

DTOP Sub Area Plan
Steering Committee Meeting
August 9, 2005, 6:30 p.m.
Oak Park Public Library

Present: Acting Chair Bob Tucker, Greg Marsey, Ray Johnson, Ilhan Avcioglu,
Doug Gilbert, Sonny Ginsberg, Colette Lueck, Rich Carollo, Lisa DiChiera,
Steve Rouse, Carolyn Saxton
Absent: Craig Failor

Village staff: Doug Kaarre, Jim Budrick, Pete Dame

Acting Chair Tucker and Carolyn Saxton reviewed the procedures as outlined at the August 2 meeting. Following the three presentations the presenters will respond to written questions.

Greater Downtown Master Plan

Colette Lueck, Plan Commission Chair, presented the Greater Downtown Master Plan (GDMP) adopted by the Village Board in March. The presentation discussed Village objectives, top issues and concerns from the public, the public participation process, the fundamental concepts, Marion Street mall, pedestrian and bicycle access, building heights, housing, retail, design review and the design guidelines.

Downtown Architectural Survey

Doug Gilbert, Historic Preservation Commission Chair, presented the Downtown Architectural Survey as prepared by the Historic Preservation Commission. The survey is currently in draft form until public comment is taken subsequently approved by the Village Board. The presentation discussed the proposed definitions of the various rankings of buildings in the downtown, the rank of each of the buildings in the Sub Area, and a map showing the locations of the buildings and their ranks.

Traffic Analysis

Don O'Hara, of the engineering firm of KLOA, presented traffic information and their analysis that was utilized in the development of the GDMP. KLOA was asked to look at specific traffic situations and analyze them. He discussed their recommendations, which included converting North and South Blvds. to one-way streets, making Westgate one-way west-bound (between Station and Marion only), convert Marion Street to one-way south-bound to Westgate and make Station Street one-way north-bound to Lake.

General Discussion

Written questions were submitted by those in attendance, as well as those on the Steering Committee. The questions were directed by Carolyn Saxton of the Community Foundation as the moderator to one of the three presenters, depending on the subject

area. All questions submitted were answered at the meeting. A summary of each of the areas of inquiry and response is below.

1. The Lakota downtown plan from ten years ago recommended removal of all the one-way streets downtown because it was confusing to visitors, shoppers and residents. Wouldn't changing North Blvd. back to one-way again re-create this same problem?
 - A. **One-way streets don't need to be confusing if you have good signage. You also get more parking that way. When the mall was still on Lake Street, the one-way streets downtown were Ontario and North Blvd. They were not near each other which added to the confusion. North and South Blvd. are next to each other which makes them logical candidates for one-ways.**
2. Did the Downtown Plan make any arrangements to rehab or restore buildings listed as Structures of Merit?
 - A. **The Downtown Plan did reference the Architectural Survey, but did not provide any incentives for restoration. They did not feel it was strongly recommended in the plan, though it could and should be.**
3. There is too much emphasis on age in making a structure of merit or of no merit. There should be more emphasis on architectural significance, which is different. A building less than 50 years old could have architectural merit and a building older than 50 years could have no merit.
 - A. **The 50-year rule is a national standard used by the federal government and followed throughout the country for historical architectural significance. The HPC did designate several older structures as having no merit. The survey is not intended to make any judgment about the architectural quality of buildings less the 50 years old.**
4. What is the accuracy of the survey? How was it conducted?
 - A. **The HPC used Village permit records, historical documentation and historic photographs provided by the Historical Society in order to make an educated decision on a building's integrity and architectural significance. They did not focus on historical significance. It was a street survey and they did not speak with property owners.**
5. Why do we allow left turns east bound from Lake Street to Marion? No cars behind them can get around?
 - A. **It could be prohibited. A left turn lane can be added if the Village wishes, but it affects the width of the parking lanes or sidewalk. The times of the parking lights can be changed. All these things can be looked at.**
6. Can a logical traffic plan be formulated without Station Street?
 - A. **Station Street is not required to alleviate traffic congestion. It was not proposed for traffic congestion reduction, but for marketing and planning purposes. Any new intersection creates conflict. However, if a parking**

garage is constructed on North Blvd., you need to get those people in and out, and it may be a positive.

7. Did KLOA factor in the proposed traffic exiting the Holley Court Garage?

A. Yes. KLOA recommended changing the traffic flow to and from the garage for better circulation.

8. With Marion Street one-way northbound and no left turn onto southbound Station Street, how will people going west on Lake Street get into the Westgate area?

A. They will take Forest.

9. The presentation seems to suggest that all traffic analyses were performed after it was assumed that Station Street would get built and Marion and Westgate would be opened to through traffic. Was any analysis performed to predict whether any/all of these street openings made overall traffic congestion on existing through streets better or worse?

A. Of course it will make it worse. KLOA was asked to analyze specific things, such as projecting the added vehicle impacts of the maximum build-outs under the downtown plan, a new street, opening Marion Street, etc. All of the proposed street openings can work in improving the overall traffic circulation. But if the new build-out occurred without any new circulation, the increased vehicles would have to be absorbed by the existing streets. How you manage additional traffic is the key.

10. KLOA stated that Station Street traffic was not anticipated to be heavy and may not be necessary. Marion opening may be sufficient alone. They would like clarification on final recommendations. If Station Street is eliminated, what is the result?

A. Station Street was estimated at 1000 cars/day. Other streets would take on the additional traffic if Station Street were eliminated (if the downtown plan occurs).

11. When the plan recommended opening Marion to vehicles, did it take into account the fact that Marion would southbound only, and solely by right turn off of Lake? Is that enough traffic to justify opening the street?

A. Not enough traffic is predicted to open Marion Street solely for traffic congestion reasons. It could be opened for other reasons. Station Street is not required to alleviate traffic congestion issues. They don't recommend it for that reason only. Opening Marion was also a parking issue and to revitalize the area with new streetscaping. The traffic was only one reason. It would still create a pedestrian-friendly environment. Having a lot of traffic was not the point.

12. KLOA shows Station Street aligned with Maple Avenue, but the CA plan had it further east. Was KLOA's recommendation to move the street west to align it with Maple or not to build Station Street at all?

- A. **KLOA was asked specifically to provide analysis for a new street within that block, but was not told where it was going to be specifically located. Where they show the street is not meant to be accurate, as it does not matter for the modeling that they were asked to do. KLOA recommended that even without Station street, they would recommend Marion and Westgate be opened to vehicles, and parking lots connected on North Boulevard, and extending the one way paired traffic on North and South Boulevard all the way to Harlem.**
13. Was economic feasibility of rehabilitation considered during the survey?
- A. **The survey does not consider economics, only the physical aspects of the building exteriors. What you do with the buildings is more of a public policy issue.**
14. The Marion Street mall is a nice place for families to gather. If the street is re-opened, is there another location where this would be possible? Would it still be possible on Marion?
- A. **The Downtown Plan proposed a smaller gathering area at Marion and North Blvd. If Marion were re-opened, the street would be “curb-less” and stanchions could be raised at each end so that the street could be closed and events could still be held on the street. The plan also recommended a plaza at Forest and Lake Street (Founders Square) adjacent to Austin Gardens. There was a lot of discussion about whether it was necessary or big enough to be useful. Good design is what makes open space work.**
15. Do the heavy traffic issues indicate that downtown development and build-out should not be increased? Is such development of dense new construction necessary?
- A. **It depends on what trade-offs you want to make. Everything has a cost. Density can be increased downtown as long traffic circulation is managed appropriately. If you do nothing you are not maximizing the economic potential. We need to create the best balance we can live with.**
16. Was the Tudor style frontage on many of the Westgate buildings original to those buildings when they were constructed? If not, how did that factor into the decision to designate those buildings as being significant?
- A. **It was discussed by the HPC. Buildings do change over time, and changes over 50 years old can become part of the historic character of a building. The HPC felt that these changes on Westgate, while not original in some cases, were significant as it was a grand plan for the street. Some were original.**
17. It was suggested to hold a design competition to redesign/rebuild the Harlem Intermodal Transit Hub as it has a bearing on the superblock design/plan and on the station.

- A. **This was not considered during the plan. The intermodal station was recently redesigned. There were suggested improvements.**
18. The Architectural Design Guidelines in the Downtown Plan are conservative, and will not produce significant structures like the new library.
- A. **Good modern design can fit into an historic context. The Guidelines are not too detailed. They leave the door open for better design, though they are more for building owners, who control the project, than the architect, who designs what the client wants. What most important about the design guidelines is that they outline what we don't want, rather than what we do want. That leaves architects more open to design creatively and not proposing something the Village won't want to see.**
19. If Marion Street is or is not re-opened, what are the options for the use of the old Sawyer College building site?
- A. **The building has been demolished and the site is available for development. It is owned by the Village and there are no specific plans for a project on that site. It depends on who owns it, what they want to put there, and whether it meets the zoning and goes through the Plan Commission. It is up to the property owner.**
20. Can the Colt Building be renovated/restored to historical significance, including "rediscovery" of the arcade connecting Lake to Westgate – or have the alterations been too extreme to make this feasible?
- A. **Any building can be restored if you have enough money. The question is whether the changes that have occurred make it economically feasible to restore it. That still has to be determined. The use is what will make a building economically viable.**
21. KLOA noted 600 additional trips if the master plan is built out. How do you factor in the additional traffic using Oak Park streets from the Chicagoland area?
- A. **They adjusted all of the volumes on the local streets to factor that in.**
22. What opportunities do we have to create bike lanes?
- A. **You can create bike lanes wherever you have room. You would likely lose parking on one side of the street or reduce the width of the driving lanes and add a bike path next to the parked cars. Chicago does it on many of its streets and it seems to work. KLOA did not recommend reducing the driving lane width recommended as it can be dangerous.**

Colette expanded on an earlier response – the use that generates enough income to make a building viable, depends on the number of people going into the building, which affects parking and traffic. They all work together. Development creates more traffic and parking. However, it's good for Oak Park in the long run.

23. Was consideration given to future increases in traffic due to planned residential development downtown?
- A. **The proposed residential build-out in the downtown plan was considered in the traffic analysis, as well as approved projects such as Whiteco.**
24. How did traffic flow in the 1940s and 50s? What was traffic and parking like then? How do current traffic flows and parking situations compare to prior to the “mall” of downtown? Are there lessons to be learned from the past?
- A. **Lake Street currently carries 13,000 daily trips in one area downtown where comparable data exists, but used to carry 17,000. Traffic was heavier in the 1960s and 70s because downtown was a regional shopping center with department stores. Traffic volumes were almost double. Not everyone drove back then and there weren’t as many cars as there are now. Comparing traffic in and out of the Holley Court surface parking area then and the Holly Court parking area and garage now shows there was surprisingly not much difference even though there are far more parking spaces now.**
25. Mr. Antunovich stated that a historic photos of Lake and Marion Street shows it being pedestrian-friendly and open to two-way traffic. Could it be like this again? Could we learn from this?
- A. **It all depends on what is designed and implemented. The cross sections of the streets could go back to what they were before. Lake Street is 72 feet.**

Adjourn at 9:00 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Doug Kaarre