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MAR 30 2011

CITY MANAGERS OFFICE
LAWRENCE, KS

3/30/11

Dear Mayor Amyx,

I am writing to request an audience with the city commissioners sometime before or during the annual city budget discussions for 2012. The purpose of this meeting is to present a project proposal that has been in development for a couple years now. Please find attached a flyer that summarizes our proposal.

I am writing as a parent, as a homeowner in Old West Lawrence, as citizen invested in the continued beautification and maintenance of city infrastructure, as an advocate for community improvement and development, and formally with regard to this project, as an advisor to my students of the Industrial Design Program, here at the University of Kansas.

Two years ago, I led a group of 15-20 students on a walk off the hill, into the neighborhood of Old West Lawrence, and finally to the intersection at Illinois Street and the 6th street Highway. I led them to the underpass that my children walk through on their way to school at Pinckney Elementary School every day. Their first impression upon arriving at the site could best be described as disappointment, shock and concern.

Anyone arriving at the tunnel will find it in varying conditions. On good days, there is a dimly lit sometimes graffiti ridden, damp, cool, and chipped concrete city utility. On bad days, there is a strong odor of urine, and on rare occasions, human fecal matter is present (often, the tunnel floods, which makes all of the suspect detritus an even more significant health concern). At its best it is a depressing promenade into Lawrence's oldest and certainly most historically significant public school. Pinckney Elementary School is the Alma Mater of Langston Hughes and Ford Corporation CEO Alan Mulally (also a University of Kansas Alumni).

In 2009 I proposed to my students, that public Art and Design plays a significant roll in society. It can serve, connect, and speak to higher ideals. I asked them to look at existing public art projects as a basis for understanding how public art installations have been utilized to enliven and revitalize depressed urban conditions. Their task was to develop a unique design that would do this for our 6th street utility. After a competitive process of elimination, three projects emerged as contenders to be presented to the Pinckney PTO. The PTO chose a project to support in moving forward.

Since then, with the help of local Architect, Shelli Ulmer, of Hernly Associates, I have guided four students through a process of developing feasibility studies and initial budget documents. We have developed a drawing set, a budget number, and identified potential manufacturers to produce this innovative and exciting design.

We have approached both the Old West Lawrence Neighborhood Association, and the Pinckney Neighborhood Associations, to attain their moral support. And most significantly, in my communication with Charles Soules, we have identified relevant potential funding sources in state and federal grant programs that could make this project a potential reality.

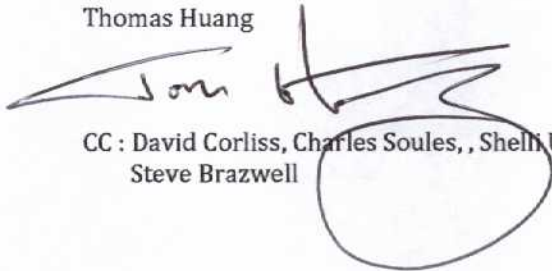
I respectfully request an audience with the City Commissioners for all parties invested to present our project and our supplemental findings. Our intent is to solicit the city for support through city grant writing resources (authorization of public works to oversee the grant writing and eventual construction), permission to affect city property, and also for matching funding for any grants received for the construction of our project.

I am hopeful that you will find our project to be significant to the beautification of an old and decaying city utility, significant through the lens of urban planning with positive civic, residential and commercial ramifications, significant through the lens of educating our youth, and lastly, significant to the development of community.

I eagerly await your response. You can contact me at tomahawk@ku.edu or by phone, 785.979.7757. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

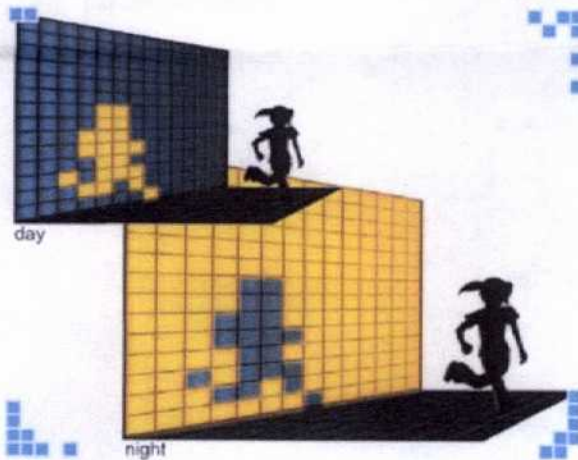
Thomas Huang

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Tom Huang', with a large circular flourish at the end.

CC : David Corliss, Charles Soules, , Shelli Ulmer, Carrie Allen, Liza Franz, Mike Wildgen,
Steve Brazwell

pixel passageway

Originally built in 1940's the underpass serves to connect pedestrian traffic between the Pinckney and Old West Lawrence neighborhoods. The underpass also serves as the historic/symbolic promenade to the original entrance of Pinckney Elementary School. Sadly, the underpass has fallen into disrepair and disregard. The area is often the target of vandalism and misuse. Despite the city's frequent efforts to repaint and maintain the underpass, the site is all too frequently the victim of obscene messages tagged in spray paint. It has also become a makeshift restroom, smelling strongly of urine and occasionally hosting human feces. The site suffers from clogged drains and is often flooded with what one hopes to be primarily rainwater.



Last spring, students from KU's Industrial Design program created a proposal to develop and install a wall of tiles which respond to movement within the tunnel. Each tile will be lit with blue and orange LEDs that use IR sensors to respond to motion.

These motion sensitive tiles will light up to create a pixelated shadow that can follow children down the tunnel. During the day the tiles will default to blue and turn orange when motion is detected. At night the colors will reverse so that the wall is orange and the shadow is blue.

The Pickney PTO will be working in conjunction with the city and the Old West Lawrence and Pickney Neighborhood Associations, and the School District to help develop this community and service learning based project.

