

Oak Park - Greater Downtown Master Plan

Focus Group & Stakeholder Interviews: July/August 2004

Summary of Interview Notes

As part of the Oak Park Greater Downtown Master Plan process, a series of focus group and stakeholder meetings were held on July 20-22 and August 4-5, 2004.

George Crandall and Don Arambula of Crandall Arambula met with interested groups and individual stakeholders, including nearby residents and those who own businesses and property downtown. Some 104 people offered their comments and ideas (a list of those participants is posted on the Village webpage.)

The following is a summary of the issues raised, organized by topic:

Village Character:

- Build on assets
- Capitalize on uniqueness compared to other local towns - diversity, history
- Vintage 1920s quality architecture is an asset
- Downtown needs a "look"
- Provide walkable scale
- Height and density have tremendous effect on character
- Changes vs. status quo

Retail:

- Mix of retail types - national and local, regional and neighborhood, destination and local services
- Provide complementary retail streets/areas, not competing "downtown" areas
- Consider competition with nearby towns
- Coordinate shop hours
- Need critical mass

Parking:

- Public perception of there not being enough parking
- Important to have parking garages
- Coordinate with River Forest to have more parker-customer-friendly parking system
- Garages need to provide parking for existing uses, which is not currently provided, as well as for future uses
- Parking structures to be clearly accessible/connected to downtown uses

Lake Street:

- Improve pedestrian environment
- Impact of first run movie theater on downtown is important
- Dead zone especially at night
- Tired, needs updating
- Provide more activity, restaurants

Marion Mall:

- Varying views on Marion Mall
- Keep pedestrian emphasis
- Gathering/communal space important
- Design an issue
- Tree selection a problem
- Need on street parking
- Open up street - improve vitality and traffic circulation
- Consider impact of construction time on businesses

Oak Park Avenue:

- North and South separated by viaduct barrier
- Different uses north and south - neighborhood services; antiques
- Different character and function from Lake

Tourism/History:

- "Historic tourism" - architectural heritage as economic/cultural draw
- For visitors entering from out-of-town, unclear how historical areas connect to downtown
- Historic preservation of quality architecture is important
- Take advantage of rich cultural history - FLW, Hemingway

Planning Process/Politics:

- Need for open public process that reaches out and engages public in planning
- Public input needs to be provided in the context of an adopted downtown plan
- Vision for growth led too much by redevelopment agency rather than planning agency
- Tax system a burden impacting competitive nature of Oak Park
- Need certainty in design/plan approval process and benefits

Performing Arts/Culture:

- Theater for performing arts
- Banquet room/gathering space for events
- High level of community interest in arts
- Enhance night life
- Possible re-use of 19th Century Women's Club, Hemingway Museum

Open Spaces:

- Open Austin Gardens to Lake Street
- Austin Gardens underutilized
- Need good pedestrian environment/green space upon entry from trains

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Summary of Interview Notes, *continued*

Traffic and Circulation:

- Lake Street congestion is a problem
- Harlem traffic more a regional, not local problem
- Opening Marion Mall to traffic could improve auto circulation
- Improve character of underpasses
- One-way streets cause auto circulation problem