

DEVELOPER DISCUSSION PANEL

West Chicago Summary Report (December 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.



West Chicago Metra Station (Photo Credit: Metra)

Discussion Participants

Urban Land Institute & Regional Transportation Authority

Tony Manno- Project Manager, Regional Transportation Authority

Mary Ellen Martin- Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Morningside USA

Cindy McSherry- Executive Director, ULI Chicago

Matt Nix- Principal, REVA Development Partners

Greg Terwilliger- Vice President, Novak Construction Company

Sarah Wick- RELATED Midwest

Art Zwemke- Manager, Robert Arthur Land Company

City of West Chicago

Honorable Ruben Pineda - Mayor

Michael Guttman – City Administrator

John D. Said, AICP - Director of Community Development



Central Main Street Retail Corridor (Photo Credit: Google Earth)

Background

Using primarily general corporate funds and, to a lesser extent, TIF funds, the City acquired the majority of the parcels in the Central Main Street Corridor and West Washington Street Area over time, with the ultimate goal of seeing them redeveloped as a means to enhance property values and encourage economic vitality in the Central Business District. By completing plans for these areas, the City has further supported redevelopment planning efforts, its interests in enhancing the local economy and tax base, and its commitment to transit-supportive development. These efforts consisted of the Central Main Street Corridor Redevelopment Plan and the Washington Street Redevelopment Project Plan.

The City's Central Business District is situated primarily along Main Street from the intersection of Washington Street to Route 59. Within the Central Business District are small shops, restaurants, offices and service uses. Mixed-use projects, constructed approximately 8-10 years ago are also present along the Main Street corridor. This area also features the City's Metra commuter rail station, with approximately 50 trains stopping per day (total inbound and outbound).

Part of the Central Business District, and many of the City-owned parcels, is located within the Turner Junction Historic District. The District contains a mix of architectural styles, with examples of several architectural periods ranging from the 1850's to the present. This District was established in 1991 in recognition of the history of the community (the first in Illinois to be created by the advancement of the railroads), to encourage maintenance and restoration of the historic elements of the building facades, to guide the design of new construction and maintain a complimentary and consistent streetscape. To that end, all renovations and new construction in the District requires Historic Preservation Commission review and approval through the Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) process.

To initiate CBD improvement efforts, the City first created a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District for this area in 1990, and, in 2013, extended it for another 12 years (to 2025). Through this TIF, the City has undertaken and completed numerous improvement projects, including the following:

- Streetscape improvements
- Metra commuter rail station enhancements and upgrades, including expanded parking areas

- Developer assistance in completion of two mixed use (commercial/residential) projects
- A facade grant program for downtown storefronts
- A retail and restaurant grant program for new and expanding businesses in the Downtown
- A pedestrian underpass reconstruction project
- Surface parking expansions and improvements
- Acquisition of numerous sites for eventual redevelopment

While the City has already expended considerable funds and efforts with Downtown improvements, the current financial condition of the TIF District is relatively healthy and stable. The City, in its 2013 TIF Extension Plan, estimates total spending (past, present, future) exceeding \$22 million for TIF-related improvements. Overall, property values in the District have increased over 113% during the first 23 years of the TIF. With anticipated redevelopment, values are estimated to increase an additional 126% in the next 12 years.

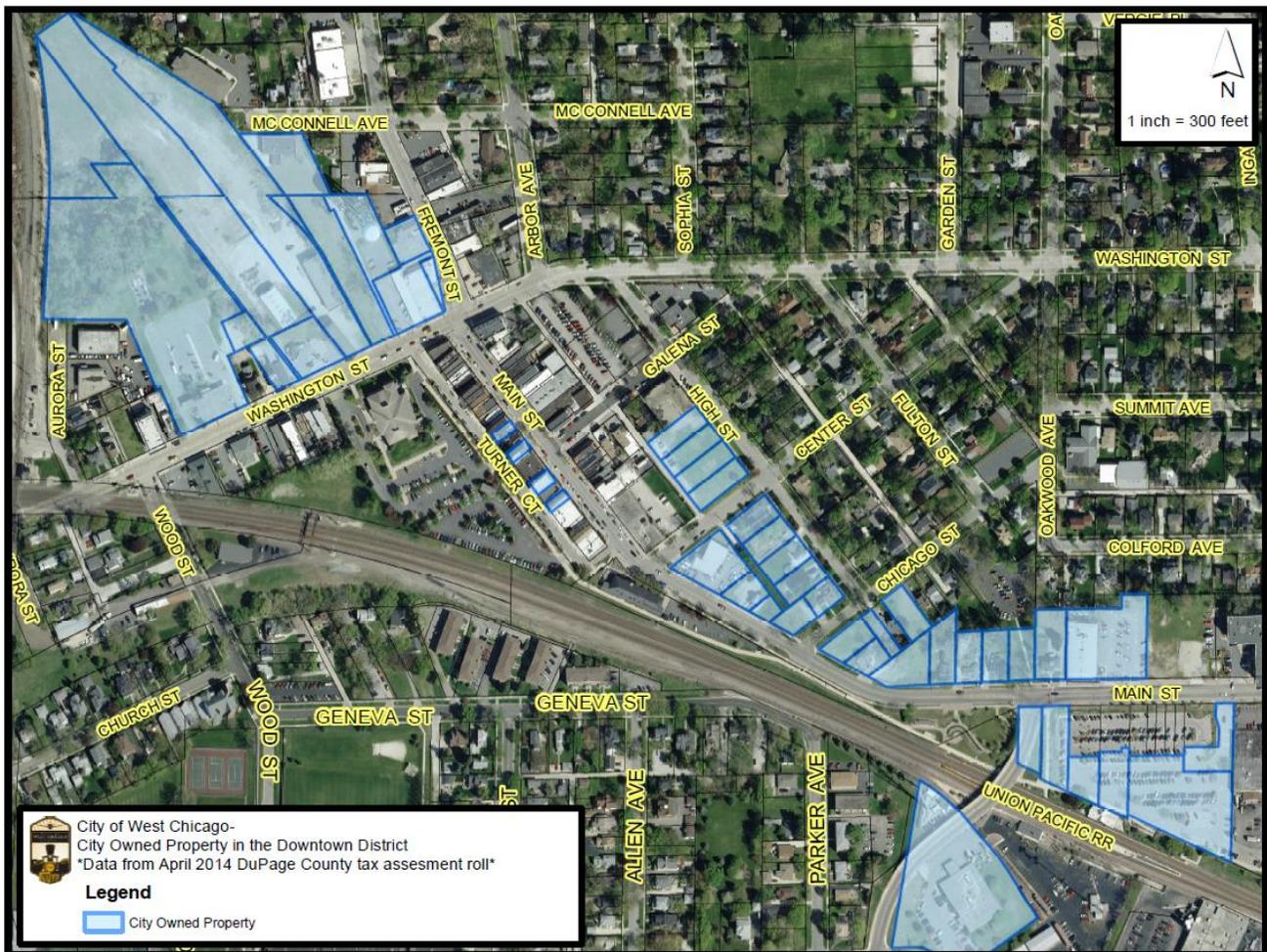
A Developer Discussion Panel was held in West Chicago on **October 21, 2015** to provide feedback to the City on the challenges being faced for development in the downtown area, the highest and best uses of key available sites that can support transit service, appropriate density for the station area neighborhoods, and how the City may best attract and encourage development in the downtown area. This report summarizes the discussion, the panel's recommendations and suggested strategies to attract new development.



Central Main Street Corridor (Photo Credit: Google Earth)

Study Area

The focus areas for the discussion were the Central Main Street area and the Washington Street area.



Key Recommendations

General Recommendations

- Embrace Hispanic demographic and promote the cultural strength and uniqueness of West Chicago:
 - Continue to support festivals and community events
 - Promote existing business development programs
 - Foster community stakeholder support to help create a grassroots organization to help promote existing businesses and attract new ones
 - Encourage the regional Chamber of Commerce to focus on local opportunities and support the downtown area
- Work with Republic Bank to create a small business program that provides support to new businesses (including a business plan template process);
- Work with Republic Bank to utilize their unused on-site parking for other Main Street area uses;
- Consider creating a town map highlighting local businesses, attractions, history, transit and bike path options;
- Explore creating a cohesive branding/signage plan for the downtown area;
- Reach out to Blue Island, Pilsen and Humboldt Park community representatives to share ideas, collaborate and cross-promote cultural opportunities;
- Explore Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ) funding for additional streetscape improvements such as lighting, crosswalks and additional pedestrian improvements along Main Street and Washington to encourage and improve walkability.

Washington Property

- Complete site cleanup and release an RFP/RFQ to solicit interested developers;
- Use the currently vacant Washington Property to hold concerts, festivals or a farmers market to generate activity in the short-term while still soliciting development interest for potential long-term investment and development.

- Work to attract a retail use at the old hardware store building on Washington at Main St.

Central Main Street / Prairie Path Bike Trail

- Connect with local developers and small home builders to gauge interest in townhomes/rowhomes on municipally-owned parcels;
- Enhance Prairie Path area (wayfinding signage, etc.) highlighting its connection to the downtown and also adjacent communities.

Depot Building

- Research potential tax credits and funding assistance for historic buildings to rehabilitate this site;
- Collaborate with a local bank (perhaps Republic Bank) to encourage their involvement in the rehabilitation of the Depot Building on Washington as well as other historic, underutilized structures ;
- Explore attracting a retail use (coffee shop, etc.) to the vacant Depot Building to cater to cyclists on the Prairie Path and residents.



Washington Street Property (Photo Credit: RTA)