

November 16, 2012

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# Developer Panel Summary Report

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Mokena, IL

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Prepared by:



## **Introduction**

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The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) has invested over \$3 million of its own funds during the past 13 years to complete approximately 75 transit-oriented development (TOD) planning studies through the RTA's Community Planning funding program. This program funds TOD planning studies 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.

While there are many success stories from communities that have implemented their plans, several communities have encountered obstacles and barriers to implementing recommendations found in their completed TOD planning studies. The RTA is continuing to invest in the communities we have worked with previously by offering an opportunity to receive additional technical assistance and support towards implementing their plans. In 2011, the RTA launched a new program, entitled *Setting Ideas in Motion: TOD Implementation Technical Assistance Program* targeted to those that have completed a TOD planning study through the RTA Community Planning Program and have illustrated a need for technical assistance and support with implementation. 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.

## **Developer Panel Participants**

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Tony Manno, RTA  
Cindy McSherry, ULI Chicago  
Shawn Temple, Weston Solutions  
Sarah Jane Wick, The Community Builders, Inc.  
Art Zwemke, Robert Arthur Land Company

## **Village of Mokena Participants**

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Joseph Werner, Village President/Mayor  
Kim Yockey, Village Planner  
Matt Ziska, Building and Planning Specialist  
Alan Zordan, Director of Economic and Community Development

## Background

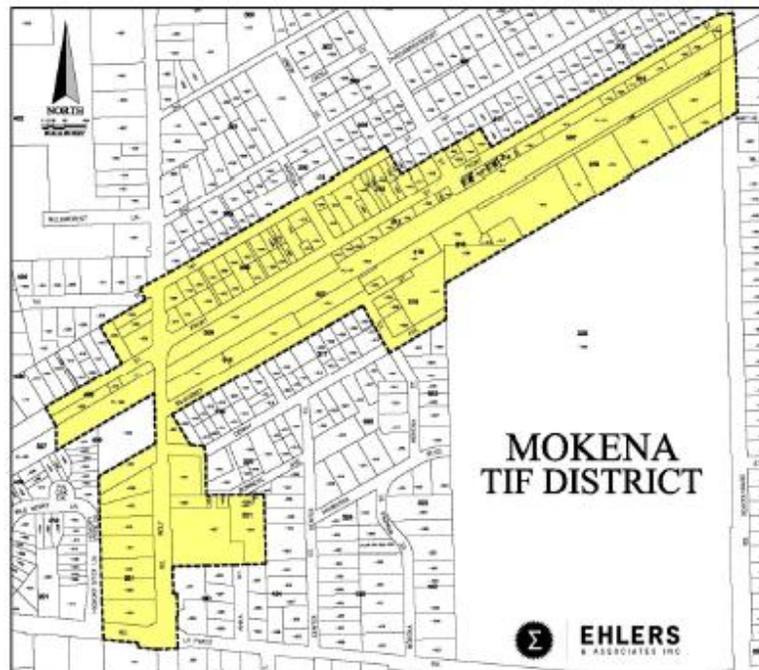
The Village of Mokena completed their Downtown Station Area Plan, funded by the RTA, in December 2008. The purpose of the plan was to increase the vitality of the downtown and enhance commuter ridership. To accomplish this, the plan focused on three specific areas of improvement: increased residential densities, increased commercial square footage, and increased commuter parking capacity.

The plan calls for three-to-four story mixed-use buildings on several key parcels of land within the TOD area. These buildings, combined with other multi-family condos and townhomes, will increase residential densities by 375 dwelling units and add 65,800 square feet of new commercial lease space. The plan also designates areas for up to 563 new commuter parking spaces.

One key component of the study is the inclusion of an alternate redevelopment plan. The preferred plan calls for the relocation of the existing Metra station approximately 800 feet to the east to align with Division Street to the north and the McGoveny-Yunker Farm to the south. The alternate plan keeps the Metra station in its current location. Other than the relocation of the Metra station, the two plans are substantially similar. The alternate framework plan is depicted below.



In accordance with the implementation strategies outlined in the Plan, the Village updated their development regulations to accommodate TOD and in 2009 created a TIF District for the majority of the station area.



### **Mokena Downtown Improvement Initiatives**

2001 – Streetscape improvements

2001 – Established a downtown farmers market

2002 – Established permit fee incentives for development

2008 – Completed RTA-funded TOD Plan

2009 – Established TIF District

2009 –2010 - Established a TOD overlay zoning district and updated development regulations

2011 – Updated fare boxes at Metra Station

2012 – Made various station area improvements for Quiet Zone designation

2013 – Way finding signage program approved for the downtown

## **Summary of Key Recommendations from Discussion**

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### **Short-Term**

- Capitalize on the historic assets in the Village, including the McGovney-Yunker Farm. Creating a destination, similar to the Naper Settlement in Naperville, would help bring attention to Mokena's history while creating activity in the downtown area.
- Consider and explore assemblage of contiguous parcels of land in the downtown area for future redevelopment. The property in foreclosure on Walnut Avenue may be a good catalyst. This will allow the Village to lead and participate in the redevelopment efforts, and will also be attractive to private investors. Facilitating land assembly from the necessary steps is attractive to private investors.
- Expand Village "toolbox" by exploring the creation of a Business Improvement District and Historic District in the downtown to increase involvement of the local businesses.

### **Long-Term**

- Explore larger economic development initiatives in the Hickory Creek Metra Station Area. Hotels, big box commercial, etc. will bring revenue to the Village and could also influence downtown redevelopment in the Downtown Station Area. Leveraging the two Metra stations as important Village amenities will help draw attention to both.
- Development on the immediate north side of the railroad tracks is not feasible due to the shallow depths of the parcels. The property on the south side of the railroad tracks (current location of the Metra station) is deeper and more appropriate for the type of development the Village is seeking. As a future consideration, the Village may explore a discussion with Metra about creating a mixed-use development on the Metra station/parking lot area that incorporates a commuter waiting area, commuter parking, and a mix of uses.
  - Potential relocation of the Metra station to the north side of the railroad tracks (on parcels that are otherwise too shallow for mixed-use development) was discussed during the Panel. This idea may not be feasible due to any existing Metra policies concerning station location; the Village is encouraged to contact Metra before this concept is explored further.
- Focus efforts on only one of the concept plans from the Downtown Station Area Plan; having more than one concept plan will not allow the Village to concentrate efforts in a definitive direction.