



DEVELOPER DISCUSSION PANEL

River Grove 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 Chicago suburban communities and development experts to shed light on the future of TODs and how this relates to the changing market and economy.



River Grove Metra Station. (Photo Credit: RTA)

Discussion Participants

Urban Land Institute & Regional Transportation Authority

Tony Manno- Project Manager, Regional Transportation Authority

Cindy McSherry- Executive Director, ULI Chicago

Greg Terwilliger- Vice President, Novak Construction Company

Sarah Wick- RELATED Midwest

Art Zwemke- Manager, Robert Arthur Land Company

Village of River Grove

Marilynn J. May- Village President

Jeff Weiner- Village Trustee

Lynn Bjorvik- Village Trustee

Frank Calistro- Village Comptroller

Mark Lucas- Village Engineer

Louis Vitullo- Village Bond Counsel

Phil McKenna- Village TIF Consultant

Ray Bernero- Economic Development
Director



Grand Avenue Streetscape (Photo Credit: RTA) 2

Background

The RTA funded the [Thatcher Avenue TOD Plan](#) in 2013 to evaluate specific opportunity sites within the ½-mile radius of the River Grove Metra station. This plan provides an inventory of existing conditions within the study area and provides strategies to build local and regional awareness of redevelopment opportunities. The TOD Plan has identified the wealth of existing public transportation options that exist in and near the study area including the Metra station and ample Pace bus service options throughout River Grove as well as access to the Cumberland CTA Blue Line station via bus or car. Additionally, in recent years the village has utilized the Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) to provide brick paver sidewalks and old-fashioned light fixtures throughout the study area. By maximizing the return on previous and continued investment the Village can create a strong sense of place through streetscape enhancements, gateway elements and transportation improvements.

With significant potential redevelopment opportunities adjacent to the River Grove Metra station, the Village of River Grove has taken a proactive approach to planning for potential TOD opportunities.

A Developer Discussion Panel was held in River Grove on **November 18, 2015** to provide feedback to the Village on the challenges being faced for development in the TOD area, the highest and best uses of key available sites that can support transit service, appropriate density for station area, and how the Village 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.



Site #1 at Thatcher & Center St. (Photo Credit: RTA)

Study Area

The focus area for this discussion is the River Grove Metra Station area.



Key Recommendations

General Recommendations

- Capitalize on River Grove's rich history as a town of local businesses (e.g. restaurants, bakeries, personal and professional services) by continuing to focus on attracting community/local retail or locally-owned national franchises;
- Establish relationships with local banks to help cultivate and encourage small business growth and continue to help existing businesses grow/expand within River Grove by helping facilitate expansion and relocations;
- Reinstate a façade and signage improvement program to help area businesses improve their storefronts while also creating a brand/character in the TOD area;
- Encourage existing businesses to consider additional ventures including an ice cream shop, live music venue, ethnic restaurants and local professional services;

Site #1

- Release an RFP/RFQ for this site to gauge local developer interest for market-rate or affordable apartment rentals and/or a mixed-income development with an affordable housing component;
 - The RFP/RFQ should allow an interested developer to control the site for up to 90 days without financial obligations. During that period of time the Village and developer can mutually decide whether to proceed with a project or not
- Development on this site must support the local rental market to be successful; consider incentivizing development by offering low land costs, infrastructure improvements and by revising building codes to allow for wood frame construction and other lower-cost materials without compromising public safety;

NEC of Center Street and Aux Plaines Avenue Site

- This site is appropriate for 2 or 3-flat buildings or townhome/rowhome development; it may not be suitable for a larger apartment building;

Bowling Alley Site

- This could be an ideal location for a Municipal Campus: Village Hall, Library, Village Green, etc. The vacant bowling alley building should be investigated to see if the structure is viable for a repurposed use;
- Alternatively this could also be an opportunity site for a privately-owned live concert venue similar to the now-closed Thirsty Whale;

Restaurant Site (Mia Passione)

- This is a great location for a restaurant and the Village should encourage, support and approve the expansion, illustrating River Grove's willingness to support existing businesses as they thrive;
- If the Village Hall were to be relocated (see above), plan for complementary uses along Thatcher Avenue;

Thatcher Woods Shopping Center

- This economic anchor for River Grove should continue to encourage additional boutique businesses along with regional retailers.



River Grove Metra Station/Crossing. (Photo Credit: RTA)