

# **Downtown Super Block**

## **Preservation Sensitive Option to Master Plan**

Submitted 20 September 2005  
Frank Lipo, Brian Taylor, Doris Blumenthal, Douglas Gilbert

## **Vision:**

The following recommendations for the super block of downtown Oak Park will provide for a vibrant retail, restaurant, residential and tourist environment that respects the historic character and scale of the super block and especially the Tudor Revival character of Westgate. Downtown Oak Park should become a destination for both local and regional residents as well as for tourists from around the world. The successfully implemented plan will attract people for extended visits for shopping, dining and cultural events.

To implement this vision, new retail development suitable for national retailers will be intermixed with renovated retail space that can provide a desirable mix of large-scale, national retail and small-scale, locally owned or regional retail. New housing development will add pedestrian traffic to the area and take advantage of rapid transit. New construction has been integrated into the historic fabric so that positive change can occur without wholesale loss of the area's historic character. Historic character and buildings will be preserved via restoration efforts and historic designations and by placing new development on sites with no buildings or those identified as having no historic merit. The north and south portions of downtown, currently physically and visually separated by the railroad viaduct, will be linked. New parking will be integrated into the whole super block with a garage, surface lots and "teaser" on-street parking. Access into and through the super block will be improved, aiding traffic conditions for visitors and providing visibility to retailers. While better accommodating auto traffic, the area will also remain a pedestrian oriented and friendly zone that encourages walking, families, street gatherings and festivals. The plan can be feasibly implemented in phases with a mix of public and private investment.

## **Recommendation 1:**

Extend Maple Avenue north between North Blvd. and Lake Street. 2-way traffic south of Westgate and 1-way traffic north of Westgate.

### *Advantages:*

Location of street R.O.W. avoids need for demolishing any buildings.

Allows a future link to South Maple Ave. and south downtown. (see Recommendation 10)

Allows new retail frontage and pedestrian friendly walkway extending between North Blvd. and Lake Street.

### *Comments:*

R.O.W. must be purchased from private owner.

R.O.W. tight at north end. This could be widened in future if building on either side redeveloped. If too narrow now, could be pedestrian only until wider R.O.W. acquired.

## **Recommendation 2:**

Construct parking garage on site of 1145 Westgate and North Blvd. surface lot. Preserve and incorporate historic façade on Westgate. Incorporate 1<sup>st</sup> floor retail along Westgate and Maple Ave.

### *Advantages:*

Only one historic building is seriously impacted for the garage. Its façade or front portion could be preserved and incorporated into the design.

New retail development along Westgate and Maple Ave.

Some surface parking for Gap and TGI Friday's preserved.

Pedestrian exits from garage on Westgate at north end and on North Blvd. at east end (near intermodal transit and Marion St.).

Near term construction feasibility.

### *Comments:*

Requires purchase of property from private owner.

Garage floor plate not "ideal" size and layout.

## **Recommendation 3:**

Preserve and adaptive reuse of Colt Building. Remodel west elevation for new retail frontage.

### *Advantages:*

Retain historic Tudor character on Westgate.

Restore Art Deco character on Lake Street.

Provide improved appearance and retail use along unsightly west side.

Possible pedestrian link between Westgate and Lake if arcade is restored.

### *Comments:*

Dependant on building assessment and financial feasibility reports.

Plan accommodates complete or partial restoration of the Colt Building.

## **Recommendation 4:**

Preserve and adaptive reuse of remaining Westgate buildings. Incorporate interior and storefront changes to provide more retail friendly space.

### *Advantages:*

Retain historic Tudor character on Westgate.

Provide for new retail and street life along Westgate.

Draw shoppers from Shops of Oak Park down Westgate towards Marion.

### *Comments:*

No property acquisition required.

Private development encouraged.  
TIF funds/federal tax credits could support incentives for rehabilitations.

**Recommendation 5:**

Reopen Marion Street to traffic. Traffic would be one-way southbound only and meander to calm traffic, allow for new on-street parking and allow for new green space.

*Advantages:*

Vehicle traffic will improve visibility to shoppers and help to revitalize Marion Street businesses.

Allows traffic to flow into super block area.

Allows for Westgate to be open to through traffic.

One-way traffic allows for wide sidewalks and extra green space. This will preserve much of the open, pedestrian friendly character of Marion.

*Comments:*

Work must be done in a way to minimize negative impact on businesses.

**Recommendation 6:**

Open Westgate to through traffic connecting to Marion Street.

*Advantages:*

Vehicle traffic will improve visibility to shoppers and help to revitalize Marion Street and Westgate businesses.

Allows traffic to flow through super block area.

*Comments:*

Redesign current street to allow for more green space and wider sidewalks.

**Recommendation 7:**

Create new Marion Plaza on site of former Sawyer Business College.

*Advantages:*

Green space and public gathering space at heart of Marion Street.

Park-like setting for families to gather or summer lunch spot.

Create a focal point, such as a fountain or public sculpture.

*Comments:*

Village already owns property.

Marion Plaza replaces the proposed Station Square, preserving parking on North Blvd. lot.

### **Recommendation 8:**

Redevelop the three buildings south of former Sawyer Business College.

#### *Advantages:*

Existing buildings are of no historic merit and one-story.

New development could be mixed use with housing and modern retail space.

New building could wrap around east side of Marion Plaza to form a square of the new park. Retail or housing entries could face the Plaza.

#### *Comments:*

Could be Village led RFP or private development.

Height should be restricted to that proposed by C-A Plan.

### **Recommendation 9:**

Redevelop the cluster of five buildings along south side of Lake Street.

#### *Advantages:*

Existing buildings are of no historic merit.

New development could be mixed use with housing and modern retail space.

New development would spur improvements to other historic buildings on Lake and to existing retail.

A pedestrian link between Lake and Westgate could be incorporated in the development.

#### *Comments:*

Could be Village led RFP or private development.

Height should be restricted to that proposed by C-A Plan.

### **Recommendation 10:**

Provide an underpass linking North and South Maple Streets.

#### *Advantages:*

Would make Maple a through street all the way to Lake.

Would connect the super block to new development on existing parking lots south of viaduct.

Would better connect north and south downtowns.

Would improve traffic flow, especially for those wishing to turn south onto Harlem.

#### *Comments:*

Long-range plan.

Planning and construction could be tied into reconstruction of Harlem underpass.

Funding could be tied into Harlem underpass.

**Recommendation 11:**

Redevelop existing Shops of Oak Park into mixed use retail and housing.

*Advantages:*

Provide housing in heart of downtown and near transit.

Provide more visually appealing gateway into downtown Oak Park.

*Comments:*

Long-range plan.

Private development.

**Recommendation 12:**

Provide for historic designations of buildings and groups of buildings within the entire downtown. Designations can include a mix of National Register Districts as well as local Landmark Districts or individual designations.

*Advantages:*

National Register designation allows for 20% historic investment tax credit for rehabilitation.

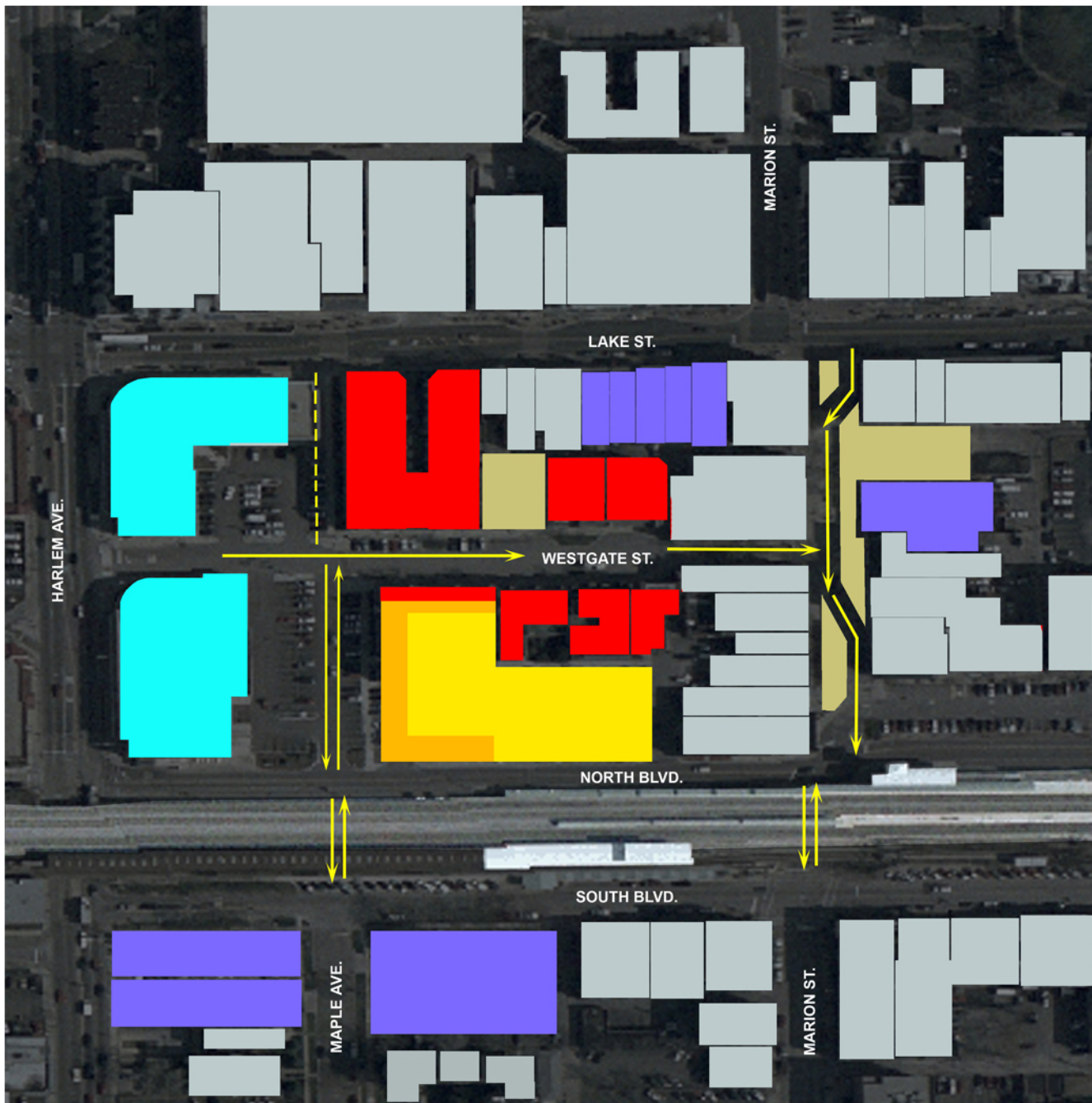
National Register designation does not come with local restrictions.

Local Landmark designations can protect buildings identified as “significant” or “structures of merit.”

*Comments:*

Historic designations will require public education on the advantages.

Requires Village Board approval for Historic Preservation Commission to proceed.



- Existing buildings
- Existing buildings for adaptive use with retail at first level
- Proposed new parking deck with retail at first floor
- New residential with retail at ground level
- Existing buildings to be redeveloped in future
- Open / green space
- Vehicular traffic  
Street direction
- Pedestrian way

In order to revitalize downtown Oak Park, we must first provide additional parking in the form of street parking and a parking garage as shown on the plan. Street parking will provide shoppers with immediate access to stores while a parking garage will provide additional parking for shoppers but also bring commuters who park and ride the train. This will result in a greater number of shoppers due to convenience during a persons commute. Secondly, buildings along Westgate, Maple, and Marion must provide storefronts. These same buildings can also provide housing above in order to create a permanent population in the downtown area to help sustain the business. The reopening of Marion to vehicular traffic must also take place in order to provide an outlet for Westgate traffic. Extending Maple north to Lake will also bring people into the heart of downtown along with Marion. These changes will create an area which is more accessible to shoppers and will help create a more vibrant and successful downtown Oak Park.

*Downtown Oak Park Super Block  
Preservation Sensitive Option to Master Plan  
September 20, 2005*