

## **A Vision for Downtown Oak Park**

### **FORum OAK PARK**

**September 20, 2005**

We envision Downtown Oak Park as a more vibrant place where people work, play, and live. We see a downtown that has retained its charm and character by preserving key historic structures that resonate with the community, along with a mix of new, more functional, environmentally sensitive and architecturally attractive buildings. Lake Street is the heart of activity, with building height at a scale in keeping with historic structures and adjacent buildings, and a welcoming, pedestrian-friendly streetscape with numerous plantings and sidewalk eateries. The energy in Downtown Oak Park is noticeable from early morning when residents begin making their way to the transit station for their morning commutes until late evening, especially on weekends.

Oak Park offers a variety of shopping, ranging from locally owned specialty stores to well-known retailers typically found in distant shopping malls. Special incentives have been used to attract or retain highly desired shops to ensure that no critical component is missing. Oak Parkers enjoy spending their time and money here rather than fighting expressway traffic to reach the Oak Brook mall or the Magnificent Mile. Parking lots and garages are strategically located and designed to make shopping and running errands easy. Bike routes and racks make bicycling an attractive option, while the pedestrian scale both here and throughout Oak Park encourages walking. Trains, shuttle buses, and the Pace system offer additional convenient ways to reach downtown.

Traffic flow along Lake Street has attracted major retailers, while the creation of routes around and off of Lake Street has improved circulation throughout downtown. Special parking areas for commuters draw more people into the central business district, while keeping transit ridership high. Businesses serving commuters are encouraged adjacent to commuter parking areas.

New condominiums and apartments have added more people and more spending to downtown. Traffic and parking impacts of new residential projects have been minimized by careful design of their access and parking. Oak Park's downtown is home to a mix of professionals, empty nesters, students, and seniors. While some new residents live above retail, most live in a few taller, 8-12 story, architecturally attractive structures that are appropriately buffered from nearby single family houses, and placed next to other tall buildings, Harlem Avenue, or the raised el tracks to mitigate their impact on neighborhoods. Residents of these mid-rises love the views of the Chicago skyline to the east and sunsets to the west, the convenient transportation network, and the active neighborhood of Downtown Oak Park.

Tour buses now schedule full day trips to Oak Park to provide visitors with time to enjoy the ambience and restaurants of downtown after they see our world-class tourist sites. Employers are locating in Oak Park as well, due to its excellent transportation network, convenient parking, superior amenities, and quality work force. In the redevelopment efforts, the Village encouraged office space above retail, despite the subsidy required, so that office workers could help maintain downtown's vitality during the day. Oak Parkers are proud of their downtown and visit often, for shopping trips, for personal services, for a meal out, to have a cup of coffee or ice cream, to go to a movie, and to attend one of several annual festivals.

## “Superblock” Key Issues

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#### 1. Station Street

- Provides badly needed direct (and visual) access to primary retail corridor (Lake St.) from the south for cars, buses, bicyclists, and pedestrians
- Improves circulation throughout superblock area
  - Reduces traffic congestion
  - Provides alternative delivery routes
  - Breaks down superblock into more pedestrian-friendly lengths
  - Increases available retail frontage
  - Makes Westgate Street viable
- Provides convenient access to parking structure
- Improves transit usage

#### 2. Colt Building Put-Call Agreement

- Costs of buying back the Colt Building appear too high considering its debatable preservation value and functional obsolescence:

\$5 million to buy back Colt

+ *opportunity costs*: the time it will take to get renovation work underway compared with Taxman's readiness to begin redevelopment

+ *renovation subsidy*: either borne by Village or by developer in the form of lower purchase price for the building

+ *permanently lower revenues* from renovated Colt building compared with revenues that would have been generated by new, more efficient development

+ *potential purchase* of 1145 Westgate from Taxman Corp.

+ *loss of catalyst* to jumpstart Downtown Oak Park's revival

+ *commitment to preserve* the remainder of Westgate Village (acquisition, renovation subsidies)

#### 3. Westgate Village

- Use resources saved by not buying back Colt Building to preserve the five easternmost buildings of Westgate Village (1112-1122-1126 on the north side, and 1125-1121-1111, and the 1109 Westgate building on the south side), which would all be located together to the east of Station Street.
- Station Street makes Westgate into a viable street, rather than an alleyway

#### 4. Other Superblock issues

- Reopen Marion Street to traffic, while retaining a strong pedestrian-friendly character
- Residential/Retail mixed use in superblock
- An innovative parking structure that incorporates retail, located south of Westgate Street and west of the proposed Station Street, including:
  - Transit-oriented retail along North Blvd.
  - Downtown-oriented retail along other available frontage
  - Possible pedestrian arcade between Shops of DTOP and garage
- Redevelop the Shops of DTOP at a higher density (in a later phase)
- Develop better pedestrian access between River Forest Town Center and Downtown Oak Park

FORum OAK PARK  
Presented to:  
"Superbock" Steering Committee  
9-20-2005

LAKE ST

HARLEM AVE

MARION ST

WESTGATE

STATION STREET

1112 - 1126  
TO REMAIN

PRESERVED WESTGATE ROW

1109 - 1125  
TO REMAIN

NORTH BLVD

