

DEVELOPER DISCUSSION PANEL

Summary Report: March 2015



Regional
Transportation
Authority



Urban Land
Institute

Introduction

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 created a partnership 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.



Fox Lake Metra Station Bike Parking (Photo Credit: RTA)

Discussion Participants

Urban Land Institute & Regional Transportation Authority

Tony Manno- Project Manager, Regional Transportation Authority

Cindy McSherry- Executive Director, ULI Chicago

Greg Terwilliger- Vice President, Novak Construction Company

Art Zwemke- Manager, Robert Arthur Land Company

Village of Fox Lake

Donny Schmit- Mayor

Brian Marr- Trustee

Anne Marrin- Village Administrator

Donovan Day- Community Development Director



Retail Uses Along Grand Avenue (Photo Credit: RTA)

Background

[The Village of Fox Lake Station Area Plan](#), funded by the RTA and adopted in 2013, created a transit-oriented development (TOD) plan for the Metra station area located in the Village's downtown. The Plan recommends ways to redevelop vacant and underutilized land, improve walkability and streetscaping and promote the Village as a tourist destination with accessible transit options to/from the City of Chicago and other suburban destinations along Metra's Milwaukee District North Line.

A Developer Discussion Panel was held in Fox Lake on **February 10, 2015** to provide feedback to the Village 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 attract and encourage development in their downtown area near the Metra station. The panel also helped the Village identify which key priorities outlined in the Station Area Plan should be addressed immediately. This report summarizes the discussion and the panel's recommendations and suggested strategies.



Office & Retail on East Grand Avenue at Forest Avenue (Photo Credit: RTA)

Study Area

The Station Area Plan project boundary is located in an area of Fox Lake bounded by Nippersink Lake to the North, Grand Avenue to the South, Pistakee Lake Road to the West, and Forest Avenue to the West. Currently, the Station Area is serviced by both Pace Suburban Bus Service, as well as the Metra Milwaukee District-North line with service to Downtown Chicago.



Figure 1-1 | Project Study Area

Key Priorities

The Fox Lake Station Area Plan outlined a list of Implementation Priorities that were discussed during the Developer Panel. Below is a list of priorities from the Study (page 62) that the Village should focus on immediately to set the stage for success:

- Improve the Gateway intersection to Downtown at U.S. Route 12 and Grand Avenue;
- Complete streetscape and pedestrian enhancements along US Route 12, Grand Avenue, and Nippersink Boulevard;
- Work in partnership with study area property owners to improve the appearance of their properties
- Identify prospective downtown tenants, particularly in food and beverage, from the surrounding region with strong operating experience in seasonal tourism markets
- Develop focused local strategies for visitor attraction to Fox Lake's recreation assets
- Evaluate the market opportunities for lodging proximate to Downtown Fox Lake and the station area;
- Implement a pedestrian crossing on U.S. Route 12 South of Oak Street;



Northeast Corner of Grand Avenue & Route 12 (Photo Credit: Google Earth)

Key Recommendations

Overall Recommendations

- Make façade and streetscape improvements to the downtown area to generate and attract additional retail activity;

Grand Avenue Corridor

- Create a unified corridor along Grand Avenue from Nippersink west to the Lake by:
 - Installing a new, bold, well-lit Welcome sign at the northeast corner of Route 12 and Grand Avenue creating a Gateway;
 - Promoting west side lakefront uses and east side historic downtown uses;
 - Improving wayfinding signage and streetscape along Grand Avenue to continue the improvements previously made by Thornton's at the northeast corner of Route 12 and Grand Avenue;
- Consider purchasing the properties along the South side of Grand Avenue east of Route 12;
- Explore creating a downtown Business Improvement District to generate additional income reserved for specific downtown area improvements (streetscaping, signage, façade improvement program, etc.);
- Promote downtown area recreation and destination activities; explore offering a free circulating trolley or tour boat service during Spring/Summer weekends to provide a way for visitors and residents to get around downtown;

Lakefront Park

- Create a visual connection to the Park from the Metra station and downtown area by improving pedestrian access through use of a bike trail, walking paths, landscaping and street furniture;
- Improve the Park area by installing a pavilion, picnic area/shelter;
- Generate activity by holding events such as fireworks shows, outdoor festivals, etc.