

Community Appearance Regulation:

Municipal Design Review Practices in Metropolitan Chicago

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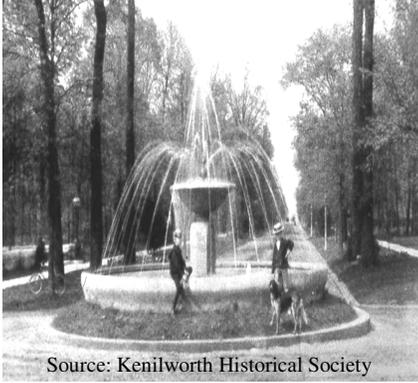
Scenic Illinois

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The Enduring Value of Design Review

Anyone involved in urban design will invariably be asked whether high quality development is affordable during difficult economic times. Over the past few decades, there has been a considerable amount of discussion about the advantages of good design.¹ Today the long-term value of good design is seen as particularly important. Moreover, recent economic pressures provide new opportunities to improve the processes for design review.

In the Chicago metropolitan area, most people are familiar with the innovative design features that have made Millennium Park so attractive. The “Economic Return on Perception,” a recent Urban Land Institute publication, has identified the economic benefits from the well recognized public building and landscape improvements—including a 25% increase in nearby property values.²



Source: Kenilworth Historical Society

There are also many more specific advantages for using review processes to achieve the benefits of quality urban design,³ including the following:

- **Economic:** An increase in the overall ambience of older commercial areas, by respecting the human scale in facade and sign design, encourages shoppers to make longer visits and increase their purchases of goods and services.
- **Social:** An affirmation or creation of a “sense of place,” by building neighborhood identity and pride, which can encourage better local security, socialization and property maintenance.
- **Greening:** Well-designed mixed use development helps preserve green space by using less land for buildings, retaining more land in a natural state and including new energy efficient and sustainable technologies.

The author of *Saving Face* conducted a study to demonstrate and quantify the benefits and concluded that: “design review can serve as a positive tool, along with other civic actions, to upgrade a community and that the increased investment in design staff to implement this tool can be recaptured by increased property valuation.”⁴

Finally, case studies of communities with longstanding design regulations, as described in this report, provide solid evidence that these local governments believe their economic interests are best served by design review regulations that have been implemented and refined over past years.

Key Partners

Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development

The Chaddick Institute, located at DePaul University in Chicago, has advanced the principles of effective land use, transportation, and infrastructure planning since its creation in 1993. The Institute offers planners, attorneys, developers, and entrepreneurs a forum to share expertise on difficult land-use issues through workshops, conferences, and policy studies. Financial support for the Institute is provided by the Harry F. and Elaine M. Chaddick Foundation.



Scenic Illinois

Scenic Illinois, a not-for-profit civic advocacy group, initiated the first comprehensive and specific statewide study of aesthetic regulations in 1998. At that time, Scenic Illinois and the Chaddick Institute compiled community appearance data on approximately 100 communities in northern Illinois. Scenic Illinois also initiated the formation of the Municipal Design Review Network and has continued to support public participation in community planning.



Municipal Design Review Network

The Municipal Design Review Network (MDRN) provides a forum for Chicago metropolitan area communities to share information regarding architectural review of buildings, signage and landscaping. The MDRN network has the specific goal to develop professionalism and best practices for the challenging legal issues involved in the regulation of aesthetics.



About the Author



John Hedrick, an attorney and consultant is President of the Scenic Illinois organization which supports public land use planning and design. He has been involved in land use issues in Illinois for over thirty years, while specializing in advertising, corporate and regulatory matters. He is also a Village Commissioner for building and landscape design review and is involved in various municipal planning matters. John has worked with the Chaddick Institute as the founder of the Municipal Design Review Network for communities involved with architectural and landscape review.

Acknowledgements

Joseph Schwieterman, Director of the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul University, hosts its Technical Workshops on land use and planning topics and provided guidance for this publication. Professor Schwieterman holds a Ph.D. in public policy from the University of Chicago and is the author of several books, including *Shaping Contemporary Suburbia: Perspectives on Development Control in Metropolitan Chicago*.

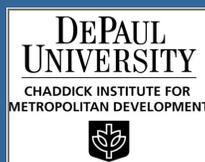
Sara Smith, a graduate of DePaul University's School of Public Service with a concentration in metropolitan planning, has also provided research and administrative assistance for the MDRN.

Municipal Design Review Network

The Municipal Design Review Network (MDRN) is a unique forum for Chicago metropolitan area communities with "design review" boards or staff to share and develop "best practices" regarding architectural review of buildings, signage and landscaping. For information regarding program dates and further details please contact:

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