

DEVELOPER DISCUSSION PANEL

Summary Report: January 2015



Regional
Transportation
Authority



Urban Land
Institute

Introduction



Downtown Lemont. Photo Credit: RTA

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) has invested over \$4 million of its own funds and leveraged over \$6 million of local and Federal funds during the past 15 years to complete approximately 90 transit-oriented development (TOD) planning studies through the RTA's [Community Planning](#) program. This program funds TOD planning studies and implementation assistance that promote walkable, mixed-income, mixed-use development co-located and/or well-connected to retail and business uses in transit station areas while also increasing overall access to transit.

From the RTA's perspective, pursuing and achieving implementation of these plans can result in more efficient transit operations, improved access to transit services and a potential for increased ridership for all three of our Service Boards (Metra, Pace and CTA). Implementation efforts can also increase private investment in TOD areas while promoting the principles of sustainability and livability.

As part of these increased efforts, the RTA is working with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) in Chicago to facilitate discussions between individual communities and development experts to shed light on the future of TODs and how this relates to the changing market and economy



Lemont Metra Station. Photo Credit: RTA

A Developer Discussion Panel was held in Lemont on **October 8, 2014** and this report summarizes the discussion and the panel's recommendations and suggested strategies.

Discussion Participants

Urban Land Institute & Regional Transportation Authority

Paul Ivers, Division President, Cambridge Homes

Tony Manno, Project Manager, RTA

Cindy McSherry, Executive Director, ULI Chicago

Greg Terwilliger, Vice President, Business Development, Novak Construction

Sarah Wick, Project Manager, Related Midwest

Village of Lemont

Paul Chialdikas, Trustee

Martha Glas, Village Planner

Charity Jones, Planning & Economic Development Director

George J. Schafer, Village Administrator



I&M Canal. Photo Credit: RTA



Budnik Building, Main Street. Photo Credit: RTA

Background

The Lemont Station Area Planning Study was completed in November 2004 and this project focused on recommendations to increase mixed use development and improve access and circulation, while maintaining the historical character of the study area. Detailed concept plans for the western portion of the Village, including the Metra station area, were prepared.

Since the completion of the Plan, the Village has adopted a Unified Development Ordinance, attracted the development of the Front Street Lofts near the Metra station; implemented Shop Lemont-the 3/50 Project, a “shop local” initiative; administered a downtown sign, façade, and site improvement grant program; and enhanced the Heritage Quarries Recreation Area. Additionally, the I-355 extension is in operation and has increased accessibility to Lemont and specifically the historic downtown.

The Village is presently working on an update to the Village Comprehensive Plan. The original Plan was developed in 2002 and updated in 2006 to include design guidelines for the 127th Street corridor. The current Comprehensive Plan update seeks to include a more substantive discussion around housing and economic development. In 2012, the Planning & Economic Development Department administered a community survey to gauge public opinion on a number of matters important to the update of the Plan. Over 400 residents completed the survey. *When asked “What is your vision for Lemont”, nearly 80% of the respondents stated a “thriving downtown”.*

The goal of the ULI panel was to gain feedback on the challenges being faced for development in the area, the highest and best uses of key available sites that can support transit service, and how the Village may best encourage development.



Discussion Panel Participants. Photo Credit: RTA



Riverwalk Behind New Development. Photo Credit: RTA

TOD Opportunity Sites



#1: 110-116 Main Street

#2: 225-241 Canal Street

#3: 400 Main Street

110-116 Main Street

110-12 Main St
Lot Size: 0.50 Acres
SF: 12,000

116 Main St
Lot Size: 0.86 Acres
SF: 9,200



225-241 Canal Street

Lot Size: 1.51
Acres SF: 65,774

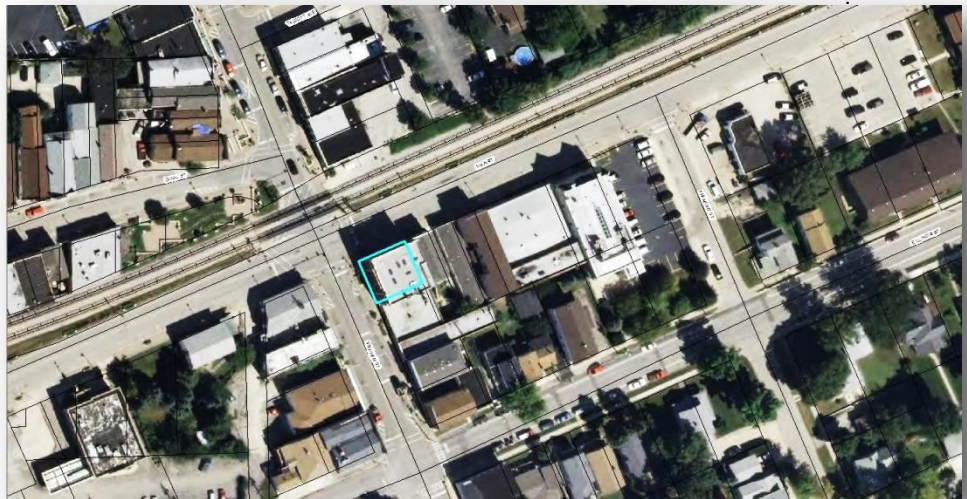


400 Main Street

Lot Size: 0.07 Acres

SF: 2,871

Commercial space vacant as of 2010, residential units occupied



Key Recommendations

Short-Term Recommendations

- Re-engage the developer of Front Street Lofts and discuss the possibility of converting the vacant commercial space to live/work units. These units have been vacant for quite a while and converting to live/work spaces may attract tenants looking for an alternative type of retail/commercial space;
- Focus on creating a “gathering place” in the downtown area to create and encourage community events and activity. A potential pocket park can be created on the vacant land adjacent to the Front Street Lofts. By generating activity in the downtown area you are encouraging residents and visitors to also patronize the existing businesses;
- Let the Downtown TIF expire and expand the Canal TIF to include some of the downtown properties that are identified as development opportunities. By creating a new TIF district the Village can explore bond opportunities and other incentives to attract development with a new 23-year TIF district;
- Engage a consultant that can perform a Rent Study to identify the downtown area’s rental demographic, appropriate rental rates, and overall market. By identifying the rental market the Village can work to attract the appropriate uses and help manage the expectations of the current business and land owners;
- Re-establish a relationship with the downtown business owners and work together to generate more interest in existing businesses by creating a Downtown Business Map to help showcase existing restaurants, taverns, and shops;

- Pursue a restaurant use for 400 Main Street. This location is in a prime location in the downtown area and can accommodate a neighborhood restaurant use;
- Explore offering complimentary valet parking services for the downtown restaurants and taverns. The Front Street Lofts public parking deck can be used as a central (free) parking location. Valet parking could not only attract more patrons to the downtown area, but also encourage patrons to stay/shop longer knowing that they have easy and free access to parking.

Long-Term Recommendations

- Encourage multi-family rental residential development in the downtown area. The zoning allows for this type of use and there are sites available for development. Attract development by streamlining the approval process and encouraging by-right development;
- Continue to promote the I&M Canal as a focal point of the downtown. Explore improving the canal by working with MWRD to increase the volume of water and generate water flow. By beautifying the canal and creating a moving water feature, it will become the focal point of the downtown area and can create natural gathering spaces;
- Focus redevelopment efforts on the north side of Site #2 (225-241 Canal Street). The southern portion of Site #2 would be most appropriate for parking to serve development on the north side, as well as public parking. Additionally, consider vacating Lemont Street north of Canal Street to create a promenade that leads to the I&M Canal;
- Consider updating the wayfinding and signage program to more clearly illustrate available parking areas (including the public parking deck in the Lofts building), various gathering spaces, civic uses, walking/bike paths, etc.
- Continue to promote the Village's great amenities including the Canal, bike trails and school system. These are amenities that will attract people not only to the downtown area, but to the community as a whole.

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Wall Mural Along Front Street. Photo Credit: RTA



Wall Mural at Main Street and Illinois Street. Photo Credit: RTA