

Evanston, Illinois

Central Street Corridor Plan & Streetscape Design

Community Workshop #1 Summary – March 1, 2007

Prepared for City of Evanston by The Lakota Group

Following is a summary of the input generated by participants during the March 1, 2007, Community Workshop 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.

Issues & Opportunities

The following were added to the State of the Corridor summary that was presented by the consultant team:

Overall

- Where feasible, new development should incorporate green design elements such as green roofs.
- Central Street should be considered as a “neighborhood” rather than a “corridor.”
- Renovation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings should be considered before new development.
- Incorporating blocks south of the Gross Point/Central/Crawford intersection and east of Ridge into the study should be considered.

Transportation

- The frequency/timing of bus routes along Central Street is a concern on Saturdays and not available on Sundays.
- The potential of a shuttle or trolley bus should be considered.
- The planning process should consider the Evanston Bike Plan.

Commercial

- The Post Office and Library are considered important neighborhood amenities.
- Support was expressed for the retention of existing auto body shops and gas stations.
- Arcades and large eaves over sidewalks on new commercial or mixed-use buildings should be discouraged.

Land Use/Zoning

Overall

- Limiting height in the R5 areas to 4 stories was considered a good approach.
- Keeping the current 3-story height limit in the B1a District was considered a good approach.

- Reducing building height to 3 stories in the B2 District between Hartrey and Eastwood was considered a good approach to controlling density/bulk on those blocks.
- There was support for keeping the current 4-story height limit near the Metra station, but not going to 5 stories.
- East of the Metra Station from Poplar to Ashland was seen as a 3 to 4 story zone.
- A suggestion was made to downzone the O1 office district to three stories or 40 feet maximum.
- A suggestion was made to downzone the entire corridor.
- Current residential setbacks from property line to building of 27 feet were seen as appropriate west of Hartrey. With sidewalks and parkways, the additional green space between the curb and the property line should be at least 10 feet wide.
- A more consistent setback for the residential blocks east of Eastwood is needed since buildings on those blocks vary in setback.
- Some supported lowering parking space requirements to encourage transit use near the stations, while providing sufficient retail parking in mixed-use developments.
- A suggestion was made that a form-based code rather than a traditional zoning ordinance should be considered to ensure that appropriate building forms and architectural styles are implemented on a block-by-block basis.
- Several participants noted that the area has smaller buildings and eclectic architecture, and that long/monotonous/unarticulated buildings should be avoided. If developers assemble several parcels, then design guidelines and/or a form based zoning approach should be used to “break up” the look of a larger building into smaller elements scaled to the context of Central Street.
- There was support for encouraging ground floor retail spaces with at minimum 50-foot depths in new developments to create active, viable shops.
- It was also suggested that local small businesses be encouraged to relocate into new developments along the street.
- Parking lots behind buildings and not fronting streets received strong support.
- There was support for encouraging underground parking where feasible in new developments.
- There was support for stepbacks at the rear of buildings facing single-family homes.
- There was support for stepbacks at upper stories to minimize the perceived height and mass of buildings.

Concepts

The following are more specific comments and input regarding the range of development and design concepts presented at the workshop:

Gross Point to Marcy Avenue

- Several tables expressed support for the “Mid” concept.
- The two-story office complex (“Max” Concept) on the southwest corner of Crawford/Central also received positive feedback.

- There was support for the redevelopment of the Citgo site, and one table suggested that this might be an appropriate place for 4 stories.

Marcy Avenue to Ewing Avenue:

- Several tables expressed support for the “Mid” concept, especially for the congested White Hen/Blockbuster corner.
- The need for intersection realignment at Lincolnwood was questioned by several tables due to cost, presence of an existing signal, and possibility that traffic problems could be transferred north to Hartzell.
- Some felt that changes to the Lincolnwood intersection should not impact on-street or off-street parking in the immediate area.
- A pocket park next to Hartigan’s Ice Cream at Lincolnwood was considered desirable by a number of tables if Lincolnwood was realigned.
- An indent or pull-in lane for buses at Bent Park should be explored.

Hartrey Avenue to Poplar Avenue:

- There was support for the “Mid” concept as some felt that the 5 stories at the Metra station shown in the “Max” concept would not fit. Buildings at the Green Bay intersection should especially be stepped back to articulate the buildings and create variety at this gateway corner.
- Many tables preferred the “Max” concept for realignment of Stewart Avenue to a 90-degree intersection with Central, reorganization of the public parking lot, and significant renovation of Independence Park. A few suggested that no fencing be used around the Park, while others liked the idea of framing the park so that pedestrians are channeled to crosswalks.
- There was support for a courtyard building approach with stepbacks for the Epco site on Green Bay, south of Harrison.
- Although there was concern expressed at the possibility of “closing” Harrison, several tables expressed interested in finding improved configurations for the street.
- One table suggested limiting height to 2 stories for these blocks.
- One table suggested that the Library be moved to the landmark building on the southwest corner of Hartrey and Central.
- The addition of some short-term parking meters (15-min.) was seen as beneficial by most to accommodate quick in/out traffic.
- Designated “Kiss ‘n’ Ride” drop-off lanes on both sides of Central on Poplar were seen as good ideas, although there was some concern about having them on the north side of Central as people would have to cross to the Metra station.

Poplar Avenue to Bryant Avenue:

- There was support for realigning Broadway at Poplar to consolidate the intersection, although some tables felt that this change might not do much to solve traffic concerns in this location.

- There was significant support for physically improving the Ryan Field parking lots/stadium area, including fixing stormwater problems and adding landscaping/paths/plazas/fencing/signage/seating.
- There was also support for a shared parking deck at Ryan Field west of Ashland. A deck would need to have good architecture due to its visibility at this highly visible location.
- There was support for retail frontage, particularly in front of a parking deck.
- There was less support for retail development directly in front of the stadium.
- One table suggested using part of the parking lot for a University visitor's center (as noted, the Max concept had small buildings at the corners of the stadium that could include a visitor center, sports museum, concessions, and tickets sales.)
- There was a question about the ability to tailgate in a parking deck and replacement bus parking (the concepts did not envision tailgating in the deck and bus parking would need to be moved to another location within the lots).
- 1620 Central – National-Louis University is negotiating to use the vacant office building at a site for its Pace Program for young adults with multiple learning disabilities. Parking needs should be minimal.
- One table suggested a landscaped buffer along Central similar to the one at Evanston Hospital.
- There was support for the transit plaza concept which involved improving the CTA station entrance/golf course starter shack as an attractive plaza with wider sidewalks, decorative fencing, improved landscaping, and seating.

Streetscape

Overall

- Preferred crosswalk elements included wide/zebra-striping, countdown timers, bump-outs in retail areas, cross walk warning lights, and, possibly LED lights. Decorative pavers or stamped concrete were not that preferred.
- Support was expressed for a 14-foot sidewalk (curb to building) along all commercial blocks where feasible.
- Support was expressed for 18-foot alleys as a new standard, particularly with screening and attractive rear building façades.
- There was significant support for the narrowing Central west of Lincolnwood to reduce weaving and speed of traffic and increase sidewalk widths. There was some concern that bottlenecks might be created if motorists can pass left turning traffic at busier intersections. Separate, left-turn lanes were suggested as a possible solution.
- Many felt that a uniform streetscape similar to The Glen should be discouraged.
- It was suggested that brighter lighting should be a priority as some retail blocks are considered “dimly-lit.”
- The planting of native trees was suggested, raised planters should be limited, moveable planters done well are okay, add more bike racks.