

Atlanta Civic Design Commission

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June 1, 1967

*Design
Comments*

Mr. Collier Gladin
Head, Department of City Planning
City Hall
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Mr. Gladin:

This is in response to your request for Atlanta Civic Design Commission Review of the report on Design prepared as part of the City of Atlanta's Community Improvement Program by Candeub, Fleissig and Associates, Planning Consultants.

In general we found the report to be informative and useful in the general discussion of design principles and objectives. We also thought a good job was done in identifying some specific problems requiring attention in the Atlanta area. We were particularly impressed with the choice and range of photographs and graphics used to point up these problem areas.

In short, the committee would have little quarrel with the general material contained in the body of the report. On the other hand, it is the consensus of the Commission that the report was extremely weak in the area of major concern to both public officials and interested citizens and of special concern to members of the Atlanta Civic Design Commission--namely in the area of specific proposals and recommendations.

We would be less than frank if we failed to state that we had hoped for more specific advice as to what steps this community should be taking now to achieve better urban design in the future. Of nine items included in the Summary of Major Recommendations (page 3 of the report) we find only two that are reasonably specific--one calling for a CED plan and the other calling for an ordinance to regulate the removal of mature trees. Unfortunately, even these recommendations are weakened somewhat by their position at the tail end of the list.

The other seven items might more properly be classified as statements of general need rather than firm recommendations to be implemented. For the most part they could be advanced for any urban area

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in the United States today. They do not, unfortunately, reflect some of the thoughtful analysis contained in the body of the Design Report itself.

Taking the points covered in the recommendations in the order of their appearance, we would make the following comments:

- (1) The statement of need "from the public and private leadership of Atlanta to a goal of a well designed city and to the program needed to achieve it" would certainly have the support of every Design Commission member. We do wish that more emphasis had been placed in the study on the development of such a program.
- (2) The Commission would agree that "Physical Design plans related to the Community Improvement Program must be carried out by the best professional designers available." We would have appreciated some specific recommendations as to how this might be accomplished. For example, we believe that more use might be made of design competitions and we had hoped to see some discussion of whether and under what circumstances the consultant would support or oppose such procedures. Also, some consideration of an "awards program" might have been provided in the report.
- (3) The Commission would probably support the idea that "The city must prepare and adopt a design-growth strategy." The report, however, is not too clear on what such a strategy would consist of or how to achieve it.
- (4) The Commission would most likely support the consultants' recommendations that design controls need to be improved "through strengthening of the Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances" and probably that the Civic Design Commission needs to be strengthened also, but we are not too clear as to how this is to be accomplished. It would have been helpful if the Consultant could have provided some specific amendments (in rough draft) for consideration of public officials and Commission members.
- (5) The statement that "a commitment is essential by all city departments to design policies adopted by the city" is again something all Design Commission members would support but we would have liked to have received some guidance as to specific steps that might be taken to achieve it.
- (6) The suggestion that a "design officer is needed" is interesting. We wish it had been accompanied by a firm recommendation as to his duties and recommended location within the structure of local government. The suggestion that he serve a city agency (existing or new) leaves the basic questions hanging without much hope for support.

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- (7) The statement that "a formal design review procedure" is needed is confusing insofar as the Atlanta Civic Design Commission is serving such a function at the present time. If the intent was to require that all major private construction in the city be made subject to such review, we wish it had been stated more clearly. Under this circumstance, we also would like to see some consideration of recommended limits and cut-off points for review of private construction.
- (8 & 9) Again, we support the recommendations that a CBD plan and tree ordinance be developed. We would have preferred to see these items heading this particular list because the bottom position does appear to weaken them.

In summary, we feel the report falls short in the most important area--the area of recommendations. We are concerned both with the recommendations actually presented and with those that were not. We believe that the hand of public agencies concerned with design matters in the city would have been strengthened by 1) a much stronger statement of the case for a CBD plan; 2) a strong recommendation that a visual survey and design program be developed and implemented with specific recommendations as to how this might be done; 3) a draft of specific amendments to the subdivision ordinance, zoning ordinance, building codes, etc.; 4) firm recommendations for a study of the impact of ad valorem taxation on design; 5) recommendations for development of an incentives program (awards or other) for encouraging good design; 6) recommendations regarding whether and how design competitions might be employed in the furtherance of good design; 7) recommendations regarding adoption of a sign ordinance; 8) recommendations regarding the development of design plans for specific major streets, expressways, rapid transit system and public open spaces, and so forth.

It may be argued that some of this thinking is incorporated in the body of the report and we would agree that some of it is. But we would also state our belief that it will not be read or, if read, not taken seriously unless it is stated explicitly and with conviction in the Summary of Major Recommendations at the beginning of the report. It is the hope of the Design Commission that the city or its consultants will be in position to follow through with the good start that has been made to develop a specific, comprehensive program for achievement of the design goals and objectives stated so well in the design report.

We thank you for the opportunity of reviewing this material. If there are any questions, please feel free to call on us for further clarification.

Very truly yours,

J. S. Perrin (w)
Joseph S. Perrin
Chairman

JSP/mjd

cc: Mayor I. Allen
Aldermanic Board