Creating Interactive Digital Applications

Three types of interactive digital applications were developed over the course of the project. The applications were developed by faculty and research assistants at the Great Cities Urban Data Visualization Lab (GCUVD), a research center within the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs. See Appendix 8 for a brief description of a profile of GCUVD Lab’s research activities. These applications are described here and are also available for viewing through the accompanying CD-ROM.

Visual Preference Surveys

Citizens need to have conversations about existing conditions of any planning area as they plan for change. Typically, citizens have these conversations at a meeting without the support of visual information. The visual preferences survey can facilitate a more comprehensive discussion about planning issues such as character, density, and safety concerns. It can be adapted for use in group settings or it can function like a traditional on-line survey that provides feedback directly to the planning staff. The two surveys designed and tested through this project provided citizens a simple way to convey their ideas regarding design issues in the study areas.

Survey of Existing Conditions Functionality and Use during the Project

Through the Survey of Existing Conditions, citizens responded to photographs and panoramic views of existing retail business districts. The survey presented 18 photos for Harrison Street and 17 for Oak Park Avenue. Each of the photographs addressed planning and design issues such as the appearance of buildings, types of businesses, environment, traffic, and safety. Users were able to react to the photographs by selecting “like” or “dislike” buttons and then, were then provided with an opportunity to add a brief comment about their reasons for their preference.

Survey of Best Practices Functionality and Use during the Project

The Best Practices Survey had photos and drawings from various sources showing examples of successful urban design from locations facing similar challenges to Oak Park Avenue and Harrison Street. These examples helped people understand the range of design solutions which could be considered for Oak Park. Both surveys were tested between December 2002 and March 2003 and were officially launched on March 10th, 2003. The Existing Conditions survey received 84 responses while the Best Practices survey received 45 responses. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix 9.

Potential Future Uses

The survey is extremely adaptable and can be easily modified to accommodate the needs of subsequent planning projects. For example, Village staff can maintain the current survey configuration but simply change the pictures and criteria by which people rate the pictures. Over a period of time, the Village will gather an image database. It will then be possible to create a searchable on-line image database of existing conditions that is available on-line and through an internal local area network. This database can be used to facilitate discussions during meetings of Village staff, appointed commissions such as the Planning Commission and during meetings of the Village leadership.