

Kathryn Jonas  
124 S. East Ave.  
Oak Park, IL 60302

TO: Steering Committee and Public  
Downtown Sub-Area/Colt Building Public Planning Process

RE: Vision for DTOP

DATE: September 27, 2005 Presentation

This current process, as well-intentioned as it might be, has flaws. First, it omits discussion of a key element - a vision and sense of place - that should have been the guiding principle. Second, with no planning consultant hired by the Village to represent the public interest, we are left to offer our own design solutions to fairly complex problems. In spite of that, many of the public have very thoughtfully, and with varying degrees of expertise, presented their ideas for a better downtown. However, there seems to be some confusion between participatory planning and careful, professional planning with meaningful public input. I'm wondering how these ideas will be incorporated into a design to be recommended to the Village Board.

Though there has been little discussion of a vision, we can look to the DTOP Master Plan process for a guiding principal - the public stated loud and clear in the formal citizen survey that one of its top priorities was preservation of dtop's historic character. When our elected officials adopted the Plan on March 21, they were concerned that this priority was not addressed and so made their approval subject to 8 conditions (copy of Resolution attached), including 1) close collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation which will endure through the life of the redevelopment project (12 years), 2) the Board will thoroughly explore alternatives to Station St. and its proposed location, the goal of which will be the preservation of the Westgate Ave. property, 3) it is a major goal of the Board that existing buildings be restored and adapted, not only acquired and demolished. 4) a three-dimensional model of existing conditions in Downtown shall be created. If these conditions haven't been furnished to you, I believe they should have since you will be making redevelopment recommendations to the Board.

My vision, which I believe is in harmony with the results of the citizens' survey is this:

1. preserve and enhance the essential historic character of dtop while complementing it with a few, carefully designed infill improvements of appropriate scale. DTOP is surrounded on all sides by a rich architectural heritage that the Village has had the wisdom to preserve by creating two historic districts - the Frank Lloyd Wright district and the Ridgeland/Oak Park District. Creating these districts has been a catalyst for creating community pride, and reinvestment in these areas continues. Downtown is also rich in historic character, as citizens have pointed out, and creating a historic district for DTOP could lead to the same kind of investment. It could knit together these two districts and make downtown a vibrant community center we can all be proud

of. And it could be a showcase for the varied architectural styles built over the years.

2. I believe quality retail/restaurants/plazas are key to downtown's success. I hope you recommend strongly to the Board that they continue working with the National Trust to help implement practices that have proven effective in revitalizing historic downtowns. We only have to look across Harlem to Forest Park's Madison St. to see how using the Main St. principles have spurred economic vitality while carefully preserving the street's historic buildings. We need to get better at attracting businesses that add to our quality of life and sense of place. Doubling the Lake Theatre to 14 screens (with TIF money as has been proposed) and providing parking will likely not enhance better retail. Instead of focusing on dense multi-family, we should focus on attracting all 55,000 villagers to dtop.

3. Start making the DTOP Organization accountable for its annual allocation of over \$300,000 of TIF money. Part of its mission is to maintain the streetscapes of DTOP and we all know they have been largely neglected and were rated "fair to poor" by Crandall Arambula. It is my understanding that they are opposed to the Main Street program though it offers resources developed over 25 years of revitalizing downtowns. Their presentation of the program in March at the Pleasant Home drew over 100 enthusiastic villagers and should be repeated for businesses.

4. Lake St. suggestions

\*address the gridlock at Marion and consider a left turn lane though this will decrease the wide pedestrian area on the south side of Lake

\*fix the oddly-configured intersection at Forest so that the east bound traffic lane is more direct and less confusing; consider a traffic cop at peak travel times as the Village does at the high school

\*Consider additional parallel parking to help retail if it does not slow traffic too much

5. Marion St.

\* the simple opening of Marion will not solve all its problems. There are long time stores that seem to be doing well. If the Marion mall had been maintained over the years and made into a real gathering place, it may have been more successful

6. Westgate

if opened, keep the sidewalks wide enough for outdoor seating

7. Parking Garage

keep it close to Marion, integrate its pedestrian access to Westgate and Marion and have a quality design

Negatives to be addressed:

1. Shops of OP created a dead zone of parking/traffic gridlock that was thoughtlessly plopped down at a key corner in dtop, which only detracted further from the Westgate buildings. It is a strip mall with its back to Westgate and our historic dtop. While it was underdeveloped for its location 9 years ago, it created some of the problems that we are now discussing. If any redevelopment is done here, it should be visually linked to the historic Westgate district. Right now Westgate visually bleeds onto the armpit that is Harlem and loses its small, intimate scale.

2. coordinate with Metra, CTA to improve the pedestrian pass that connects South Blvd to North Blvd. Consider opening it up, creating attractive space around it, even on outdoor cafe along South Blvd. where there appears to be adequate space. This will increase the activity around this important hub and should increase transit use. Right now it is surrounded by newspaper boxes and a Police sub-station which visually dominate the entrances. If the Village worked with the CTA to place a substation here, we can surely work with them and Metra to enhance the area.

Finally, you (Trustees) cannot expect the public to maintain this level of participation in every planning effort. The Village needs to start allocating adequate funds for expert planners to assist with these studies. Public input is essential to the process, but experienced professionals must be brought in because we should not be wasting time coming up with solutions we are not trained to address, and reinventing the wheel while there are many excellent models to look at. The CA process was largely discredited by the public not because it involved an outside planner, but because the major decisions about development had already been made and conveyed to CA. As former President Trapani stated publicly, the purpose of the Master Plan was to extend the TIF not to engage in any serious planning with the public.

Additional Recommendations to Board:

1. address zoning immediately to set a maximum height for new dtop buildings that is sensitive to the existing building heights. (La Grange has limited their retail to 2 stories and residential to 3 in their downtown area) Setting the Fields bldg height as the goal could seriously overwhelm dtop.
2. purchase the Colt Bldg if Taxman cannot find an economically feasible way to preserve it for retail and office
3. do not look at this area separate from the rest of dtop. Its connection to the rest of dtop, the Ave/Lake and S. Marion St. districts will help determine its success and the ultimate success of all these areas.

RESOLUTION NO. 2005-R-102

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE ADOPTION OF THE "*GREATER DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN*" AND "*GREATER DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES*" FOR THE AVENUE BUSINESS DISTRICT, DOWNTOWN OAK PARK, AND THE SOUTH MARION STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT

BE IT RESOLVED by the President and Board of Trustees of the Village of Oak Park, County of Cook, State of Illinois, that the "*Greater Downtown Master Plan*" and "*Greater Downtown Development Guidelines*" for The Avenue Business District, Downtown Oak Park, and The South Marion Street Business District is hereby adopted with the following conditions:

1. That staff prepare an Ordinance Creating the Downtown Design Commission to include representation of the historic preservation community, architects and Downtown property owners to apply the proposed design guidelines to new construction in the above-named business districts.
2. That detailed training is conducted of the Downtown Design Commission by Crandall and Arambula.
3. That the staff provides reports every six months to the Village Board and Downtown Design Commission as to implementation of the plan and that the Village Board and Downtown Design Commission meet to discuss initiatives prior to implementation.
4. Initiate process for identifying and registering key historic buildings in Greater Downtown.
5. The Board, no later than May 20, 2005, will meet with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois and relevant Village entities to begin a process of close collaboration which will endure through the life of the redevelopment project.
6. The Board will thoroughly explore alternatives to Station Street and its proposed location, the goal of which will be the preservation of the Westgate Avenue property.

7. That it is a major goal of the Board that existing buildings be restored and adapted, not only acquired and demolished.
8. A three dimensional model of existing conditions in Downtown shall be created. Further, prior to implementation of any private redevelopment project, a three dimensional model and rendering of the proposal shall be produced and circulated throughout the community for review and comment, via public meetings held by the applicable review body. All other proposed improvements shall be depicted in a conceptual rendering.

Said Plan and Guidelines are attached hereto and made a part hereof.

**THIS RESOLUTION** shall be in full force and effect from and after its adoption and approval as provided by law.

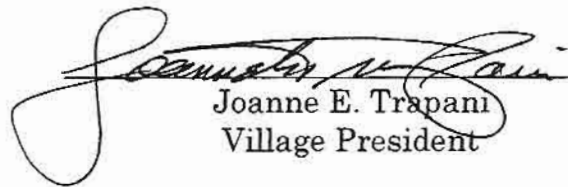
**ADOPTED** this 21st day of March 2005, pursuant to a roll call vote as follows:

**AYES:** Trustees Pope, Gockel, Kostopulos, Johnson and Milstein and President Trapani

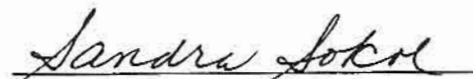
**NAYS:** Trustee Carpenter

**ABSENT:** None

**APPROVED** by me this 21st day of March 2005.

  
Joanne E. Trapani  
Village President

**ATTEST:**

  
Sandra Sokol  
Village Clerk