

October 20, 2005

TO: David G. Pope, President  
Village of Oak Park Board of Trustees

FROM: Downtown Oak Park Sub Area Steering Committee

RE: Steering Committee Plan  
for Downtown Oak Park Sub Area  
and Colt Building

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The Steering Committee has submitted to you a map setting forth our recommendation on the downtown Oak Park sub area (the “*Superblock*”). The Steering Committee was fortunate to hear a great deal of public comment and view presentations by the public and consultants regarding the Superblock. The numerous issues associated with the Superblock have been debated and analyzed. A great deal of time and thought has gone into this recommendation, and the Steering Committee believes that understanding some of our reasoning associated with this final recommendation is very important. The following bullet points attempt to capture some of our thoughts.

**PRESERVE HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

- Preserving as many historic buildings as possible in a fiscally responsible manner was a top priority
- Pursue historic designation of the area including National Register District and local landmarking
- Preserve Westgate Buildings on North Side of Westgate (1112-1126) with adaptive reuse of the interiors
- Preserve at least the facades (minimum 30 feet) on three Westgate Buildings on South Side of Westgate (facades, not entire buildings, deemed most significant)
- Preserve existing Historic Buildings at corner of Lake and New Street with adaptive reuse of the interiors
- Preserve existing Historic Buildings on both sides of Marion with adaptive reuse of the interiors (only a “no merit” building would be removed as a pedestrian walkway)

## **COLT BUILDING**

- Village should not purchase the building, even though many committee members went into the process with the idea of keeping the building
- Costs associated with buying and renovating the building to its historic arcade status are too high, with a negative return on the investment
- Costs associated with buying and improving the building in its current configuration are too high; additionally, such an improvements do not maintain the building's true historic value
- TIF monies can be better spent elsewhere to preserve and enhance the Westgate and Marion Street areas

## **WESTGATE**

- Should be opened to traffic between Harlem and Marion
- Crucial to energizing Westgate and creating a new, vibrant four corners of retail (at New Street intersection)
- Helps improve access and traffic circulation in downtown
- Two-way traffic on Westgate West of New Street; remainder of traffic flow to be determined by traffic consultant
- Note: Committee is not in favor of the "Arcade" concept (moving the store front back) at the Northwest corner of Marion and Westgate, as proposed by Antunovich Associates
- On-street parking (parallel and angled)
- Wide sidewalks where possible (to possibly accommodate street plantings and activities like outside dining)
- Westgate should be made of unique pavers (cobblestone or something similar)

## **MARION STREET**

- Should be opened to one-way traffic (as set forth on map) between Lake and North Blvd.
- Traffic flow is suggested to move South on North half of street and North on South half of street, but traffic consultants should provide analysis

### **MARION STREET (CONTINUED)**

- Marion Street should be winding and made of unique pavers (cobblestone or something similar)
- Incorporate extensive landscaping with trees and planters to retain pedestrian and “green” character of the street
- Marion merchants will be put through great hardships during construction, so on-street parking places should be included and the Village should work hard during the construction phase to promote the Marion businesses and hold special events on or near Marion Street
- Ability to close Marion Street easily from traffic (for festivals, etc.) should be incorporated into final plan
- Incorporate a bike lane into Marion Street

### **NEW STREET**

- A new two-way traffic street with on-street parking running from Lake Street to North Blvd.
- Creates vibrant four corner retail intersection (corner of Westgate and New Street)
- Helps improve access and traffic circulation in downtown
- Brings traffic flow from Lake Street to CTA/Metra Station and new parking garage
- Create right turn lane on Lake Street into New Street (to help prevent any traffic back-up coming off Harlem)
- New Street should be made of unique pavers (cobblestone or something similar)
- Incorporate a bike lane into New Street

### **NEW PARKING GARAGE**

- Need parking garage for 500 - 600 automobiles (the need for more parking was the single issue agreed upon most in the public survey)
- Current North Blvd. lot should be used as part of garage footprint

## **NEW PARKING GARAGE (CONTINUED)**

- To make garage user friendly, with relatively flat parking floors and not too tall, garage should extend North only if necessary, removing back ends of three Westgate buildings; 30 foot frontage of buildings at a minimum should remain (most significant quality of these buildings)
- Building experts to decide if additional room is required to reach 500 - 600 spaces; garage may need to extend over New Street and possibly into the new building on west side of Westgate (or in the alternative, over North Blvd.)
- Residential units on top of garage might be acceptable, depending on design (overall height would be a concern)
- Create pedway from new garage to Marion Street by removing single “no merit” building
- Committee not in favor of two separate garages (cost, user-friendliness, etc.)
- Create pedestrian entrance/exit through one of the Westgate buildings
- Include extra bike parking (including lockers) in garage; possible location for showers, etc. for bikers as well
- Delivery and garbage services to Westgate buildings can be accomplished within the new garage
- Install security cameras and other security devices to increase public safety in and around the garage

## **RETAIL**

- New first floor retail space creation along Westgate and New Street (see map)
- Opened Westgate and Marion to add to visibility of merchants on those streets
- New on-street “teaser” parking and new parking deck to feed retail
- Overall recommendations will create an exciting downtown that will attract additional shoppers

## **LAKE STREET**

- Two-way traffic with new left turn lanes for turning North onto Marion (when headed East) and South onto Marion (when headed West)
- Include more on-street parking along Lake Street
- Narrow Lake Street sidewalks as necessary to accommodate street parking and new turn lanes

## **MARION PLAZA**

- Create a new park on Marion Street where college building once stood (if feasible, incorporating existing Marion Mall trees into new site)
- Add playground equipment or fountain
- Add benches and possibly a sculpture
- Space might one day be used as a pedway for a possible parking garage in back of East side Marion Buildings

## **NORTH BLVD.**

- Consider, in consultation with traffic experts, one-way traffic eastbound in conjunction with a westbound one-way flow on South Blvd.
- Sidewalk on north side on North Blvd. should be improved and expanded to enhance pedestrian experience for transit riders
- Westbound access between Forest and Marion should be accommodated if North Blvd. is made one-way (perhaps within existing lot)

## **SHOPS OF DOWNTOWN**

- Building facades need improvements and integration into the rest of downtown Oak Park
- Long term redevelopment should include mixed-use residential floors above first floor retail
- Possible addition of residential (first floor retail) building in parking lot behind Old Navy store (if deal can be reached with current tenants regarding parking spaces)

## **RESIDENTIAL**

- Should be added to most new structures above first floor retail (see map)
- Adds to activity in downtown and safety (eyes on the streets)
- Tallest residential building should be closest to tracks
- Integrate parking requirements in basements

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

- Construction and development related to sub area plan should follow the principals of sustainable development regarding environmental, economic and social quality of life issues
- LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Building Standards are one example of sustainable development that can be achievable by developers, in various levels of certification
- Investigate methods to recapture rainwater for watering landscaping

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

- Archways (or similar unifying characteristic) should be added at the Westgate/Harlem and Lake/New Street entry points to sub area
- Various recommended improvements need to utilize high quality materials and design
- Bike racks and bike lanes should be added throughout the sub area
- Explore consulting with the National Trust for Historic Preservation for best way to implement this sub area plan
- Office uses can be incorporated into retained buildings, but only above the first floor
- Incorporate “green roofs” into designs, if possible
- Wherever possible, plans for the sub area should include detailed, professional landscaping designs that should be submitted to and approved by the Community Design Commission
- Oak Park shuttle bus route should be incorporated into new plan
- In the future, explore the possibility of a Maple Street “punch-through” at the tracks to better connect both sides of the tracks

## MISCELLANEOUS (CONTINUED)

- Consult with Metra and CTA on overall plan implications
- Consider pedestrian overpass over Harlem connecting sub area with River Forest shopping area
- When Harlem underpass renovations take place, consider right turn lane onto North Blvd.
- Any tourism studies done regarding sub area should be done in conjunction with the Oak Park Visitors Bureau

