

The Circulation and Access Plan describes vehicle, pedestrian, and transit improvements recommended within the Concept Plan. In order to create and sustain a vibrant business district that provides pedestrian-friendly connections to and from the Elmwood Park Station, the majority of improvements relate to Grand Avenue and to Conti Parkway. Proposed improvements are depicted in Figure 9: Circulation and Access Plan and briefly described below.

Vehicle Circulation, Access, and Parking

Grand Avenue's street paving width is 56-feet wide from curb to curb, but the street's travel lane configuration varies due to intermittent on-street parking, turning medians, and intersection turning lanes. This inconsistent configuration creates a disorienting environment, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with the corridor. The condition also limits on-street parking, which is desired as a pedestrian-friendly buffer between moving traffic and sidewalks. The Plan suggests Grand Avenue should be re-designed to consistently accommodate four 11-foot travel lanes and two 7-foot parking lanes from Harlem to 76th Avenues. An exception would be to allow for left-turn lanes at signalized intersections, and the low concrete medians near the at-grade crossing of Grand Avenue and Metra's Milwaukee District West (MD-W) Line cannot be removed.

The majority of properties fronting Grand Avenue currently depend on mid-block curb cuts to access off-street parking lots. This access configuration necessitates a center median turning lane along Grand Avenue. In order to re-design Grand Avenue with consistent on-street parking, curb cuts and single-use off-street parking lots need to be reduced. Potential solutions to this parking access dilemma are to provide shared municipal parking lots and to require side or rear yard access to parking lots.

As part of the Preferred Concept Plan, redevelopment projects depend on structured parking to eliminate the need for off-street surface parking and maximize site development potential. In order to provide safe access to proposed parking structures, new traffic signals are recommended on Grand Avenue at 72nd Court and at 74th Avenue. Prior to actual site redevelopment, these new traffic signals could provide new consolidated access points in order to reduce curb cuts, and remove the median turning lane on Grand Avenue. The proposed traffic signals would need to be discussed with IDOT, ICC, and Metra due to the nearby traffic signals that would need to be interconnected.



FIGURE 9

Circulation & Access Plan

July 2006



- Elmwood Park Metra Station
- Study Area Boundary
- Village Boundary
- Grand Avenue Re-Design
- New Traffic Signal Recommended
- Pedestrian Streetscape Enhancements
- Crosswalk Enhancements
- Commuter Parking (139 Spaces, Including 5 Accessible)
- Proposed Future Commuter Parking (90 Surface Spaces)
- Proposed Shared-Use Parking Garage Locations



Since Grand Avenue is under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the recommended street configuration, signalization, and access patterns will require a detailed engineering study to analyze potential impacts. The Village should discuss potential funding with IDOT for a preliminary engineering study for the Grand Avenue re-design recommendations. Federal funding is available for transportation projects that improve pedestrian access to train stations.

It is important to note that the at-grade railroad crossing with Grand Avenue is currently being studied for a possible grade separation. The current study will not be complete until late 2006. If a grade separation is deemed feasible and warranted, the implementation could take up to 10 years based on funding availability. Although the study's outcome may affect local roadway configuration, the Village should not delay in making Grand Avenue a more pedestrian-friendly street that connects with the Elmwood Park Station.

Pedestrian Circulation and Access

The current streetscape environment along Grand Avenue contains virtually no pedestrian amenities, and few street-level shopping opportunities. The Plan seeks to improve pedestrian amenities to complement and enhance the proposed mixed uses and residential uses along Grand Avenue. More importantly, the Plan recommends the creation of a unified business district--including Grand Avenue from Harlem and 76th Avenues, Conti Parkway, and the Elmwood Park Station--through a streetscape improvement program with the following pedestrian enhancements.

Streetlights

Pedestrian-scaled lighting is typically about 16-feet tall and focuses light on the sidewalk, which improves the pedestrian's safety and comfort. Recommended spacing is typically 60 feet on center. High-mounted streetlights illuminate the road and are meant for vehicle safety. Nevertheless, the style and pattern of the high-mounted streetlights could match the pedestrian-scaled lighting to create a harmonious and orderly impression when driving or walking along Grand Avenue and Conti Parkway.

The Village has recently installed new pedestrian lights onto the high-mounted streetlights from the 76th to Harlem Avenues. Nevertheless, this project does not preclude the possibility for new decorative streetlights in the future.



Streetlight Banners

Colorful banners are typically used to welcome visitors to a district and provide business or community information. In order to unify the business district along Grand Avenue from Harlem to 76th Avenues and along Conti Parkway, streetlight banners should be installed to brand this geographic area as “Downtown Elmwood Park.” The Village currently has plans to install banners on every other streetlight pole in this area.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks should generally portray an image of a well-maintained and quality business district. New sidewalks could consist of plain concrete with a brick paver edge treatment, plain concrete with a scored pattern, or exposed-aggregate concrete that provides texture and color variations.

Crosswalks

Well-maintained striped crosswalks indicate to pedestrians and vehicles that the pedestrian has the right-of-way within the crosswalk area. Crosswalks are recommended at every signalized intersection along Grand Avenues, as well as along all cross streets. Due to expanse of paving at the Grand Avenue and Conti Parkway intersection, a special scored concrete pattern is recommended to unify Grand Avenue, Conti Parkway, and the Elmwood Park Station. (Note: Any crosswalk treatments that require sub-surface treatments and pass over a bus stop should be designed with a reinforced pavement according to Pace standards.)

Street Trees

Street trees provide shade to pedestrians in the warmer months, and soften an urban environment dominated by concrete and asphalt. Since Grand Avenue does not contain overhead utility lines, a street tree that provides a canopy over Grand Avenue could be used.

Street trees are typically planted at 30 feet on center, and pruned to avoid blocking retail signage. In addition, it is important that trees do not interfere with Pace bus zones, which encompass an 85-foot length at corners. Street trees should not have any branches below 11.5 feet due to the height of Pace buses.



Street Furniture

Street furniture such as tables and benches help create an “outdoor room” environment and implicitly signal to pedestrians that they should linger in the public realm. Benches and trash receptacles are especially important at train and bus stops for commuter comfort, as well as within small parks and plazas along Grand Avenue and Conti Parkway. In order to maintain a clean sidewalk environment, trash receptacles should generally be placed within each block of the business district, and convenient to bus stops and outdoor seating areas.

Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding signage is important for both pedestrians and vehicles to travel to areas of interest within the business district. When a passenger departs from a train, they should be able to orient themselves towards Grand Avenue and Conti Parkway. In addition, signage should be used to clearly direct departing train passengers to nearby bus stops for transfer purposes. Similarly, vehicles along Grand Avenue should be able to easily locate the Elmwood Park Station and commuter parking areas. Due to the perception that there is a lack of business parking, consistent wayfinding signage could be used to direct vehicles to shared parking facilities and side street parking areas.

A more detailed streetscape study should be undertaken to determine the specific types and locations for all of these pedestrian amenities. Due to the cost of streetscape improvements, the Village may wish to pursue a phased approach that allows the Village to provide public improvements when a development is approved for a particular block area. However, if the Village is able to obtain funding to re-design Grand Avenue and construct pedestrian enhancements at the same time, the Village should consider an integrated improvement approach to ensure cost-efficient implementation. Tax increment finance (TIF) funding could be used for engineering and construction of a streetscape improvement program, and is described further under Plan Implementation.

Transit Access and Circulation

Current access and circulation patterns to and from the Elmwood Park Station could be improved for pedestrians, vehicles, and buses. As highlighted in the Preferred Concept Plan, the station



side redevelopment concept contains a transit plaza, a gateway park, a bus drop-off, a kiss-n-ride location, and pedestrian enhancements. The Village should discuss these concepts with IDOT, Metra, and Pace to determine engineering feasibility. Pace is willing to work with the Village to develop a bus stop shelter plan to conform to the overall design of the streetscape improvement program.

Due to the proposed transit plaza and gateway park, pedestrians would have greater northbound access to and from the station between Grand Avenue and Conti Parkway. Pedestrian access is currently mixed with vehicle access due to existing land uses and curb cuts. Additionally, there are recommendations to improve pedestrian access along Marwood Avenue west to Grand Avenue by completing the sidewalk from 77th Avenue to 77th Court and installing wheel-stops along the commuter parking area, which would prevent vehicles from encroaching upon the sidewalk area.

The two proposed public open spaces would also improve transit and vehicle circulation. The gateway park would contain open space, sidewalks, and curbs. East of 76th Avenue, five on-street parking spaces would be assigned as a kiss-n-ride location with 15-minute parking restrictions. At Grand Avenue and 75th Court, a bus pull-out would be located at the northern perimeter of the transit plaza with clear views of the train station. (Note: On-street parking cannot interfere with Pace bus operations which require an 85-foot zone for corner stops and a 125-foot zone for mid-block stops).

Finally, Metra has expressed a need for future commuter parking, particularly on the north side of the train station. To maximize existing parking resources, the Village could establish a free permit system for commuter parking along Marwood Avenue during peak hour use. For future parking infrastructure, Metra and the Village should explore the potential for a commuter parking lot on the north side of Grand Avenue at 75th Court. The single-story and auto-oriented land uses in this location are not transit-supportive. A commuter surface parking lot in this location would not only serve future parking needs, but could also be incorporated into a future mixed-use development project. Alternatively, future commuter parking demand could be accommodated in a parking structure as part of a mixed-use development along Grand Avenue between 74th and 75th Avenues. If the Village pursues the proposed kiss-n-ride, bus pull-out, or parking structure or surface lot for various uses, including future commuter parking needs, a public/private partnership could be formed between multiple parties, such as the Village, IDOT, Metra, and developers.

