

Design Evanston Fountain Square Review

7.28.16

Heidrun Hoppe, Director:

The current design does a remarkable and efficient job of addressing the many traffic patterns and potential uses of the space over the rhythm of the seasons and the year. The elimination of the curbs is a great idea as long as we don't end up with bollards or, worse, chains to mark it off during non-festival times. Many groups and uses have been considered and carefully accommodated, and the function of the Square as a veteran's memorial has been retained, as it needs to be. It is a thoughtful and inclusive layout.

However, now that you have a base structure for the layout, the design needs to be considered.

The very safe and standard use of paving, trees, cafe tables and fountain is not more than a nice shopping mall plaza, and not the important civic focus that we truly want and need. There is no spark of innovation or joy that gives identity to Fountain Square and makes it truly an inspiration in Evanston. Trying to satisfy everyone has ended up so bland that it will ultimately satisfy no one.

Some thoughts:

- Look to Millenium Park for the inspiration to try something daring and creative, that speaks to OUR time and not just our history. Don't be afraid to offend.
- Is it necessary to keep the veterans' plaques intact? They could be used as raw material for something else.
- Hold a design competition from our local (and outside) artists for the glass wall and other elements (chairs, tables, fountain, paving, lighting) that will ideally bring forward some truly individual creative ideas and make this space something we can really embrace. Or commission artists to do this work without a competition.

To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, there has to be a there there.

- Trying to marry modern design with traditional elements is a mistake. The light fixtures should be rethought. The slim modern design with a traditional base ultimately ruins both.
- The south end of the Square seems like an afterthought.



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David Galloway, Director:

I'm glad it is not as fussy as most of the original schemes were. The enlargement of the plaza areas and elimination of traffic lanes and the relocated northbound lane onto Sherman are great moves. The flexibility of the fountain plaza is a big plus. The programmable under-paver fountain should be a nice attractive and playful element.

I wish it could extend higher than 6 feet. That would help with needed drama and it could be programmed to not exceed certain heights during strong winds.

Not sure about the glass war memorial panel. Needs gravitas and skilled execution. The flag at the south does not have the substance to hold and identify that space. Needs more there? Maybe that should be raised on a grassy platform that spans a portion of the south edge? Table and chair seating is fine if it is used and never in disarray. The cube fixed seating elements - I don't know. Depends on material and execution. No benches for vagrants.

While accessibility is beneficial a part of me is not keen on the pedestrian and road surfaces being at the same level. I feel the need for more differentiation between the uses and expression of the pedestrian plane. Curb shadow lines also help define the space. Maybe broad curb-cut areas with some raised curbs, planters? I feel the need to tint the plaza tree edges on the drawings with green color to define them and for some grass areas for folks to recline. A low-sloped grassy berm to a low curb wall in lieu of some of the tables? Alas, it is an open room with furniture and fountains to define the space. I yearn for a bit more "architectural" definition that does not deter the flexibility of mixing with the street when the street is closed to traffic and open to pedestrians.

Must the entire teardrop island between Grove and Davis be hard surface? Why not grass south of the permanent winter trees? I do not see the benefit of that area being at the same elevation as traffic pavement. Will bollards (and chains? Likely not) deter cars and define the area?

I realize I am praising its lack of complexity and fussiness while longing for more definition. That much use of pavers also requires a tasteful design particularly if there is to be a pattern of differing colors.

The trees at the plaza sides are critical to the design and the spatial definition. I hope they budget for quite mature ones. And the "Christmas" conifer arrangement maybe should just be one single unit or is that too much emphasis on one religious symbol?

Want to see more info on the combo traffic and walkway light fixtures. Walkways in the entire downtown need effective lighting! Highway lighting is not appropriate. And bike accommodations should be plentiful and not trite. No chaining to furniture, trees, bollards etc.

Laura Saviano, Director:

Fountain Square needs to be and should be dazzling in some way! This is our sliver of an opportunity to really make a place in our downtown, so let's do it right! I'm not convinced the current design is it...how about an international design competition for the veteran's memorial? It's worthy of some outside thoughts.

Jack Weiss, President:

The design, while perfectly functional and responsive to a variety of potential uses, is not inspiring. If we want a Fountain Square that attracts and excites visitors the design elements should wow them.