones
- Foster Intensity of Development
  - No ambitious development projects
- Ensure a Balance of Activities
- Provide for Accessibility
  - Wide walkways
- Create Functional Linkages
  - Parking lots in back/Street Facades
- Build a Positive Identity

Framework
- Build On Existing Assets
  - Build on city center's existing physical assets and special visual qualities
- Take Care Of The Pedestrian
  - Water features, sculpture, café's and entertainers

- Paumier, C. (2004) *Creating a Vibrant City Center: Urban Design and Regeneration Principles.* Washington, D.C.: ULI-the Urban Land Institute.

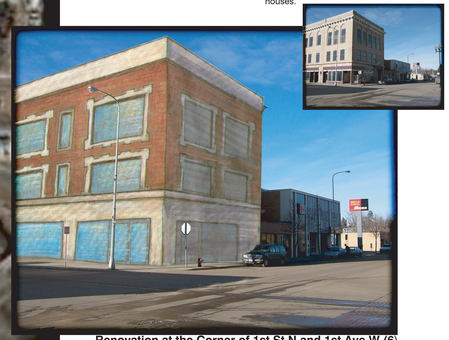
Boulevard Along Villard Ave (5)

Renovation at 38 West 1st St (7)
Proposed Rentable Residential Units

Proposed Site Plan Scale: 1:2000

"In the language of urban history and policy, "planning" refers to efforts to shape the physical form and systems—the neighborhoods and places within which we carry on our lives and the networks that link the parts of a metropolitan area into a functioning whole."

-- Carl Abbott



Renovation at the Corner of 1st St N and 1st Ave W (6)
Proposed Main Level Retial and Upper Level Residential

Preservation

Chicago Boulevard System

In 1907, Chicago's legislation implemented a comprehensive park system that would improve the "City in a Garden". Street boulevards became an integral part of this plan. These wide, straight roadways, bordered or centered with grassy medians and formal tree alleys, were planned to connect projected parks on the South, West, and North sides forming a "greenway" completely encircling the fast-growing city. Intended to provide orderly circulation through the city as well as corridors of light and space, these boulevards remain some of Chicago's principal roadways as well as a remarkable urban amenity.

Chicago Park System

In the late 19th century, Reformers argued that open space and fresh air were essential to childhood. They also regarded green spaces as necessary quite refuges for adults bombarded with the noise and clamor of city life. The most visionary of these park plans was Burnham's plan of 1909 which integrated all elements of the growing city as well as the region if affects. It sought to comprehend the entire region as an interrelated system of built-up and open spaces

Historical Preservation

Historic preservation gained popular support in Chicago in the 1960s when public concern over massive and indiscriminate destruction of Chicago's built environment developed in response to three trends: (1) government-sponsored "urban renewal," (2) construction of high-speed, limited-access expressways financed largely by federal highway funds, which slashed through neighborhoods; and (3) the real-estate boom in response to the demand for increased office space in the Loop.

With increasing understanding that historic preservation is a way to connect the present with the past, more individuals and communities are undertaking their own preservation projects. Aging downtown areas have been rejuvenated by the restoration of an old theatre or by the development of a district of nineteenth-century houses.

1958

1100 S Michigan -- Today

1963

State and Washington -- Today

1963

Michigan and Randolph -- Today

Human Scale

Park/Plaza (1)

Pedestrian Mall (2)

Pedestrian Mall and Depot Park (3)

Design Overview

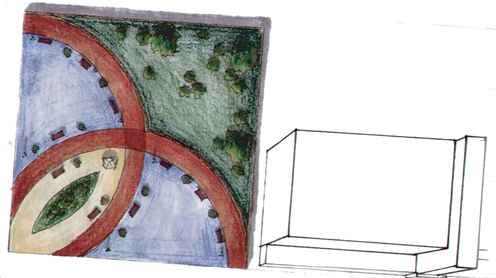
This design focuses mainly on Villard Avenue and the area which encircles the depot. This building is a benchmark for the town of Dickinson, and therefore needs to be incorporated into its development. The depot has been renovated to serve as a Museum for the town of Dickinson, allowing people to learn more about its foundation. The area around the depot was designed specifically for the pedestrian traffic that comes to this area. Outdoor plazas and green spaces surround the building, helping to create a place of serenity and relaxation.

The park area is continued across Villard Avenue into what is the existing plaza. The original idea for this plaza was well-intentioned, but not executed. In my design I have designed it with the idea of a "Central-Park," to help tie this intersection together. This area will be used as a central display area for local artists, along with a place for public and private gatherings and city displays.

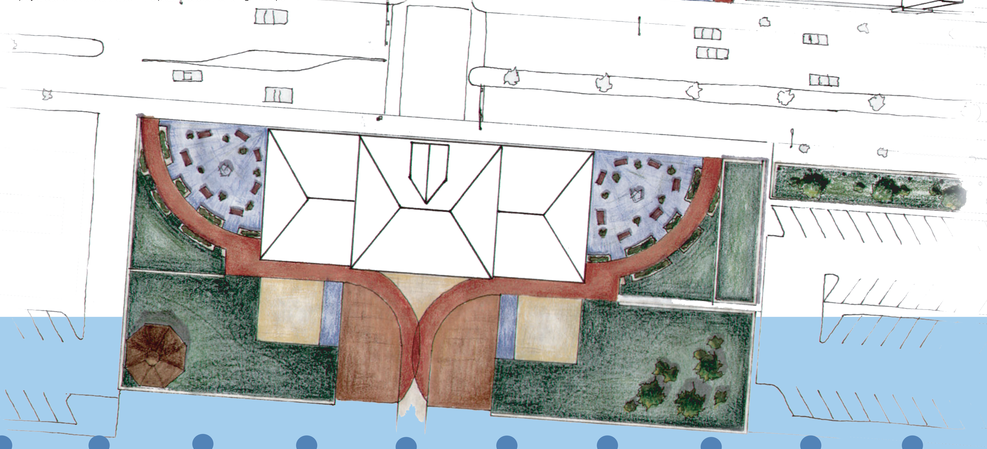
The main street was reconfigured by removing a lane of parking and adding a boulevard strip down the center. This will help to bring the extremity of vehicular traffic down and create a more comfortable pedestrian space. Street trees and furniture were implemented to help create a calming and enjoyable experience along this main drag.

A large pedestrian mall is designed for the area to the west of the depot. This element was added for several reasons. First is to bring commercial and retail life back to this main street. Over the years businesses have migrated out of this area, leaving it depleted, but not without potential. This mall is an indoor mall with the ability to open up during warm weather and create an open space for pedestrians to enjoy.

On the east side of the depot infill buildings were added to help close in the vastness of the south side of Villard Avenue. With a mixture of retail and residential units these buildings will also help bring people back downtown. Also, the incorporation of fine art and visual art studios in this area will bring both entertainment and beauty to this area. Display areas for art are available in the plaza areas surrounding the depot.



Park/Plaza (1)



East Villard Development (4)

Proposed Site Plan Scale: 1:350

"Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech."

-- Proverbs 1:20-21

Street Furniture Details

Pedestrian