

January 19, 2009

Architectural Enhancement Initiative

Google's *Project 10 to the 100th Power* was a call for ideas to change the world by helping as many people as possible. Google will provide \$10 million to each of five winning projects.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgSRwOZtDQ8>

Entries were due in October. Over 100,000 projects were submitted! On January 27, 2009, Google will publish the top 100 projects and ask the public to vote for their favorites, narrowing the field down to 20. An advisory board will then select up to five final ideas.

My project was called the *Architectural Enhancement Initiative*. It addressed the issue of community - helping connect people, build communities and protect unique cultures.

What one sentence best describes your idea?

This is an innovative planning tool that enables architectural ornamentation for new buildings, resulting in more attractive and walkable communities.

Describe your idea in more depth.

The Architectural Enhancement Initiative is a pilot program that would work by providing the funding and incentive to developers to pay for architectural enhancements to proposed commercial and residential buildings.

Enhancements include, but are not limited to, cornices, pilasters, friezes, moldings, transom windows, mosaics, stained glass, decorative tiles, window treatments and other architectural detailing. All architectural enhancements must be visible by pedestrians.



A panel of nine individuals would review proposals and approve them or make suggestions for refinement. The panel would decide whether the enhancements were of proper quality and quantity based upon a predetermined set of guidelines. Review by the panel would be one of the initial steps in the overall planning process, and there would be no fee paid to the panel for its services. The mayor, city council and planning department would each individually appoint one-third of the members to the panel, who would serve either voluntarily or as part of their regular employment.

Developers would be eligible for funds up to 10 percent of the cost of their proposed building if it were constructed without the enhancements. The funds provided to the developer must be used for architectural ornamentation approved by the review panel.

Those developers that opt out must contribute an assessment into the program totaling 10 percent of the cost of the building.

The \$10 million award from Google would be seed money for the first projects, after which the Architectural Enhancement Initiative would be self-sufficient and ongoing. The mayor and city council could decide to increase or decrease the percentage of awards and/or assessments in order to maximize effectiveness of the program.

The initiative is intended to be duplicated in towns and cities throughout the United States and possibly other nations.

What problem or issue does your idea address?

(a) The project addresses a problem in architecture by enabling decorative structures. Most buildings constructed today are disappointingly stark, drab and boring. One reason is high construction costs, which discourages fine craftsmanship. The proposal addresses this issue by providing incentives to developers for architectural enhancements.

(b) The project addresses a crisis in planning by increasing community acceptance of, and satisfaction with, new buildings. In cities everywhere, residents battle developers over proposed projects that are incompatible with neighborhoods. Lawsuits add years of planning and millions of dollars to projects. The proposal addresses this issue by increasing citizens' support of buildings.

(c) The project addresses environmental issues by improving acceptance of infill development, enabling greater density and encouraging pedestrian activity. Beautiful buildings lure people out of their cars and make our neighborhoods more walkable. This solves a number of environmental issues.

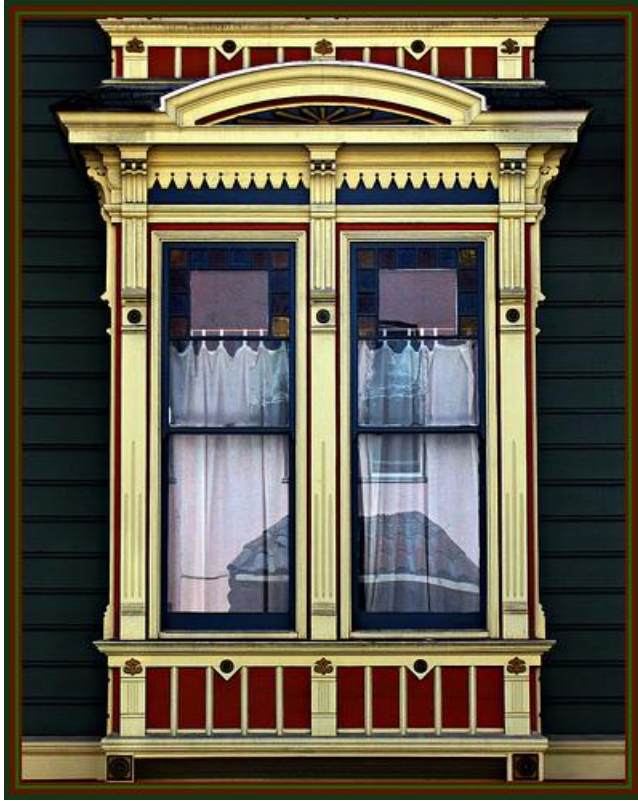


If your idea were to become a reality, who would benefit the most and how?

If the Architectural Enhancement Initiative were to become a reality, all citizens of cities that adopted such a program would benefit from its implementation.

We treasure our historic buildings not because they're old, but because they're beautiful. Planners go to great lengths to preserve historic structures, yet discourage the imitation of historic designs because they feel they dilute the historicity of older buildings. The Architectural Enhancement Initiative challenges that practice. If things were built more beautifully in the past, why not emulate those better designs? Quality of construction and craftsmanship must be the same or better than before.

Beautiful buildings, whether old or new, result in greater enjoyment of neighborhoods, more walking by citizens, lower obesity rates, greater interaction among neighbors, less traffic, less pollution, greater savings on gasoline, decreased dependence on foreign oil, increased business in neighborhood business districts and increased tourism.



What are the initial steps required to get this idea off the ground?

The Architectural Enhancement Initiative could be easily implemented within a year or two.

The program requires a planning department of progressive thinkers backed by a supportive mayor, city council and citizenry. San Francisco is a natural first choice. Portland, Seattle or Chicago would be excellent alternatives, although any progressive city could be the ideal pilot project.

Once the city has been selected, an architectural review panel would need to be appointed. Guidelines would need to be developed, as well as a structure for including the initiative within the city's planning process.

Buildings already in the planning pipeline prior to implementation of the Architectural Enhancement Initiative would be excluded, as it would only pertain to new projects.

In addition to receiving funding, developers participating in the initiative could be further assisted through streamlined permit processing for their projects.

Describe the optimal outcome should your idea be selected and successfully implemented. How would you measure it?

The optimal outcome of the Architectural Enhancement Initiative would be a major policy shift in architecture and planning towards more attractive and pedestrian-friendly designs.

There are a number of mechanisms one could use to measure the success of the initiative: (a) calculating the number of developers who opt in versus opt out of the program; (b) tracking the number of buildings enhanced as a result of the program; (c) calculating the dollar amount of enhancements to buildings; (d) conducting surveys of people with regards to their perceptions of buildings that have been architecturally enhanced through the initiative versus buildings that were not; (e) conducting surveys of developers regarding their feelings about the initiative; and (f) conducting before and after surveys of the walking habits of people.

Ideally, the Architectural Enhancement Initiative would be adopted in a number of cities across the United States and throughout the world.

The voting begins January 27, 2009. For more information, visit [Google's Project 10 to the 100th Power website](#).

