Muncie’s Façade Grant Program

Re-envisioning Downtown Muncie through Preserving Historic Commercial Buildings

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The Speakers and their roles

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The red star is at Cornerstone Center for the Arts, the venue for the conference. The area in the red border is the target area for the façade program.
Muncie had a thriving downtown in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, centered on several blocks of south Walnut Street. Here Walnut Street is being paved with brick.
Downtown had continued success through World War II with a large department store, several movie theaters, and numerous other shops and businesses.
After WWII, suburbanization and the American love affair with the automobile took their toll on the downtown. The development of strip malls, drive-up restaurants, and the like began sucking the life out of Muncie’s downtown. This scenario played out in cities and towns across the United States.

The ultimate stake through the heart was the introduction of the enclosed shopping mall. Now you could shop all day and get a meal or two, all in climate-controlled comfort.

**1964:** Indianapolis developer Melvin Simon and Associates to build a shopping mall on 56 acres according to The Muncie Star. "Original plans called for a four-story office and medical building, plus three high-rise apartment units," in addition to retail, a 1967 article notes.

**1969:** Muncie Mall Groundbreaking

**1970:** Sears Officially opens new store at Muncie Mall leaving downtown
An early postcard promoting the Muncie Mall
Downtown businesses tried to compete, often with modernization of their facades which we now see as ill-advised.
Even before the Muncie Mall opened, a proposal was introduced to convert downtown Walnut Street into a pedestrian-only outdoor mall. This concept was popular across the nation.
Downtown Walnut Plaza Design & Construction 1973-1975

Graham, Love & Taylor
John Lantzius, John Russel

Plans were prepared by a local architectural firm in collaboration with 2 Ball State University professors.

Downtown Walnut Plaza Design & Construction 1973-1975
The grand opening of Walnut Plaza was greeted by a large crowd. Sadly, the novelty soon wore off and downtown was more deserted than ever. If downtown decayed because it was inconvenient to drive and park there, now it was impossible.
The decline continued. More and more businesses closed or moved out, buildings became vacant and deteriorated. Downtown needed life support.

Walnut Street by the late ‘80s into the ‘90s
In the early 1980’s, a program began to encourage property owners to rehabilitate their buildings by offering grants to restore facades. As a HUD entitlement community, the city funded the program with Community Development Block Grant funds.

**Downtown Façade Grant Program**

**1983-1998**

- Average Annual Spending - $64,000
- Maximum Granted per year - $100,000
- Average Grant - $37,000
- Largest grant $100,000 (Roberts Hotel)
- Smallest $1,163 (Geiger Block)
- Funded by CDBG money
- 50-50 grant program
The early façade grant program had limited success.

**Downtown Façade Grant Program**

**1983-1998**

- CDBG funded
- Began as a 50-50 matching program
- Initially, the maximum grant was $5000
- Ended as a 70% (city) -30% (owner) match
- Largest grant $130,000 (Senate Block)

Smaller grants were not enough money to complete a façade restoration and prevailing wage requirement made projects cost owners more money, thus the adjustment to 70-30 match.
In the early 2000’s the city decided to invest in a major expansion of the façade grant program.

**Downtown Façade Grant Program**

**2002-2005**

- Total Grants Given - $1.589 Million
- Private Match Investment – 2.54 Million
- 12 projects funded
- Concentration/Priority to Walnut Street Downtown Core
- Grants paid for front, rear and side elevations if visible from street, roofs when needed and architect fees

108 E Jackson St
Commercial Office Space
$100,000 Grant Funded
$ 83,843 Owner Investment

![Image of 108 E Jackson St](image)
Downtown Façade Grant Program

2002-2005

- $1.5 million total grants/forgivable loans made to 12 property owners
- Property owner required min 30% match
- Building required to be designated as a Local Landmark to receive funding
- Design Consultants required from a Pre-Qualified list of architects, 70% of fees were reimbursed as part of grant
- Design must follow the Secretary of the Interior Standards as approved by the City Historic Preservation and Rehabilitation Commission
- Contractors were required to demonstrate experience with historic structures

122-124 S Walnut
Retail street level + market rate apartments
$227, 672 Grant Funded
$ 97,573 Owner Investment
Downtown Façade Grant Program

2002-2005

Partners and Funding Strategies:

- Muncie Redevelopment Commission (MRC) borrowed (bonded) $1.5 million.

- Bonds purchased by consortium of four local banks: Star, Old National, First Merchants & Mutual (now Northwest).

- Funds were granted by MRC to Urban Enterprise Assn dba Downtown Development Partnership, as a Community Development Corporation who managed the program and contracted for work.

- Bond payments made annually for 10 years by City of Muncie paid from Community Development Block Grant Funds (backed up by EDIT and TIFF)
Downtown Façade Grant Program
Design and Construction

Bill’s firm, Morgan Roemmel Design, in collaboration with Structural Engineering Solutions, Inc. was hired for 4 of the façade projects. He believes the success of Muncie’s program is due, in large part, to the following goals.

- **Strive for Authenticity**
  - Study similar buildings
  - Find historic photos
  - Search for physical evidence
  - Reference historic documents

- **Hire the most clever and skilled contractors you can**
AUTHENTICITY

Study Similar Buildings

One way to seek authenticity is to study well preserved or restored buildings whenever you can.
AUTHENTICITY

Study Similar Buildings

Since documentary evidence is often lacking, sometimes one has to make educated guesses about a building’s original appearance. Even though he is now retired, Bill still pauses to photograph historic buildings whenever he travels. Ice cream tends to lessen the impatience of his companions.
AUTHENTICITY

Study Similar Buildings

You can take advantage of study by others, like this example from Illinois Main Street. Victorian facades share a number of common features, with a myriad of permutations.
AUTHENTICITY

Historic Photos

The first MRD project is the building on the right. This, surely, is an infill building from the mid 20th Century.

A historic photo shows that the building once had the elaborate brick and stonework of the building on the corner.

What a shame it was torn down.

Or was it?
AUTHENTICITY

Physical Evidence

Peeling away some of the aluminum, we discovered an original cast-iron column and cast-iron pilasters. Sadly, they were all that remained of the original façade.

Unfortunately, the budget would not allow reconstruction of the original façade.
The budget was further constrained by the need to address a side façade. This was once a party wall to a building that had been torn down. Note the pockets where the joists used to be. As is often the case, this wall was built of soft brick not intended for exposure to the weather. A frame of steel studs and an EIFS system were used to stabilize this wall.
This is the completed project. It’s the least authentic of our designs. In hindsight, some might say we should have preserved the mid-century façade. Others might say that we violated the Secretary’s Standard on prohibition of creating a false sense of history. That said, we preserved all original fabric, people like the building, and it has been continuously occupied for 20 years.
Our next project is the Heorot Pub and Draughthouse. It looked like the photo on the left when we began. The historic photo on the right was certainly no help.
AUTHENTICITY

Historic Photos

We found these two early photos of the Heorot. Note the very different appearance of the second floor. We decided that the one on the right was later.
AUTHENTICITY

Physical Evidence
Since some elements of the later historic façade remained, we opted to go with that design. It is interesting to note that the third floor façade is stone, while the second floor is sheet metal crafted to look like stone.

Paint shadows on some of the sheet metal guided us on molding profiles.
Reference Historic Documents

We never found photos of the early storefront, so turned to period catalogs for inspiration. Many of these such as E. L. Roberts, Musser Sash and Door, and Mesker Ironworks are available as reprints.
This brings us to our tip about hiring clever contractors. Our builder for the Heorot was Matt Gossage of Griffin Restoration. We had observed storefront work happening on site. Those projects were at the mercy of the weather and took the main entrance out of commission for a long time.

There must be a better way. If you could mail order a storefront in 1900 and have it come in on the train, then surely we could build a storefront off site and plug it in.

So, after scrupulous field measurement, the Heorot storefront was built in the relative comfort of Matt’s shop.
The storefront was moved to an adjacent vacant building where it got its first coat of paint.
On the appointed day, the storefront was carried down the sidewalk and wrangled into the Heorot. Hurray! It fit.
CONTRACTORS: Use Skilled and Clever Craftspeople/Contractors

Within a few days, the doors were on, the glass was in, and the storefront was receiving final touches.
The completed project.
Our next project is Doc’s Club. Again we have a very unhelpful historic photo. This building had received one of the earlier façade grants but was in need of some tlc.
We almost didn’t recognize the building in the historic photo on the left. The third floor was removed after a fire in the 1930’s.
The façade work at Doc’s was limited to rot repair, some trim and paint because much of the budget went to a badly needed new roof. We hated spending money on things with no visual impact, but preservation of the building’s integrity had to come first.
The final MRD project is Ballaird Hall. Vera Mae’s Bistro next door (an early grant recipient) had been so successful that they needed to expand. There’s a long story about the name change from Ballard to Ballaird, but no time to tell it. We were blessed to find a historic close-up of the storefront.
This historic photo guided several façade restorations. Ballaird Hall is third from the left.
This was another Matt Gossage project. Again, the storefront was crafted in the shop and inserted into the building.
Ballaird Hall completed as an annex to Vera Mae’s.
Ballaird Hall’s rear façade was highly visible from a large parking lot and the street to the west, so it received some attention as a part of the grant-funded project.
The façade grant push had the desired effect. We like to think that those 12 projects achieved “critical mass” to turn downtown around.

Downtown Façade Grant Program

2002-2005

RIPPLE EFFECT

- Reduction in vacant buildings
- 20+ initial market rate apartments were developed in upper stories of participating buildings
- Return on investment for property owners (all local individuals)
- Efficacy of process (design, bid, build)
- Increase of tax revenues (both property taxes and TIFF)
- Quality of Life/Place returned to downtown
- Spurred additional private investment
In addition to the private investment required by the grant match, an untold amount of private dollars went into interior renovation.

Here, the interior of Ballaird Hall was transformed from an abandoned hardware store into luxurious dining space. The second floor was remodeled into an over-the-top apartment for the building owners.
Unused upper floors were developed into market-rate apartments, as here at the Heath Iron building. This is also an example of a rear façade renovation.
The rebirth of downtown made it less risky to invest in nearby buildings. The Judson Building got a complete rework, inside and out, with no public dollars involved.
These Walnut Street buildings were renovated with only private funds.
The Patterson Building received multiple façade grants through the years. Our poster child for downtown decay eventually became a useful structure.
In the wake of the façade program, downtown Muncie saw the first new construction in decades.
In the next several pages are the 2002-2005 façade projects that you haven’t seen yet.

Muncie Façade Restoration Grant Program

Murray / Freund Building
Owner: Murray Building Partnership
Design: Underwood Architecture

Before

After
Muncie Façade Restoration
Grant Program

Renaissance Place
Owner: Renaissance Place, LLC
Design: Gooden and Ellis Architects
Muncie Façade Restoration Grant Program

205 S. Walnut St.
Owner: Gary Riley
Design: Rob Van Marter

Before

After
Muncie Façade Restoration Grant Program

American United Appraisal
Owners: Jay and Brian Allardt
Design: GEA Architects

Before

Historic Photo

After
Muncie Façade Restoration Grant Program

Downtown Development Council Urban Enterprise Association
Owner: Muncie Urban Enterprise Association
Design: Gooden and Ellis Architects
Downtown Muncie is once again a place where people want to be and businesses can thrive. Once a bit scary, it is now lively, even at night.

Below is a shot from Ribfest and at right is Jenny Devoe performing to a packed Walnut Street during Muncie Gras.

We hope this presentation may prove helpful to other downtowns.

Thank you.