Community Input Process

The Community Input Process addresses the strategies used by the consultant team to inform stakeholders and to obtain input on the project.

This chapter includes a description of the community involvement process and the results of the community input exercises, including the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) survey and the Image Preference Survey.

This chapter also includes a summary of the goals and objectives informed by the Community Input Process, and a summary of the design alternatives presented to the community.

Community Input Process
Overview

Community Meetings

The City and Consultant team held two Community Meetings to solicit involvement and input from the community.

Community Meeting #1: Asset-Based Planning Workshop

On February 21, 2007, approximately 15 participants attended the first community meeting to kick off the North Chicago Transit-Oriented Development Study. The consultant team provided an overview of the project and discussed the preliminary analysis of the study area, addressing existing physical conditions, market conditions, and transportation facilities and transit service.

Several community input activities provided participants with an opportunity to voice their concerns early in the project. Activities included a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) survey, which is a planning tool that focuses a community's assets while acknowledging its actual or perceived deficiencies. An Image Preference Survey[SM] (IPS), which collects input on community character and appearance, was then conducted.

Community Meeting #2: Design Alternative Discussion

On August 23, 2007, approximately 13 participants (8 of which were Steering Committee members) attended the second community meeting for the North Chicago TOD Study. Farr Associates presented the results of the SWOT and IPS surveys from the first Community Meeting; discussed the results of the Market Study; introduced the Goals & Objectives, which were informed by these surveys and studies; and presented the design alternatives for the study area.

Community Input Activities

SWOT Analysis

The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) analysis was used to gain insight on existing conditions and on local stakeholders' concerns. This exercise empowers the community to build on its strengths and opportunities and to target weaknesses and threats for improvement. In addition, it assists stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the concerns and priorities.

The comments collected during the SWOT have been used over the course of the project by the consultant team as indicators of the characteristics and issues that the community feels strongest about. The community's preferences help guide the project by identifying perceived or existing positive and negative traits, to be addressed appropriately in the planning process.

At Community Meeting #1, an open discussion was held to solicit input from all stakeholders, resulting in a "laundry list" of comments for each category. A full summary of the SWOT results is included on the following page.

At Community Meeting #2, the meeting participants reviewed the SWOT results from Community Meeting #1 and marked those that they felt were most important within each category. Those items which were marked as high priority by participants are colored green on the adjacent list. Those that received two votes are a darker shade of green than those that received only one vote.

Strengths	Opportunities
What are your advantages?	What can improve or benefit?
What is the current situation?	What could change?
What are your disadvantages?	What obstacles are there?
Weaknesses	Threats

SWOT categories address the questions above.

FARR ASSOCIATES
Architecture | Planning | Preservation

Strengths
Existing train station/Metra service
Great Lakes Naval Station
Surplus of jobs
Good street connections to the west
Senior facility on Sheridan
Lake front
Sheridan Road is crossable for pedestrians
Residential units above storefronts
Foss Park

Weaknesses
Lack of businesses along Sheridan Road
No place for seniors to go
Abbott owns much of the land around Metra Station
No views of the lake from downtown
Retail options are limited due to small lot size
Land ownership downtown is fragmented
Second floor residential on Sheridan Rd. has a poor image
IMAGE of Sheridan Rd.
Lack of facilities (hotel, restaurants) for visitors to Great Lakes
Poor quality of pedestrian facilities
Access to the park is limited and not very visible
Lack of activities at the park
Uses surrounding lake front not conducive to recreation
"Left-over" low-functioning industrial uses
Truck storage and parking in downtown
Maintenance of bus shelters
Sidewalks and roadways are in a state of disrepair
Lack of "niche" or focus for commercial area

Opportunities
Vacant land near Metra Station
Business attraction
Visitors for Great Lakes' weekly graduation
Redevelopment of Sheridan Crossing site
Under-served retail market
Higher density development; high-rise residential with lake views
Redevelopment of industrial land with residential uses (east of Metra Station)
Affordable housing
Possibility to increase lake front/ park access
Park beautification efforts
Renovation of existing beautiful homes
Establish focus/niche for Sheridan Rd.; possibility to change IMAGE
Housing for "Geographic Bachelors" (relocated to GLNB for ~2 years, without their family)

Threats
Stagnant
Median income is low
Second floor residential on Sheridan Rd.
IMAGE – low-quality, unsafe shopping area
No clear market assets
High percentage of renter-occupied residential
Lack of energy/vitality in the downtown area
Absentee landlords in adjacent neighborhood
Lack of property maintenance
Crime/perception of crime

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were identified during Community Meeting #1 and prioritized during Community Meeting #2. Green items were prioritized by either two people (dark green) or one person (light green).

IPS Survey

The Image Preference Survey (IPS) is a powerful tool for soliciting group preferences on community character and appearance. Because this survey method relies on participants individually registering their preferences as numeric scores on a "test" form, the results are perceived to be fair and neutral, helping to build consensus. Discussion took place after the scoring was complete, and comments were recorded to provide qualitative explanations of the scores.

The Image Preference Survey was administered at the first community meeting on February 21, 2007. The results were presented at Community Meeting #2.

The results of this process provide insight on North Chicago stakeholders' preference of first impressions, pedestrian character, commercial character, residential character along Sheridan Road, and the residential character in adjacent neighborhoods.

The discussion following the Image Preference Survey and the survey results themselves indicated that the majority of stakeholders participating in the exercise have similar preferences for community character, regardless of whether a participant was a concerned resident, leader of a community organization, business leader, or elected official.

Categories

Participants in the community meeting viewed a slide show of photographs, with each slide containing a pair of photographs in the following categories:
- First Impressions
- Pedestrian Character
- Commercial Character
- Sheridan Road Residential
- Neighborhood Residential

Process

Each slide included two images from the same category, paired randomly with no intended relationship between them. The photographs included primarily depicted development options that are not found locally.

For this exercise, each participant received a survey form and pencil and was asked to rate each image on a scale from -5 to +5 according to how appropriate they felt each image would be for North Chicago. As participants viewed the slides, they recorded their impressions for each image

on the scorecard. After scoring was complete, a summary slide was viewed to aid discussion of individual preferences.

Scoring & Results

After the meeting, the quantitative results were tallied and the highest- and lowest-rated images in each category were compiled for insight on community priorities.

On the following pages is a summary of the IPS results, which indicate the best and worst images from each category as identified by the participants in the meeting. The complete summary of images used in the IPS and the scoring summary are located in the Appendix.

The consultant team refers to the rating of the images and discussion by the participants as an indication of community preferences for the City's identity, neighborhood character, and other urban design elements. These preferences have been used to guide the planning process and to provide insight on North Chicago stakeholders' community preferences.

Sample scorecard from the Image Preference Survey

Sample slide from the Image Preference Survey

First Impressions: Results

3 Highest-Rated Images

2R

Rank: 1st out of 12 images
Score: 3.22
Comments: "A great look", "the trees and flowers are nice."

3R

Rank: 2nd out of 12 images
Score: 3.20
Comments: "Great", "the natural feel is appealing."

1R

Rank: 3rd out of 12 images
Score: 2.18
Comments: N/A

3 Lowest-Rated Images

1L

Rank: 12th out of 12 images
Score: -2.80
Comments: "Really uninviting",
"I wouldn't want to be there."

5R

Rank: 11th out of 12 images
Score: -1.60
Comments: "Uninviting," "narrow and dark", "not a good impression on foot or in a car."

3L

Rank: 10th out of 12 images
Score: -0.91
Comments: N/A

Community Input Process
Image Preference Survey Results
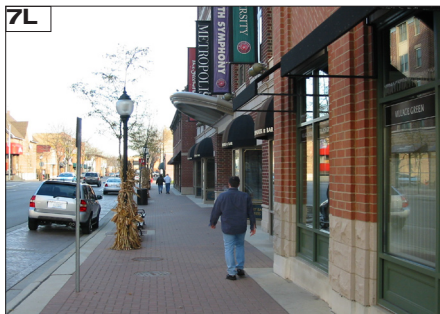
Pedestrian Character: Results

3 Highest-Rated Images

13R

Rank: 1st out of 14 images
Score: 3.64
Comments: "The trees add to the experience", "nice facades".

8R

Rank: 2nd out of 14 images
Score: 3.50
Comments: "Good old style and traditional look," "brick sidewalks are nice," "sidewalks could be wider".

7L

Rank: 3rd out of 14 images
Score: 3.27
Comments: N/A

3 Lowest-Rated Images

9L

Rank: 14th out of 14 images
Score: -2.55
Comments: "There's no real separation between cars and pedestrians", "I'm not sure where you're supposed to walk!"

7R

Rank: 13th out of 14 images
Score: -2.18
Comments: "This would be difficult to maneuver with family or kids."

10L

Rank: 12th out of 14 images
Score: -1.90
Comments: "Parking is too close to the sidewalk."

Commercial Character: Results

3 Highest-Rated Images

20L

Rank: 1st out of 14 images
Score: 4.09
Comments: "Building works well with the street/sidewalk; it comes up to the corner."

15R

Rank: 2nd out of 14 images
Score: 3.30
Comments: "The storefront windows are nice and big, but the doors make the left side of the building seem like a blank wall."

18R

Rank: 3rd out of 14 images
Score: 2.18
Comments: "You can see the stores easily, good storefront windows."

3 Lowest-Rated Images

15L

Rank: 14th out of 14 images
Score: -0.91
Comments: N/A

18L

Rank: 13th out of 14 images
Score: -0.40
Comments: N/A

19R

Rank: 12th out of 14 images
Score: -0.18
Comments: "Doesn't 'hold the corner'", priority is given to cars, not pedestrians.

Community Input Process
Image Preference Survey Results

Sheridan Road Residential: Scores

3 Highest-Rated Images

21L

Rank: 1st out of 14 images
Score: 2.90
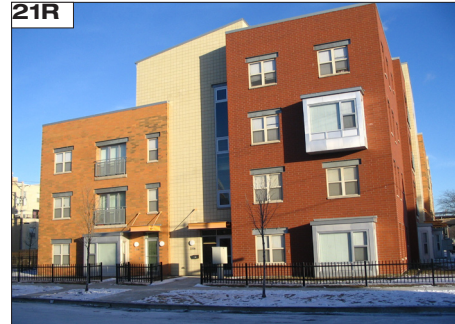Comments: N/A

22L

Rank: 2nd out of 14 images
Score: 2.82
Comments: "Storefronts with residences on upper floors would work for Sheridan Rd."

26R

Rank: 2nd out of 14 images
Score: 2.82
Comments: N/A

3 Lowest-Rated Images

21R

Rank: 14th out of 14 images
Score: -0.82
Comments: N/A

25L

Rank: 13th out of 14 images
Score: -0.10
Comments: N/A

23R

Rank: 12th out of 14 images
Score: 0.55
Comments: N/A

Neighborhood Residential: Scores

3 Highest-Rated Images

Rank: 1st out of 14 images
Score: 3.50
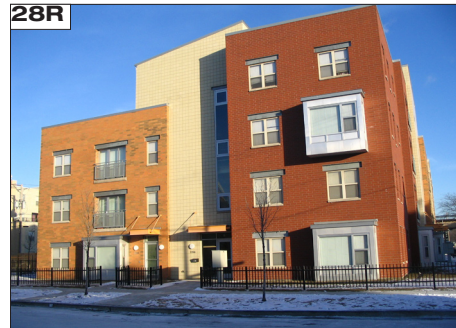Comments: "Nice look for multi-family housing."

Rank: 2nd out of 14 images
Score: 2.91
Comments: "Good, traditional look would match existing neighborhood."

Rank: 3rd out of 14 images
Score: 2.64
Comments: "Porches are nice and add to the neighborhood character."

3 Lowest-Rated Images

Rank: 14th out of 14 images
Score: -2.73
Comments: N/A

Rank: 13th out of 14 images
Score: -0.60
Comments: "How do you get inside?"

Rank: 12th out of 14 images
Score: -0.55
Comments: "Wouldn't work with the existing neighborhood."

Goals & Objectives

Farr Associates created a list of Goals & Objectives for the project, based on the results of the existing conditions analysis, SWOT survey and IPS survey. The original Goals & Objectives were revised after input from the Steering Committee, and the revised Goals & Objectives were presented at Community Meeting #2, where they were received favorably.

The goals are broken into four broad categories—Land Use and Development, Transportation, Urban Design, and Business Development. Each category has a goal and corresponding objectives to provide a vision and guide future actions. The Goals & Objectives agreed upon are as follows:

Land Use and Development
Goal: Focus appropriate development in areas of most impact.

Objectives:
1. Create a concentrated walkable downtown core along Sheridan Road, between Foss Park Avenue and 18th Street.
2. Focus residential development around the station. In later phases and as available, convert properties along Sheridan Road, north of 16th Street, to residential uses to shift commercial uses to a consolidated area.
3. Anchor all corners with buildings; prioritize corner properties within the downtown core for redevelopment.
4. Identify potential infill residential sites west of Sheridan Road.

Transportation
Goal: Improve community accessibility and link all modes of transportation with the Metra Station.

Objectives:
1. Align at least one east/west intersection at Sheridan Road.
2. Create a pedestrian-friendly downtown core.
3. Provide on-street parking wherever possible to reduce negative impacts of large surface lots.
4. Link the McClory Bike Path with the Metra Station.

5. Link bus routes with the Metra Station. Shift bus routes closer to the station.
6. Meet Metra's projected parking need for 100 to 150 spaces by 2030.
7. Connect Lakeside with Grant Place for additional connections between the station and downtown.
8. Connect 16th Street with Foss Park Avenue in a future phase for a more direct route to the station.

Urban Design
Goal: Create a downtown core that will attract visitors and businesses.

Objectives:
1. Preserve existing historic downtown buildings and infill with buildings of similar character and scale.
2. Carefully guide design of new development to relate to pedestrians.
3. Add street trees, with prioritization of the downtown core.
4. Add pedestrian crossing zones on Sheridan Road, between 16th and Broadway to connect both sides of Sheridan Road and signal to drivers that they are entering a downtown area with pedestrians.
5. Provide better way finding and signage throughout the study area.
6. Designate areas for bus stops with passenger amenities such as shelters, trash cans and signage.

Business Development
Goal: Create a continuous, thriving retail district.

Objectives:
1. Expand the customer base for local businesses by prioritizing residential development with close proximity to the downtown core.
2. Attract new businesses and services.
3. Create a consolidated district to incorporate multiple destinations in one stop.

Design Alternatives

Farr Associates, with guidance from the Steering Committee, created two design alternatives for the study area. These design alternatives were presented at Community Meeting #2 and are included in the appendix of this report.

The two alternatives represented different degrees of public and private investment, but shared several specific design strategies that are recommended by the consultant team regardless of the level of investment. A combination of these two alternatives was ultimately decided on by the Steering Committee after input from the community. The resulting plan is discussed in the following section of this report.

At Community Meeting #2, North Chicago residents marked their design preferences.