



Section 4: Implementation

Overview

A major commitment will be needed by City staff, the local Aldermen, civic groups, and business/property owners to implement the Central Street Master Plan. An implementation strategy should include the following components:

- Zoning/Guidelines Code Changes
- Priority Projects Identification
- Streetscape Design/Engineering
- Capital Improvement Programming
- Façade Improvement Program Expansion
- Communication/Coordination (local, regional & state levels)

Along with the above initiatives and actions, there are a variety of funding sources that should be explored to address building, streetscape, and infrastructure improvements, as well as development along Central Street. These potential sources include:

- State and Federal funding programs.
- City of Evanston Capital Budget
- Special Service Area Financing
- Other Tools.

The Central Street Master Plan will be used by elected and appointed officials, community leaders, property owners, and developers as a guide for planning and development decisions over the next 5 to 10 years. The Plan should be revisited and updated every 5 years to ensure that strategies and recommendations continue to meet area needs.

Priority Projects

The first step toward Master Plan implementation should be identification of projects that can be considered priority or “catalytic” projects that would begin to address optimal land use mix and development opportunities, as well as deteriorating physical conditions along Central Street. The following should be considered as priority projects:

Public

Independence Park/Stewart Parking Lot:

The park, which functions as a town square or village green for the north side of Evanston, is in need of physical improvements to facilitate its use by residents and shoppers. The parking lot needs to be more efficient regarding access and circulation, and its entrance on Central needs to be eliminated to reduce traffic conflicts.

Improving these two public facilities, along with realignment of the Central/Stewart intersection, should be considered as one project for design and engineering. Incorporating sidewalk bump-outs and crosswalks where appropriate, additional on-street parking spaces (when the lot driveway is eliminated and Stewart is moved), and new sidewalks following a design theme for the overall Central Street corridor should also be part of the re-design.

When the design for the redevelopment of Independence Park/Stewart Parking Lot proceeds, possible improvements to other parks located along Central Street should be addressed.

Streetscape/Gateways:

As important as changing Independence Park and the adjacent City parking lot, enhancing the physical character of the Central Street streetscape and its gateways will make the area a more attractive and safer place to shop, dine, and work. Based on the Streetscape Study prepared during the Master Plan process, this project should address the streetscape issues identified by the consultant team, City staff and community.

Although this project may need to be organized in phases depending on future funding sources, the next step in the streetscape design and engineering process should include:

- Improving sidewalk, crosswalk, lighting, and “greening” along Central Street, including where needed on residential blocks.

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- Reducing the width of Central Street between Prospect and Lincolnwood to 42 feet will allow the addition of at least 5 feet to the streetscape/sidewalk zones on both sides of the street.
- Reorganizing the Central/Crawford/Gross Point intersection, including Hot Dog Island and the parkways of each property around it. The design of this section of Central Street should focus on how it can be “retrofitted” with better sidewalks and more landscaping in the short-term, while changes to the City’s zoning code would address how new development would provide wider, planted parkways.
- Improving the northwest corner of Central and Girard as an attractive “Transit/Golf Plaza” and gateway to Central Street.

Ryan Field:

During the planning process, the consultant team, City staff, and community identified significant issues with the physical conditions and “look” or appearance of the large parking lots that surround and dominate Northwestern University’s Ryan Field Stadium. Significantly changing the conditions of these lots would:

- Resolve reoccurring flooding issues.
- Provide a more attractive environment for residents who live nearby and shoppers who visit the street on a daily basis.
- Provide a more attractive environment for people who visit the area and stadium during games days and special events, like high school graduations.
- Contribute to a more viable shopping and dining experience for the blocks located between Ryan Field and the Metra station.

As noted in the Master Plan, the Northwestern University parking lots also have potential for new development along their Central Street frontages that could also positively contribute to the viability of area retail and use of transit. The potential for new development on Central, along with the overall physical changes to the lots, should initially be considered as one priority project.

The City and University should conduct a joint “feasibility study” that addresses the next level of design for upgrading the lots, including links to the Evanston stormwater system and sustainable design concepts. The study would also address the potential for structured parking with retail on the northwest corner of Central and Ashland, and a building for office, retail, and/or restaurant use on the east side frontage of the stadium. Costs, revenues, phasing, organizational responsibilities, and alternative funding sources would be addressed for each component.

If the study determined that development along the frontages was not feasible, or that it needed a much longer time frame to implement, then the parking lot improvements should be considered as a shorter term project.

Parking Changes:

Recognizing that there are not a lot of opportunities to significantly increase the amount of parking along Central Street (except for a potential deck at Ryan Field), another more short-term project would involve the following steps:

- Convert 2 to 3 on-street spaces just east of Hartrey to 15-minute times to provide more “quick in/out” spaces near smaller restaurants.
- Consider changing some spaces between Hartrey and Green Bay to 3-hour times near larger restaurants and the library.
- Work with Chase Bank to clarify the use of the large bank lot for shared parking for shoppers and dining patrons, and establish appropriate signage within the lot.

Rail Viaducts:

Upgrading or reconstructing the rail viaducts over Central Street will significantly improve vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow and safety along the eastern stretch of this important roadway. The City should work closely with Metra and CTA to successfully redesign and program improvements as it has done with other viaducts in Evanston.

Private

A major focus of the Master Plan is establishing a new, more sensible “building envelope” or “building form” for future development. As new buildings are proposed, developers will need to follow the Plan and updated zoning approach to accomplish a higher quality of site and architectural design.

While new development will occur over time when property and business owners decide to change use, ownership or building size or function, there are some properties that should be considered priorities for change. To accomplish change at the sites listed below, the City and owners should begin working together to facilitate the concepts delineated in the Master Plan.

Central/Crawford/Gross Point Intersection:

There are several redevelopment opportunities around this highly traveled and visible gateway intersection, along with the “clean-up” and “green-up” needs discussed earlier. The City should meet with property owners to discuss the potential for change and new land uses, including the possibility of introducing more office space to serve the northwest corner of Evanston.

CVS Site:

Within the intersection, the CVS Drug Store is the most prominent and active business. Discussions with the owner should review the longer-term concept of full redevelopment of the site with new retail buildings, as well as the immediate need for a significant physical improvement to the site and building.

Blockbuster/White Hen:

More centrally located on a commercial block at the southwest corner of Central and Ewing, the combined Blockbuster Video and White Hen grocery store site is an inefficient, auto-oriented development that creates significant traffic, parking, and visual impacts on Central Street and the adjacent residential neighborhood. The City should work closely with the business and property owners to explore alternative locations along Central Street for these businesses so that their combined sites can be redeveloped with a building that better fits the pedestrian character of the area.

Chase Bank Site:

While considering the short-term need for additional parking in the Chase Bank lot near the active commercial blocks east of Hartrey, the City and Chase should also explore the potential for a high-quality, mixed-use development at the site as a gateway into Central Street from Green Bay Road and the Metra Station. This large, highly visible site could provide a more active retail presence for Central Street as shown in the Master Plan.

Because properties near this site are beginning to “change hands” and be developed, discussions should also include the paint store owners to the south to further explore the development potential of both sides of Harrison.

Priority Initiatives

Zoning/Guidelines Changes

A priority next step for implementation of the Master Plan is to update Evanston’s development codes to accommodate the new development direction for Central Street. The City should further review all related codes to determine revisions needed to accommodate the physical changes and development scenarios recommended in the Master Plan section of this report.

Changes to the codes can be implemented using one or more of the following methods:

Change Existing Code:

This step would use the City’s existing zoning format to address the recommended changes to the districts along the street, as well as the bulk requirements of each district. Districts would be changed through map amendments. Changes to bulk requirements (building height, setbacks, alleys) would require rewriting the text of each affected district.

During the revision process, further study would be required to determine if the changes recommended for Central Street are appropriate for those districts that apply Citywide. If not, an “overlay” zoning district may be feasible to make the desired changes only apply to certain areas on Central Street.

Design Guidelines

In 2006, the City adopted “Design Guidelines for Planned Developments,” which are “advisory” or complementary to existing zoning regulations. They are designed to aid in the evaluation of both planned developments and conventional developments.

The guidelines present appropriate standards and applications of building design, building setbacks and massing, mix of uses, adaptive reuse, parking, circulation, landscaping, and sustainability. The scope and intent of the guidelines appear to be appropriate for encouraging high-quality development that complements both adjacent buildings and public space.

As an advisory document, it may be necessary to create a checklist or more formal process to effectively evaluate new projects' site and building design based upon the guidelines. Consideration should also be given to requiring that all developments follow the guidelines so they are not used as a negotiated “bonus” that allows for increases in the scale or mass of proposed projects beyond the limits of respective zoning designations.

In addition, the City should consider expanding the guidelines to apply to small-scale commercial districts such as Central Street using the Master Plan as a base. Many of the examples included in the current document appear to be higher-density downtown or near-downtown mixed-use or condominium buildings or auto-oriented, suburban scale developments. More examples should be included that illustrate how new infill or renovated structures can be developed within an existing low-density, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood.

To encourage higher -quality projects and facilitate the development review process, the City should consider:

- Creating a “checklist” or more formal process for evaluating projects following the design guidelines.
- Requiring that the guidelines apply to all development within the City.
- Expanding the guidelines to apply to smaller-scale commercial districts or create separate design guidelines for such areas.

Form-Based Code

A new approach to zoning that is being considered by some communities is a “form-based” code. Such a code serves the same function as standard zoning and design guidelines but takes an approach that more specifically defines the desired form of buildings, while de-emphasizing more widely employed use and bulk/density regulations such as floor-area ratio (FAR) and maximum dwelling units per acre. Other key features of form-based codes include build-to lines, height minimums and maximums, architectural requirements, parking setbacks, defining districts by street segments, streetscape and signage standards, performance standards and use regulations, and simplicity and streamlining of text. When zoning is addressed for Central Street, the use of a form-based approach should be considered.

Façade Improvement Program

The Evanston Storefront Program provides grants equal to 50% of the cost of approved renovations, up to a maximum grant of \$10,000 per storefront or 50 linear feet fronting a public right-of-way. A maximum grant per building has been established at \$40,000.

The City, new civic group, and business/property owners should continue to encourage participation in the program for properties located on Central Street to enhance the area’s appearance and generate interest in further area improvements. This effort could include:

- More active marketing of the program to local business and property owners.
- Recruiting a few committed property owners to “get the ball rolling.”
- Conducting a more detailed assessment of Central Street buildings to determine “high priority” properties.
- Facilitating the design process for property owners by hiring one architect to address several properties.
- Packaging several buildings into one bid package for contractors to reduce costs and create a more dramatic physical change along the street.

Streetscape Design

As discussed under priority projects, a critical initiative will be the enhancement of the Central Street streetscape. This next step should include taking the Streetscape Study to a Design Development level to more specifically determine the scope and cost of the project. Construction documents and capital improvement programming could then be organized by need and phase or if budgets permit, for the overall length of the street.

Capital Improvement Programming

The following funding sources should be considered:

State + Federal Sources

There are several state and federal programs and sources of funds that may be appropriate to address capital improvement needs along Central Street, including the potential structured parking at Ryan Field. The next step in the process will involve researching such sources to determine availability, eligibility, and timing.

City of Evanston Capital Budget

Funding for Master Plan projects and initiatives will need to be identified in the City's Capital Improvement Program. Capital improvements will need to be phased, based on funding availability and physical need.

Special Service Area

A Special Service Area (SSA) is a state-authorized financing program that can be administered by the City that provides financing resources for a specific area. Special tax assessments are paid by the property owners in a designated area. An SSA is initiated by property and business owners wanting certain services above those already provided by the City, or other services not provided such as advertising, marketing, parking, loan programs, capital improvements, and maintenance, including snow removal along sidewalks.

A group of contiguous property owners vote to form an SSA, which consists of all properties that would benefit from the services, and elect to levy an additional property tax to pay for the services. If approved by the City Council, the tax would be levied and distributed to the SSA on an annual basis.

An SSA Commission is formed with representatives of business and property owners to administer the services. The Commission, along with the City, would hold public meetings to discuss the benefits of the SSA with the community. The entire process to establish an SSA can take between 6 and 12 months.

An SSA may be a useful implementation tool for improving, managing, and maintaining the commercial blocks along Central Street.

Other Tools

Tools used by other cities and villages include Business Improvement Districts and Tax Increment Financing Districts.

Communication/Coordination

Local

Local residents recently created a new civic association, Central Street Neighbors Association, to work more closely with the City on improvement and development of the area. The group has begun conducting meetings, assisted in the review of drafts of the Master Plan, and reached out to local merchants.

It is important that the group continue to develop as an open communication vehicle for all residents that live in the area, including those that live directly on Central Street in apartments, condominiums, and town homes.

It is also critical that the business and property owners get more involved with what is happening along the corridor. Whether through the merchants association or as a committee of the new civic group, the owners need to be active partners that help the City and residents keep Central Street the eclectic, special place that it is. This effort should include getting more owners to fix up their properties, assisting City departments in facilitating the streetscape, signage, and parking improvements recommended in the Master Plan, and working with the City to facilitate quality sensible redevelopment of key properties.

Regional

Metra, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Regional Transit Authority (RTA), and PACE will be involved in the improvement

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or replacement of the viaducts at Poplar and Girard as well as implementation of new drop-off zones or station area improvements such as the proposed Transit/Golf Plaza at the CTA station. The City will need to work with CTA, PACE, Northwestern University and Evanston Hospital (ENH) to improve transit service along the corridor. This may involve expanding existing bus service or developing a new shuttle service to ferry commuters to the hospital or university.

State

City staff and elected/appointed officials will need to continue to work with regional and State agencies that are involved in the area to achieve the objectives of the Master Plan. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has jurisdiction over much of the corridor, and priority projects including roadway narrowing, streetscape enhancements, lighting changes and turning lane improvements will require cooperation between the City and IDOT.

