

PREFACE

Designing the City: A Guide for Advocates and Public Officials is a practical manual for citizens, policymakers, and activists who want to improve the way their communities are planned, designed, and built. I wrote this book as a response to requests from many people seeking advice on ways to improve their public environment. It is based in large part on my experience as a city planner and design advocate working with numerous state agencies, cities, and towns. Little information exists on how to work toward quality design. Many books are available on issues such as the process of design, what makes design “good” or “bad,” and organizing for political change. A serious gap occurs, however, in documenting successful strategies and approaches to working with key players in the design and development process. This book helps fill that gap.

This book is not intended as an architectural treatise on design principles; numerous examples abound. Nor is it possible within the scope of this book to adequately define “good” or “bad” design. Instead, this book provides an approach to design decision making and ways to influence those decisions. In it you will find ways to make your voice heard and examples of successful strategies for working with designers, developers, and people in the public and private sectors to improve your neighborhood or community.



The goal of this book is to provide tangible and proven models and strategies to help you to:

- Establish unique and productive partnerships
- Develop resources to get your project accomplished
- Broaden your expertise, perspective, and constituency
- Increase the legitimacy of your program
- Create new and enduring models for effective action
- Educate participants and consumers of the design and development process

Here is how you might use this book: Chapter 1, "Getting Better Design in Your Community," provides an overview to design advocacy, describes various participants in the design process, and outlines effective roles for action to obtain better design. The second chapter, "Convincing Arguments for Design," offers responses to those hard questions you are asked constantly (or perhaps you are the one posing these difficult queries). The most typical perceptions and excuses offered by others as to why "it can't be done" will be raised, along with convincing answers. Chapters 3 through 8 present specific strategies and successful programs created especially for use in working with municipal and state government on tangible community design projects and educating citizens and decision makers in the process.

These approaches are extremely diverse; they include bridge and highway design, grant programs, artists' housing and cultural facility development, state finance and development agency policies on design, awards programs, and education of both public officials and children about design. All of these strategies can be adapted for your benefit on a local or state level. The final chapter, "Practical Tips for Action," will help you assess opportunities and problems, determine a plan of action, build a constituency, find the resources, anticipate the problems, and turn a good idea into action. The appendixes and bibliography provide additional information to aid in implementing many of the programs and strategies described in the text of the book.

If you opened this book, you most likely have a role in the design process or you are concerned about the future of your town. The intended audience of this book includes people with very different yet significant roles in influencing the design and

development of our communities. This book is for you if you are affected by state and local government, including mayors, planning and zoning boards, legislators, public finance agencies, redevelopment authorities, environmental agencies, and public works departments who build, finance, or oversee development projects. In both the public and the private sectors, developers, financial institutions, architects, planners, engineers, and landscape designers continually work to influence the shape of our cities and towns. Other important groups who would benefit from the lessons presented in this book include community development corporations, neighborhood associations, state and local arts organizations, Chambers of Commerce and downtown improvement associations, environmental organizations, citizen advocacy groups, and concerned residents.

Many of the ideas shared in this book stem from my work as the creator and director of the Design and Development Program of the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities (now known as the Massachusetts Cultural Council). The Design and Development Program established partnerships with other state agencies involved in the development process, with cities and towns, and with citizens across the state to help improve the quality of design of the public environment. In 1988 the Design and Development Program received a Presidential Design Achievement Award as a model of design excellence. Strategies I developed at the Council (and with other state arts councils, such as Oklahoma) and the lessons learned are incorporated throughout this book. More recently I coordinated the Mayors Institute on City Design/Northeast and a new initiative integrating arts and community development for the New England Foundation for the Arts. These programs provided valuable insights which I share here. I hope that within these pages you will find ideas for action, practical tips to keep you going, and moral support for your own efforts.