

# Campustown Clocktower & Welch Avenue Improvements

Ames, IA

FTS

To improve Campustown's retail performance and identity, FTB's placemaking measures helped humanize its main street (Welch Avenue) and extended ISU's collegiate brick character onto it.

## BEFORE

- While Campustown's location next to Iowa State University was convenient for students, the district's wide, barren streets and utilitarian shops and bars failed to draw residents and visitors.
- Along Welch Avenue, the storefront fabric "petered out" into filling stations and fast food outlets just one long block from ISU.
- Campustown did not look or feel related to ISU's gracious campus nor its architecture.



1994 USGS aerial photo of Welch Avenue in Campustown (horizontal street at center) with the ISU campus to the right (north). The Clocktower would be sited just south of the Welch Ave./Chamberlain St. intersection (at center). Note the absence of street trees on Welch Avenue.

## ASSIGNMENTS

- Working with constrained city resources, develop approaches to broadening Welch Avenue's appeal beyond its auto-dominated look and feel.
- Find ways to make the district more memorable and strongly linked to the campus.
- Create a "quality statement" with targeted and readily implementable improvements.

## OUTCOMES

### Campus Clocktower designed and constructed; Welch Avenue streetscape concepts built.

- FTB's streetscape recommendations added corner bulb-outs and sidewalk trees. New streetlights were centered in parking lanes to help visually narrow the street (where underground utilities prevented trees from fulfilling that role). The City implemented the streetscape concepts.
- FTB sited and designed a small-scale public clocktower one long block from campus and in the center of Welch Avenue, at the crest of a hill to define a pedestrian-scale urban "room."
- The clocktower design incorporated modern and traditional brick themes and elements from historic city and campus buildings; FTB prepared the architectural drawings.
- The street and clocktower have become symbolic icons for Campustown and Ames, used by city, university and business promotion programs.

**CLIENT:** City of Ames

**IN COLLABORATION WITH:** Sierra Engineering Group (structural engineering)

**FTB:** When this project was completed the firm name was Freedman Tung & Bottomley (FTB).



To quickly and powerfully create a highly visible placemaking change, FTB conceived of a small-scale civic clocktower to accent and enclose the block-long walkable Campustown storefront cluster (with the ISU campus at the opposite northern end). This compared with waiting for privately funded facade improvements to frontage buildings that might never happen.



**Left:** FTB recommended fast-growing and tough Locust street trees for Welch Avenue, with light foliage and high branching to avoid obscuring windows and signs. Lines of streetlights were moved into parking lanes to visually narrow the driving corridor for cars while expanding the visual width of pedestrian-priority areas. The streetscape was implemented by the City.

**Right:** A close-up view of the clocktower's re-statement of decorative brick, limestone and copper architectural themes from a fusion of both the ISU campus (including its Campanile) and historic downtown Ames architecture.



An image of the view looking up Welch Avenue's streetscape, as seen from the ISU campus. The Campustown Clocktower forms a memorable terminus and visual focal point for the long one block cluster of pedestrian-scale shops. This image (and slogan) are used on the Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau website.