

DEVELOPER DISCUSSION PANEL

Summary Report: January 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 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.

A Developer Discussion Panel was held in Forest Park on **November 25, 2014** and this report summarizes the discussion and the panel's recommendations and suggested strategies.

Discussion Participants

Urban Land Institute & Regional Transportation Authority

John Gerut- Director of Housing, IFF

Mary Ellen Martin- Senior Vice President, Morningside Group

Cindy McSherry- Executive Director, ULI Chicago

Matt Nix- Principal, REVA Development Partners

Heather Tabbert- Manager, Local Planning & Programs, RTA

Art Zwemke- Manager, Robert Arthur Land Company

Village of Forest Park

Anthony Calderone- Mayor

Tim Gillian- Village Administrator

Jo Ellen Charlton- Village Planner

David King- Resident

Bob Cox- Resident



Background

During the previous decade, the Village of Forest Park saw significant investment from both the public and private sectors along Madison Avenue. The Village made pedestrian-friendly streetscape improvements while entrepreneurs opened new restaurants, shops and art galleries. To continue this success, the Village is now focusing on improving Harlem Avenue, its eastern border with Oak Park. The stretch of Harlem Avenue between the Harlem Avenue CTA Green Line and Harlem Avenue CTA Blue Line stops is an assortment of old housing stock, a church, local businesses in a strip mall and stand-alone buildings, national chains and a small amount of vacant land. The CTA and Pace Suburban Bus both run service along this corridor- Pace Bus route #307 connects to the Harlem CTA Blue Line Station and CTA bus route #90, Pace Bus routes #305, #307, #309, #313 and #757 connect to the Harlem CTA Green Line station.

Recently the Village completed the [*Homes for a Changing Region*](#) report in cooperation with Bellwood, Berwyn, Maywood and Oak Park to look at housing needs in these five communities (also known as the *West Cook County Housing Collaborative* or WCCHC). This project, funded by CMAP with support from the Illinois Facilities Fund (IFF), Metropolitan Mayors Caucus and Metropolitan Planning Council, recommends that Forest Park leverage its CTA stations to attract mixed-use, transit-oriented development. To support this effort, a Transit-Oriented Development Fund (TOD Fund), administered by IFF, can be accessed by multi-family developers for projects near transit and with an affordability component to provide funding for low-cost predevelopment and acquisition loans.

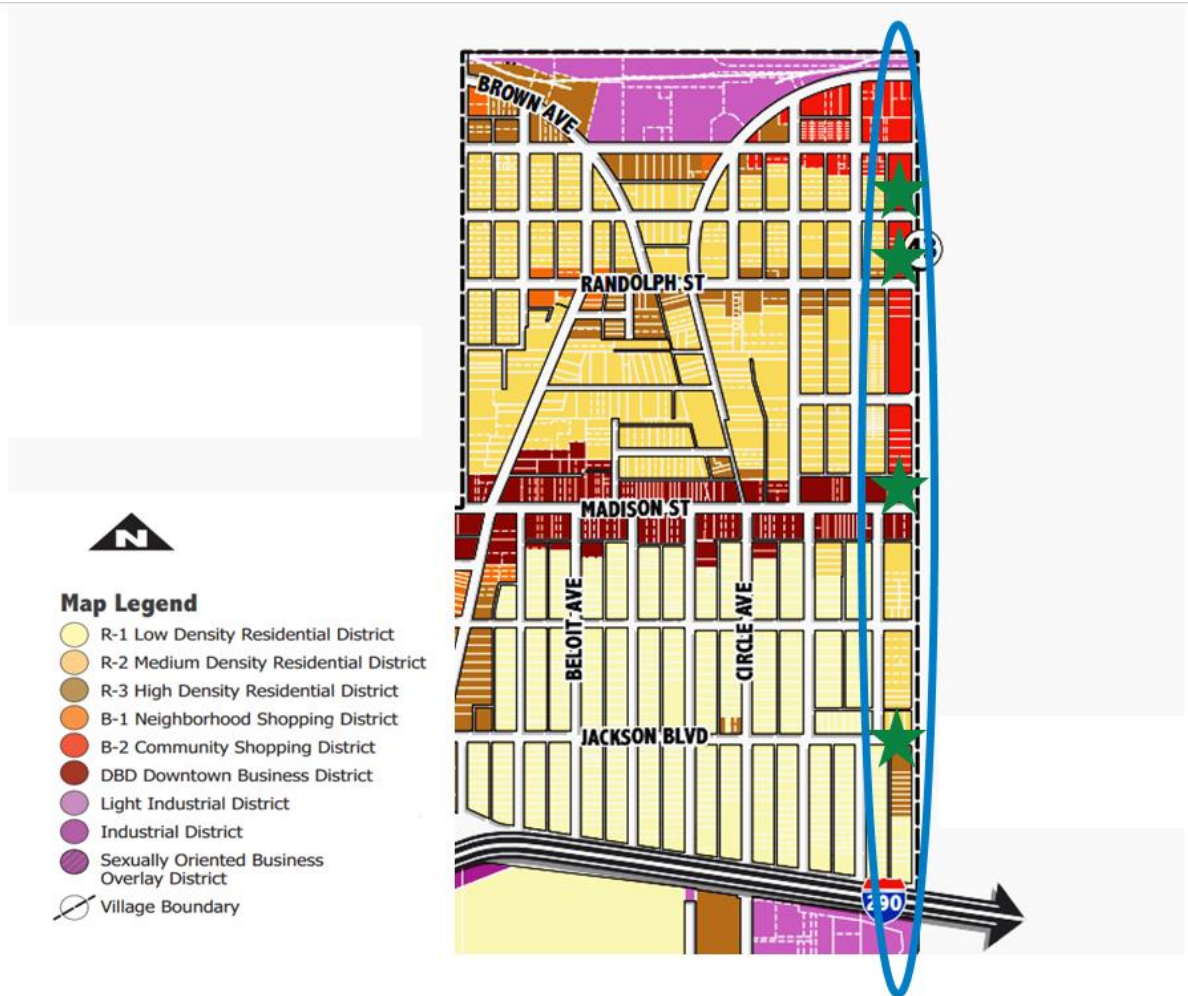
The Village is included in the RTA's [2015 Community Planning Program](#) and will receive assistance updating their zoning regulations along both Roosevelt Road and Harlem Avenue to allow and encourage TOD. This project will be undertaken in early 2015. Recommendations from this panel discussion will help the Village identify how they can revise their current zoning regulations along Harlem Avenue.

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 attract and encourage development along Harlem Avenue.

Study Area

The discussion focused on the Harlem Avenue corridor between the Harlem CTA Green Line station and the Harlem CTA Blue Line station (approximately 1 mile long). This corridor consists of mixed-commercial and residential uses as well as some vacant properties. The Average Daily Traffic count along this corridor is 37,100 (IDOT 2013).

The four focus sites are 109-123 Harlem, 137-149 Harlem, 325-329 Harlem, and residences along the 500 and 600 blocks of Harlem Avenue.



Key Recommendations

Overall Recommendations

- Update the zoning along Harlem Avenue to include form-based regulations to help attract development;
- Village should explore funding streetscape improvements along Harlem Avenue to create more of an identity as well as a safe pedestrian environment;
- Focus on commercial and rental opportunities;
- Capitalize on the developer-friendly and business-friendly aspects of the Village through enhanced and improved marketing/branding efforts;
- Prohibit new curb cuts along Harlem Avenue (and encourage a reduction in curb cuts as new projects are built);
- Utilize TIF as an incentive as well as mechanism to subsidize land acquisition;
- Focus on attracting couples without children, empty-nesters and younger people to the Village;
- Work to improve the performance and stigma attached to the school district;
- Support and encourage affordable and market-rate senior housing;

Site-Specific Recommendations

Circle Ave & Harlem/CVS Area Site

- Expand the RTA zoning update project to include the industrial and commercial properties along the south side of the Green Line tracks;
- Slowly transition the existing industrial uses out and introduce high-density, mixed-use development;
- Work closely with Oak Park to ensure that both sides of Harlem at Circle Avenue are developed as a “gateway” to both communities;

Village should consider matching the building heights and density allowed on the Oak Park side of Harlem Avenue at this corner;

Madison/Harlem Site

- Encourage a mixed-use development (6-7 stories);

U-Haul Site

- Work with U-Haul to relocate within the Village, allowing the Northwest corner of this site (immediately south of the CTA tracks) to be available for redevelopment;
- Encourage mixed-use (residential and first-floor grocery) high-density at this location;

Church

- Create a partnership with the church to be a champion for a senior housing product;