



Regional
Transportation
Authority

**DEVELOPER DISCUSSION
PANEL SUMMARY
REPORT**

A blue directional sign for Brookfield station. The sign is rectangular with a blue border and a lighter blue background. It features the word 'Brookfield' in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below it, there is a white arrow pointing left, followed by the text 'From Chicago' in white, sans-serif capital letters. On the right side of the sign, the words 'Platform 1' are visible in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The sign is mounted on a dark blue post. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with green grass and a brick building under a clear blue sky.

Brookfield
← **From Chicago** Platform 1

AUGUST 2018

INTRODUCTION

Since 1998, the RTA's Community Planning program has been providing funding and technical assistance for transit-oriented planning and implementation initiatives with local partners throughout the six-county service area. The program promotes walkable and sustainable communities around transit service by encouraging transit-supportive land uses and infrastructure, local economic development, and better access to employment centers and amenities.

The Community Planning program continues to be an important tool in the region for implementing transit-oriented development (TOD). Throughout the 20-year history of the program, the RTA has invested over \$20 million in federal, local and RTA funds and collaborated on over 200 projects. Collaborating partners include the RTA Service Boards (CTA, Metra, and Pace), all six county governments within the service area, several councils of mayors, and over 175 local governments.

Through its support for transit-oriented planning throughout the region, the Community Planning program builds on the strength of our transit network to promote more sustainable and livable communities that deliver value on our transit investments for both local partners and the Service Boards.



Grand Boulevard in downtown Brookfield

TOD Developer Discussion Panels

In 2011, the RTA expanded the Community Planning program to add implementation-focused projects, including Developer Discussion Panels. Since that time, the RTA has partnered with ULI Chicago, a professional organization of real estate and land use experts, to connect local governments with development professionals to facilitate practical discussions on the market potential of opportunity sites. These half-day events are intended for those municipalities that have completed a TOD plan, but need additional assistance in drawing transit-supportive projects within their study areas. The panels involve local government staff engaging with development experts to discuss potential strategies to effectively revitalize key parcels of land in a community. The Village of Brookfield was selected to participate in a panel after applying to the Community Planning program in 2017.

DISCUSSION PANEL PARTICIPANTS

The panel was held on the morning of August 2, 2018 at Brookfield Village Hall with the following participants. On the day of the event, Village representatives gave a presentation to panelists on recent planning and development activities before taking them on a tour of downtown Brookfield and the opportunity sites that the Village has identified for potential redevelopment.

Village of Brookfield

- Scott Bernacki** - Permit Services Coordinator
- Nick Greifer** - Community & Economic Development Director
- Michelle Ryan** - Board of Trustees
- Christopher Straka** - Planning & Zoning Commission

Urban Land Institute (ULI) and the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)

- Michael Horsting, AICP** - Manager, Local Planning, RTA
- Cindy McSherry** - Executive Director, ULI Chicago
- Matthew Nix** - Principal, Reva Development Partners
- Thomas Shanabrich** - Director of Finance, McCaffery Interests



Panelists discussing the study area



Touring the opportunity sites

BACKGROUND

Demographics

Brookfield is a suburb of roughly 19,000 residents, located in western Cook County, 13 miles from downtown Chicago. It is widely recognized as the home of the Brookfield Zoo, located near the intersection of 31st Street and 1st Avenue, which attracts visitors from across the region and beyond. Brookfield’s character is predominately residential with walkable neighborhoods of historic bungalow homes common throughout the Village. There are several commercial districts in Brookfield, as well. Downtown Brookfield, located near the Brookfield Metra station, and the Eight Corners district, located a half-mile northwest of downtown, are traditional pedestrian-oriented business districts while Ogden Avenue and 47th Street are auto-oriented corridors where businesses generally provide private off-street parking.

Demographically, Brookfield’s population has not changed significantly since the 2000 census. The median age of residents trends several years older than Cook County (35.9) and the region (36.5) at 39.3 years and median household income, at roughly \$75,000, trends significantly higher than both Cook County (\$55,521) and the region (\$63,441). Nearly 80% of housing in the Village was built prior to 1970 and 75% of all housing units are owner-occupied¹. According to Village representatives, there has been a recent increase in the number of young families moving to Brookfield.

Transit Service

Brookfield residents have transit access from both Metra commuter rail service and Pace bus service. Metra’s BNSF line, which connects downtown Chicago and Aurora, bisects the Village from east to west and includes three stations within the Village limits. The Congress Park station is located near the western boundary of the Village near Ogden Avenue, the Brookfield station is located at Prairie Avenue in downtown Brookfield, and the Hollywood station is located near the eastern boundary of the Village, just a half-mile south of Brookfield Zoo.

Brookfield is also served by three Pace fixed route buses: #302, #304 and #331. They provide access to destinations within the Village such as the zoo, Eight Corners and downtown, and connect to various other transportation and commercial destinations.

Planning & Development Projects

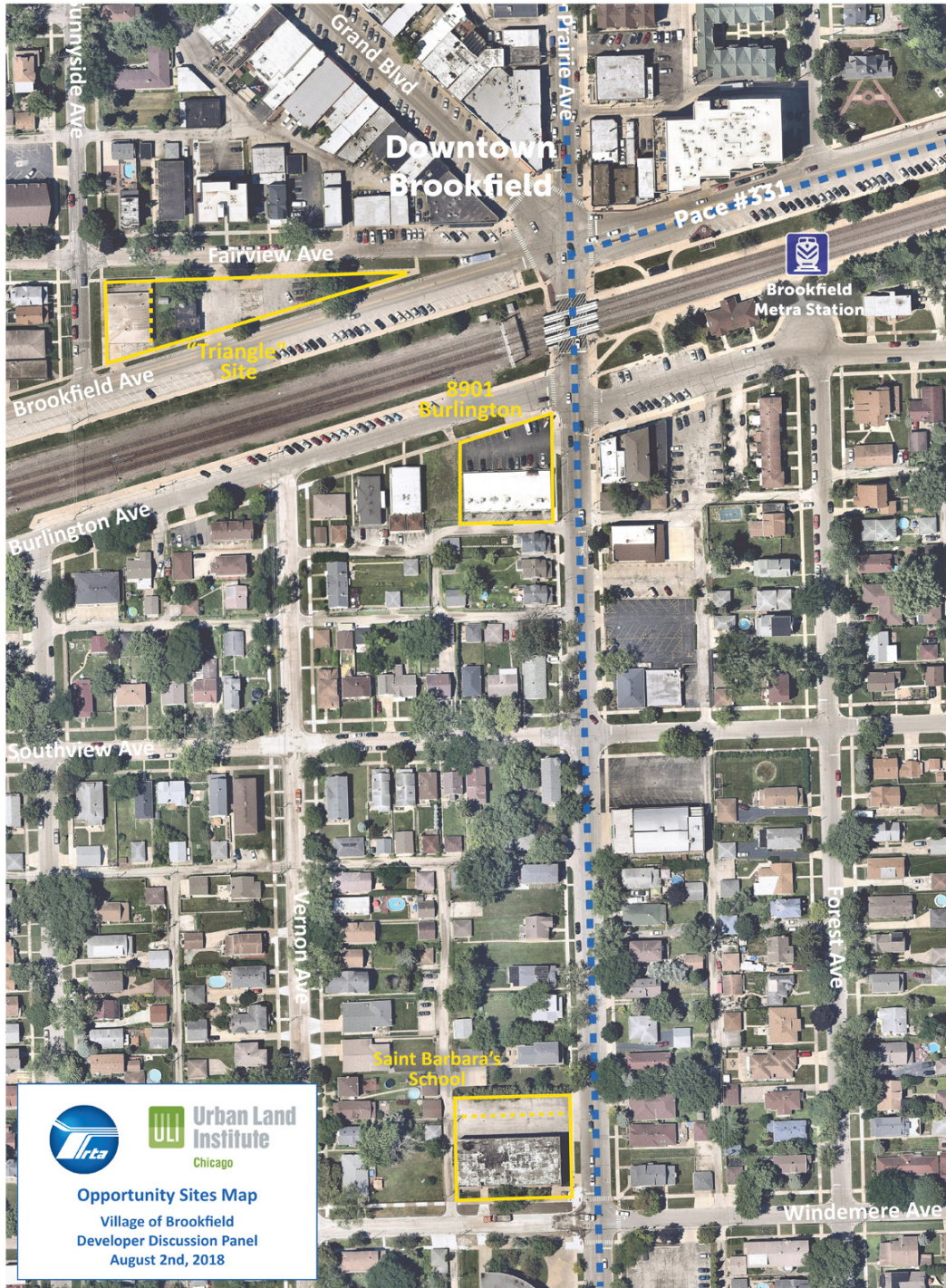
Brookfield has completed several planning initiatives in the past that promote TOD. The 2020 Master Plan, adopted in 2004, included a subarea TOD plan for the three Metra station areas. In 2017, the Village completed its Zoning Modernization project with assistance from the RTA, which established a transit-supportive form-based code for the three Metra station areas. The new zoning allows greater density in TOD areas, streamlines the development process and promotes a pedestrian-friendly built environment. Most recently, the Village adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2018 that includes TOD planning recommendations for downtown Brookfield.

Village leadership is focused on promoting TOD in its downtown within walking distance of the Brookfield Metra station. There has been recent developer interest in the area with the completion of a nine-unit multi-family building on Fairview Avenue and a six-unit multi-family building approved for Burlington Avenue, both within a block of the Metra station.



STUDY AREA

Downtown Brookfield is centered around the six-corner intersection of Brookfield Avenue, Grand Boulevard and Prairie Avenue. The Brookfield Metra station is located at the southeast corner of the intersection, between Brookfield's two other Metra stations, Congress Park and Hollywood. The downtown business district is concentrated on the block of Grand Boulevard directly northwest of the intersection.



Map of the study area

DOWNTOWN RECOMMENDATIONS

Several overarching recommendations for attracting private development and visitors to downtown Brookfield emerged during the panel's discussion.

Improve Downtown Brookfield's Pedestrian Environment

Downtown Brookfield has the benefit of a traditional street grid with walkable blocks and sidewalks, however, there are additional opportunities for improving the pedestrian environment.

- Convert the angled parking on Grand Boulevard to create space for wider sidewalks, streetscaping and other place-making elements that will make downtown Brookfield more attractive and welcoming to visitors. Streetscaping improvements could include elements such as banners, decorative paving, curb bump outs, ornamental lighting, and planters.
- Make the commuter parking that is parallel to the railroad available for overflow parking on nights and weekends, when it is not in demand for Metra riders.
- Add wayfinding signage to direct visitors to the downtown core as its location is not readily apparent from the Metra station and its main streets are not major thoroughfares.
- Improve pedestrian safety at the central downtown intersection of Grand, Prairie and Brookfield. The current geometry of the intersection creates long crossing distances for pedestrians. Additions such as curb bump outs, planters, and raised crosswalks can create a more amenable pedestrian environment.



Streetscaping and pedestrian safety improvements at the Oak Park Metra station

Grow Incrementally

- The Village should continue to pursue 6-12 unit multi-family development in the TOD area by working with developers who are interested in projects of this scale. Adding small-scale development in an organic nature will facilitate incremental population growth.
- Incremental growth may eventually lead to larger-scale TOD projects. At this time, however, the Village is not positioned to attract this type of development because there is not a demand for housing at such price points. Potential residents are more likely drawn to Brookfield because they want to own and single family homes are relatively affordable. Therefore, any proposals for projects such as six-story multi-family developments should be diligently reviewed for financial feasibility.

Incentivize Economic Development and Improvement Projects

Positioning the commercial district as an attractive location for new businesses is vital to the overall growth of downtown Brookfield as walkable amenities and services are a key selling point for TOD residential developments.

- Pursue a funding strategy for downtown improvements, such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), a Special Service Area (SSA), or Business Improvement District (BID)
- Start a façade improvement program for aesthetic improvements to downtown businesses; storefront improvements benefit the pedestrian environment by creating a more inviting appearance.
- Implement policies that support local businesses, such as allowing outdoor seating space; local establishments with character will attract more visitors to downtown and promote pedestrian activity.
- Provide funding incentives for projects that fit the Village’s planning vision when developers can reasonably show the need for assistance with funding gaps.



Recently completed multi-family housing in downtown Brookfield²

Take Advantage of Community Assets to Promote Growth

- Brookfield has appeal for young families that are looking to purchase a home but are being priced out of desirable city neighborhoods and more affluent suburbs. This is a clear target demographic for the Village to attract. Brookfield has several appealing qualities for young families such as quick and convenient Metra service to downtown Chicago, a variety of recreation options, and quality local schools, particularly at the middle and high school levels.
- There is potential to support the local economy and attract interest in downtown Brookfield by encouraging zoo employees and visitors to dine and shop there. The Village should consider strategies such as a marketing partnership with the zoo, wayfinding signage and a circulator shuttle service. In addition to drawing interest in downtown businesses, there is an opportunity to market Brookfield as an appealing place to live for the young families visiting the zoo.

OPPORTUNITY SITE RECOMMENDATIONS

Triangle Site (8820 Brookfield Avenue & 8921 Fairview Avenue)

The “Triangle Site” is located across Brookfield Avenue from the Brookfield Metra station, south of the central downtown commercial district on Grand Boulevard and directly west of the major downtown intersection of Grand, Prairie and Brookfield. It is a half-acre in area and made up of two parcels. The western parcel is occupied by a vacant building that is owned by the Brookfield Zoo and the eastern parcel is occupied by a vacant commercial building. The panel members offered the following recommendations.



Building owned by Brookfield Zoo on the Triangle Site



Narrow parcel geometry poses a development challenge

- Due to the unusual geometry of the site, the eastern portion is too narrow to support development. Efforts to attract new development on the site should focus on the western parcel that is occupied by the vacant building and the Village should pursue public space, such as a plaza, on the eastern portion. This may coincide with the closing off of Fairview Avenue, west of Prairie Avenue, to create a more amenable pedestrian environment. It is possible that the western portion of the site is adequate for a development such as a six to nine unit multi-family building, however, the aforementioned parcel geometry may pose challenges to potential developers.
- Adding public space and a feature such as public art, landscaping or a fountain at this location will improve the connection between the central area of downtown, along Grand Boulevard, and the Metra station.
- As an alternative to a new development project on the site, the Village should approach Brookfield Zoo about a partnership to activate the existing building with events related to the zoo, such as learning sessions and workshops. This is also a potential strategy to draw more visitors to the downtown.
- There is greater redevelopment potential for the existing automotive repair business located immediately to the north of the site on Fairview Avenue.

8901 Burlington Avenue

8901 Burlington Avenue is located directly southwest of the Brookfield Metra station and currently occupied by an active strip retail center that is over 40 years old. The property is .37 acres in area on a single parcel. It has a SA-1: Core Mixed Use designation under the Village’s recently adopted form-based code, which allows for the most intense level of development in the Village, up to six stories. A developer is currently pursuing approval for a mixed-use multi-family building on the vacant parcel located immediately to the west of the site. To the east of the site, across Prairie Avenue, is Irish Times, a popular restaurant and banquet hall with a long history in downtown Brookfield. The owner of Irish Times has recently acquired adjacent buildings for expansion or redevelopment of the site.

- The site has an advantageous location, across Prairie Avenue from the Metra station and Irish Times and roughly a block south of the heart of downtown Brookfield on Grand Boulevard. Establishing connections to these surrounding assets through elements such as streetscaping, pedestrian amenities, and branding will make the site more attractive for redevelopment.
- The pending development of the property to the west and a potential expansion of Irish Times could draw more activity to the intersection adjacent to the Metra station, drawing more attention to the site as a redevelopment opportunity.



Strip retail center at 8901 Burlington



The panel visits the site

Saint Barbara's School

Saint Barbara's School, located at 3934 Prairie Avenue, two blocks south of the Metra station, is occupied by a former private school that closed in 2012. The site is a half-acre in area, made up of two parcels that include the school and a small surface parking lot. In addition to its proximity to downtown Brookfield, it is also within walking distance of the Ogden Avenue commercial corridor.

- As the Village continues to pursue infill residential development in the downtown, affordable market-rate housing should also be a priority. Considering Brookfield's significant senior population, there will be demand for housing that allows them to age in place in a walkable neighborhood with access to public transportation. The existing school building offers such an opportunity through the possibility of a conversion to residential units. Other communities in the region have successfully completed adaptive-reuse projects to preserve existing buildings, such as Villa Park's Ovaltine Court, which converted Ovaltine's historic factory complex into housing. The Village should consider a partnership with an agency such as the Illinois Housing Development Authority if it wishes to explore the possibility of senior housing.
- At this time, there is not a strong market for new construction apartments that will rent for over \$2,000 per month in Brookfield. Affordable housing is one of Brookfield's points of attraction and conversion of the school building offers a practical means for adding more of it in downtown.



The panel visits the site



Ovaltine Court: adaptive reuse housing in Villa Park³

CONCLUSION

As an established suburban community with notable amenities like convenient transit access to downtown Chicago, walkable neighborhoods with historic housing stock, and numerous recreational options, Brookfield has clear strengths to build on when it comes to attracting new development and growing its population.

The Village has taken vital steps towards improving its downtown TOD area by implementing a new transit-supportive form-based code and recently completing a comprehensive plan that places special focus on the Village's Metra station areas. At the same time, there is growing interest in downtown development projects, seen in the construction of new housing and expansions to existing local businesses. The recommendations provided in this report will augment the knowledge gained through these recent accomplishments and guide Village leadership as they continue their effort to grow downtown Brookfield as a desirable transit-oriented community.



Brookfield Metra Station

REFERENCES

- 1 2015 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates
- 2 "8934 Fairview Avenue." Available Homes. Brightleaf Homes, n.d. Web. Summer 2018. < <https://www.mybrightleafhome.com/buy-a-home/listings/8934-fairview-ave>>
- 3 "Ovaltine Court." Apartments.com, n.d. Web. Summer 2018. < <https://www.apartments.com/ovaltine-court-villa-park-il/rq9mdk1/>>



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