

From: Barbara Ebel <ecology@greenknowe.org>
Sent: Tuesday, November 16, 2021 12:26 PM
To: Padilla, Ingrid <ipadilla@ci.brisbane.ca.us>
Subject: for Planning commission tonight

Ingrid,

Please forward to the BPC as soon as possible. I'm afraid I thought I had until Thursday to finish this, but looked at the calendar on Monday and noted the Planning Commission is meeting tonight and Council on Thursday. I have been working as hard as I can to polish the up since finding my error.

I hope everyone will read it and give it due consideration.

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Barbara Ebel

Case for using specific Architectural Styles as part of the Objective Design & Development Standards for Brisbane

Is it possible to use a term like Art Deco etc. in objective design standards? When I asked our consultants in a recent meeting on objective design standards, I and the other attendees were told that this is possible so yes. You can do this.

What area should be covered? I would recommend either major or minor renovation of the building exteriors in the NCRO-2 district. There are other options of course.

Why do this? There are multi-fold reasons, all of which come together to make a strong case.

Defining a style(s) upfront guarantees you a cohesive landscape. I have attended countless design meetings and Planning Commission session in my years in Brisbane. I can promise you that the architects rendering of the building is always lovely. There is never any trash on the ground, the colors are muted and blend well with other buildings and the particular shade of blue they have used to shade the sky. The birds sing and sun always shines in a rendering and it always looks great with the building next door. If only this was true in real life. Buildings often fall short of their forecast glory. By defining an architectural style(s), you can ensure at least one level of compatibility not provided by the draft standards.

We already have a number of beautiful Art Deco buildings on Visitacion, and one permitted design on San Bruno Ave. There are other architectural styles, but Art Deco, California Spanish and Arts & Crafts are already represented. In order to avoid an increasing mish-mash of styles, some of which have yet to be invented, go with what you have. I proposes adding one or more of the above to the ODDS.

The only guidelines in the proposed design standards center around building articulations and set backs. Articulations are nice, but they don't really define a standard or "look" for an area. You can have Art Nuevo buildings with articulations. You can have Art Deco buildings with articulations. You can have Brutalist buildings with set backs and articulations. Articulations and set backs don't promise you anything about the building you will get other than that it will have set backs and articulations. This is a sort of like saying you like cars, but you only want cars with wheels. So Tesla or El Camino?

Architecture is flighty and fad driven. It is constantly seeking to reinvent itself like runway couture. Some times the results are good, but it also results in a lot of rotten eggs. (see Blobitecture, which btw, is probably compatible with the currently contemplated objective design standards) The [Brianna Rennix & Nathan J. Robinson](#) article, “Why You Hate Contemporary Architecture” states Boston's City hall looks like a “hideous concrete edifice of mind-bogglingly inscrutable shape, like an ominous component found left over after you’ve painstakingly assembled a complicated household appliance,” and “that people were begging for it to be torn down before it was even completed.” If having big names design buildings cannot guarantee a pleasing design, how can we expect to get good results with every project picking arbitrary styles independently? <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2017/10/why-you-hate-contemporary-architecture>

What would be the impact? Take the 23 Club as an examples. Its a much loved building with loads of history, a great interior and a rather unremarkable exterior. Its probably going to be redeveloped soon and one of three things can happen. The exterior could remain relatively unchanged and rather dull. It could be remodeled into some modern facade of stacked and articulated rectangular elements and look out of place with the buildings on either side and loose its sense of connection to a cornerstone of Brisbane history. Or it could be subject of ODDS that include some limitations on architectural style and attain new character and charm (even though we cannot use those words in the ODDS.) The choice is clear.

Can it work? The answer is, it already has! When 50 San Bruno came before the Brisbane City Council for approval, the architect was asked to add more Art Deco details to the exterior of the building, and he did it! It wasn’t even mandatory, but Mr. Trotter does a lot of work in this community and valued the opinion of the council, and we now have a really elegant design approved. We cannot expect architects that have no connection to this community to care about the aesthetic legacy they leave here long term. They are looking for a portfolio page at best. With one or more architectural styles included in the new objective design standards, we can replicate this success with 50 San Bruno.

This would be very good for Brisbane. Architecture helps define a sense of place. You don’t have to be an expert to understand this. In the preceding Baylands EIR, it was projected that more people would head from Brisbane to the Baylands to shop than would come to old Brisbane from the Baylands. We will be looking at a net decrease in business for our local shops. We cannot hope to compete with the newness of the Baylands, so how do we make the businesses in old Brisbane a destination? One is having the right mix of cute and trendy shopping options. Hopefully the Brisbane Chamber can help us develop our business community into something robust. Another component is place making and you have an opportunity to make a start on that today. By choosing Art Deco, or frankly another style, you give old Brisbane an unique, *distinctive* appearance. Something that will stick in peoples minds. Residents often refer to Carmel as their ideal. Google describes Carmel as, 'known for the museums and library of the historic Carmel Mission, and the fairytale cottages and galleries of its village-like center.' Every one I have spoken too in old Brisbane values its quaint charm. This could be us, but not if you let the future take a wandering course.

Why am I just now hearing about this option? I don't know. It’s not like I haven't been saying this for years. My informal polling of residents on social media in February had an overwhelmingly positive response. Shelley Hodes and Frank Martin agreed, “Some of the box structures along Visitation can not be restored into their former glory as there never was any.” Shelly pondered, “what other idea can we come up with to keep our downtown quaint and historic feeling? Number 1: Don't add more sterile boxy modern cost-cutting eyesores to the mix.” She also disparaged older building being made

contemporary to everyone's detriment. Our current tact of letting people do what they want as long as they required number of set backs and articulations are met will not preserve the charming buildings and history we do have.

Leesa Greenlee suggested adding a number of styles to give owners further options but still keep the pallet somewhat cohesive. Leesa noted an example of Arts and crafts style at 248 Visitacion and examples of the California Spanish at 400 Visitacion, Madhouse Coffee Shop. Examples of Art Deco are located at 31 & 185 Visitacion. She noted that many of the buildings appeared to have been built in the 1930 and still bear some resemblance to the Art Deco style of that era.

Will there be objections? Yes, there always are. Let's get this done. Lets' get something done. I have been begging for this since 2017, maybe earlier and the stakes are so much higher now with the state requirement for ODDS. Really, I'd take anything except total inaction. Its like standing at the alter. Speak now, or forever hold your piece because what ever you ask for today, is what we are going to be married to for a long time.