

October 10, 2007

A Report on Conversations about Wayfinding and Design in Ann Arbor.

Consensus; No branding...form follows function.

17 people gathered at the auditorium at the Art and Architecture building Tuesday night and talked about wayfinding and design in the public streetscape. A dozen citizens met with Susan Polley of the DDA along with Profs Jackson, Hesseltine, Overmeyer and Samuels of the Art School faculty.

Susan presented the history of the project from the DDA's perspective with some of the following key points.

- They felt A2 needed a wayfinding system but initially shied away from developing one.
- Several board members attended a national conference and were impressed by the number of cities that had implemented a wf system.
- They decided to put out an RFP via the Internet and ultimately chose Corbin because of their wide range of experience and flexibility to deal with the bumps in the road during the overall process.
- The DDA did not intend to have this be a branding program but the citizen input started to drive the designs in that direction: Whimsical ...M go Blue ... We're a Green City... Take a history perspective.

“The process taken to involve the public in the design of the A2 wayfinding system (a project advisory committee that included the UM Planner, A2 Convention & Visitors Bureau director, key city staff, and a noted landscape architect plus community meetings) was very well intended but not productive and led Corbin to take wrong turns. Participants generally didn't attend one meeting to the next so feedback started afresh with each meeting, and was often in stark contrast to the messages received earlier. Sessions were held over the course of months, so the thread that bound everything together felt lost along the way. Meetings were promoted, but there was a scarcity of skilled and experienced design professionals in attendance which would have contributed far different feedback at these meetings. We need to find a new process.”

Feedback;

“I empathized with Susan and did not envy the position she was in. Wayfinding is beneficial... The DDA's intent may have not been the branding of A2 but perception is reality and the designs as shown will brand A2. A2 should take a leadership roll in all areas. It should bridge the gap between the city and the UofM. This is good opportunity for good design and the designs as presented offend my sensibility. They need to be of timeless quality. The DDA must be very careful with this large responsibility and not let this project take a life of its own where it creates a poor brand for years to come.”



“What is the problem? If it is wayfinding then that is easy to solve if it is branding that is a much more difficult issue... The Best of Corbin? this looks like it is an off the shelf design. We need what is best for A2. Raleigh NC has almost the same design.”

“Corbin has been set up for a public hanging. I am not interested in critiquing their designs or developing new ones. I am interested in defining the problem, developing the criteria to solve the problem and then let them do their job.”

“Corbin needs to go back to wayfinding and stop decorating.”

“The process to this point was poorly done and created a recipe for mediocrity. Corbin and the DDA should have seen this coming and changed the process.”

“I initially thought of this as a good opportunity to showcase some wonderful and potentially elaborate designs. Then as I thought about it more it became apparent that A2 does not need a brand projected in the city or on these signs. The city itself and all its unique and diverse elements are the brand. These designs are a brand and they directly compete with the real Ann Arbor brand that surrounds them. They feel like they are trying to make the town like any other generic American Town. It starts to make the city feel like anywhere mall USA. I feel the designs need to take away all of the elements that are screaming brand and get back to what the original intention was, to be a wayfinding system.”

“It seems that if the goal is to pare down the signage it would be nice to incorporate the wayfinding into the existing city street signage.”

(Susan explained that it was brought up to the city and they said it was not an option.)

“Maybe if it was presented in a manner explaining that it would eliminate a good amount of signs and clutter they may see it differently.”

“How has integrating these with existing UofM signage been addressed? Could this be done with similar or identical color schemes? The city and the university should flow smoothly together.”

“The designs should be understated and fall into the background. It is a strong argument to make making them similar to the universities.”

“The London England park signs are extraordinary in their simplicity. They fit their context. The process this has gone through seems backwards. Shouldn't the sign density and message load been addressed first and then the overall design of the signs. The needs should have driven the aesthetics. Form follows function.”



Of the 12 cities discussed, the Bellingham, Washington wayfinding program generated the most interest from the group.

submission guidelines

we're interested in your ideas,
not the perfection of your rendering.

The entire sign package has 10+ sign types...to make it all a little easier,
please focus your design efforts creating the sign type shown below;
a downtown-scale pole sign.

Corbin's explanation of design rationale below is helpful to understand
the system of hardware required to create an adaptable, cost effective sign.

PDF's, EPS, JPEGS or faxes are accepted.

Outline your typography for accurate representation.

Please place name, email address and a phone number
on your submission.

fax; 734.665.0794

email; signdesign@grafaktri.com

Submissions will be scaled and formatted alike,
and shown without creator identities.
They will be printed and mounted to 16x 20 board,
with a dry erase overlamine.

Entries must be in by **noon, October 30**

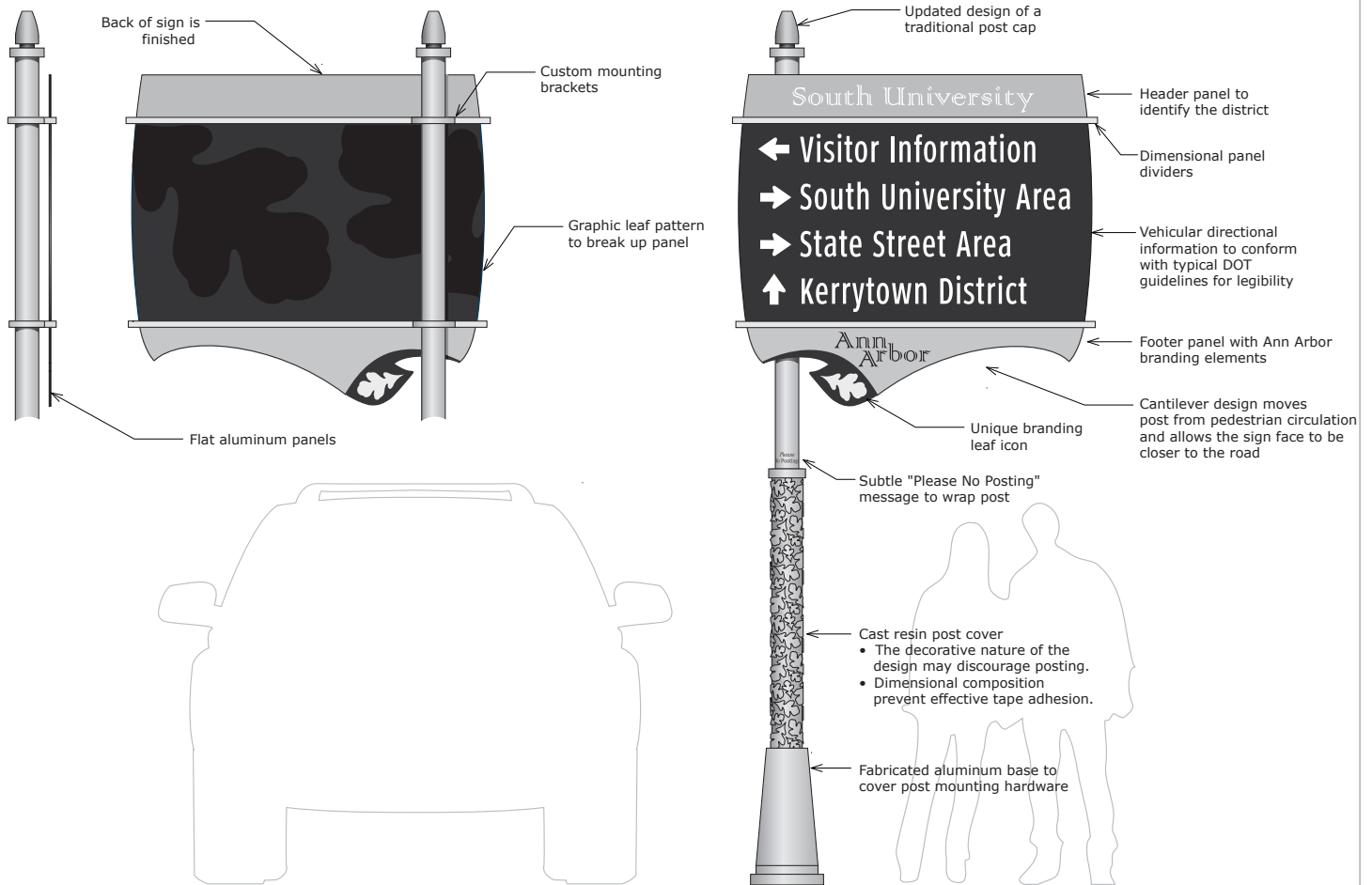
Public viewing / comments encouraged
Tuesday October 30

Arbor Brewing Company 5-8pm
and

Thursday and Friday November 29 and 30
at the Downtown Public Library .

All entries will be posted at [Arbor Update.com](http://ArborUpdate.com)

Explanation of Design Rationale



Corbin Design
July, 2007

Saturday November 3 10-2pm. A charrette will be convened of 15 to 20 individuals at the offices of Grafaktri Inc. on North Main. It is hoped that a handful of good designs will rise up through the public review and commentary process. The creators of those concepts, along with an invited group of creative professionals will participate in a 3-4 hour program that will result in a design(s) that will be presented to the DDA in an November 9 meeting.

Corbin Design will create the rest of the sign types and continue implementation process.

Compensation

Creator(s) of accepted design may get a group hug from the DDA Board.

Submit ideas to:

fax; 734.665.0794

email; signdesign@grafaktri.com