

Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Design Concepts for the Lincoln Street Bridge

by Jack Weiss, Design Evanston August 8th, 2022

As the Central Street bridge nears completion this summer, preliminary discussions have already started at the city to begin planning for the next bridge replacement project in Evanston – the Lincoln Street bridge.

A community organization, the Working Group for Better Bridges, founded by Richard Miller and supported by Seventh Ward Council Member Eleanor Revelle, shifted its focus from the new Central Street bridge to Lincoln Street. Design Evanston members were invited to join in.

On July 14, 10 Design Evanston professional members and five others met with Richard Miller and Design Evanston team leader David Galloway to develop design concepts for the replacement bridge on Lincoln Street. The small group included First Ward Council member Clare Kelly and the city's Economic Development Manager Paul Zalmezak as invited observers.

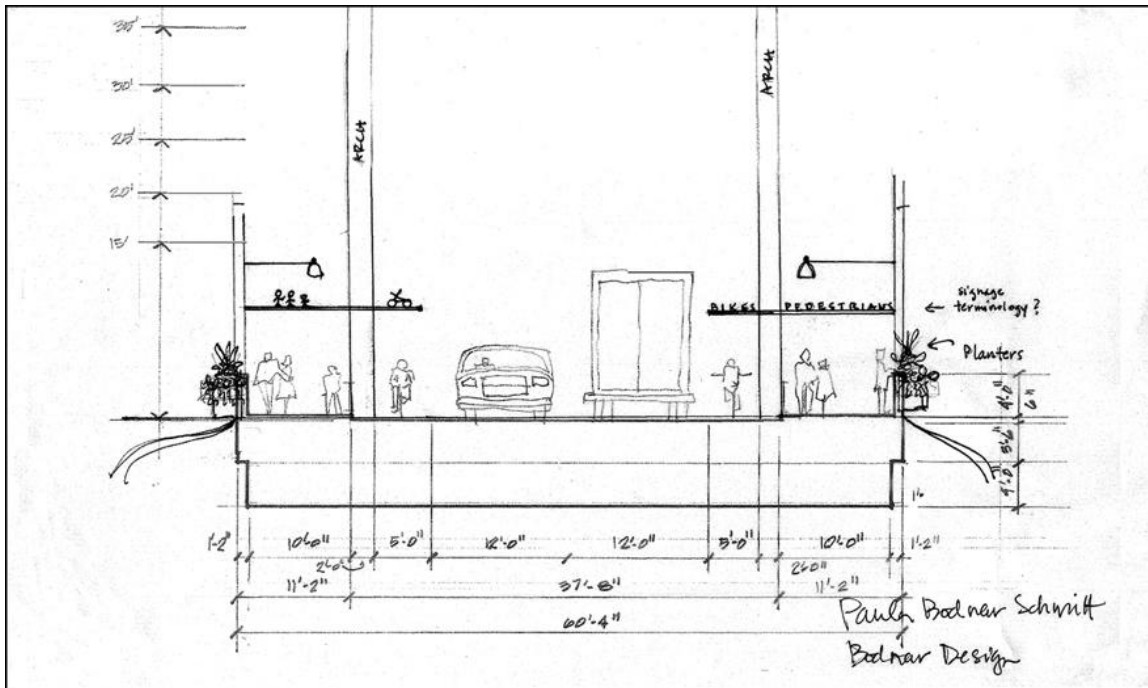
Prior to the evening's "charette" – defined as an intense effort made by architectural students to complete solutions to a given architectural problem in an allotted time – Design Evanston's professional members had received 87 pages of supporting background material, including a 27-page report that summarized the results of a project by 30 students in Northwestern University's School of Engineering Structural Art class, led by Professor David Corr.

The assignment: "Suggest a replacement bridge for Lincoln Street where it crosses the North Shore Channel." In addition, base drawings (section, plan, elevation) of the existing structure, Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) guidelines, lane configuration options and other programmatic materials were provided.

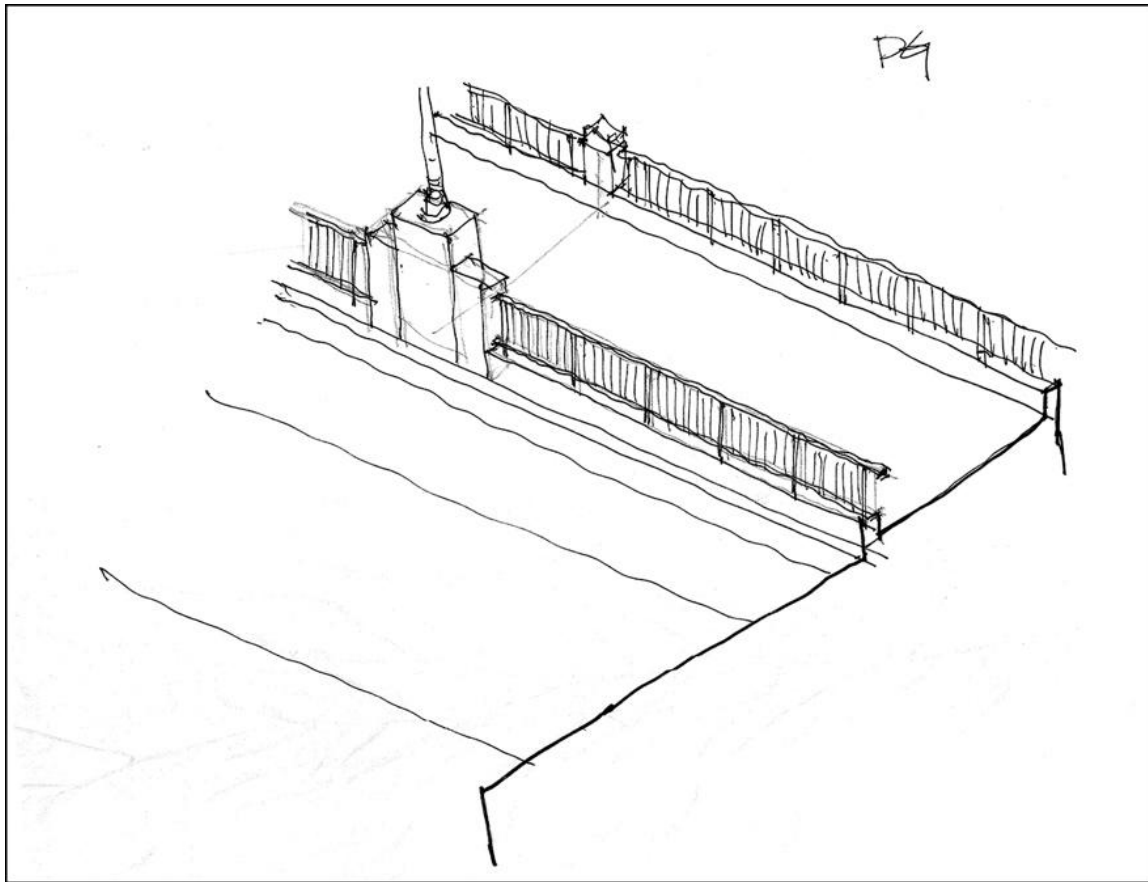
As the charette began, Richard Miller reiterated: "The task is to imagine or design a section of streetscape on Lincoln, in a landscaped setting, which fits into that setting with a sense of belonging." He and Galloway then presented a one-hour summary of the evening's goal: to develop design concepts, based on each member's professional expertise and insights, that demonstrate design possibilities for the new bridge. Use of the bridge by cars, bicycles and pedestrians suggested functional solutions. The bridge's location over a waterway suggested aesthetic solutions. Whether to recycle the existing structure or build new suggested financial solutions.

During the two hours that followed five individuals and one small team worked with paper, pens, pencils and markers – some searching their laptops – to develop their design concepts. All were then invited to present their visual concepts and provide verbal commentary. The result was magical. "Something really remarkable," said Council Member Kelly. "Our most important meeting ever – the beginning of a whole new chapter," said Miller.

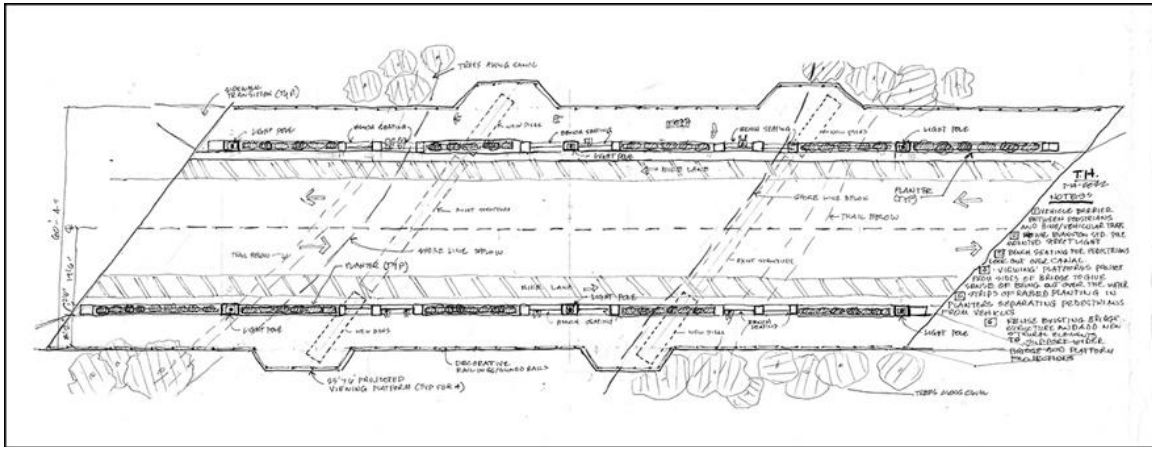
Following are the design concepts that emerged from the charette:



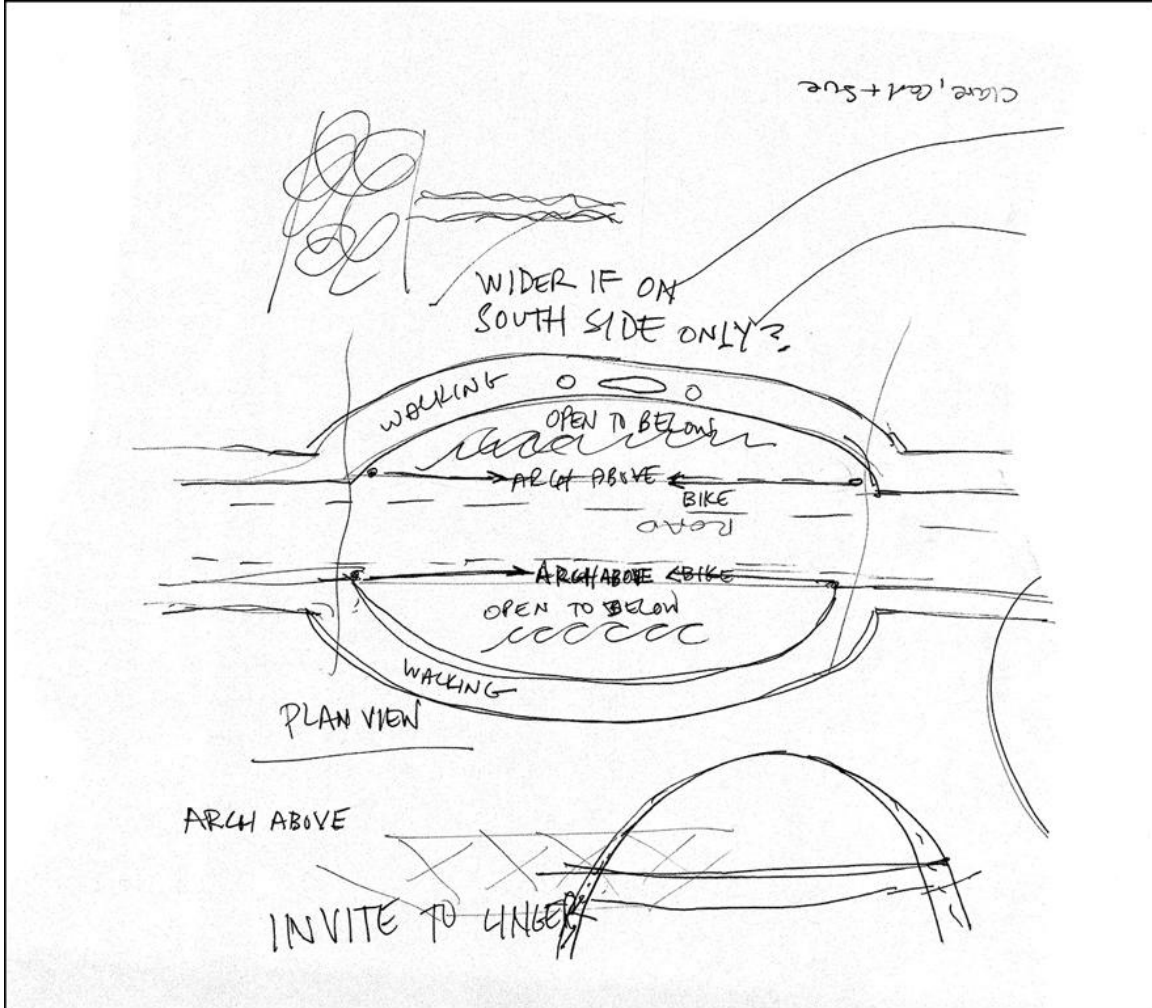
1. Paula Bodnar Schmitt, the group's only graphic designer, focused her effort on graphic messaging and placemaking aspects with an emphasis on the approaches to the full span through arch bridge.



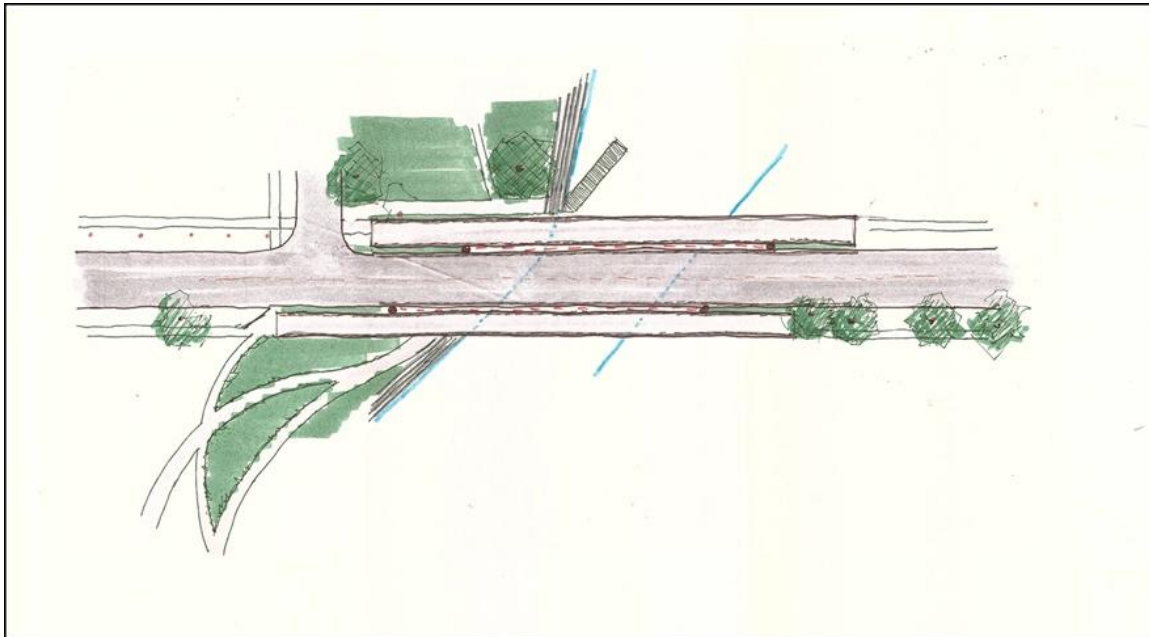
2. David Galloway's concept involved an economical decision to recycle the existing support structure, which appears possible, and create improved features on the bridge deck, including functional concrete piers and metal railings.



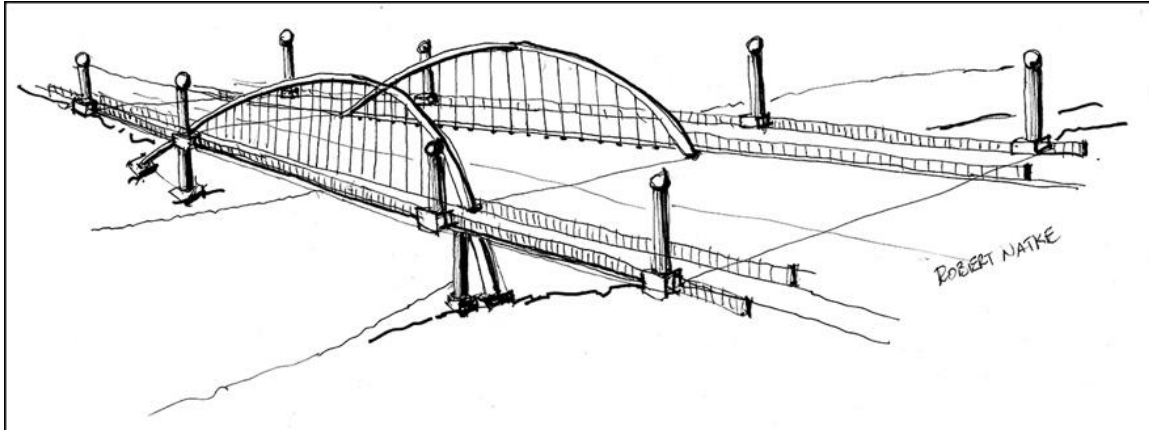
3. Tom Hofmaier also suggested reuse of the existing support structure but with the addition of pedestrian bump-outs and planters within the IDOT-required lane dividers between vehicles and pedestrians.



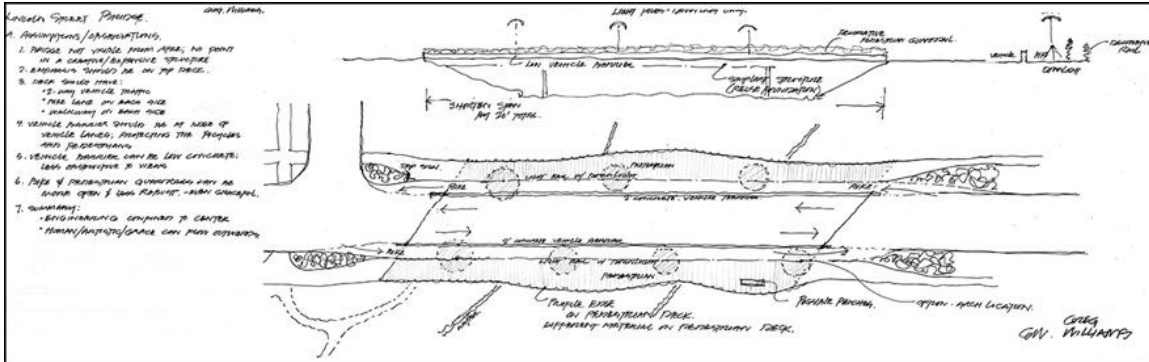
4. Carl Klein/Sue Gartzman/Clare Kelly's proposal called for a full span through arch at the roadway edge but with a pedestrian pathway that arches away from the roadway to encourage downward views and reflection.



5. Siamak Mostoufi addressed features tangential to a full arch bridge such as a pedestrian and golf cart crossing at channel level on the west bank below, instead of at the street.



6. Rob Natke proposed a small, delicate through arch structure spanning only the channel itself with east and west approaches marked by decorative light standards and walkway bordered with light metal railings.



7. Greg Williams' concept also involved reuse of the existing bridge support structure with the addition of a buttressed, undulating pedestrian deck built from wood or other porous material.



8. Jim Gamble submitted photographs and comments post-meeting. His concepts reflected several others in the group: Separation of the traffic and pedestrian barrier and use of natural materials for the walkway.

Nearly all the design solutions addressed one IDOT requirement equally. That was to place the heavy safety barrier on each side of the vehicle lane and not on the outside of the pedestrian walkway – as was done at the Central Street bridge.

That feature alone would contribute to a more open and lighter look when viewed from the side. Jim Gamble’s photograph of Wilmette’s Linden Avenue bridge, above, clearly demonstrates that concept.

The next step in the process will involve issuing a report on the charrette’s design concepts to the city Engineering Department for its review this month, and inclusion in the city’s request for IDOT funding by September.

Although final design of the Lincoln Street bridge is still months away, Miller and Design Evanston members are hopeful that one or several of the concepts that were generated in the charrette will see their way into the construction documents for the new Lincoln Street bridge.

Dave Galloway summarized Design Evanston’s thoughts: “We are hopeful that the ideas, concepts and schematic designs generated at the charrette will: 1. Be well-received by the city; 2. Have an influential effect on what engineering firms are selected to receive the city’s RFQ [request for quote]; and 3. Strongly inform and influence the contracted firms’ design for the bridge.”

Design Evanston’s “Eye on Evanston” articles focus on Evanston’s design history and advocate for good design. Visit designevanston.org to learn more about the organization.

Source: EvanstonRoundtable 8.8.22