

Historic Meridian Park



BEAUTIFICATION BLUEPRINT

The Historic Meridian Park neighborhood sponsored a community design “charrette” workshop on February 9-11, 2006 to develop a vision for a “distinctive, signature look” for the area. The Ball State University’s College of Architecture and Planning: Indianapolis Center facilitated a neighborhood survey, community meeting and the charrette workshop in which nearly two dozen students of architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, and historic preservation teamed with college professors and local design professionals. Prior to the workshop, an academic studio in historic preservation also conducted extensive research into the history and conditions of the Meridian Park neighborhood. This newspaper documents the recommendations derived from the community input and charrette workshop.



WHAT IS A CHARRETTE?

Legend has it that in renaissance France, students studying architecture would transport their architecture projects from home to school for reviews by their professors on horse-drawn carts known as “charrettes.” While riding on the charrette, students would be frantically working to complete their drawings or models to perfect them for the review.

Today, the design professions use the term to describe a short, intense period of brainstorming on a design issue. Instead of the charrette coming at the end of the project (as in renaissance France), charrettes are usually a “kick-off” event to come up with an overall organization and approach as well as concepts for the design issue at hand.

The ideas shown here are just that—an overall organization and general concepts. They aren’t final refined ideas. They are meant to facilitate discussion and provide the neighborhood with a professional opinion on how to best move forward with beautification plans. Most importantly, the images are just the beginning. To make them happen, the neighborhood must prioritize, start with one or two, and champion their development.

SIX PLACEMAKING STRATEGIES

for a beautiful neighborhood

Define **THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

The manner in which the neighborhood was platted at the turn of the 20th century as well as the architectural style of the homes suggests the Meridian Park Neighborhood explore adjusting its boundary east to Central Avenue. Not only would Central Avenue provide greater visibility for the neighborhood, a significant renaissance is occurring along Central Avenue just across Fall Creek.

Beautify the **STREET CORRIDORS**

If the historic homes are the defining characteristic of the neighborhood, the public realm, including the streets and sidewalks, are the front door. They are public places everyone experiences, whether one lives in or commutes through Meridian Park. Well designed and maintained public places convey community pride and create a lasting impression.

Restore and Maintain **THE HISTORIC CHARACTER**

Perhaps the single greatest strategy in developing identity is to preserve and maintain the tremendous identity that already exists—and cannot be recreated. The historic homes are the defining characteristic of the neighborhood, and regardless of any beautification efforts, will remain the defining characteristic.

Encourage **MIXED-USE ANCHORS**

The most memorable urban neighborhoods have more than beautiful homes and great streets. They have mixed-use retail centers where residents can relax over a cup of coffee and share their lives. Healthy neighborhoods bring healthy business, and having an active retail area adds a vibrancy that improves the quality of life for residents but also is noticed by passers-by.

Develop a Network of **ACTIVE PUBLIC PLACES**

Active sidewalks and parks indicate a healthy and safe community life. Just as street lights and trees contribute to a visitor's impression, so to does a family taking an evening stroll, a neighbor jogging on a crisp morning, and children playing in a park. A well-connected sidewalk system, connections to nearby greenways, and a hierarchy of parks are essential to neighborhood identity.

Incorporate Identity **INTO NEW DEVELOPMENT**

There are several opportunities for new infill development within and nearby the neighborhood. Potential new development could itself be a gateway and contribute positively to neighborhood identity. While literal replication of historic styles should be discouraged, buildings should be well-designed, incorporate historic elements, materials, and patterns, and convey that this historic neighborhood has a vibrant future.