

Oak Park - Greater Downtown Master Plan

Workshop 1: July 2004

Public Comments Received



Workshop Summary

More than 100 people attended the first public workshop and offered their comments on an individual Response Sheet for the Oak Park Greater Downtown Master Plan, July 21, 2004.

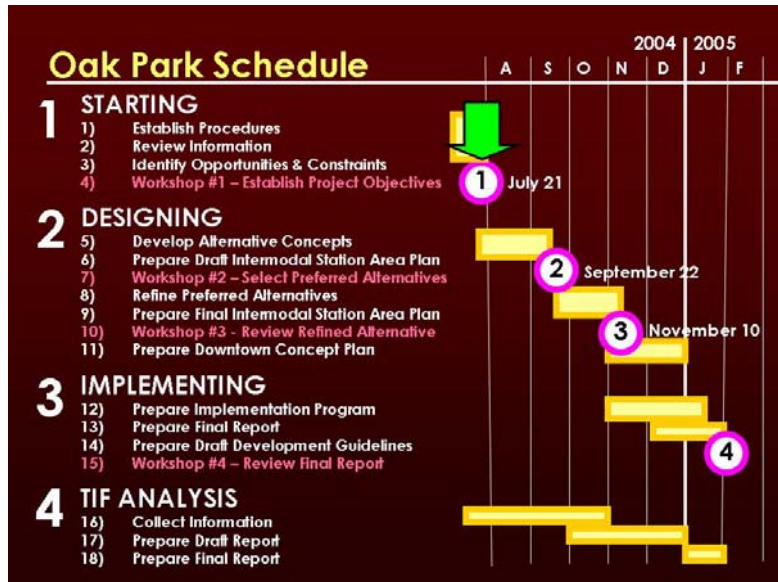
Members of the public, local business owners and other stakeholders met at Oak Park-River Forest High School with the Village Board and community development staff to discuss the creation of a plan for future redevelopment of the greater downtown area.

After a PowerPoint presentation providing background on the planning process and the project scope, workshop participants gathered into small discussion groups to raise their top issues and concerns. Issues were then summarized and reported back to the large group.

Each person was asked to complete an individual Response Sheet (illustrated at right); 103 response sheets were received. Issues raised most often are listed below (with *number of times mentioned italicized in parentheses*):

Project Goals/Objectives

- Character (*105 total*):
 - preservation/history (*47*)
 - density/height (*33*)
 - design quality (*25*)
- Traffic and Congestion (*52*)
- Retail: mix of local, national and various types (*44*)
- Parking (*28*)
- Financing/TIF (*21*)
- Political/Planning Process (*18*)
- Open space - creation of better public spaces (*14*)
- Enhancement of pedestrian environment (*14*)
- Marion Mall (*13*)
- Bicycles (*3*)



Oak Park

Greater Downtown Master Plan

Response Sheet **1**
July 2004

North

I. Issues and Concerns

List your three top issues and concerns:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

II. Special Areas

On the map above, please note areas you believe:

- Present special design opportunities
- Are areas of concern

Name (optional): _____

If you need additional time to respond, please return your comments to:
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Table Discussion Reports

Meeting attendees gathered in smaller groups to discuss their issues and concerns regarding the Oak Park Greater Downtown Master Plan. One representative from each group then reported back to the larger group the issues raised at their table. Flipchart notes of those comments are as follows.

General questions raised:

- Input into comprehensive plan process?
- Moratorium on downtown development?
- TIF analysis role in planning process?
- How were stakeholders interviewed/included?
- Projects - involve ecological/environmental considerations?
- Village presentation on website.

1. Issues and Concerns - List your three top issues and concerns:

Table 1

- A. Oak Park character
- B. Impacts
- C. Good analysis
- D. Open process
(Additional - see attached email illustrated at right)

Table 2

- A. Quality of life
- B. Density needs - i.e. parking
- C. Traffic patterns
- D. Historical flavor - preserve "gem"

Table 3

- A. Traffic/parking
- B. Blend historical character
- C. Design guides
- D. Funding

Table 4

- A. Overview plan - good
- B. Diversity - height/size

Table 5

- A. Density - and range of retail opportunities without more cars
- B. Transit without autos
- C. Locally owned businesses; national without chain style architecture

Table 6

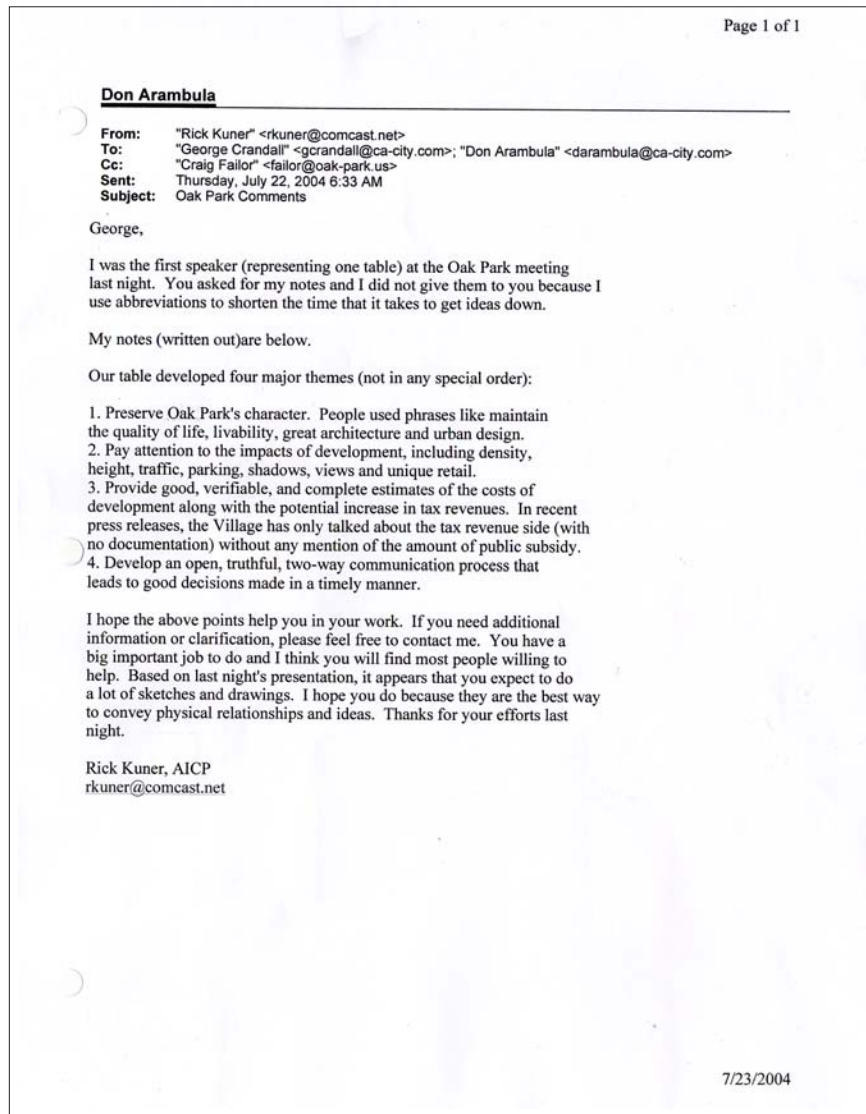
- A. Connectivity
- B. Living room
- C. Aesthetic

Table 7

- A. Leverage architecture - "Wow" factor

Table 8

- A. Marion/Harlem -
 1. Revitalize dead spots;
 2. Short-term parking;
 3. Access from Ontario to Lake at parking lot



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Table Discussion Reports, *continued*

Table 9

- A. TOD - shopping in Oak Park
- B. Limit building height
- C. Parking for current residents

Table 10

- A. Parking - shoppers, community residents
- B. "Charm" - not big retailers
- C. Structure for commuters
- D. Marion Street - not opened up

Table 11

- A. Traffic - Harlem/Lake
- B. Architecture - better 20th century
- C. Local-owned
- D. Less auto-oriented
- E. Mixed use on Lake

Table 12

- A. Hard look at zoning
- B. Input on ROI
- C. Impact on real estate taxes

Table 13

- A. Centralization - other neighbors connect to downtown

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Written Comments

Individuals answered the response sheet questions with comments that fell into the following categories: character, traffic and congestion, retail, parking, financing and TIF, political planning process, open space, enhancement of pedestrian environment, Marion Mall, and bicycles.

1. Issues and Concerns -

List your three top issues and concerns

Character:

Preservation of Historic/Small Town Feel

- Maintain diversity.
- Provide charm.
- Preserve historic character of downtown.
- 24 Hour City!
- Unity Temple plan properties east and south. Concerns are Oak Park is land locked, cannot modify the existing building, is in paid growth mode, and squeezed, religion and education (for children) and parking. Unity Temple is a major tourist attraction, continual support is in partly Unity Temple Restoration Foundation (UTRF).
- No 24 hour city.
- Keeping character of Oak Park.
- Historic Preservation - restore historic facades, new construction should be no higher than 5 floors to match existing structures.
- Maintain and enhance historic character of the village (respect the structures that were classified as "significant architecturally" in the Oak Park survey - protect them.
- Maintaining the historic character of the downtown and promoting new development that is consistent with this character (including size, height, etc.). New development should be consistent with the existing architecture that has been identified as valuable from the historic perspective. Existing buildings that are inconsistent with the historic vision.
- Preserve our small town feel.
- Preserve historically significant buildings.
- History.
- Keeping character of Oak Park.
- Preserving neighborhood character.
- Preserve, highlight historic buildings.
- Preserving historical past.
- I'm also very concerned about maintaining economic diversity for residents - don't take people out of Oak Park!
- Creating unique attractions for historic tourism, and exploiting this tourism better.
- Creating open spaces - meeting spaces and preserving historic character.
- Architecturally significant.
- No strip mall, out of character.
- Viability of downtown. Remain small town.
- Residential mix.
- Character of the community.
- Analyzing and improving commercial spacing, making the economics work while preserving historic, aesthetic quality.
- Leveraging Oak Park's unique assets: Frank Lloyd Wright Architecture Heritage.
- Preserve historic buildings.
- I moved to Oak Park 18 years ago from Astor Street in the Gold Coast area of Chicago. The reason being that I wanted to live in a smaller community close to the city and be a part of a "charming" community. The Frank Lloyd Wright Homes Prairie style architecture, and Austin Gardens adjacent to where I live sealed my decision. Today we seem to be losing our character with the downtown projects now being proposed. On today's news the Soldier Field Stadium may lose its historic status because of the space ship in the middle that has caused an eyesore and threatens landmark status. I feel this same thing is happening to Oak Park.

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Written Comments, continued

- Preserve historical character and buildings.
 - Business facades should match and fit into the idea of Oak Park as architecturally interesting.
 - Historic preservation.
 - Historic preservation.
 - Ensuring that downtown development doesn't make Oak Park neighborhoods less attractive.
 - Preserving and enhancing the historic character of Downtown Oak Park.
 - Small town feel.
 - Preserving and enhancing historic buildings.
 - It is important to highlight the uniqueness of Oak Park to distinguish it from other "hot" development areas in Chicago collar communities. Rather than create another high-rise haven around our public transportation stops, Oak Park should develop and finesse that for which it is internationally known. From its inception, Oak Park has been a nurturing ground for innovators in fields as diverse as architecture, literature, natural science, social science, and business. Efforts should be made to establish this fact as our community identity, and every effort should be made to continue the tradition of forward-thinking innovation and not copycat rampant build-ups.
 - Maintain aesthetics and unity to fit historical character.
 - Maintain historic character.
 - Character and architecture, keep true to the community.
 - Preserving the unique character of Oak Park visually. Generic computer designed buildings are strongly discouraged.
 - Quality of life for residents and shoppers.
 - We are an old suburb, but a forward thinking one.
- Density/Height**
- Greater density desired, well-handled.
 - Density of people and buildings - i.e., no setbacks, too tall, etc. (impacts height and air flow).
 - Density/Height: New construction/ Livability, Quality of Life, values to be preserved?
 - Mega-Density Development.
 - Density.
 - Density.
 - Density.
 - Building Heights: new compared to old.
 - Density of buildings.
 - TOD - with low density.
 - Low-Density.
 - Excessive height of new buildings compared to traditional Oak Park.
 - Historic/Frank Lloyd Wright's on Forest Avenue directly about downtown: dense development will ruin these assets by putting them in shadows and behind walls of traffic.
 - Controlling increased density.
 - Density - too tough.
 - Family-friendly pedestrian downtown endangered by push for high rise density.
 - Density (i.e. birth rate).
 - Overdevelopment.
 - Limit to seven stories.
 - Building Height.
 - Density and height of proposed developments to maintain existing relationship.
 - Concerned that building height will be unattractive.
 - Height- number of stories of development- things are going too high, no seven stories on the Marlac House needed!
 - Prevent any buildings taller than five stories from being built- no Whiteco! Make new buildings environmentally friendly.
 - Preserve scale/massing.
 - Oak Park losing its character- apartments and condominiums overtaking single family homes.
 - Development on hold/slow til this process completed, height limit.
 - Go up!
 - Projects of managed density.
 - With the proposed new condo development the population will be too dense.
 - Increased density at Harlem and Ontario - a negative.
 - Broader residential density well designed.
 - Overloading density destroying the neighborhood character.

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Design Quality

- Beauty - Improve streetscape, lighting fixtures.
- Continuity.
- Streetscape (hard to pick just three!).
- Aesthetics.
- Dress up El embankment walls (i.e. murals, etc.), pedestrian underpass.
- Design, a key priority.
- Incongruent style of new buildings compared to traditional Oak Park.
- Development should be made to blend in with architectural feel of "Downtown."
- How to motivate "world class" architecture consistent with our heritage.
- Poor design of most buildings along Lake (few true historic character).
- Uniform look.
- WOW factor - make Oak Park a desirable destination.
- Support local enterprises = limit "chain" architecture.
- Guiding present and future design of new buildings.
- Need more quality development.
- Building material and looks.
- More welcoming and attractive places for teenagers.
- Improving visual appearance.
- Cohesion and compatibility of design.
- Maintain quality structure.
- Making CTA/METRA right-of-ways and underpasses more attractive.

- Limit "chain store" architecture - we can do better!
- Appropriate architecture in new development.
- Integrate residential into downtown better.
- Create unity in streetscape.

Traffic and Congestion

- Traffic flow and parking.
- Traffic flow/ parking/integration of town.
- Traffic patterns that are realistic and work.
- Traffic/parking.
- Traffic/parking.
- Traffic/parking.
- Traffic and parking.
- Traffic.
- Traffic.
- Traffic.
- Traffic.
- Traffic flow.
- Traffic flow.
- Transport Center.
- Maximizing downtown capacity densely will push traffic deep into quiet residential areas.
- Quality of life, density, traffic.
- New traffic, congestion, added population problems.
- Parking and traffic infrastructure will not handle additional load.
- Traffic flow and adequate parking.
- Density - traffic.
- Safety - re: traffic.
- Congestion of cars - especially along Harlem.

- Need additional tax on SUVs; they aggravate traffic density and will cause reconfiguration of parking areas.
- Safer traffic light system along Lake Street.
- I'm worried that traffic near Harlem will be gridlocked all the time. What good does it do to have stores if you can't get to them or can't park!!
- Congestion.
- Traffic density and parking.
- More mass transit opportunities and alternative transportation.
- Better access to transit and bus connections at intermodal station.
- Traffic density.
- Traffic congestion and flow issues.
- Extreme future vehicular congestion on Lake Street.
- Pedestrian safety and better traffic patterns on Harlem Avenue.
- Traffic congestion at Lake Forest Cinema.
- How can sewer water supply take this new concentration without tremendous tearing up of the streets to meet new demands?
- Traffic flow on Lake Street.
- Parking must be user friendly.
- Density/parking/traffic - they're inextricably related.
- Traffic density and congestion - one way: Lake Street.
- With traffic at a stand still, how do merging vehicles get through?

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- Traffic on Lake Street and Kenilworth too heavy - Harlem congested.
 - Development of rapid transit areas/stops.
 - Traffic circulation - auto, bike, and pedestrian.
 - Cars, Cars, Cars, Trucks, Cars, Cars, Buses, Motorcycles, Cars, Cars, Cars.
 - The viaduct on Harlem south of Lake should be replaced to allow better traffic flow, turning out of Oak Park - and aesthetics.
 - Traffic congestion, parking with friendly access to retail.
 - Confusing traffic circulation, parking, bikes, walking.
 - Traffic and parking, Lake, Harlem, North Blvd., Marion, Forest, Ontario, etc. - the whole map.
 - Link areas up with a jitney that runs more frequently.
 - Traffic management will be essential to handle the increased density of projects already planned for the downtown area. Traffic is already discouraging during busy hours and no plans have been publicly discussed to handle the increased traffic burdens.
- Parking**
- Loss of surface parking lots in the central Oak Park - need a hotel not Whiteco.
 - Parking.
 - Parking.
 - Parking.
 - Parking (and safety perceptions).
 - Bank One lot - displacement of parking (sanctuary of Oak Park uses lot for overnight parking as well as daily) primary parking for Lake Theater; permanent loss of vital handicap parking spaces.
 - Parking!! (Not enough for current let alone future use).
 - Density/parking.
 - Density and parking needs for residents and shoppers.
 - Easy street parking for quick errands.
 - Large obvious signage for parking areas, like downtown Chicago: big lit arrow.
 - Multiple housing in downtown needs to add significantly to parking, streets, and other infrastructure.
 - Include RF Town Center so that we don't get towed if we walk to Border's from Whole Foods.
 - New residential buildings - parking problems.
 - Parking for current residents - simple, reasonable.
 - Parking supply.
 - Will there be sufficient parking spaces provided for new/increase in building density?
 - Parking!! (What will happen to retail shops during so much concurrent construction?)
 - Parking for residents near downtown.
 - Parking for all seasons.
 - Parking - especially at night - even if have to pay for overnight.
 - Adequate parking (free for shopping and commuters).
 - There must be more than adequate parking to cover any future development.
 - Special design opportunities: creative parking opportunities to allow for more than adequate parking so that all users, commuters, residents and customers will have adequate parking, and create parking structures that won't stick out like a sore thumb.
 - Parking - study flow and make it easy to park short term to support businesses.
 - Parking supply and management.
 - Bank One parking lot - proposed monolithic building.
 - Parking - always a headache.
- Retail**
- Ease of establishment: Why does Oak Park lose business to RF/FP?
 - Inefficient retail opportunities.
 - More taverns/bars (retail diversity).
 - Not suck all retail to core at expense of East and South Oak Park!
 - High quality retail.
 - No more fast food, convenience stores and dollar stores.
 - Get a variety of businesses that we can use.
 - Make shopping area consumer friendly.
 - Boutique shops - keep.
 - Support and encourage small businesses.
 - Niche retail, a good blend, sustainability.

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- Maintain small business already here and encourage new small business.
 - Focus on the locally owned unique retail that preserves a sense of character (we don't need an Olive Garden on every corner).
 - The uninviting flavor of Lake St., retail seems unconnected.
 - Lack of things to do after a show, i.e. out at 9 P.M., most restaurants closed.
 - Need to attract new businesses on Lake Street (Sarah Lee, TJ Maxx).
 - Neighborhood business districts.
 - Destination shopping needs to be restored.
 - No meeting/eating place here for 300 ft. Bringing people (residents, I'm talking about housing development) to downtown doesn't necessarily mean more business, just more congestion.
 - Positive environment for development.
 - Encourage small business rather than just chains.
 - Include all retail areas in planning.
 - Need a mix of chain stores with local unique businesses to bring a mix of "spenders" and "lookers."
 - My autobody shop on South Blvd.'s survival.
 - Maintain diversity of locally owned retailers.
 - More national retail.
 - Passage to the River Forest shopping area.
 - Shops that provide for daily needs.
 - Uniform retail
 - Quality of life concerns - choice of retail - attract unique and private business in balance with national chains.
 - Businesses should blend bigger retailers with unique stores to bring a wide variety of shoppers.
 - Neighborhood - commercial relationships.
 - More unique retail in Downtown area.
 - Strong local, regional and national business must be attracted without subsidies, at fair market value.
 - Local retail balanced with national chains - not preference for chains.
 - Easy access to businesses for quick errands.
 - Coordinate shop hours, appearance, condition of property.
 - Some new boutique size retailers, i.e. DSW Shoe, Kids R Us.
 - I am concerned with how the entire village benefits in terms of South Oak Park Avenue and Harrison.
 - It is important to build a much better tie between our historic districts and our downtown retail area. Prominent, easily accessible location of our Visitor's Bureau in downtown, with a close tie-in to the Historical Society Museum where residents and visitors can gain an effective appreciation of the uniqueness and significance of Oak Park, would be ideal.
 - Revitalize the dead spots on Lake Street.
 - Pedway over Harlem to link Lake shopping to shopping center on other side of Harlem.
 - Lack of reason to visit Lake Street (few good shops).
 - Not just national chains - don't homogenize the town, please.
- ### **Marion Street Mall**
- Marion Street Mall should be more pedestrian friendly - not have large trees in center, better landscaping.
 - Leave Marion Pedestrian Mall in place, but improved.
 - Retain but upgrade Marion Mall and Streetscapes (e.g. brick walls, lighting).
 - Revitalized Mall - pretty dead, better stores.
 - Leave the Marion Street Mall.
 - What to do with Marion St. Mall?
 - Restore Marion Mall as a through street from North Blvd. to Lake Street.
 - Marion Pedestrian Mall is a gem which should be maintained and improved to make it even more of a downtown draw. Keeping Marion Street a pedestrian mall.
 - Mall does not invite people to stay, just to pass through to get to Lake Street.
 - Keep and enhance Marion Street Mall to make it work. We need it!
 - Turn Marion Street Mall into a "Living Room." It's boring, freshen it up.
 - A second area of concern is the Marion Mall. It is the only quiet place to go in the DTOP area. Please keep it a mall.

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Financing and TIF

- Maximize impact of public money used to achieve benefits.
- Increase taxes.
- TIF District diversion of taxes from the schools to private development.
- Will there be a R.E. Tax increase to fund this project?
- Our tax base.
- Improvement in cost funding.
- The separation of the TIF districts from the rest of the village planning.
- High property tax.
- Want minimal impact on taxes.
- Community needs to be attractive for investment and increase tax base via increased value of property.
- Development must be economically sound (based on fact, not assumption).
- Development that is cost-effective and truly improves things.
- True economic development i.e. not ahead - taking additional village costs versus increased tax income.
- TIF.
- Positive use of the TIF.
- Downtown transportation and street connections.
- True returns on investment.
- Spending public money wisely - TIF funds, subsidies, etc.
- TIF was an incentive, maybe is obsolete.
- Maintain diversity of retail stores/offices/residents in TIF district.

Enhancement of Pedestrian Environment

- User friendly walkways.
- Downtown should be pedestrian friendly.
- Pedestrian friendly.
- Sidewalks on Harlem are frightening; perhaps a walkway from Lake Street to Ontario east of Harlem that has shops along it.
- Taxman Developments are pedestrian nightmares!
- Connect Scoville Park and Austin Gardens more with pedways.
- Pedestrian friendly commercial retail districts.
- Having to push the buttons at the crosswalks - walk signs should cycle regardless (sounds small, but makes downtown pedestrian unfriendly and dangerous, because people cross regardless).
- Encourage TOD = Pedestrian oriented environment.
- Pedestrian friendly?
- Pedestrian friendliness.
- Keep lots of it green! Keep it walkable.
- Improve pedestrian links and mitigate crossings at roadways.
- Enhancement of pedestrian experience, creation of better public spaces.

Open Space

- Establish a large gathering space downtown.
- Lack of gathering places for informal/formal interactive.
- Open space in design.

- Meeting spaces, such as the mall are good.
- Sustaining of park and natural spaces.
- Central living room - gathering place for people.
- Partnering with businesses and park.
- Emphasis is on design and green space.
- Make Austin Gardens accessible to the public - too hidden now.
- Central living room (gathering place).
- Landscaping - add small gardens, flowers, fountains, to enhance beauty.
- More inviting hardscape areas.
- Park for residents.
- Integrate active youth activity spaces into public areas (places for biking, skating, hanging out, childcare...not a community center).

Political/Planning Process

- Urgency and a community sense of commitment and deadlines.
- Unnatural fear of a very few vocal, to change and growth.
- Reorient to planning department from current weight given to development department.
- Meaningful public involvement in development - not just chosen by village.
- Financial analysis/information from Village Government: reliable, truthful, complete, objective!

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- Village board appears to have a development agenda that ignores the desires of the community.
 - The power of the Village President and key staff in pushing inappropriate development.
 - Zoning/architecture requirements manageable.
 - Village officials need to understand the importance of quality not quantity.
 - That historic preservation is not a priority of current leadership.
 - The Village of Oak Park government as a landowner and developer - not appropriate.
 - The #1 Issue: The current board is not open to using competitive bidding process for one of the largest developable parcels at Harlem/Ontario. The currently favored developer, Whiteco, has a business model of high-density rental units which may not be suitable, but without competitive bidding process we have no other options for that site.
 - Hand picking of focus groups to exclude interested neighbor groups.
 - Must do a comprehensive plan- no more piecemeal!
 - We need a comprehensive plan- not piecemeal!
 - Planning process must be transparent and verifiable.
 - Unified planning among the village, Avenue Business Assoc., Downtown Oak Park, and Marion Street Business Assoc.
 - Coordination of development.
- Bicycles**
- Bicycle paths.
 - Lack of pedestrian/bicycle focus.
 - Pedestrian/bicycle friendly development.
- Other**
- Solar, wind turbine, green roofs.
 - Mixed Use - residential component.
 - Make new buildings environmentally friendly.
 - Whiteco project at Ontario and Harlem is impractical, cancel it or modify it.
 - Downtown land use (max) - understanding zoning (current), what impacts full build-out might have - what is current infrastructure carrying capacity.
 - Choosing the "right" developments for each of the suitable sites.
 - Downtown Oak Park density - i.e. Whiteco and Marlac House Development.
 - Better place for Oak Park Historic Museum.
 - TOD housing and parking for residents, business districts and commuters at Harlem and South.
 - Oak Park very much needs and deserves a cultural art and performance venue and/or coordinated areas - in the "cultural corridor" or in downtown Oak Park.
 - Turn culture link into something attractive.
 - Continuing viability of Downtown.
 - Whiteco Project - no charm.
- Sustainability: environmentally sustainable buildings, accommodate downtown to pedestrians and disabled. Maintain Oak Park's "sleepy-town charm," develop bike people friendly areas (public transportation effectiveness). Oak Park and other business districts.
 - Current development (may be inconsistent with final plan) taking place (Gold Rush) prior to plan completed.
 - Develop mixed-use zone district along Lake Street between Harlem and Oak Park.
 - Orderly and timely development progress.
 - Maintain momentum for in process projects.
 - Lots of green trees - shade trees.
 - Transit Oriented Development needed. Would like to see a liveable city.
 - New plans will offer real financial benefit to the community.
 - Integration of art history e.g. Frank Lloyd Wright etc. with existing commercial and residents.
 - Use development for all age groups.
 - Seemingly under-used street frontage along El.
 - Under-utilized parcels.
 - Incorporate the elevated train into the "design."
 - Global climate change.
 - Freight trains parked on tracks in town.

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- Performing arts center in the building now housing the Hemingway Museum.
- Check the vitality along Madison in Forest Park, Harlem to 1st, huge drain on Oak Park.
- Link the library to public life in downtown.
- I thought this was going to be a bona fide charette process!
- This may be a good opportunity to do away with the "patchwork."
- Moderately priced housing incorporated in this plan.
- Oak Park Values: economically affordable and liveable community for a wide range of people, a community where local businesses flourish, keep aspects that facilitate the community.
- That four huge development projects are in before this work.
- Hotel to create overnight visitors.
- Connections - How to work with railroad?
- Why not a blend of commercial and museum? We have thousands of tourists come to FLW on Chicago Ave. Why not lure them to special spots on Lake Street as well? Orientation Center? Our Historical Society? Visitors Center?
- 1038 Lake Street Building - This area is one of personal nature. I own (with my husband) the property at 1038 Lake St. We are the owners and proprietors of Razzle Dazzle Costumes for 23 years. That space is now vacant, and is actively being marketed to be leased. This building is also home to Mancini's Restaurant.
- In my position as a board member of the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest, I have experienced years of frustration concerning a permanent home for us. If you have done your homework, and all indications are that you have, you know about the failed proposal of a joint effort (between the Historical Society and Taxman Corp.) to create a permanent space in the historic Dreschler Building. This was a regrettable loss for the community of Oak Park-River Forest and the ever growing tourist population.