The Royal Oak Studio: Re-building the American Small City

THOMAS BARRIE
Lawrence Technological University

This paper presents the results of a series of community-based architectural and urban design studios which have utilized Royal Oak, MI as a case study. Specifically, a study funded by Royal Oak's Downtown Development Authority entitled *Community Visions of Royal Oak* is presented in detail. The paper discusses the philosophy, pedagogy, methodology, research, and directed student analysis and design that comprised the project. It argues that cities such as Royal Oak are representative of the history, development patterns, problems and promises of small cities across the USA, and therefore are effective laboratories for academic design studios.

The *Community Visions of Royal Oak* project, initiated in the Fall of 1995, intended to deepen the community dialog, research, design development, and possible implementation of proposals pertaining to Royal Oak. The goal was to build upon its urban foundation to create more sustainable and comprehensive urbanism. The studio, part of Lawrence Tech's Integrated Design Studio curriculum, was team taught by an architect, urban designer, and engineer, and the project included a community design charrette, community presentations, and input and participation from residents, public officials, local businesses, and area professionals. Specifically, the project addressed particular issues and areas identified by the community design charrette as well as previous city studies. Additionally, the semester-long project focused on the design of new district courthouse and central civic space. The project concluded with a public presentation and exhibition, and a publication is slated for completion in January 1997.

The conclusion outlines how community-based design studios can effectively communicate urban design issues not only to students, but to the general public. It argues that only through educating students, professionals, municipal officials and citizens about the matrix of social, political, economic, civic and legal issues that comprise contemporary urbanism, can appropriate strategies be formulated and effectively implemented.

BACKGROUND

Royal Oak is a small city[1] located in suburban Detroit. Its history begins in 1836 when a land speculator[2] bought land (in what is now the city center), in anticipation of the railway line slated between Detroit and Pontiac. Royal Oak was laid out in 1838, and similar to railroad towns that were created across America as the new territories were opened up to settlers, it utilized a typical gridiron plan.[3] The utilitarian grid served to efficiently divide land for sale, and. the railroad connection established Royal Oak as a transportation and shipping center which served as a catalyst for the growth of its downtown.[4] Royal Oak was incorporated as a village in 1891 and became a city in 1921. By the 1930's it was a bustling hub, with a dense city center served by commuter rail service and the Detroit Urban Railway. Throughout the 20th century the city continued to grow — its last annexation was in 1957 which established its present day boundaries. Its residential neighborhoods were established as the city expanded, with the two most prodigious periods of growth being the 1920's and the post-W.W.II era.[5]

Royal Oak has suffered from the same pressures and decline that Detroit, and small and mid-size cities across America have been subject to, and in the 1970's it was merely a shell of its past. However, for many reasons including a proactive city government, the creation of a Downtown Development Authority, a committed group of downtown merchants, the arrival of a community college campus, and the completion of a major interstate connection, it has been able to re-build its urban core. Its success is remarkable, especially when compared to the ubiquitous suburban sprawl that surrounds it.

Royal Oak is a place known for its street life and pedestrian scale and accessibility. Within its small downtown, architecture, sidewalks, trees, street furniture, signage and lighting all create a place where it is comfortable and enjoyable to walk and window shop. People often drive for miles just to visit Royal Oak, to walk its streets, eat dinner, see a movie at the local "art theater," patronize its night clubs and coffee shops, or simply hang out on its street corners.

They come in part because Royal Oak is a definable place — an exception to surrounding towns that often have little identity beyond a geographic location and an interstate exit. They come for places that provide what their own towns can't, and for the social climate that the downtown affords.

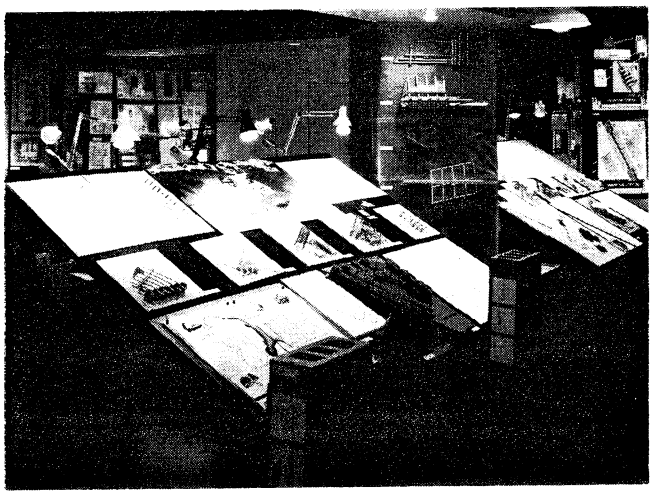
However, even though its central business and surrounding neighborhoods posses a modicum of density, diversity and pedestrian accessibility, it still has many "holes in its fabric." Royal Oak's development patterns, codes, housing mix, problems and concerns are ones that are typical of American small cities. Though its downtown is definable, it suffers from suburban zoning and traffic engineering standards, and much of the city is characterized by auto-dominated development patterns. Exclusive zoning ordinances make mixed-use difficult, and building codes enforce sprawl. The CBD has little housing, and the city's housing stock is dominated by the single family house. Mass transportation is minimal, and significant resources directed toward maintaining its road network,[6] and like municipalities across America, Royal Oak has fiscal problems that are directly related to the cost of maintaining its suburban infrastructure.

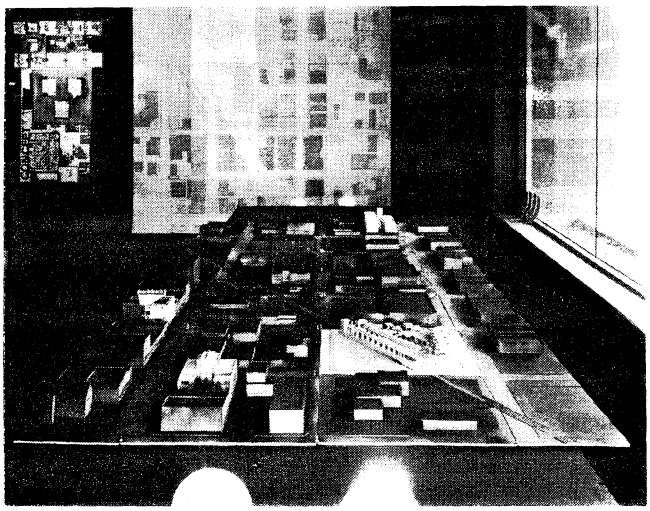
PROJECT PHILOSOPHY AND PEDAGOGY

Royal Oak has proven to be a rich laboratory for student design projects, because it has both a healthy density, diversity and sense of place — and many of the problems typical of small cities across the USA. Previous studio projects addressed issues of civic identity, public space, urban design strategies, and mixed-use development in the downtown. These projects were showcased in a community exhibition in 1995.

The urban design study built upon the previous projects. It respected the existing urban structure, and for the most part to worked within the givens, and suggested modest, incremental changes. Specifically, the design methodology was one of the **identification** of what works, and its **emulation**.[7] The project philosophy and pedagogy included the following:

1. There is an indirect but significant relationship between environment and behavior—we create the built environment of our cities and suburbs, and they in turn affect our self-definition and sense of well-being. Good urban design is a partial but essential part of the solution toward making our lives more satisfying, easy, economical, productive and meaningful.[8]
2. There is a rich urban tradition in America which dates from the founding of the country and includes a broad range of hopes, ideals, plans, standards and practices for our towns and cities. Recognizing the fecund tapestry of the American small city and building upon its successes is the key to strengthening our built environment.
3. The distinction between city and suburb; downtown and neighborhood, is often artificial and ideological. Each needs the other and the overall health of a city is dependent on their mutual support. Furthermore, cities can no longer be expected to solve their own problems. A city-wide, inter-city and regional approach is necessary to solve our common problems.
4. Urban design is neither exclusively objective codes and ordinances, or subjective aesthetics, but a complex matrix of social, political, ecological, economic, civic, legal and design issues. Students, professionals, municipal officials and citizens need to be educated about the full range of criteria for appropriate and effective urban policies to be formulated and implemented.





Figs 1 and 2. The initial Royal Oak projects included a commuter rail station, a mixed-use housing project, a performing arts center, and a museum — all utilizing vacant downtown sites. The exhibition was mounted in a downtown retail space.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

The LTU urban design study included a detailed analysis of the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. It identified **issues**, **areas** and **elements** that need to be addressed to achieve a more diverse, dense, pedestrian-accessible, downtown that is more closely linked with its surrounding residential neighborhoods. It envisioned a city that is sustainable

over the long period, and offers the sense of community and the types of opportunities and lifestyles that small cities have traditionally provided, and that Americans continue to value.

The urban design study began by examining the existing structure and character of the downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. Eight districts, lying roughly within the Downtown Development Authority's boundaries, were identified — based on their location, identity, use or dominant institution. Each of the districts were then analyzed separately, and in relationship totheir surroundings. Circulation systems, land-use, historical layers, scale, materials, street edge, lighting, entry, pedestrian access, automobile issues, parking, streetscape, nightscape, and relationship of open space to building mass where inventoried. After the initial field work, two axonometric drawings of each district where then prepared. The first documented existing conditions, noted their positive and negatives, and were color-coded to indicate land-use, circulation, and open-spaces. The second drawing then "visioned" how the district could be transformed in ways that built upon its positive aspects, mitigated its negatives, and achieved a greater cohesion and accommodation. A model of the downtown (fig. 3), sketch plans, sections and 3D vignettes further documented visions for each district.

Fig. 3. A model of Royal Oak's downtown documented existing conditions and included visions for its future.

Fig. 4. A community design charrette initiated the urban design study and was attended by over 60 participants.

THE COMMUNITY DESIGN CHARRETTE

The preliminary analysis and visioning was brought to the community design charrette. (fig.4) In keeping with models of this national phenomena, the Royal Oak charrette began with a slide presentation which included background, existing conditions, precedents and specific visions. The presentation, as much as possible, cited local examples as models and used accessible, jargon-free language. It targeted local officials, many of whom ascribe to the national trend of a retreat from civic investment.[9] Over sixty people attended, and spent an entire day working intensely in groups.[10]

The charrette process was clearly identified as **proactive** not **reactive**; a process in which local businesses, institutions and residents could anticipate and address concerns and issues — instead of reactivity challenging proposals later. Its educational focus was designed to inform the participants about urban design precedents and models as a means to empower them to participate in urban design issues in an informed and effective way.[11] The charette was not simply a brain storming session, but served as a "bully pulpit" from which to educate the participants. Though the city's business and residential community that participated are committed to the future of the downtown area, they suffer from a lack of urban design literacy and the prejudices and misconceptions typical of the American public.[12] Its rigorous research and professional visions however, also reinforced the value of engaging professionals as part of the process. It argued, as Raymond Unwin did at the turn of the century, about the critical need for planning before development, and that planning is an intrinsic civic art — not merely an aesthetic dressing up.[13] This is an important distinction that needs to be articulated to combat the pervasive climate of civic cost-cutting and *lazzais-faire* planning.

The charrette participants, working in groups, identified *issues*, *elements*, and *areas* that needed attention, and then, assisted by students, "visioned" alternatives. These established the parameters and focus of the subsequent urban design project. The identified issues, areas and elements

were as follows:

- *Pedestrian Accessibility*, including signage, lighting, zoning regulations, landscape, streetscape, seating, pedestrian paths and patterns, activity areas and gathering centers.
- *Connections*, such as achieving clearly defined entries to the downtown, gateways, thresholds, and linkages, addressing traffic patterns, and articulating the structure of the city grid.
- *Edges, Periphery and Transition Zones*, to link the surrounding residential neighborhoods with downtown.
- *Parking/Trolley/Public Transportation*, including on-street parking options, parking structures, and surface lots, and public transportation in the form of a rubber wheeled downtown trolley.
- *Railroad Right of Way,* including a railroad pedestrian walkway, lighting, a future Amtrak platform, planting, and murals.
- *Housing*, including proposals for downtown housing, codes and zoning regulations, density, diversity, and 24 hour life.
- *Oakland Community College*, which provides an anchor for the downtown, but needs a clearly articulated identity, and stronger links to the downtown.
- *The 2nd Street Civic Corridor, Farmer's Market, Civic Events Plaza, and Courthouse.* Proposals to consolidate the existing framer's market and link it with a principal downtown public space in the form of a civic corridor. Student design projects for the proposed new district courthouse and adjacent civic events plaza addressed issues of public space and civic identity.

THE URBAN DESIGN PROJECT

Pedestrian Accessibility

Concerning pedestrian accessibility, a range of concerns and issues were identified during the charrette and the subsequent urban design project, and specific proposals documented. For example, a zoning overlay for the downtown area was recommended that would encourage desirable growth, facilitate density, diversity and mixed-use, and establish appropriate urban standards for buildings, automobiles, and public spaces.[14] Existing zoning codes were not addressed, only the appropriateness of suburban codes being applied to Royal Oak's downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. This attitude recognizes that our built environment is not the result of market-driven, *lazzais-faire* practices — but of specific building codes and planning practices.[15] It promulgated the notion that healthy and sustainable urbanism depends on proactive civic and legal interventions, and long-term planning and commitment.

Additionally, it recommended that any proposal should **build upon, not counter to**, the existing fabric and aim for incremental development that is responsive to changing conditions. Master plans that do not have provisions for regular updating, or that rely on invasive and large-scale developments should be avoided. Rather, a framework of codes and selective interventions can create the "warp" of the city, that over time is elaborated upon by the colors and textures of the "weft," of subsequent buildings, parks, public spaces, and other interventions.

Given the diversity of the population of Royal Oak, and the fact that the downtown area attracts both the very young and the elderly, it was deemed essential that clearly defined and safe pedestrian crossings of its busy and wide main streets be established — anything less is dangerous and irresponsible. Another option proposed was "boulevarding" certain sections of main thoroughfares — arguing that boulevard islands have many benefits: they soften the hard surfaces with plantings and brick details; they slow traffic; and they provide a place of refuge for pedestrians crossing the wide streets.[16] Special lighting at principal intersections and additional lights with pedestrian signals were also recommended.

The study also identified downtown alleys in need particular attention; many strewn with dumpsters, cluttered with overhead utilities, and in a state of disrepair. In an open grid city such as Royal Oak, there is virtually no "back side," and all streets and alleys are potential pedestrian routes. Improvements of alleys are often viewed as an unnecessary luxury that has only subjective aesthetic benefits. However, because it is the richness of the pedestrian experience that attracts people to visit Royal Oak and patronize its businesses, improvements of this type are investments in this future.[17] Sidewalk seating is another element that can be seen as an amenity of limited value. Worse, are fears that comfortable seating will attract vagrants and undesirables, and encourage them to stay. Often street furniture is deliberately made uncomfortable to discourage vagrants from staying, but the result is often the opposite— **only** vagrants then use the seats.

It is clear that people come to Royal Oak not to drive around in their cars, but to get out of them so that they can walk around. It is a place not to **drive through**—but to **drive to**. However, it is often difficult for Americans to see streets as anything other that efficient conduits for automobiles. Many US cities suffer from the dominance of automobile traffic and a lack of pedestrian scale, identity and accessibility. Gaps in building frontages, inconsistent street edges, and a variety of building styles and scales further exacerbates the problem. Conversely, many cities have equally suffered from the pedestrianization of streets—the closing of streets to vehicular traffic.[18] However, there are workable alternatives to either the auto-dominated street, or the pedestianized enclave. Principally, the goal is for streets that have calmed traffic and create an environment that balances the needs of the pedestrian with that of the automobile.[19]

Thresholds and Connections

The second important issue identified by the design charrette were thresholds and connections — which were defined as

points of entry to the downtown, and elements which provide links across the CBD and with the surrounding neighborhoods. Establishing clear boundaries is crucial to the identity[20] and individuality.[21] All the main entries to Royal Oak's downtown suffer from a lack of delineation and identity, as discontinuous strip development and roadside architecture[22] gradually give way to the density and street edge of the downtown. Generally, all the entry roads need attention regarding architecture, lighting and sign standards.

It was recommended in all these areas that existing businesses incompatible with the downtown be identified for future development once their use changes. The thresholds to the downtown visioned a variety of strategies including painting and paving patterns to mark pedestrian crossings or intersection centers, lights at corners and plantings at strategic locations, boulevards, and markers. Other visions included renovating a prominent railroad bridge, and looking at ways to link the surrounding residential areas with the city center.

Parking/Trolley

Royal Oak, like small and mid-sized cities across America, clearly has the need to augment its transportation system, and provide alternatives to the private automobile. Similar to other cities, Royal Oak at one time did provide a range of transportation choices - street car and interurban lines interconnected the city and connected it with Detroit, and intercity trains linked it with the (at the time) extensive national rail system. Historical photos of Royal Oak document the once extensive trolley system, and its abandoned (Grand Trunk) passenger rail station is testament to the one-time grandeur of America's rail system.[23]

Today, as the economic costs of maintaining an auto-dominated mass-transportation system claim a high percentage of our municipal and personal resources, the wisdom of abandoning public transportation is questioned. Mass transportation in Royal Oak is minimal, and significant economic resources directed toward maintaining the public transportation system of the private automobile.[24] Economics is not the only criteria to consider however, when it comes to bus and light-rail proposals —social and environmental considerations are equally important. It is essential that our transportation system serves the needs of a broader spectrum of our society—the young, the old, the physically impaired and the poor in particular. The environmental implications are obvious, and their economic impact should be included in any comprehensive proposal. Additionally, there is the potential of public transportation to provide a powerful civic identity, through its vehicles and stations. There is currently a renaissance of regional and light rail systems in particular areas of America,[25] and it is obvious that the investment in civic transportation not only has economic, ecological, and social benefits, but that a greater sense of civic identity and pride is achieved. The subsequent quality of life and enhancement of business opportunities should not go unrecognized.

Recently a rubber-wheeled trolley system to serve downtown Royal Oak was proposed, mostly as an antidote to the "parking problem." This proposal was considered as part of the urban design study. However, we envisioned it as a system that not only linked outlying parking areas with the downtown, but that provided a modicum of public transportation to serve the adjacent residential areas. Trolley stop shelters were proposed, and stations given names to reflect the character of their location. It was noted that though a system of this type will never pay for itself, its benefits to the real estate and business value of the downtown should be figured into any balance sheet.[26] Additionally, it was argued that other forms of public transportation should be included in any comprehensive plan for Greater Royal Oak. The restoration of trolley (light rail) service linking the downtown with Detroit and other cities is a current MDOT[27] proposal and Royal Oak has the opportunity to take a regional initiative by developing a city-wide bus system.

In response to regularly voiced concerns about downtown parking[28] the urban design study proposed additional on-street parking. It cited precedents of successful American shopping streets (such as Newbury Street in Boston) and local downtowns, that make use of high-density on-street parking.[29] The benefits of on-street parking were outlined such as the following: traffic slowing which furthers the pedestrian environment; people park closer to retail, restaurants etc., and are not forced to park in distant lots or in parking structures; greater vitality in downtown area—the "crowded restaurant syndrome" that makes any place seem attractive and vital; and as a cost effective, convenient means for satisfying parking needs.[30] The LTU study provided typical street plans which documented additional on-street parking, restored angle parking, street plantings and pedestrian crossings.

The Railroad Right of Way

Royal Oak was founded as a railroad city, and unlike neighboring Birmingham for example, its original plan included the railroad right of way. Clearly, since its inception, the railroad has been an essential feature of the downtown, and its impact is still important today. At regular intervals during the day, life pauses as the signals clang, the barriers descend, and the freights or Amtrak rush through town maniacally blowing their horns. It is the city's carillon and an important ingredient in Royal Oak's civic identity.

Transportation spines and edges often can serve as important civic places. The Urban Design study focused on the Railroad Right of Way in Royal Oak as an important component that has the potential to integrate the rail with the downtown, and link a series of public areas. The proposal envisioned a pedestrian way along the track throughout the downtown. It recognized the important safety considerations of public walkways along the rail line, but suggested that by formalizing what is now done informally, this area could become a much safer place. The study proposed linking an existing parking structure with the Amtrak platform, and the

creation of a number of downtown parks. One proposal transformed an existing lot and parking area into a seasonal skating rink, and cited the importance of a central point that provides opportunities for communal activities as an essential ingredient of healthy urbanism.

Housing

One result of exclusive suburban zoning is the separation of housing from other uses and areas. Initially, separate zones for housing, commercial and industrial uses was a prudent response to unhealthy living environments. However, as these standards were indiscriminately applied across the country, the result was the fragmentation and monotony that characterizes our contemporary suburbs. The places where we live, though they may comprise attractive houses, well-kept lawns and tree-lined streets, are typically marooned within large tracts of housing, and disconnected from schools, shops and cultural institutions. Royal Oak's patterns of housing reflects national models: exclusive zoning ordinances make mixed-use difficult, and building codes enforce sprawl. Of the 29,000 total housing units in Royal Oak, more than 20,000 are single-family detached, 70% owner-occupied. Reflecting national trends, the average household in Royal Oak is 2.5 persons, and 25% percent of its population is age 55 and over. In 1989 of over 28,000 households, a little less than one-half earned $35,000 per annum. This has not changed appreciably over the past seven years, while the average prices of houses has continued to rise from its 1989 level of $76,000. Clearly there is a need in Royal Oak, as there is across America, of alternatives to the single family house and its decentralized development patterns.

The study argued that there is a need for greater diversity, density and mixed-use in the CBD. The strength of Royal Oak lies in its existing diversity—elderly, young adults, skateboarders, young families, long-term residents, the gay community, and day and night visitors. The city needs to build upon this to create a more **sustainable community**, both in the CBD and throughout Greater Royal Oak. Not only does Royal Oak need a broader range of businesses in the CBD, it needs a diverse range of housing as well, especially housing that provides for a range of family types and income levels.[31] The urban design study identified a number of areas as potential future housing. The proposals ranged from large scale development, to small infil projects and sites that build upon existing housing.

Oakland Community College

A real success story in the revitalization of downtown Royal Oak was the arrival of a Community College which provides the important role of defining the image of Royal Oak as a young, "college town." Unfortunately, the architecture of the campus does little to integrate it with the downtown area, or to facilitate its educational image.[32] The study posited that if the community college is to present itself as a place of higher education, and if Royal Oak is to more thoroughly benefit from the presence of a downtown campus, the imagery, entry, orientation, and organization of the campus will need to be addressed. It also recognized that eventually the campus will need to expand, identified a number of future development sites, and proposed that a central parking lot be moved and converted to a campus quadrangle.

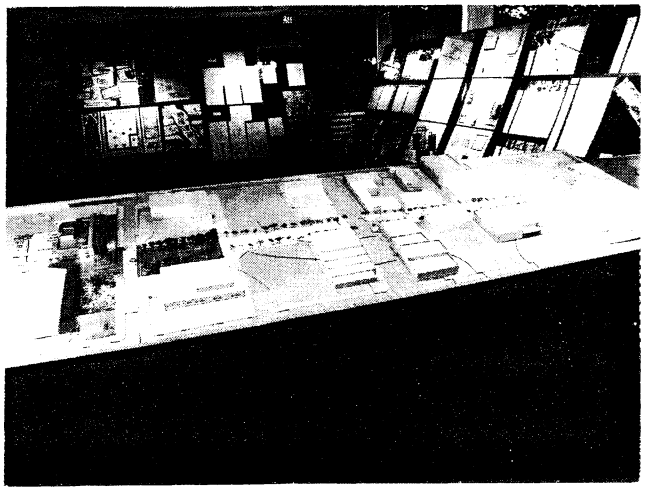
The 2nd Street Civic Corridor, Farmer's Market, Civic Events Plaza, and Courthouse

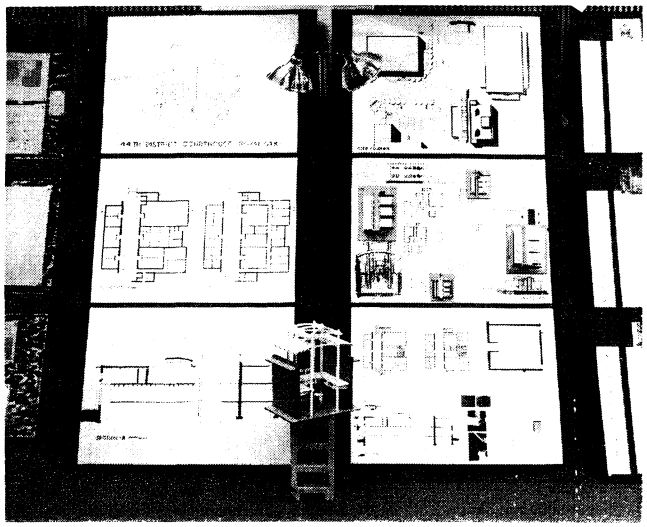
The urban design study also addressed the transformation of a downtown street into a civic corridor. Its intention was to establish a clearly demarked civic enter in the CBD in the spirit of mid-western county seats, and utilized proven urban design techniques and elements such as vista, landmark, civic scale, and spatial definition and sequence.[33] Civic identity was established by building upon existing federal and municipal buildings — the post office, town hall, the library and the farmers market — and anchoring them with a new rail station and a proposed new Circuit Courthouse and civic events plaza at its terminus'. Infil buildings were also proposed, recognizing that spatial continuity is essential to successful public spaces of this type. Sites were identified for future housing/business/ retail uses to complete the street edge and provide spatial closure and continuity. Throughout, planting and lighting was envisioned to create a significant place of clear civic importance.

The courthouse, farmers market and library frontage were the subject of a specialized study and a range of proposals. The projects stressed the importance of the new courthouse and the farmers market, as civic buildings essential to the definition not only of the civic corridor but of the city as a whole. The courthouse was sited and the farmers market transformed, to integrate them with the civic corridor, and to provide a significant public space at its terminus.[34]

CONCLUSION

The urban design project concluded with a public presentation and exhibition. (figs. 5 & 6) A slide presentation summarized the urban design study, and eight student teams presented designs for the courthouse and civic events plaza. The project was primarily educational — it educated students who have grown up in a country that for two generations has had a compromised urbanism. Its educational focus clearly was of value to the students, but its goals had a broader focus. It also served to provide citizens with the means to be articulate about the built environment—so that they may participate in the future of Royal Oak effectively and successfully. Without educational outreach, the academy and profession will remain isolated, and the populace uniformed and mistrustful of professionals. Like ward to ward local politics, a process like this is time consuming, but only through educating the public and public officials can appropriate, lasting, positive change be effected. Amitai Etzioni argues that the social environment needs tending just as much as the natural environment.[35] I argue that the built





Figs. 5 and 6. The exhibition featured a model of the civic corridor including the new courthouse, farmer's marker, and rail station. It included the urban design study, as well as a number of courthouse projects.

environment is equally crucial, and that a social movement similar to the environmental movement is necessary to address the critical problems we face. The study urged the participants to be proactive, not reactive — to have vision and anticipate concerns. It recommended that a permanent structure, with authority, for citizen input concerning issues of the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods be set up, and argued that without such a structure, committed citizens will feel marginalized, and will continue to react negatively to new proposals.[36] Lastly, it suggested that with the proper knowledge, professional resources and long-term planning, Royal Oak could become a model for the renaissance of the small cities across America.

NOTES

[1] Population approximately 65,000.

[2] Sherman Stevens

[3] For a cogent description of the mid-19th century proliferation of speculative railroad towns, see Kostof, Spiro, *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meaning Throughout History,* Boston, Bulfinch Press, 1991, p. 122-123

[4] Early industries included the manufacture of animal bells, bricks and tile, and the building of sailing ships (with an attendant industry of planing mills.) The surrounding farmland produced a variety of crops, (including cranberries and rhubarb from the marshy areas), and the city center eventually became a hub for the selling of farm products.

[5] The early houses were typical American Colonial houses, few of which survive today. Many of Royal Oak's houses which date from the 1920's were built by developers using "kit houses" popular during this time — the classic mid-western four-square, bungalow and cottage styles. The post-war neighborhoods are characterized by the GI houses of the FHA driven post-war housing boom, as well as eclectic styles of single family houses that characterize American suburbia.

[6] This significant municipal cost is rarely questioned even though it squanders revenues on a wasteful transportation system which, as Benton MacKaye pointed out, "should go into more significant aspects of life."

[7] A central feature of Duany Plater-Zyberk's methodology for Traditional Town Planning Practice.

[8] While recognizing that, in the words of Alexander Garvin, "fixing cities does not fix people." *The American City; What Works, What Doesn't,* 1994

[9] The charrette utilized in part the model developed by Duany Plater-Zyberk (as described in the "Traditional Town Planning Practice" handbook. In a phone conversation with the author, Jeff Speck, project manager a DPZ, stated that though the process is collaborative, it is clearly led by professionals.

[10] A broad spectrum of Royal Oak was represented which included: the City Commission, the DDA, the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Royal Oak Association (a downtown business group), the Parking Committee (a sub-committee of the DDA), the Historical Society, the Baldwin Theater (a local amateur theater), the library, the District Courthouse, the Farmers Market, the religious community, Oakland County Planning, area architects and professionals, the elderly community, and local residents.

[11] The urban design study utilized, in part, the community input process outlined in *Planning to Stay; Learning to See the Physical Features of Your Neighborhood* by William Morrish and Catherine Brown, Milkweed Press, 1994.

[12] Its timing was propitious — it came at a time when a downtown high-rise condominium development had just been defeated after a long and acrimonious citizen-led fight.

[13] Unwin, Raymond. *Town Planning in Practice; An Introduction to the Art of Designing Cities and Suburbs,* New York, Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1971 (first published 1909)

[14] Examples such as the El Pueblo Viejo district in Santa Barbara were cited.

[15] Kostof eloquently challenges the validity of *lazzais-faire* theories of city development in *The City Shaped,* p. 33

[16] However, it is the type of proposal that traffic engineers will immediately oppose, citing the disruption in traffic flow. When Plymouth MI proposed boulevarding a section of Ann Arbor Trail, along with other improvements to the downtown, it was immediately challenged. However, now the attractive boulevard is embraced and even graces the cover of the downtown marketing report. It was noted that this street carries 20,000 cars a day; Main Street in Royal Oak 25,000.

[17] In cities such as Northville, MI and Plymouth that have done alley improvements, the marketing and mercantile benefits are apparent.

[18] Initially based on European models, (Rotterdam's Lijnbaan, for example, 1953), downtown pedestrian malls have often resulted in just the opposite of what they intended — designed to be vibrant, dense places, safely removed from the automobile, they instead became forgotten back streets. While workable models can still be found in many European cities, (such as Stroget Street in Copenhagen), and some in America (such as Quincy Market in Boston,) it is not a form easily adaptable to American cites.

[19] An alternative is temporary street closings which can be done by inexpensive removable bollards. Royal Oak, like many American cities, is very comfortable with street closings during civic events. Daily or regular closings are another matter, however, though examples that are found in the French Quarter of New Orleans and in Santa Monica California may provide useful examples.

[20] One of 9 criteria of urbanism cited by Kostof in *The City Shaped.*

[21] Benton MacKaye argued that a city needs to be an "interesting and cosmopolitan individual," and that "if you have seen one (American city) you have seen all; they have geometry not personality. From *The New Exploration*

[22] Benton MacKaye argued that a city needs to be an "interesting and cosmopolitan individual," and that "if you have seen one (American city) you have seen all; they have geometry not personality. From *The New Exploration*

[23] The decline of the rail and trolley system in America was not simply a reflection of consumer choice of wheels over rails for personal and commercial transport, but was the result of shrewd and at times ruthless business practices by the auto industry. The intentions of GM and Ford were to monopolize transportation means and eventually garner an increased market share, all of which is documented in the congressional hearings of 1974. The result, as Lewis Mumford eloquently stated, "is a crudely over-simplified method of mono-transportation: a regression from the complex, many-sided transportation system we once boasted." From "The Highway and the City," 1964.

[24] For example, Oakland county of which Royal Oak is a part, budgeted 83 million dollars for major roads in 1996. (Only 6 million was allocated for parks and recreation.) Bus system users are predominantly poor and are stigmatized by infrequent service and shoddy bus shelters. In Royal Oak almost 90% of all workers drive alone to work, 6.5% carpool, and .8% use public transportation.

[25] Some are cities such as New York and Boston which never completely abandoned their subway and rail systems — some cities such as St. Louis, San Diego and Los Angeles are needing to totally re-build.

[26] Small towns and cities that have rubber wheeled trolleys, such as Edgartown, MA and Topeka KS, are committed to maintaining them for a variety of reasons. At Edgartown, trolleys link an outlying parking area with the narrow streets of the downtown shopping area, and in the case of Topeka, their trolleys have become a civic icon.

[27] Michigan Department of Transportation.

[28] Currently there is a growing perception that Royal Oak has a "parking problem." A 1995 Downtown Parking Study supported this perception. Its recommendations include adding a downtown parking structure at 2nd and Center to provide 398 spaces, and subsequently an assessment on businesses in the CBD and raising of meter rates were proposed to fund this and other proposals. In response, a group of merchants was organized to respond to the Downtown Parking Study, and to explore alternatives for parking in the CBD. One result of the committee's work was an alternative parking study, prepared by Thomas Barrie and Jack Hanna in consultation with a number of city and state officials, that suggested additional on-street parking.

[29] Local cities such as Birmingham and Plymouth, MI have restored angle parking in their downtowns to the benefit of downtown businesses. Historical photos of Royal Oak show that it once had considerably more on-street parking including high-density angle parking.

[30] The study concluded that by adding parallel parking, and restoring angle parking on certain streets, over 350 additional parking spaces could be created. On-street parking is obviously a cost-effective means of adding parking due to its low installation charges (approximately $315 per meter, plus line painting and signage if necessary - the cost would be much less for the restored angle parking.) This investment would be quickly repaid by the revenue generated by the meters.
Concerns about safety issues and Act 51 state road maintenance funds regarding restored angle parking were responded to by citing the precedent of Woodward Avenue in Birmingham where angle parking has not resulted in an increase in accidents, and that though some Act 51 moneis could be lost for those portions of the road where angle parking was restored, the worst case scenario was for a loss of less than 1% of the yearly award by the state to the city.

[31] One important ingredient of diverse downtowns is the "shop house," or housing located above street-level retail, often owner occupied.

[32] The building consistently turns its back on the street, and offers a bland public face that reveals little about the vibrancy inside. Instead its wraps itself around an internal court, reminiscent of the 1970's shopping malls that were clearly its model. It is clear that this organization was deliberate because of the sacrifices that were made to a workable and convenient plan to accomplish it.

[33] Precedents included the work of Kevin Lynch and Gordon Cullen.

[34] The design process also served to confirm the importance of the farmers market to the city. Most proposals included a retrofit of the western facade of the market so that it could open to the new plaza, and provide space for push carts and other venders. Like the cathedral close of European medieval cities, the civic events plaza could serve a variety of functions from the mercantile to the celebratory. It could provide a definable place for community events and activities that would further cement the community image of Royal Oak. Successful public spaces, Harvard Square, the green and bandstand in Oak Bluffs Massachusetts, and the bandstand at Northville, were cited as models for this essential urban ingredient.

[35] Etzioni, Amitai, *The Spirit of Community, The Reinvention of American Society*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1993, p.119

[36] Other recommendations included the following: 1. Commit to enacting a comprehensive **master plan**, produced by a prominent national firm. Ensure that the project is properly funded, that it includes significant community input, that it sets a range of goals and an incremental action plan, includes the provision for regular updating by the same team, and lastly is adopted with full authority for its implementation. 2. Establish a **Principal Shopping District**, (much like has been done in Birmingham and Plymouth), to aggressively attract businesses that would diversify , infil, and the strengthen the downtown area. 3. Hire a firm to do a **marketing study**. Such studies are essential to combat the aggressive and successful marketing techniques of malls and big-box stores. 4. Maintain the DDA, and confirm its authority by continuing the practice of exactions for public works, planning studies, land acquisition, etc.