

## Eye on Evanston: Thoughts on Design | Design Evanston's Project Reviews

by [Jack Weiss, Design Evanston](#) July 30th, 2023

During the past year, Design Evanston members have been collaborating with city planning staff and council member Clare Kelly to develop a proposal for a new Community Design Commission in Evanston. [That proposal](#), prepared by city planner Cade Sterling, was presented to the city's Planning and Development Committee on July 10.

The proposal [failed to move forward](#) due to a reluctance by a majority of Planning and Development members to consider adopting the proposal before the city's new comprehensive plan is implemented—in about two years.



During P&D's discussion, one recent project, The Legacy, was cited as one that would have benefited from a Community Design Commission's overview. Credit: Horizon Realty Group

When Design Evanston, founded in 1980, received the state's approval for not-for-profit status in 2005, it did so with two stated purposes: "1. Design Evanston will instruct the public on subjects useful to the individual and beneficial to the community. 2. Design Evanston may provide services that result in the lessening of the burdens of government".



## Design Evanston Trader Joe's Project Review

We've been invited by the Johanna Nyden of the City's Community and Economic Development Department to review the proposed design for Trader Joe's at 1211 Chicago Avenue.

"Staff and Alderman Melissa Wynne, Third Ward, would be interested in the feedback of the design professionals in the Evanston community that are familiar with Evanston's design standards and architecture."

Join us for this important member-only opportunity to meet with the developers and provide our professional expertise and opinions.

**6:30pm, Thursday, June 21, 2012**  
**Aldermanic Library, Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue**



Please RSVP to [jw@jackweissassociates.com](mailto:jw@jackweissassociates.com)

Design Evanston Invitation to the Trader Joe's Project Review in June 2012. Credit: Jack Weiss

In response to that mandate, Design Evanston began to implement an on-going series of formal project reviews of local projects that were referred by city staff or by mutual agreement with developers. From 2012, when it reviewed Trader Joe's, through 2022, when it reviewed Varsity Theater/Bookman's Alley, Design Evanston provided eleven other formal project reviews: The Main, 847 Main Street; 824-828 Noyes Street; 605 Davis Street; Performing Arts Center, 1700 Sherman Avenue; Merion Legacy, 1621-1631 Chicago Avenue; Housing Authority, 1600 Sherman Avenue; 1101 Church Street; and Office Tower, 1740 Orrington.

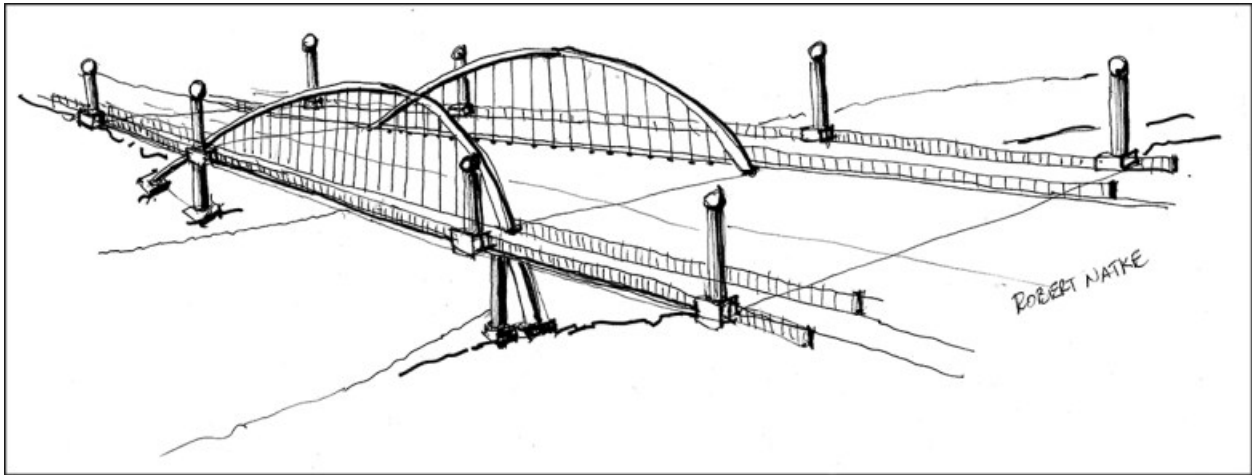


Rendering of the proposed Bookman's Alley Credit: Campbell Coyle Real Estate

In 2018 the Design Evanston board developed [a set of objective review standards](#) based loosely on those of the Plan Commission and Preservation Commission. Interestingly, project design reviews were a topic commonly mentioned during discussions leading up to the Community Design Commission proposal.

In 2016, Design Evanston held an informal in-house Project Review of the proposed Fountain Square redevelopment by the city and its consultant, Teska Associates. In brief, the Design Evanston team felt that [the proposed plan fell short of being an exciting public space](#).

In a related activity to provide important design advice, much like that which would be provided by a Community Design Commission, Design Evanston professional members have also gathered in Charettes—working sessions to explore design alternatives to public spaces. In 2019 DE issued a report on the Library Parking Lot. See the report [here](#). In 2022, in collaboration with the city's Public Works Department, councilmember Eleanor Revelle, and Working Group for Better Bridges led by Richard Miller, Design Evanston held [a charette to explore design options for the Lincoln Street Bridge](#) replacement and participated in public meetings.



Concept sketch of proposed Lincoln Street Bridge Replacement. Credit: Robert Natke

Over its 43-year history, in addition to its formal Project Reviews and informal charettes, Design Evanston has been engaged in numerous civic activities. Many of these activities address its not-for-profit mission and reflect on founder Bob Teska's statement: "The 1970s were highlighted by a surge of real estate development investment in downtown Evanston...Good design became an imperative...The result: Design Evanston."

The organization's chronology, found on its website, cites multiple examples of design advocacy through civic engagement over the years. Design Reviews, charettes, design assistance to local businesses, tours of public places and spaces, quality design programs, and design awards dominate the list.

*In part two of this series, Design Evanston's long history of presenting design awards—another benefit mentioned during Community Design Commission discussions—will be featured. Design Evanston's "Eye on Evanston" articles focus on Evanston's design history and advocate for good design in our city. Visit [designevanston.org](http://designevanston.org) to learn more about the organization.*

Source: Evanston RoundTable 7.30.23