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DDA Proceeds with Wayfinding Signage System

Last summer the DDA provided City Council with a report on its work developing a comprehensive wayfinding project that will make it easier for visitors to find their way to downtown and to their chosen downtown destination. This memo is an update on the DDA’s progress on this project.

As mentioned in the earlier memo, Corbin Design Company was selected to design the wayfinding system for Ann Arbor, based in part on their extensive experience developing comparable systems for several dozens of other municipalities, including other college towns. Over the past year or so, a Project Advisory Committee met several times and numerous focus groups and community meetings were held to elicit public feedback on the sign design, as this is the most visible element of the project. From this feedback a semi-final design array was presented to the DDA board at its September 2007 meeting.

At that time members of the local design community asked the DDA to be allowed the opportunity to provide additional feedback on this sign design. The DDA agreed and tabled the project to enable this group time to develop their comments. This group held a general meeting with approximately a dozen design professionals in attendance, and then a design charette where several draft sign designs were created. These sign designs were then placed on a local blog and at the downtown library for public feedback and comment. At the end of their work, a representative of the design community presented a recommended design concept to the DDA at their November board meeting to illustrate their recommendation to the DDA that it focus on a design that doesn’t attempt to “brand” downtown Ann Arbor, but rather, is a design that is clean, simple, and attractive.

The DDA was very grateful for this help, as the design community provided fresh insight into how the project could meet its goals. The DDA Research and Opportunity Committee spent time discussing how to incorporate the best of what had been developed to that point with these new recommendations, and gave direction to Corbin Design who has created the sign design (see attachment).

You will note that the revised design has a streamlined, attractive appearance that will make it easy for visitors to find their way around. The four downtown commercial districts will be distinguished by the use of color and name, and the downtown signs will be modular in nature so individual destinations can be installed or replaced as needed without replacing the entire sign. The system as it's developed will include a "family" of signs, including signs at the highway exits pointing you to downtown, vehicular scale signs and pedestrian signs, as well as pedestrian-level maps with a 'You Are Here' orientation.

A list of downtown destinations has been developed that will include the government and nonprofit facilities open to the public such as the Washtenaw County Court House, AATA Blake Transit Center, the post offices, Guy C. Larcom Building/City Hall, museums, and theaters. A recommended signage plan has also been developed that will be presented to MDOT (Michigan Department of Transportation) for its approval, including highway signs indicating downtown exits. The list of downtown destinations and the MDOT plan were shared with representatives of the Ann Arbor Convention & Visitors Bureau and the University of Michigan for their input.

The next step will be the development of a three-dimensional sign prototype that will be manufactured and installed on a downtown sidewalk so further community input can be elicited about the design, choice of color and font size. A map indicating where specific signs will be installed is under development and will be provided to City staff for their feedback and approval sometime in the coming weeks.

Please let me know if I may provide you with any additional information on this project.

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