

# **Evanston, Illinois**

## **Central Street Corridor Plan & Streetscape Design**

### **Workshops #1 & #2 Summary**

---

#### **Prepared for City of Evanston by The Lakota Group**

Following is a summary of the input generated by participants during the initial visioning workshops conducted for the Central Street Corridor planning/design process. The Lakota Group, IEI Engineers, and Gewalt Hamilton Associates, the City's consultant team, will incorporate the information into the process.

During the workshops, a Visual Preference Survey was conducted to help participants think about various building types and styles that may or may not be desired along Central Street. The results of that survey have been summarized in a separate, companion report.

---

#### **Visioning Workshop #1: West of Hartrey – February 1, 2007**

#### **Constraints/Issues/Negatives**

##### **Overall**

- Although distinct areas along Central Street are considered pedestrian friendly, some blocks discourage walking and/or are considered unsafe due to sidewalks conditions, narrow sidewalks, lack of sidewalks and/or traffic movement along the street or through intersections.
- There is especially concern about pedestrian safety and movement near the Metra station and along the block between Hartrey and Prairie Avenues, which has significant pedestrian movement between the shops, park, and parking lot.
- There is concern that the small scale of several of the shopping blocks will be significantly changed due to new development that “fills out” the allowable zoning, possibly creating a “canyon” effect.
- New mixed-use buildings have been placed close to the street with minimum sidewalk room.
- The architectural design of new buildings has become a concern regarding the lack of articulation, scale, open glass storefronts, and physical character.

##### **Residential**

- Residents living adjacent to some commercial blocks expressed concern about the use of alleys for loading and the visibility of rear facades/upper floor windows/dumpsters/garages of new multi-story developments.
- There is concern that the density of housing near the transit stations may already be placing too much of a burden upon the area's traffic and character.
- Some expressed concern that rising home prices have made the area unaffordable for lower-income or younger homebuyers.

## **Commercial**

- There is a perception by residents that certain commercial uses are over-represented and may be hurting the vibrancy of certain retail blocks. These uses include banks, ATMs, real estate offices, medical offices and general office space.
- The retail environment lacks significant diversity, especially in convenience goods, restaurants and cafes, which forces residents to leave the neighborhood for everyday items.
- Some felt that the adjacent residential population lacks the density to support a greater range of “support” retail.
- There is a lack of “destination” retail that would create a more desirable, pedestrian-friendly area.
- Recent strip mall development was seen by some residents as a wrong development direction for the street.
- Some automobile repair shops lack sufficient landscaping and screening.

### **Commercial Blocks** (Gross Point/Crawford Intersection)

- As a gateway location into Evanston, this intersection has excessive amounts of exposed asphalt, utilities and buildings in need of rehabilitation or removal.
- The parking lot at CVS is unattractive and under-utilized.
- The drive-through at Starbuck’s is located near residences, and some expressed concern about automobile exhaust and speaker noise.
- Some sidewalks and crosswalks are in poor shape and not ADA accessible.
- Turning movements at some intersections are difficult and cause traffic back-ups.

### **Commercial Blocks** (Central Park to Ewing)

- Lack of consistent sidewalks and narrow sidewalk width has negatively affected the area’s walkability, created an uncomfortable shopping “street wall,” and reduced visibility for turning motorists as buildings are placed close to the corner.
- Although parking availability has improved, it is still inadequate at certain times.
- There is a lack of sidewalks near the commercial blocks, especially at the Mitchell Museum.

## **Transportation**

- As a major east-west corridor, the street is often congested due to its importance to residents, commuters, hospital and university traffic, and public transportation.
- The offset intersection at Lincolnwood/Central has had several accidents. Other offset intersections in commercial areas include McDaniel, Ewing and Hurd.
- Lack of consistent and/or clear crosswalk markings is hindering pedestrian movement.
- Many of the bus stops lack signage.
- Lack of benches and shelters at bus stops makes waiting for buses uncomfortable and discourages transit usage.
- There is concern that drivers don’t have good “sight lines” when exiting side streets onto Central Street due to buildings placed too close to corners.
- Commercial blocks lack adequate or well-placed bicycle racks.

- The lack of bicycle lanes increases competition between autos and cyclists.
- Excessive road widths/lanes and lack of a consistent speed limit encourage traffic to proceed faster than posted limits.
- Many of the alleys, especially those along commercial strips, are too narrow to easily accommodate a mix of uses, including truck deliveries and residential access.
- There may be a need for more parking near the busy shops between Hartrey and Prairie Avenues.
- Turning movements into the City's parking lot at Stewart Avenue are difficult.
- Concern about how the area's alleys can handle more traffic when most are narrow, have utility poles, and/or are in poor condition.
- The turning radius into alleys needs to be improved so that all types of vehicles can better turn into alleys from side streets and into residential alleys from commercial alleys.

### **Streetscape**

- Deteriorated, uneven or non-existent sidewalks and curbing, especially along commercial stretches, is affecting pedestrian safety and the corridor's overall physical attractiveness.
- Some felt that parts of the corridor, especially its western stretches, lacked adequate pedestrian lighting.
- The pots and planters located along the street are not in great condition.
- The south side of the street lacks sunlight, especially during the winter months, where taller buildings may block the light.
- The western end or gateway of the corridor is especially in poor physical condition, lacking sidewalks, trees, and decorative City streetlights.
- The west side of Green Bay Road needs streetscape improvements.
- The Northwestern parking lot is deteriorated and unattractive.

## **Positives/Strengths/Opportunities**

### **Overall**

- Central Street has walkable areas with a variety of shopping opportunities, including "Mom and Pop" or independent retailers.
- The area has a "hometown, quirky" feel... "hodgepodge is wonderful."
- Participants liked the "human scale" of the buildings and streetscape along Central Street.
- There is support for the implementation of environmentally friendly strategies and green building design.
- Residents like the scale and feel of Downtown Evanston, but they do not want to repeat it on Central Street.

### **Residential**

- High-quality residential neighborhoods offer a variety of housing styles/types.
- Community residents are open to transit-oriented residential density, as long as the "small town" feel of the area is preserved and the area's traffic network, parking facilities, and schools are not overburdened.

- New townhomes at the corner of Hartrey and Harrison are good example of development that should be encouraged.

### **Commercial Areas**

- Residents appreciate the diverse, eclectic, “funky” feel of the neighborhood, which has developed over time.
- The street has synergy between retail and public uses and amenities, including several parks, the hospital, university, North Branch library and post office.
- Residents appreciate the convenience and character provided by the presence of auto repair shops along the corridor.

### **Transportation**

- The area has easy access to jobs and shopping opportunities in Downtown Evanston and Chicago.
- Residents and workers have excellent access to public transportation, including Metra, the “EL,” and buses.
- The Metra Station was recently renovated and the embankment attractively landscaped.
- Central Street may have excessive lane widths, especially west of Lincolnwood, that provide an opportunity to widen sidewalks/parkways or add medians.
- Employee parking along the street is a concern.

### **Streetscape**

- Residents appreciate the tree canopy created by larger trees, especially in residential areas with large setbacks.

### **Open Space**

- Several parks are located along Central, providing a range of recreational activities, including tennis courts, playgrounds and seating areas.
- The North Shore Channel is a large greenway that is used for golf and rowing.

## **Development Ideas**

### **Overall**

- Several suggested that building heights be limited to 2 to 3 stories to preserve area character, with possibly going to 4 stories on a few blocks near transit.
- New developments should incorporate building step backs and rear setbacks to enhance the street’s character and transition to single-family homes.
- Design guidelines should be established that address building styles, materials, and form.
- Eclectic architecture should be encouraged rather than one style or “cookie cutter”-style design.
- Shadow studies may help to determine proper heights and setbacks.
- The location and size of Bent Park may make it an ideal for a community center.
- Certain building elements that do not reflect local character should be discouraged, including imitation vintage facades, over-designed corporate storefronts, and arcades.
- Need to balance economic development and tax base considerations with small unique character of the area.

- Make the street “walk worthy”...add more small retailers, improve streetscape conditions, establish regular maintenance program, calm traffic where appropriate, locate new development on blocks that can handle density.
- New building...the Renal Center, is prime example of what not to develop on the street.
- Proper setbacks are needed...wider sidewalks must be protected.
- A façade improvement program for existing merchants/property owners should be considered.

### **Residential**

- Underground parking should be utilized in condominiums and mixed-use buildings to ensure active and attractive uses at the street level.
- Parking requirements should be minimized to promote walkability and lessen automobile dependency.
- Courtyard buildings that break-up mass and provide light and green space should be encouraged.

### **Commercial Blocks** (Central Park to Ewing)

- If the street configuration is changed to “square up” the Lincolnwood/Central intersection, a neighborhood plaza/gathering place should be considered adjacent to the ice cream shop.
- The purchase of the bank parking lot at Lincolnwood for public parking could ease parking issues.

### **Transportation**

- A shuttle bus should be considered between Metra and Ryan Field/Hospital to reduce traffic congestion, possibly traveling the entire street.
- Parking decks should not be utilized, except if they are well-designed and properly located.
- Consider a parking deck on the NU parking lot or shared parking.
- Consider using wide sidewalks or park edges for angle parking to increase parking spaces in underserved commercial blocks.
- Consider traffic calming ideas for the overall length of the street.
- Consider increasing alley width.... “not too narrow and not too wide”.
- Difficult to navigate the Gross Pointe/Crawford/Central intersection.
- There is “lane confusion” at some intersections and in locations where street narrows.
- There was question about the timing of traffic signals.

### **Streetscape**

- Building setbacks should be increased on certain blocks to enhance the pedestrian environment, create interesting spaces and allow for outdoor dining.
- Sidewalk “bump-outs” should be considered and sidewalk widths increased to improve walkability and pedestrian safety (e.g. Central Park, Lincolnwood, and Hurd).
- Sidewalk widths should be consistent.
- The Hot Dog Island site has potential as green gateway into the community or restored as a community “icon.”

- Desire expressed for consistent, but low-key streetscape elements, including light poles, trash receptacles and news boxes.
- The overuse of decorative features, including brick pavers, low-rise planters, or stone caps on planters, were seen as possibly too costly, obstructive to pedestrian flow, and contrary to eclectic character of the neighborhood.
- Banners affixed to light poles could help tie the various retail nodes together and foster a unified image of the area. One merchant expressed a concern that the current poles cannot support the wind loads for banners.
- Try to tie together the commercial blocks with coordinated, similar streetscape improvements.

## **Visioning Workshop #2: East of Hartrey – February 8, 2007**

### **Constraints/Issues/Negatives**

#### **Overall**

- There is concern that the small scale of several of the shopping blocks will be significantly changed due to new development that “fills out” the allowable zoning, possibly creating a “canyon” effect.
- Although distinct areas are pedestrian friendly, other sections discourage walking as a result of lack of interest, visual barriers (e.g. viaducts), or safety concerns.
- The good “feel” of the overall character of the street is deteriorating....there are “crummy bits” that need improvement.

#### **Residential**

- Residents living adjacent to some commercial blocks expressed concern about the use of alleys for loading and the visibility of rear facades/upper floor windows/dumpsters/garages of new multi-story developments.
- There is concern that the density of housing near the transit stations may already be placing too much of a burden upon the area’s traffic and character.
- Some expressed concern that rising home prices have made the area unaffordable for lower-income or younger homebuyers.

#### **Transportation**

- As a major east-west corridor, the street is often congested due to its importance to residents, commuters, hospital and university traffic, and public transportation.
- Lack of consistent or clear demarcation of crosswalks is hindering their effectiveness.
- Congestion on Central Street is causing spill-over effects onto residential streets, as drivers attempt to bypass traffic or commuters look for parking spaces.
- Many of the bus stops lack proper signage.
- Lack of benches and shelters at bus stops makes waiting for buses uncomfortable and discourages transit usage.
- Retail districts lack adequate or well-placed bicycle racks.
- The lack of bicycle lanes increases competition between automobiles and cyclists.
- Excessive street widths/lanes and lack of a consistent speed limit encourages traffic to proceed faster than posted limits. Several people said they have experienced unsafe traffic movement from drivers quickly merging into reduced/narrowed lanes.
- Many of the alleys, especially those along commercial strips, are too narrow to easily accommodate a diverse mixture of uses, including commercial truck deliveries and residential access.
- Lack of drop-off/pick-up lanes at Metra and CTA ‘El’ is resulting in vehicle and pedestrian conflicts.
- Walking conditions are poor and perceived to be unsafe along the North Shore Channel bridge due to high curbing and narrow sidewalks.
- There is a lack of safe, pedestrian crossings at the Peter Jans golf course.

- The Metra viaduct and CTA station/viaduct are in disrepair and are both unattractive and “unfriendly” to pedestrians and drivers.
- Bus shelters are not present at most bus stops and the CTA ‘El’ station.
- Several alleys that are in highly visible locations are not well screened or buffered, are in disrepair or are not properly aligned with street.
- The Central Street/Green Bay Road intersection has poor turning movements/visibility, traffic congestion, and narrow sidewalks.
- Need an education outreach program to remind drivers that they are to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks.

### **Streetscape**

- Some business signs are considered out of scale or character with the area.
- Overall signage is considered deteriorated, confusing, or non-existent (e.g. directional signage, parking signage, merchant banners, and store signage.)
- Some sections of sidewalk are not well-lit for pedestrians.
- There are deteriorated, uneven or non-existent sidewalk and curbing, especially along commercial stretches.
- Buildings on the south side of the street block sunlight on sidewalks, especially during the winter months.
- Most of the planters along the street are in fair to poor condition, and have not been well maintained.
- If the streetscape is improved along Central Street, there is concern about future maintenance....who will do and will it be done regularly.

### **Commercial Blocks**

- There is a perception by residents that certain commercial uses are over-represented and may be hurting the vibrancy of certain retail strips. These uses include banks, ATMs, real estate offices, medical offices and general office space.
- Narrow sidewalks discourage outdoor dining/seating.
- Some were concerned that the adjacent residential population lacks the density to support a greater range of ‘support’ retail.
- The CTA ‘El’ station interior space is underutilized and “unfriendly.”
- On-street and public lot parking meters, which have a 2-hour time limit, do not provide enough time for evening activities, such as restaurant dining.
- Double-parking by delivery trucks impedes traffic flow.
- Some are concerned that the growing presence of regional and national franchises is weakening the area’s unique, small independent retailer character.
- Some new developments have shallow retail depths, which may lead to ineffective retail space.
- The Metra viaduct serves as a barrier between more viable retail to the west and “declining” or “struggling” retail area to the east.
- The Green Bay Road intersection crosswalks and curbs are in disrepair and narrow.

## **Open Space**

- There is a lack of public parkland east of Green Bay Road.
- Independence Park is a large open space, but it lacks attractive seating for area shoppers. Landscaping along its frontage also could be improved.
- Independence Park has equipment for children, but it is not oriented to use by other age levels.

## **Positives/Strengths/Opportunities**

### **Commercial Blocks**

- Central Street has walkable areas with a variety of shopping opportunities near residential neighborhoods, including “Mom and Pop” or independent retailers.
- Participants liked the “human scale” of development along Central Street and its “quirky charm”.
- The area has a “small village within the City” feel ...a “European village” character.
- There is support for the implementation of environmentally friendly strategies and green building design, such as LEED standards or adaptive reuse.
- Community residents are open to transit-oriented density, as long as the “small town” feel of the area is preserved and the area’s traffic network, parking facilities, and schools are not overburdened.
- Residents like the scale and feel of Downtown Evanston, but they do not want to repeat it on Central Street.
- The character of the built environment along Central Street was considered neither too urban nor too suburban, and a very positive attribute of the area.

### **Residential**

- High-quality residential neighborhoods with a variety of housing styles/types along Central Street.
- New townhomes at the corner of Hartrey and Harrison are a good development example.
- There is a strong sense of pride of ownership among local residents.
- Participants expressed a desire for affordable housing opportunities to be available.

### **Transportation**

- Easy access to jobs and shopping opportunities in Downtown Evanston and Chicago.
- Accessibility to public transportation.
- The Metra Station was recently renovated and its embankment attractively landscaped.
- Central Street may have excessive lane widths, especially west of Lincolnwood, that provide an opportunity to widen sidewalks/parkways or add medians.
- “Double parking” of delivery vehicles and short term shoppers (going to quick restaurants) is backing up traffic.
- Some participants said new development should provide enough parking so as not to overwhelm the streets or neighbors.

### **Streetscape**

- Residents appreciate the tree canopy created by larger trees, especially in residential areas.
- Several residents liked the less polished, less uniform streetscape conditions that now exist, such as merchant-provided planters. Others said certain aspects of the streetscape, such as garbage cans and benches, could be uniform.

### **Commercial Blocks**

- Residents appreciate the convenience and character provided by the presence of auto repair shops.
- Residents appreciate the diverse, eclectic, “funky” feel of the neighborhood, which has developed over time.
- The street has synergy between retail and public uses and amenities, including several parks, the hospital, university, North Branch library and post office.

### **Open Space**

- Independence Park is an important open space for library patrons, shoppers, and parents with children.

## **Development Ideas**

### **Overall**

- Several suggested that building heights be limited to 2 to 3 stories. A few participants were comfortable with 4 or 5 story heights in appropriate locations such as areas along Green Bay that are not in smaller-scale commercial areas.
- New developments should incorporate building step backs and rear setbacks to enhance the street’s character and transition to single-family homes.
- Design guidelines should be established that address building design, materials, and form, but not become “taste police” and force one style...must be eclectic.
- Planning should consider the “character zones”, differences between uses and sub-zones, and the “Main Street” role of Central Street, rather than approach it as a “corridor” to travel through.
- Codes or standards should consider multiple building heights on single blocks.
- Certain building elements that do not reflect local character should be discouraged, including imitation vintage facades, over-designed corporate storefronts, and arcades.

### **Residential**

- Underground parking should be utilized in condominiums and mixed-use buildings to ensure active and attractive uses at the street level.

### **Transportation**

- A parking deck on the NU parking lot should be considered for shared parking.
- A small parking deck on the City parking lot at Stewart Avenue.
- Improved screening and buffering of the NU parking lot should be considered.
- Pedestrian crosswalk visibility and safety should be improved with wide “zebra” striped markings, easy to see, bright lighting, and consistent signage.
- Encourage collaboration between this planning process and the city’s overall bike plan.

- Consider constructing overhead walkways to the Metra Station to allow pedestrians to avoid crossing the Green Bay/Central Street intersection.
- Investigate reconfiguring Poplar and Broadway to allow for a new development site and to improve traffic flow.
- Consider traffic calming measures, but the street must handle regional access for north side of City, hospital, and the university.
- Consider consistent traffic speeds along the entire length of street.
- Add “drop-off” lanes near transit stations.
- Consider formal arrangement with Chase Bank for restaurant parking.

### **Streetscape**

- Consistent, “low-key” streetscape elements.
- Brick pavers and decorative planters were seen as possibly too costly and contrary to the area’s eclectic character.
- Sidewalk planters may be constructed with built-in benches.
- Light pole banners should be used to create linkages between the various retail areas.
- Sidewalk widths should be consistent
- Improve visibility of sidewalks and intersections by placing streetlights at a regular and appropriate distance.
- Brighter streetlights at intersections with higher traffic and pedestrian volumes should be considered.
- Consider improvements to Independence Park including more seating, chess tables, and bike racks.
- Building setbacks should be increased on certain blocks to enhance the pedestrian environment, create interesting spaces and allow for outdoor dining.
- “Green up the Gateway” at Gross Pointe/Crawford/Central.

### **Commercial Blocks**

- Signage guidelines should be created so that new signs match the character of the area.
- Shared parking lots should be encouraged.
- Parking meters should have longer time or be free during evenings and weekends.
- Independent and unique retail uses should be encouraged to maintain the eclectic character and promote the area as a regional destination.
- Retail depths in new developments should be at minimum 50 feet.

### **Commercial Blocks** (Stewart to Prairie)

- Parks, library and post office are considered important public amenities for the area.
- Strategies should be explored for using Independence Park as a site for more neighborhood activities or festivals.
- The possibility of adding angled parking along Stewart Avenue should be explored.
- The Chase Bank parking lot could be the site of a parking deck and/or a mixed-use development.
- The Paint Store also may have redevelopment potential oriented both to the Metra station and surrounding low-scale commercial blocks.

- Highly visible alleys should be improved and buffered (e.g. alley next to Symphony's and the alley alongside the Chase Bank parking lot).
- Landscape improvements should be encouraged on the Christian Science site.
- Only retail uses should be encouraged at the street level in some locations, while office and residential uses should be encouraged on upper stories.
- The Stewart Avenue public parking lot spaces and access points should be reconfigured to provide more screening and better traffic flow.
- Explore strategies for providing economic support for retail development.

### **Open Space**

- In addition to improved landscaping, Independence Park should be renovated to encourage use by a wider segment of the population.