

**DTOP Sub Area Plan**  
**Steering Committee Meeting**  
September 13, 2005, 6:30 p.m.  
Brooks Middle School

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

Village staff: Craig Failor, Doug Kaarre, Jim Budrick

*Motion by Marsey to approve the minutes of August 30, 2005. Second by Rouse. Motion approved.*

Chair Tucker introduced the meeting. He provided a handout on the past TIF spending, prepared by Lisa Lyons and Greg Peters. Lisa and Ken Busse will keep the Committee cognizant of the TIF throughout the process. The two trustees on the Committee are non-voting members, though they will be able to provide valuable information during the process. At the next meeting the Committee will be accepting outside proposals that should be submitted prior to the meeting. The Committee will review them at the beginning of next week's meeting. They will also take Q&A from the public at that meeting. Written comments may be submitted to Craig Failor at Village Hall. Regarding tonight's process, he prepared a "starting point plan" of the superblock based on various comments so far. It is strictly an idea to start discussion. He asked Craig Failor to put the map together and it will be used to initiate discussion throughout the evening.

Ms. Saxton stated that they will discuss various components of the plan. The Committee will discuss them first, and members of the public should raise their hand for questions or comments on each component. This will give guidance to the next step. She works for the Community Foundation of Oak Park & River Forest. She is a neutral party and her role is to help facilitate the public meetings. She introduced her associate David Weinling. She explained the sign-in sheets and the code of conduct.

Chair Tucker provided an overhead projection of the "starting point plan" (the "plan"). He described the plan. He added a new north-south street from Lake to Westgate adjacent to the Colt Building on the east. Westgate will be one-way eastbound connecting to Marion. Marion will only be open one-way southbound from Westgate to North Blvd. It will remain pedestrian between Westgate and Lake. There is a large parking garage with retail on the first floor between North Blvd. and Westgate adjacent to the Shops of Oak Park. He was trying to preserve more buildings. On Marion he is trying to preserve some of the pedestrian mall. There is a new open space on the south end of Marion (referred to a Station Square in the Crandall Arambula plan). This "plan" addresses the need for additional parking, which was the evident opinion in the

preference survey. The parking garage removes the TGIF parking lot. He is open to thoughts on parking from the Committee.

Questions (Q) and Comments (C) from the Committee and the Public and the subsequent discussion:

All access to the new garage is off Westgate or North Blvd.

**Q. Is the size of the parking garage based on the optimum size proposed by Crandall Arambula?**

A. The garage footprint is based on the Crandall Arambula (CA) plan. It removes the 1145 Westgate building and 1121 and 1121 Lake Street (the old Carlson Buildings). The garage will have 170-180 cars per level with retail on the first floor.

**Q. How do you get from the train station to Westgate?**

A. That is not considered on this plan.

A drive-through in the parking garage from North Blvd. to Westgate could be considered.

It is effective but not visually appealing.

It would be better to have a smaller parking garage on the site where the existing Village parking lot is. The proposed one seems too big.

**Q. Based on its location next to the train station the parking garage seems like it would be only for commuters. How does it trigger economic development?**

A. The focus of this plan was to make Westgate a usable street.

**Q. Why is Station Street not proposed all the way through to North Blvd.?**

A. It would remove more historic buildings. It was a trade-off. He agrees there would be better circulation with a through-street.

Keep the garage on the existing parking lot. Keep the pedestrian access through the parking lot and the existing walkway to Lake Street from North Blvd.

**Q. Is it physically possible to put a parking garage in the existing parking lot?**

A. Other things occur as well. The back of the Westgate buildings would need services and an alley would be created. The efficiency of a garage decreases as it gets narrower.

**Q. Could you remove the back of some Westgate buildings to get a bigger garage?**

A. It's possible.

The Village parking lot is almost identical in size to the site of the Avenue Garage at Oak Park Avenue, which is six levels and 520 cars.

Parking should go where retail needs it. The Whiteco/Holley Court Garage expansion will have lots of spaces. To have another garage here and to remove several spaces from the Marion Street lot will not provide enough parking near Marion. TIF money should go more towards façade and existing retail upgrades rather than new retail and a new garage.

A new garage in the proposed location would require immediate redesign of the Old Navy building. It doesn't seem easy to get to the garage.

The CA plan proposes that parking garage to be one-way traffic with flat levels. The Avenue garage is two-way traffic with angled levels.

**Q. Why is on-street parking proposed on Westgate and Marion streets? They already have street parking on Lake.**

A. People want to park in front of shops. Marion is one-way only and more accommodating to pedestrians and a bike lane.

The location of a garage on the parking lot may load the area with parking, but the location of the box garage on the "plan" would affect the businesses such as Old Navy. It would provide more exposure to Westgate and potential new retail.

There is a concern about getting from the parking garage to Marion. An L-shaped garage makes more sense. They should get the parking as close to Marion as possible.

**Q. Are there any buildings on Marion that could be demolished for access to the garage?**

A. The potential is there. Some of those buildings are ranked as having "No Merit."

Walkways could be created from the garage to Marion.

Commuter parking could be restricted to the upper levels of the garage. If the garage were next to the Old Navy building, you could create an arcade feel between the buildings.

There is the same issue on the back of the Westgate buildings. Stores don't like to have two entrances. If the garage is an L-shape, how do you position stores and what do you do with the backs of the buildings.

By putting the garage on the parking lot, the existing Westgate buildings serve the function of retail in front of the garage.

If we preserve the Colt Building, the restored arcade could be the pedestrian way connecting Westgate and Lake.

There was a discussion regarding various locations for Station Street. The buildings on the south side of Westgate are Significant.

**Q. Eastbound on Lake should be a right-turn only on Station Street. Is Taxman okay with a garage on their lot?**

A. Taxman has not discussed the idea with the Village.

**Q. There have been two assumptions – 1) rehab the existing buildings and deal with the traffic circulation issue, or 2) demolish old buildings for new buildings (CA Plan). If we want to keep old buildings and have new ones, how do we do that?**

A. They are looking into whether the Colt Building and others can be rehabilitated for modern retail.

**Q. Is new residential in the “plan” and is there a place for it?**

A. It is hard to put residential over existing buildings. There was a desire for it in the surveys. It would promote commuters. It may also add more cars.

They should look at new residential south of the railroad tracks.

Oak Park has not really capitalized on the intermodal station. Residential near the station could reduce traffic due to more use of Pace, Metra and CTA. They need to think creatively to make downtown an inviting pedestrian environment. They need to fully explore that.

There are transit-oriented development opportunities on the parking lots south of the railroad tracks at South Blvd. and Harlem. Can retail be supported in those areas? A business probably wouldn't want to face the tracks. Does it make more sense to designate those areas for parking and residential?

Keep in mind the challenge for vehicle ingress/egress.

Transit-oriented development is a good theory. It should be this Committee's priority. They need core retail area with housing towards the fringes.

Residential could go over the retail.

The parking for the Marlac site is mainly underground with retail on the first floor.

An opportunity for new residential is where the Shops of Oak Park are with retail on the first floor.

The Colt Building is a good location as well.

The gap on the north side of Westgate is actually above the basement of the Colt Building.

**Q. A few hundred new condos won't beef up the quality of retail. How do we do that?**

A. New retail would want to be near other good retail. The proposal might bring some. Retail wants to be in this area. It doesn't look at nice in the area. We need to fix up the existing buildings and create a new structure. It's like the chicken and the egg.

We need to generate interest in downtown. All of the towns that were visited by the trustees and National Trust had fundamental anchors and had kept their older buildings. The Shops of Oak Park generate 65% of the sales tax and all our anchors are near Harlem. They need visibility. There is no theme to downtown. It doesn't seem as if we have enough downtown to warrant heritage tourism.

One the tasks for the consultant BDI to look at is what retailers might want to come here. They should also consider what the market will be downtown when the new development is completed (Whiteco, Marlac site, etc.).

We need an east-west retail corridor from Harlem to Marion to connect the streets. Could turn the Gap and Old Navy towards Westgate if it becomes a retail street.

More retail along Westgate brings people further east. Taxman would have the benefit of adding retail to Westgate.

Building a garage won't bring new retailers to old buildings.

Crandall Arambula called for three mid-box sized anchor retail locations downtown – one in the superblock. We need retail on Westgate to connect to Marion. The challenges to run a small business are enormous. The tax structure is prohibitive. We need to create a better environment and more people and more parking.

Crandall Arambula focused on retail on Lake and not Westgate. The Shops of Oak Park is visible to traffic on Lake and Harlem. Part of its success is the perception of convenient parking nearby. It's a combination of visibility to the street and parking and the retail fitting in the space (new or rehab). Get Lake functioning again with traffic (it used to have a higher traffic volume). It used to have several department stores and more retail. Open all of Marion so the business there benefit from traffic visibility. Want to see planning and economics mix to give a sense of place that redevelopment people want to see. We have some good anchors – Lake Theater, three bookstores, apparel on Harlem. The sense of place is not there. This plan doesn't generate new funds in increment going forward. We need to pay for future improvements. We should develop models with numbers.

**Q. Should there be retail on Westgate?**

- A. It can happen with Station Street or a walkway to create a new sense of place or a focal point.

The “plan” doesn’t have Marion all the way through to Lake for the reason that the Lake and Marion intersection can be confusing.

Station Street was attractive to create a sense of place and new retail. Opening it is a must. You should add residential over retail. They’re doing it in downtown Evanston. Residential can have parking underground, retail doesn’t. Residential downtown adds life on the street and more eyes for safety. You can phase the parking. There are opportunities on both sides of the railroad tracks. You could have commuter and/or employee parking on the south side.

Open Marion Street all the way and use the Business College site as open space.

Marion and Westgate offered opportunities to create a sense of place, but the Village hasn’t spent money on either street. We don’t need a new street to do that.

**Q. Should Marion Street be open two-way or one-way?**

- A. Southbound one-way is the best solution from a traffic circulation standpoint.

Open Marion street all the way. It provides the businesses with a long-term exposure to traffic, which is a good thing. CA’s plan to have it a limited-traffic street with a pedestrian sense was good. Southbound traffic is the best way to get traffic down to Westgate.

Station Street needs to be as far from Harlem as you can get it. Residential downtown is a positive for foot traffic. Circulation around downtown needs Marion open. Northbound could work, but should be right-only on Lake or you’ll need another signal. Lake Street should be right-only on Station or Marion. Marion should be open two-way on the south half and one-way on the north half. Because the parking lots are scattered it is disjointed. Add residential over retail/parking. Marion should not have on-street parking if it is opened two-way.

The curbless street proposed by CA was appealing for festivals. Traffic flow on Westgate will be good for the buildings.

We need Station Street to feed the parking garage.

That need is reduced if you open Marion Street.

Station Street feeds the retail too.

The parking garage needs some visibility from traffic streets. It shouldn’t hide behind buildings.

It could be a signage issue.

The retail on Westgate died before Marion Street became a mall.

**Q. How will Station Street add new retail with existing buildings on each side?**

A. You can add retail spaces along the sides of existing buildings, like Chipotle did.

You could add a garage at 1145 Westgate, 100 cars per level, and keep the parking lot open by Old Navy, and keep or create pedestrian walkways to Marion and Lake.

**Q. Everyone thinks the Shops of Oak Park was underdeveloped. What could go there now if they were to be demolished?**

A. The context of the market when they were built was to go a little at a time and see what happens. Today a mixed-use development would be appropriate – retail with residential or office above. It will be looked at during the process.

New development could cantilever out over North Blvd. to get more space.

Station Street provides access and visibility to the parking garage and for retail. It would be more people with more visibility. It's an advantage to a street or walkway leading people down that Marion doesn't do. You also want people to go from the garage to Lake Street too.

Q. What do people think about an L-shaped garage?

A. We need to keep the sight lines to Lake Street. It would be difficult for a big garage on North Blvd. to hide.

Station Street was named that way because it connected the train station to Lake Street.

The proposed Station Street in the "plan" doesn't feed the parking garage, but it would have more flexibility if it did. Bringing it through to North Blvd. takes out more historic buildings.

Station Street creates four short loops for pedestrians to walk and not one long walk like now.

Station Street could come through to the North Blvd. garage. The Avenue garage is on a one-way street with one entrance/exit. This plan still has two access points to the garage.

**Q. Where do most cars at the Shops of Oak Park come from – North Blvd. or Westgate**

A. Most come from North Blvd.

The garage design is shopper friendly. A potentially larger floor plate in the CA plan means flat levels in the garage. We need to attract people going east on Lake Street.

Chair Tucker stated that next week the Committee will look at proposed plans at the start of the meeting. We will start with at least two. They will also discuss the Colt Building and the consultants will be here. Each Committee member, and members of the audience, will be asked what they would like to see in the superblock at that meeting.

We need input from businesses and historic preservation architects.

This group is ahead of itself. What do we want in downtown? Modern or character worth preserving to make unique? The Shops are generic and could be anywhere and do well. They don't have anything to do with downtown Oak Park. There are no alternate visions. What he's hearing is modern development while grudgingly saving some old buildings. Royce Yeater of the National Trust said a unique downtown brings unique retailers.

The Committee has been doing what Royce Yeater said. They have to start somewhere. They have no vision – but bring it next week. They will decide by infrastructure improvements to retail and know how to save the buildings.

There was a dismissal of heritage tourism earlier. Why? There are 100,000 visitors to Oak Park every year. We need to think about how to get them downtown.

Mr. Carollo stated that he would be happy to meet to discuss how they market downtown at the Visitors Bureau.

This was a very constructive discussion.

*Motion by Carollo to adjourn. Second by Rouse. Motion approved.*  
Adjourn at 8:50 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Doug Kaarre