



EVANSTON THRIVES

RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

Prepared for the City of Evanston
City Council Approved - April 2023

MAYOR'S MESSAGE

From the moment I started running for mayor half a year into the pandemic, we've spoken of change amid recovery. Over the past few years, we've found that it's not enough to mitigate the harms of the virus and simply rebuild what we had before. The world is changing and our community's success will be defined by our ability to anticipate and adapt to those changes. This is perhaps most true of our business districts, which will be forever transformed by the explosion of remote work as well as new consumption patterns.

The great news is that our city offers so much. We are home to renowned global institutions, growing companies, and over 30,000 households. Families, young professionals, and new businesses move to Evanston because they want to experience our city's dynamism—the multiple forms of transit throughout the city and into Chicago, the density, the lakefront, and, most importantly, our diversity and cultural vibrancy. Our business districts—eight of them!—are gems of our neighborhoods and economic engines for our community.

It's time for Evanston to own its position as the big city on the North Shore. While being a big city does come with challenges, it's time for us to lean into the opportunities that come with this position. Our size, density, and physical and cultural connection to urban life set us apart from every other community on the North Shore. Our city is also strong, and we need to embrace changes that will make us even stronger and more resilient in the coming years. Change is difficult, but we are prepared to push through a period of discomfort for the betterment of Evanston.

Our businesses are the engine for placemaking and activation in Evanston. In order for them to thrive, the City must support them in their efforts to innovate and adapt. Now that workers largely no longer have to show up to the office and shoppers have limitless online options, we have to rethink things—how we design places that foster walkability and encourage residents and visitors to stay awhile and how we create new opportunities for cultural and entertainment options within each one of our beloved districts. This will require us to improve City processes and ensure a culture that will embrace change. It will require Evanston being a city that hears an innovative idea, and instead of responding with “no we've never done it that way”, says “here's how we can make that work”.

This is why I am excited to announce the launch of the Evanston Thrives Action Plan. Its fundamental message is that Evanston's business districts should be celebrated and tied together through strong City support, communications, and design. Now that we have this roadmap, it's time to start implementing—not because every word of this will be easy or uncontroversial, but because in these complex times, bold change is required to achieve the success that we know lies within our grasp.

I hope you share my enthusiasm to get to work and create Evanston's next exciting chapter!

Best,



Daniel Biss
Mayor
City of Evanston



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the dedicated efforts of:

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Paul Zalmezak, City of Evanston
Economic Development
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Angela Schaffer, Central Street SSAs
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Howard Street Business Association

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Community Development
Economic Development
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Health & Human Services
Parks, Recreation & Community Services
Police
Public Works Agency

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Lenice Levy, Good to Go Jamaican Cuisine
India McKay, Peckish Pig / Palmhouse
Amy Morton, Barn / Found
Larry Murphy, YoFresh Cafe
Peter O'Malley, Beer on Central
Micheal McLean, Property Owner / Developer

*And the hundreds of businesses voices who
helped to shape this Retail Action Plan.*

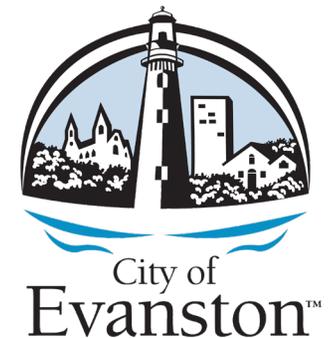
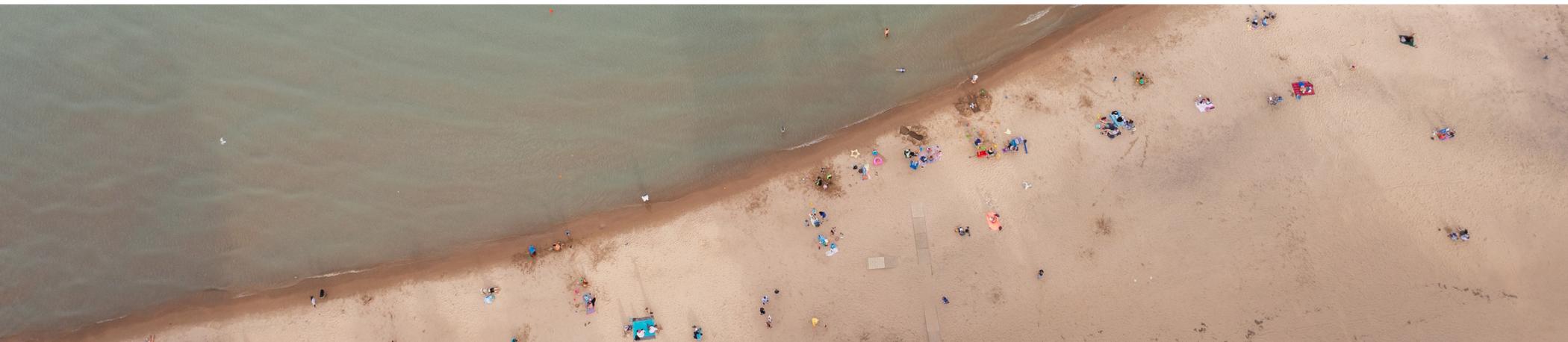


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INTRODUCTION

GOALS & PROCESS

PROJECT BACKGROUND

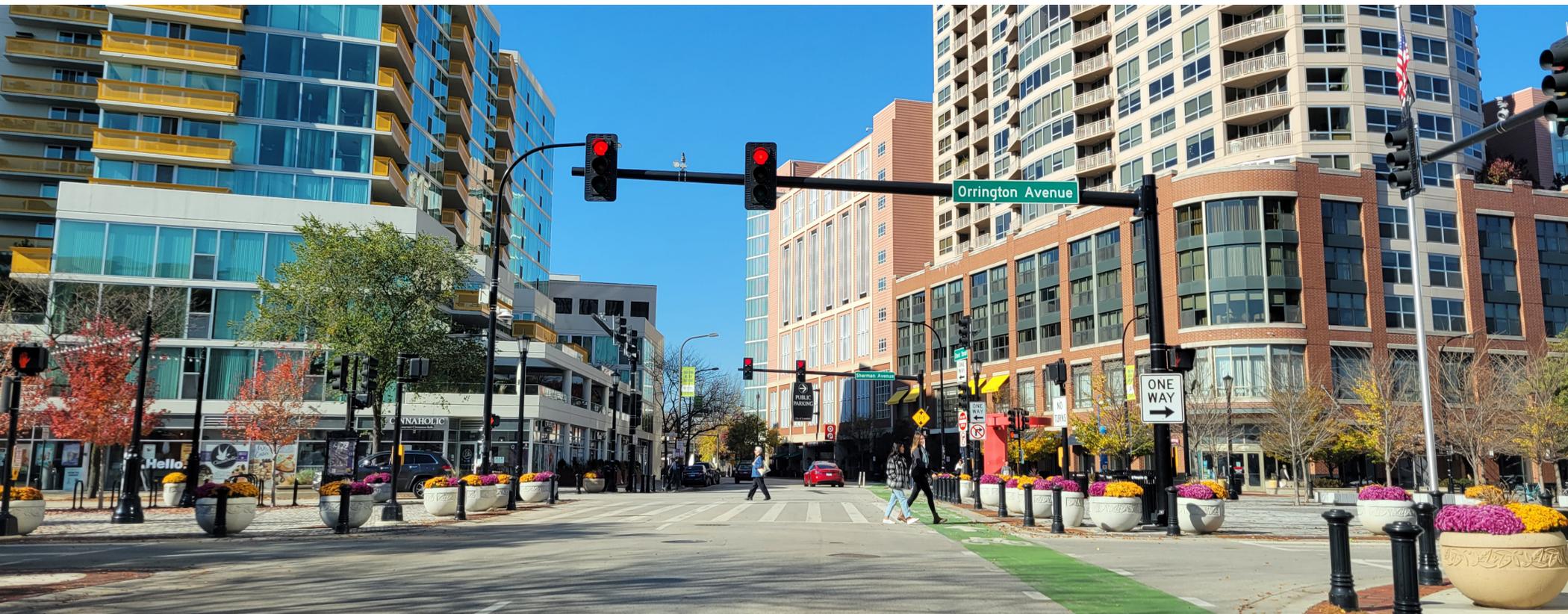
The Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan was initiated in July 2022. It involved thousands of unique voices throughout the community, including business owners, residents, visitors, and City staff and elected officials. The result? A detailed Action Plan for business supports, events and programming, tenant attraction, placemaking and marketing.

At the project outset, the Evanston Thrives team worked with the City to establish the following project goals:

- **Reimagine our neighborhood business districts, balancing market realities with bold and creative design.**
- **Protect and reinforce our city's most precious assets at the neighborhood level.**
- **Celebrate the unique identity of each district—past, present and future stories—through branding and placemaking.**
- **Identify the ideal use of ground floor space for each district and citywide.**
- **Build a toolkit to ensure more equitable investment and support for local businesses.**
- **Inform the City's business recruitment and retention efforts in these areas.**

EVANSTON IS ENVIABLE

Evanston offers a density and variety within the retail environment unrivaled on the North Shore. With access to local and regional transit networks, Evanston’s market is bolstered by its connectivity in the region. Evanston is home to a Big Ten University with 18,000 diverse, high-performing students. Perhaps most notably among North Shore communities, Evanston balances desirable elements of urban and suburban lifestyles by offering the benefits of a “big city”—like multiple theater venues and entertainment destinations and retail amenities, which are substantial (e.g. two Whole Foods, a Trader Joe’s, two Target’s, and more)—and the high-quality and family-friendly amenities that appeal to those seeking a calmer pace and quieter settings, including the nationally renowned lakefront beaches of the North Shore.





WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

Downtown areas and commercial districts across the country are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, many downtown areas and retail districts were competing with retail growth farther afield in surrounding suburban areas. In many cities, downtowns were already losing—not gaining—retail market share before the pandemic closures hit. The pandemic furthered this trend. Cook County data indicates that visits to ‘Retail & Recreation’ and ‘Workplaces’ destination categories were each down 11% in late 2022 from the baseline value (Jan-Feb 2020).

Although some restaurants and retailers have returned to more typical hours, some impacts of the pandemic will linger much longer and continue to impact the experience of operating customer-facing businesses:

- **Lower or slower sales:** Although many retailers involved in the Evanston Thrives process noted that business has returned to more sustainable levels than last year, most are still experiencing sales lower than pre-pandemic levels.
- **Online ordering, pick-up, and delivery services:** This aspect of business, particularly for restaurants, is still in high demand as customers became accustomed to ordering from home.
- **Strong preference for open-air seating:** Outdoor dining and activity was normalized during COVID and remains an activity many continue to seek out even on colder days. This outdoor experience remains critical to the future of these districts, where in the wake of COVID, the need for activity, programming, and places to enjoy the neighborhood are essential ingredients to draw customers and support small and local businesses.
- **Work from home & low office occupancy:** Regular travel to workplaces has dropped in every metro area. Daytime population in a downtown area is critically linked to the presence of major employers and office-workers in downtown buildings. The transition to full or part-time work-from-home is perhaps the greatest threat to downtown areas in the near term. All downtown areas experienced pain in this area, and the speed of recovery is closely linked with worker return to offices and with the construction of new housing. Downtown Evanston estimates downtown office buildings, generally, are at about 60% of their pre-pandemic occupancy. 1007 Church Street and 1603 Orrington office buildings in the heart of Downtown Evanston are logging 20-40% of their daily office-worker headcount in the building each day compared to pre-pandemic activity.

The reality is, not all of these office spaces will get filled. Many surveys and studies show that workers prefer a hybrid model. And so, cities must begin to take measures to attract broader interest in their downtowns, more often and more intentionally than ever before. Office workers alone won't fill the gap in retail sales and downtown activity. Downtown must appeal to everyone - more residents, shoppers, visitors, tourists, students, and seniors.

Downtown areas like Evanston's, which exist as mixed-use centers, have the highest adaptability. Evanston shows market strength among North Shore communities, and the stores and destinations anchoring Downtown today are enviable staples for a downtown area. An urban format Target, Whole Foods, and the newly reopened AMC theater play a critical role in generating foot traffic for other nearby businesses as well as affirming the submarket's viability within the tenant community. These types of retailers reinforce the flexibility to live, work, and play in Downtown.

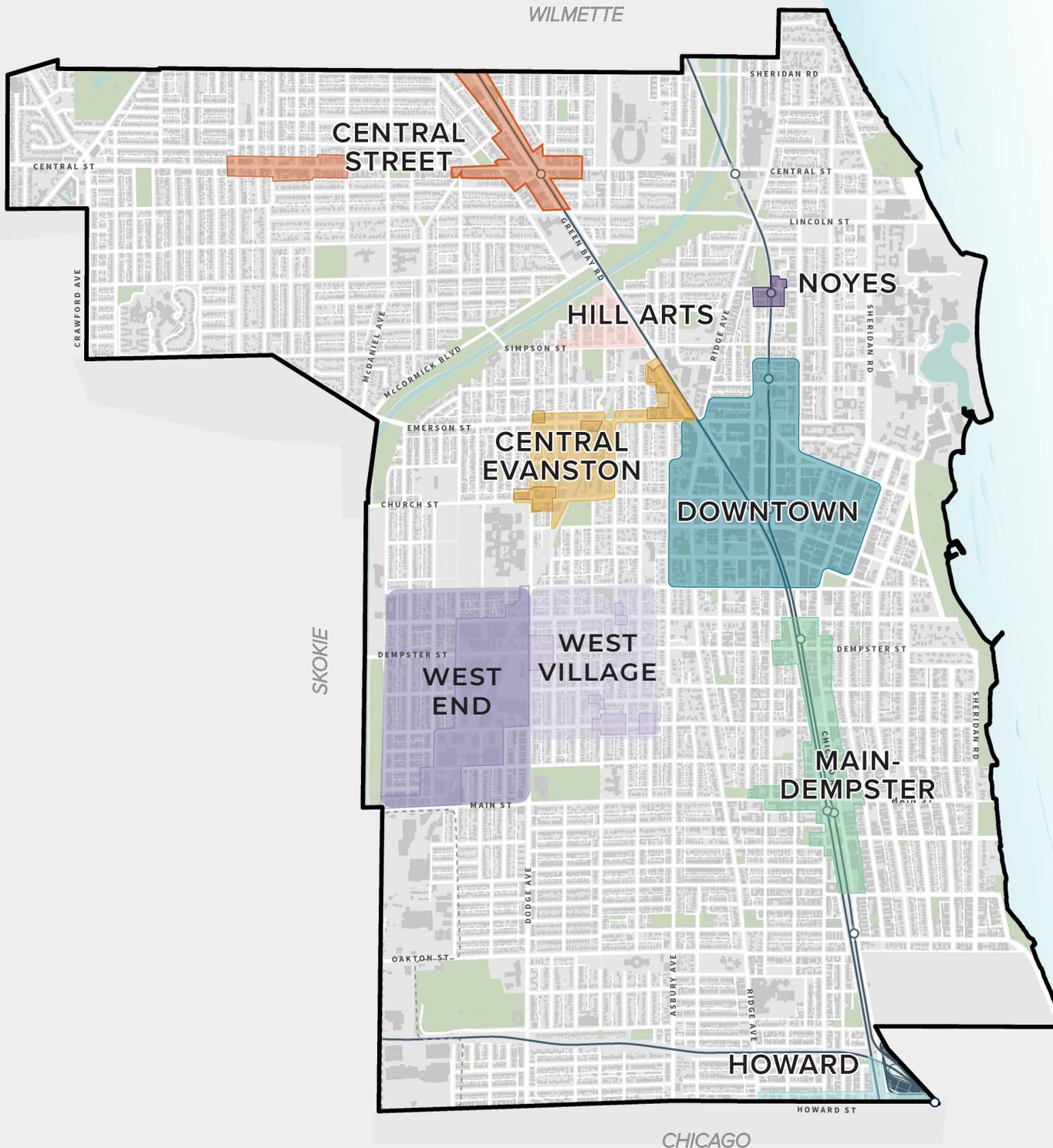
Despite what you may have heard, this is not the retail apocalypse.

Despite much hand-wringing in the national media about the dominance of e-commerce and its impact on bricks and mortar retail, statistics show that brick-and-mortar retail leasing has been robust. Roughly the same amount of retail space has been leased in the last twelve months nationwide as in 2019. Meanwhile, 2022 was the first year since 2016 that store openings exceeded closures, with the latter declining by 61% year-over-year in the first eleven months of 2021. And despite early-pandemic projections of ten years of e-commerce growth, e-commerce's share of total retail is roughly 12.9%, representing just an increase of 150 basis points from 1Q 2020.

The pandemic forced cities to be more flexible and adapt quickly—two things municipal entities aren't widely known for. The cities that are performing best today are those that institutionalized policy changes, invested strategically, and recommitted to their downtown and retail districts.

Now is the time for Evanston to critically evaluate the next steps in the evolution of Downtown and retail districts across the city. This research, engagement, and strategies are grounded in helping the City and their partners support and grow the corridors, districts, and centers that make Evanston unique.





EVANSTON'S RETAIL DISTRICTS

The city of Evanston's Economic Development Division (ED) administers business-related grants and programs and manages business registration citywide. Within each of the City's eight retail districts - including Downtown - ED also helps to coordinate and champion physical improvements to the streets, sidewalks, and public spaces as they move through budgeting, permitting, and implementation by other city departments. Three of Evanston's retail districts are also designated "Special Service Areas" (SSA) - Downtown Evanston, Central Street, and Main-Dempster Mile. SSAs are financing tools often used to support and implement a wide array of services, physical improvements, and other activities in retail districts.

An SSA is a tax levy established by ordinance for a defined area for a defined period (10 years) with support from local property owners which allows the City to tax and deliver services to these defined districts. Each SSA has a designated managing organization, and the tax collected goes directly toward funding for the SSA's administration, marketing, and business development, and to fund and maintain public way improvements specific to that area. This means that for Central Street East and West, Main Dempster Mile, and Downtown, the business owners have an additional advocate and resource working on behalf of the district as a whole. One critical goal of the Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan is to ensure that the businesses operating in non-SSA districts have equitable access to resources and support provided by the city of Evanston.





WHO SHAPED THE PLAN

Thousands of voices were heard throughout the Evanston Thrives process—from residents to business owners to business district representatives to city staff and elected officials. A Task Force of over 30 businesses throughout Evanston helped to guide the process and resulting vision and action items. Pop-up workshops, a community survey with over 2,100 responses, and stakeholder interviews also helped to identify the biggest challenges, priority areas, and placemaking interventions featured in this Plan.

CITY WORK SESSIONS

Mayor Biss + Council Members
 City Manager + Departmental Leadership

SSA MANAGER ONGOING GUIDANCE

SSA Managers (Central Street, Downtown Evanston, Main-Dempster Mile)

FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS

Open call to businesses (breakouts by district: MDM, Central, Downtown, Howard, and West End)
 Creative, arts, and entertainment businesses
 Newly-opened businesses
 Black Business Consortium
 Downtown residents
 Local commercial real estate brokers

BUSINESS-OWNER TASK FORCE

A group of 30 business and/or property-owners in Evanston who volunteered to participate in regular project input sessions.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Project kick-off with department heads
 Presentations to the City of Evanston Economic Development Committee
 Pop-up at Downtown Evanston, Church & Dodge, and Main-Dempster Mile Fall Fests
 Participation in monthly/quarterly meetings: Hill Arts, Howard, and Central Evanston Business Association
 Presentation to representatives from the leadership of major companies
 Northwestern University leadership

CITY OF EVANSTON STAFF WORK SESSIONS

City work sessions included staff related to signage permitting, event coordination, and infrastructure.

*"Local owner, ambiance, quirks, and place
you want to bring out of towners"*
- Downtown Resident, about Downtown

*"I saw an article about 20 college
towns to visit this Fall. I want to
see Evanston on that list."*
- Downtown Business Owner

*"People don't wander the city to
explore - they head to exactly
where they want to head to."*
- Business Owner

*"Davis Street used to be the
Northshore leader in restaurants;
used to be more charming"*
- Downtown Resident

*"Every industry has its own little silo. It is
the greatest failing of our City... It is the
same thing with the arts."*
- Arts, Creative, and Entertainment Business Focus Group

Task Force

What we heard:

- ▶ City policies and staff disposition are not leveraging the creativity of local business owners.
- ▶ Evanston has lost its strength as a destination on the North Shore.
- ▶ The lakefront is an incredible, undervalued/under celebrated asset in Evanston.
- ▶ Tax structure affects Evanston's ability to compete.
- ▶ Crime and panhandling are impacting businesses.
- ▶ It is difficult to host events in Evanston.
- ▶ Some districts get more love than others.
- ▶ Paid parking is a pain point, but the issue varies by district.
- ▶ Success equates to visible change to the physical environment.

Focus Groups

About the business districts:

- ▶ Participants want to see action resulting from this plan.
- ▶ Industries and information are siloed; information is difficult to find.
- ▶ Evanstonians appreciate local, unique, and quirky businesses.
- ▶ Desire for more to do, third places, and entertainment.

About Downtown:

- ▶ There needs to be a clearer idea for the future of Downtown.
- ▶ Panhandling continues to be a problem in Downtown. Residents feel the issue is not receiving sufficient attention.
- ▶ Downtown may be catering to the functional needs of students, but missing the entertainment and third places that would improve the general appeal of this destination.
- ▶ Evanston- particularly Downtown- no longer has cachet in the region that it once had and COVID isn't the only thing to blame.
- ▶ There is no advocate for Downtown within the City. There is a sense that no single City staffer or political entity is focused on Downtown.
- ▶ There is a perception that the increase in medical buildings Downtown is diminishing street-level activity.

Citywide Survey

General public responses:

- ▶ The Survey was **available July through November 2022** in both English and Spanish.
- ▶ A total of **2,098 surveys** completed.
- ▶ Participation by **all Wards**.
- ▶ **All age groups and income categories** were represented.
- ▶ 31% respondents were **parents of children under 18 years**.

Business-owner responses:

- ▶ A total of **202 business owners** participated.
- ▶ 30% have been in business **16-20+ years**.
- ▶ **60% rent their space**.
- ▶ **53% are owned by women**.
- ▶ On average 51.5% of business owners selected **“I don’t know”** when asked about the effectiveness of the **Evanston Economic Development Division**.
- ▶ The top categories where owners selected the most “very effective” and “somewhat effective” were **maintaining the streetscape** and **implementing mural/local art**.

Responses from Northwestern students, staff, & faculty:

- ▶ 72% of Northwestern-affiliated surveyed were **faculty, staff or administrators**.
- ▶ Students were asked to consider a scenario in which they could use their campus card for payment at off-campus businesses. **55% of students surveyed would want to use their campus cards if they were an accepted form of payment at off-campus retailers and restaurants**.
- ▶ 51% of students **walk as primary mode of travel**.



CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

This document provides guidance for policy changes, new and expanded marketing initiatives, and specific improvements for districts across the city. Underlying all of this work are a number of critical factors that must be acknowledged and addressed to see more action and more investment.

- 1. DON'T ALLOW YOUR PERCEPTION OF THE CITY TO BE A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY.** Evanstonians are down on the city and Downtown—the negativity is palpable. The business-owners, residents, and even local leaders are perpetuating a narrative that Evanston is “dead” or “empty,” which overlooks a lot of the market strengths and uniqueness the city has to offer. Even if Evanston isn’t as vibrant or active as it once was, a community that has given up on itself has no hope for a better future. Public perception and morale are everything.
- 2. POSITIVE CHANGE REQUIRES COMMITMENT AND RESOURCES.** If the City is unwilling or unable to commit funding, there’s a limit to what can be accomplished.
- 3. CREATING GREAT PLACES REQUIRES CITY STAFF AND PARTNERS TO WORK TOGETHER IN A COORDINATED AND INTEGRATED WAY.** Without coordination, efforts will fail. Business stakeholders and internal staff expressed the same sentiment during the Evanston Thrives engagement—one department making changes won’t make a difference. Commitment must come from the top of the organization, and changes must be made across departments involving all facets of the City that touch Evanston’s retail districts.
- 4. A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH NORTHWESTERN IS CRITICAL TO ACCOMPLISH THE GOALS OF THIS PLAN.** The University is an economic engine for the city of Evanston; and a strong, healthy, vibrant city is in the interest of the University. The City needs Northwestern University as a partner and champion for Evanston. In return, the City should see the growth and success of the University as a mutual benefit for Evanston.
- 5. INVESTING IN BETTER DATA IS CRITICAL TO SHIFT FROM A REACTIVE TO A PROACTIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY.** The City must be equipped to make informed decisions with limited resources. Investments in systematizing data will not have immediate return, but these systems will be critical to guide and sharpen the City’s economic development strategy in the years to come.
- 6. DOWNTOWN DOESN'T HAVE TO WAIT FOR OFFICE WORKERS TO RETURN TO BE SUCCESSFUL.** This is a post-pandemic issue. The turn to remote and hybrid work models has impacted downtowns across the country, but there are a number of opportunities for increasing foot traffic in Downtown Evanston, even if office workers never return. Northwestern students play a crucial role in downtown activity and sales, along with Evanston’s growth in reputation as a destination in the North Shore region.

HOW THIS DOCUMENT IS ORGANIZED

A broad set of stakeholders provided issues and ideas to inform the Evanston Thrives Retail District Action Plan. A few months into the process, themes began to emerge in the types of challenges Evanston faced today, and the types of questions and focus stakeholders both within and outside the City were hoping to glean from this process.

The plan is organized into 5 Chapters: **Business Support, Events & Programming, Tenanting & Attraction, Marketing,** and **Placemaking.** Each of these chapters focuses on the city as a whole with a specific focus on the Downtown area integrated throughout.

Placemaking Plans for each of Evanston's retail districts follows citywide recommendations in the Placemaking Chapter. Each of these plans includes discussion of unique features and attributes for the subject district, and presents a placemaking strategy, menu of options, as well as a district brand identity coordinated with the overall parent brand introduced in the Marketing Chapter.

The Placemaking Plans provide guidance for each of Evanston's retail districts, tailored to their organizational capacity. For non-SSA districts, these plans provide a roadmap to use working with the City Economic Development Division staff to implement proposed initiatives that district representatives are most excited about in the coming years. Note that placemaking project concepts shown on private property are for illustrative purposes and do not imply that owner agrees to the proposal nor suggests the City will acquire the property.





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COFFEE HOUSE

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BUSINESS SUPPORTS



The City is not using available data analysis tools to make impactful decisions.

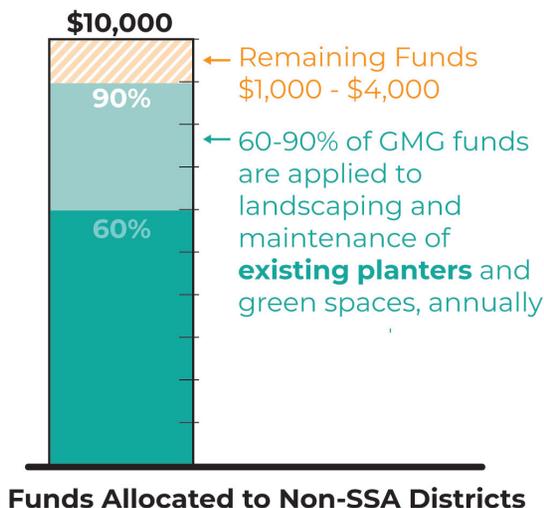
- ▶ **The City doesn't have a single source of data for all businesses:** the Economic Development Division's data on existing businesses is not comprehensive, particularly for businesses established before the City began requiring its own licenses.
- ▶ **The City has two different datasets reflecting food-based versus other types of businesses.** The data available describing food-based businesses is not as comprehensive as the information collected for general business licenses.
- ▶ **There is no source of information with data on the condition or availability of ground-floor retail spaces:** The City does not have a comprehensive dataset reflecting information about retail spaces (filled or vacant), internal systems, equipment, or scale of commercial spaces. CoStar data and boots on-the-ground knowledge from SSA Managers provide the most comprehensive reflection of vacant or available spaces and assets.
- ▶ **City policies and staff disposition are not leveraging the creativity of local business owners:** Business owners have identified arduous, limiting and costly city policies and procedures that inadvertently disincentivize businesses from pursuing a related project or improvement. Business owners have creative ideas and community knowledge on how to market their businesses and are key collaborators in this process.



Evanston's economic development initiatives don't address the full spectrum of needs articulated by local business owners. Resource allocation policies are opaque.

- ▶ **Small business owners and Evanstonians at large want to see stronger support for local businesses:** There is a need for visible support campaigns that engage Evanston communities. Many feel Evanston's reputation as a great place to run a business has slipped in recent years, beginning before the COVID-19 pandemic. Business owners want high-quality streets and sidewalks, but also assistance with new equipment and space improvements.
- ▶ **"Small businesses" are a point of pride for many Evanstonians:** Evanstonians have expressed a prevalent sentiment of loss of neighborhood character and beloved destinations, leading to a general sense that Evanston has lost its strength as a destination on the North Side.
- ▶ **Aggressive panhandling in and around Downtown continues to be intimidating to visitors and difficult for businesses to manage:** It is important to stress that panhandling is not a crime. However, the root issue of intimidation in public spaces needs to be addressed with a holistic and kind approach.
- ▶ **The Great Merchant Grant Program to support non-SSA district vitality isn't sufficient to implement impactful placemaking projects:** The City offers non-SSA districts \$10,000 grants for district improvements. An analysis of Great Merchant Grants in recent years showed that \$6,000-\$9,000 of funds are applied to landscaping and maintenance of existing planters and green spaces. The remaining \$1,000-\$4,000 is insufficient to achieve the placemaking and identity-building goals of local businesses in these districts.

REVIEW OF GREAT MERCHANT GRANT PROGRAM FUNDING



- ▶ **Businesses don't seem to know what grant programs are available:** The City offers several programs designed to directly support businesses and business districts including the Great Merchant, Entrepreneurship Support, and Storefront Modernization programs. At the same time, low utilization and survey responses from business owners indicate that many merchants are unaware of the programs. Information about available resources and programs is available, but people are confused or otherwise don't take advantage of the programs, leaving money on the table.

According to survey responses, only 2% of business owners have participated in or received funds from the Great Merchants Grant Program, and 7% have participated in or received funds from the Storefront Modernization Grant Program. Business survey comments indicate that many owners are unsure if they qualify for these grant programs.

There is huge potential to better communicate and market existing programs to local businesses. Targeted information campaigns and website/application form improvements will help business owners feel more confident to take advantage of Evanston's business support programs.

The City acts reactively while the business community seeks proactive support and communication.

- ▶ **City business communications aren't clear enough for owners:** Business owners want more proactive communication about projects and initiatives that impact or benefit Evanston businesses.
- ▶ **Business owners don't feel that City staff are as available as they once were:** Many business owners aren't sure the best way to get questions answered in a timely manner, particularly if it requires multiple departments. Business owners desire a more collaborative disposition toward problem-solving and policy leniency from the City.
- ▶ **Evanston doesn't have a strong reputation as a place that supports small businesses and entrepreneurship:** Small business owners are worried about the reputation of Evanston compared to places like Skokie and Wilmette. Business owner survey respondents identify, "Supporting businesses and economic growth" (56%), "Marketing your commercial area or retail district within Evanston" (28%), and "Drawing new visitors to Evanston" (25%) among the most important priorities for their commercial areas. These priorities should drive the actions of the Economic Development and other staff working on behalf of Evanston's retail districts.



How is the city of Evanston Economic Development Division doing today?

MAINTAINING THE STREETScape and **IMPLEMENTING MURAL/LOCAL ART** were the two categories where business-owners selected the most “very effective” and “somewhat effective” answer choices in the Evanston Thrives public survey.

When asked, “What should be the highest priorities for Economic Development?” participants chose:

- #1 **SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH (56%)**
- #2 **IMPROVING THE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE (35%)**
- #3 **MARKETING YOUR COMMERCIAL AREA OR RETAIL DISTRICT WITHIN EVANSTON (28%)**

- ▶ **Past city initiatives were popular but now defunct:** Programs like Evanston Edge StartUp Showcase, popular with the Evanston business community, were disrupted by COVID. Many see the potential for Northwestern University or larger corporate entities in the area to play a larger role and want Evanston to be a place that fosters business creativity and feels unique among North Shore communities.
- ▶ **Efforts of many working on behalf of the local business community are not coordinated.** Partners like the Evanston Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Evanston, Main Dempster Mile Special Service Area, Central Street Special Service Area, Chicago’s North Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau, Evanston Made, the Black Business Consortium, and even the Evanston Public Library (business classes) are working on behalf of the local businesses community. However, their efforts are not consistently coordinated on economic development goals.
- ▶ **A stronger relationship between Northwestern University and the city of Evanston is warranted:** Strengthening that relationship would be good for businesses and Downtown Evanston.

“[Before COVID] I was able to go to the City and get what I need done in one visit now I don't even know if there will be people in the building”

-Evanston Business Owner

“The students don't consider themselves as a part of Evanston, just that they are in Evanston.”

- Focus group participant.

“I read an article about 20 college towns to visit this fall, I want to see Evanston on that list.”

- Downtown Business Owner

“[Permitting] process feels more ad hoc than it should. [Businesses] get to a point where they feel they are “done” then something else comes up.”

-Evanston Business Owner



Some policies and programs aren't equitably distributed, and resource allocation policies are opaque.

"The City's ED team should work to spearhead more business development."

-Survey response

"The west end and the 5th ward seem to be overlooked"

-Survey response

- ▶ **Without a clear strategy, economic development policies focused on business districts may miss the mark on equity outcomes desired by the City:** Some neighborhoods need more attention and support to elevate their community impact. For example, the Church and Dodge business district, also known as Central Evanston Business Association (CEBA) has depended on small number of businesses who are volunteering their time to play a management and advocate role for their districts to ensure 5th Ward businesses aren't overlooked. For survey respondents who know the Hill Arts District best (Ashland and Simpson intersection), the top two words used to describe the area were "abandoned" and "neglected", despite the district's two major anchor businesses, Double Clutch and Soul & Smoke being frequently touted as Evanstonian's favorite food destinations in other survey answers.
- ▶ **Existing programs can highlight promotion or support regardless of location:** Promotion/Support of businesses agnostic of location and based on ownership by minority, women, or LGBTQ+ identifying individuals is not directly called out within existing programs.
- ▶ The Mayor, Councilmembers, City Manager, and Economic Development Division staff are all working hard to improve and retain Evanston's business districts, but the **resource allocation strategy is not coordinated among all interested stakeholders and the messaging around decision-making is not planned or controlled.** As a result, the business community is confused and perceives the resources to be unfairly distributed.
- ▶ **It is difficult for some small businesses to use rebate programs currently offered by the City:** The City's grants are administered on a reimbursement basis. The significant upfront cost is a deterrent to applying for the grants.

"From my understanding, new businesses usually do not qualify for the storefront program, at least mine doesn't, so how can we improve or repair storefronts when the buildings are old and property management doesn't do it either."

-Evanston Business Owner

The entrepreneurial community in Evanston could be more actively engaged to support Evanston’s retail districts.

- ▶ **The City of Evanston doesn’t have a strong start-up/entrepreneurship pipeline:** Early-stage / Start-up companies require resources beyond what the City of Evanston can provide, but when these small businesses are ready to grow by adding multiple employees and needing bricks and mortar space (often referred to as “Stage 2”), Evanston should be the natural next step. The City should strategically position itself to draw and keep Stage 2 businesses in the local area.
- ▶ **The City isn’t focused on building connections.** City leadership has the power to convene stakeholders of the business community for a purpose. Even without directly dedicating financial resources to early-stage companies, the City can play an important role in facilitating relationships and connections and raising the profile of creators and new businesses. The City should foster collaboration with new partners to tackle unique challenges and generate fresh ideas.

ENTREPRENEURIAL INDICATORS IN EVANSTON’S ECONOMY:

- Identified 12,000 local products sold through ETSY
- 205 KICKSTARTER projects of all types

 <p>4C Insights (Acquired by Mediacocean) Alok Choudhary MORE ABOUT THIS STARTUP ></p>	 <p>Actinia Mercouri Kanatzidis MORE ABOUT THIS STARTUP ></p>	 <p>Actuate Therapeutics Andrew Mazar MORE ABOUT THIS STARTUP ></p>
<p>ADAPTIVE-HEALTH</p> <p>Adaptive Health David Mohr MORE ABOUT THIS STARTUP ></p>	 <p>Aivo Health Apkar Apkarian MORE ABOUT THIS STARTUP ></p>	 <p>Acumen Pharmaceuticals William Klein, Grant Krafft MORE ABOUT THIS STARTUP ></p>
 <p>AKAVA Therapeutics Richard Silverman</p>	 <p>Angiotensin Therapeutics Inc.</p>	 <p>AMPHIXBIO</p>

ACTIVE TECH SPIN-OFF COMMUNITY: Over the last several years Northwestern has spun out at least 79 companies based on technology created at the University. While much of this biotech may not fit well within Evanston given the need for lab space and access to research teams, other inventions could work with the existing building stock.



COMPLETE STARTUP ECOSYSTEM: Northwestern has created an internal start-up ecosystem including providing different types of space options to faculty and student entrepreneurs. The Garage is the 11,000-square-foot home to more than 1,000 student-founded startups and projects. The Innovation and New Ventures Office (INVO) “supports innovation and entrepreneurship at Northwestern and helps move Northwestern technologies to the marketplace”

BUSINESS SUPPORTS

**TAKE
ACTION!**

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Improve data collection tools and processes.

ACTION

Manage business license requests & complete the city's records of businesses, types, and locations.

- ▶ Follow up with any ground floor business identified by the Evanston Thrives analysis as not represented in the city's business license database.
- ▶ Create a consistent intake questionnaire used by both ED and Health and Human Services (HHS) to complete a single dataset reflecting ground floor uses of all retail types. Expand questions related to existing space dimensions, access, interior systems and equipment, and parking.

ACTION

Systematize data management and presentation using new internal systems or a third-party tool.

- ▶ Explore a third-party tool or internal process to establish a combined database for business information collected for Business License and Food Establishment permitting.
- ▶ Identify/Procure preferred calendar management method/service.
- ▶ Consider creating a dashboard of local metrics posted on the ED website with information that may benefit retailers or brokers.

Informed decision-making relies on good data. The City can take steps to improve data representing the local retail environment by adapting data collection tools that already exist, systematizing future collection methods, and thinking bigger about access and management strategies.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Simplify internal processes and policies to better support business owners.

With the help of the local business community, Evanston Thrives identified several policies which are overly restrictive and processes that are difficult to navigate, particularly compared to other North Shore communities. Property and business owners long for a clear, predictable, and swift permitting process. Recommendation 2 identifies policies or processes generally identified to stifle creativity, convolute, or prolong the permitting process, and offers ideas to improve how Economic Development staff interact with the business community day-to-day.

ACTION

Create a Business Start-up Guide for Evanston.

- ▶ Create a Q&A page on the Economic Development website with frequently asked questions about grants, permits, processes, and oversight.
- ▶ Develop public-facing guidance that accurately represents processes that require review and approval by multiple departments.
- ▶ Clearly identify circumstances where a project may require additional steps to be permitted or otherwise deviates from a typical process.
- ▶ Create a Business Start-up Guide or “cheat sheets” for how to open a business and navigate the permitting process or other quick start guides.
- ▶ Provide an estimated timeframe for common procedures for internal review and approval wherever possible. (examples: turnaround time for sign or event permitting and approval)

DOING BUSINESS IN DETROIT

The city of Detroit provides an example of a web interface that anticipates user needs. Links to quick guides help the visitor navigate through our processes whether you want to start a new business, bid on a contract, or purchase land for development.

ENGLISH ESPAÑOL BENGALI العربية MORE


Where am I: [Home](#) / [Mayor's Office](#) / [Office of Immigrant Affairs](#)

Start a Business

Entrepreneurship is key for economic growth of the City of Detroit, and more importantly, an opportunity for its residents to realize their goals. Listed below are necessary tools to start your business, from planning and development to growth and expansion.

Getting Started

- [Before you apply for license checklist](#)
- [Business license fees](#)
- [Business license forms](#)

Start or Grow Your Business

- [ACCESS](#)
- [Detroit Economic Growth Corporation \(DEGC\)](#)
- [Motor City Match](#)
- [Minority Business Development Agency](#)

Small Business and Start-Up Incubators

- [Tech Town](#)
- [Foodlab Detroit](#)
- [Green Garage](#)
- [New Economy Initiative](#)

Business Development and Support Institutions

- [Minority Business Development Agency Detroit](#)
- [Detroit Development Fund](#)
- [Detroit Economic Growth Corporation](#)

How to Apply for permits online

Watch some helpful videos that will walk you through the application process and plan review process.

Step 1. Create an eLaps account
 Step 2. Submit an application for permit online
 Step 3. Access your ePlans account and upload drawings
 Step 4. Check the status of your project in ePlans
 Step 5. Submit corrections or download approved plans
 Step 6. Download your permit from eLaps

[Click here for a Step-by-Step Guide that breaks down the process](#)

Building Permits

Make sure you submit the appropriate & required documents to obtain your building permit.

- [Commercial Building Plan Checklist](#)
- [Residential Building Plan Checklist](#)

ACTION

Refine Economic Development's management and response strategy for business communication.

- ▶ Establish "office hours" for in-person and calls. Identify unique times for event/programming questions distinct from business issues and/or requests
- ▶ Establish / manage a chat line for quicker questions or redirection to other city departments or partners.
- ▶ Create and advertise a means to submit questions or requests via the ED website; Consider collaboration with Evanston 311.

ACTION

Better market available resources to local businesses.

- ▶ Reformat the Economic Development newsletter to include more communications targeted toward businesses.
- ▶ Retool the Economic Development website and presentation of city grants available to businesses.
- ▶ Regularly promote resources directly to businesses by attending SSA district meetings and business alliance meetings.
- ▶ Highlight businesses that use city programs through local news, city communication, and social media.

QUESTION POSED TO TAKE FORCE:

Would the proposed changes to the Economic Development communications improve how you interact with the City? What's missing?

Yes, I believe this would help. Regarding the cheat sheets, it would be good to thinking about what all different things trigger different processes needed. ie- if you are selling food, then this applies to you... If you have customers on site, then.

Great ideas, but a lot of this requires deep participation from OTHER city departments. How do we make that happen

More communication from city is great, but also sometimes multiple departments in city don't feel like they communicate with each other and we get conflicting information. Cohesive response from city would be helpful

Using local news to promote small businesses using city programs is not helpful. Local news does not put it in a positive light as the reporters do not support tax dollars going to business owners.

EVANSTON THRIVES BUSINESS OWNER TASK

The Evanston Thrives Business Task Force and survey responses offer some insight into how the City could improve communication to make the greatest impact.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Re-balance and more equitably distribute City resources to better support business needs.

The City has finite resources to draw or support businesses already located in Evanston. City grants should be written such that the limited resources are being distributed equitably and to the most deserving businesses in alignment with Evanstonians' broader values. This means offering grants to local, non-formula, or Evanston-based businesses— and prioritizing business owners of color, women, veterans, or LGBTQ+ owners.

ACTION

Conduct a review of all grant programs administered by ED Division to align with equity and economic goals.

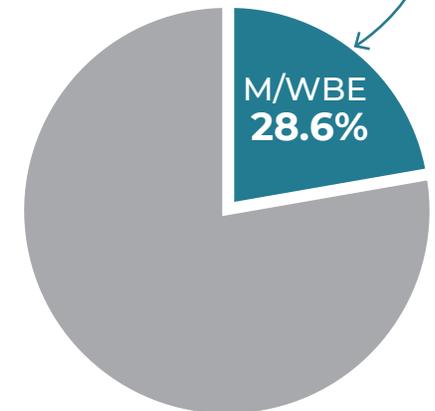
- ▶ Compare each program's intent and limitations; revise to prioritize appropriate businesses by owners, location, or legacy status.
- ▶ Prioritize businesses located within a retail district or at nodes with co-located retail businesses to encourage retail clustering.
- ▶ Ensure Business Registration tools collect sufficient information to establish funding priority businesses so that each year, funds are allocated. Offer priority to business owners of color, women-owned businesses, and veteran and LGBTQ+ owners.
- ▶ Ensure funding priority for non-formula, Evanston-based businesses. Adopt a Formula Business definition for Evanston, which establishes qualifying characteristics of the number of retail establishments, standardized characteristics, financing or ownership model, etc. If policy changes are made, relax restrictions of grant funding for formula businesses in the downtown area on a case-by-case basis.

Today, only M/WBE status is collected through the Evanston Business Registration survey.

PROPORTION MINORITY / WOMEN OWNED BUSINESS ENTERPRISES IN EVANSTON

28.6% of businesses represented in the City's records of active businesses self-identified as being minority or women-owned.

Source: City of Evanston



ACTION

Restructure the Storefront Modernization Program (SMP).

- ▶ Add “Next Steps” explanation to the end of the SMP Request web form.
- ▶ Review publicly available program information for clarity of intent and limitations.
- ▶ Advocate for increased budget allocation for the interior build-out assistance aspect of the Storefront Modernization Program to be used in areas without a TIF.
- ▶ Decouple interior build-out funding/ support from SMP once budget allocation for interior build-out grant/program is established.
- ▶ Restructure Storefront Modernization Program such that some portion could be advance funding rather than rebate if city-approved contractors are contracted to complete the work.
- ▶ Identify City-approved contractors to complete work requested through any program using City resources.

The city of Baltimore Commercial Revitalization Program offers an example of how this could work. Check it out!

ACTION

Allocate funds for retail district improvements.

- ▶ Institutionalize a priority for infrastructure enhancements in defined retail district areas.
- ▶ Allocate funds for maintenance, snow removal, and landscaping of streets and sidewalks within non-SSA retail district areas.
- ▶ Allocate funds in CIP for placemaking and public space enhancements in areas identified by the Retail Action Plan or future plans including Evanston’s retail districts and Downtown.

ACTION

Grow the reach of the Legacy Business Program.

- ▶ Allocate Legacy Business Program annual funding that can be used for marketing the program and participant businesses.
- ▶ Prioritize Legacy Businesses in funding allocation for all physical improvements administered by Economic Development.

ACTION

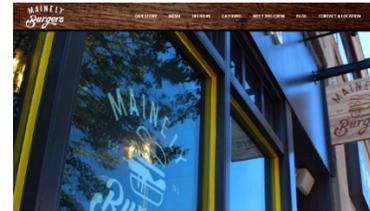
Promote Sustain Evanston

- ▶ Clarify how/if funding for physical improvements is available through the Sustain Evanston program.

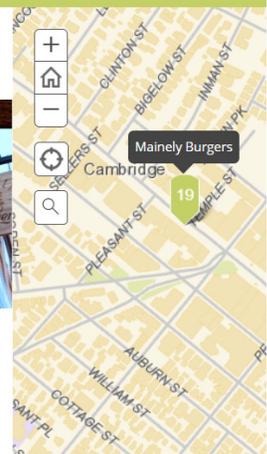
Small Business Enhancement

Businesses throughout Cambridge have leveraged the Small Business Enhancement (SBE) Program to make in-store improvements or boost their marketing efforts. Here is a sample

19 Mainly Burgers



Mainly Burgers used the SBE program to create a new website and offset the costs of new kitchen equipment. Check out their new website [here](#). (FY 2017)



SMALL BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMS CAMBRIDGE, MA

The Small Business Enhancement (SBE) Program is a reimbursement grant program that helps eligible retail, food, home-based and creative for-profit businesses purchase equipment and materials associated with growing their business in Cambridge. The Program has a storymap that markets businesses participating in the program.



“ For Detroit’s comeback to be a true success, there must be opportunity for the Detroiters who stayed.”

– Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan

ENTREPRENEURS OF COLOR FUND - DETROIT, MI

A new source of business capital for Detroit businesses owned by entrepreneurs of color and businesses that primarily hire people of color.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Strengthen partnerships with Northwestern University and other institutions that can help achieve entrepreneurship goals.

Encouraging entrepreneurship is important for economic growth. Entrepreneurs create new products and services and stimulate new employment, which ultimately results in the acceleration of economic development. As home to a top 10, nationally-ranked university, as well as a founding member of the Big Ten athletic conference, Evanston could emulate other university towns that have thriving entrepreneurial and research scenes along with NCAA Division 1 athletics. These relationships are built over time through interactions that welcome and encourage creativity and innovation.

It is also important to recognize that universities, municipalities, and other institutional partners offer different strengths in an entrepreneurship pipeline. As businesses evolve through stages, each stage benefits from different types of support and resources. In the “start-up” phase, business incubators and venture capital firms are best positioned to offer industry-specific expertise and financial resources to seed growth. By the second phase, “stage 2”, a company will have moved beyond startup and have the aptitude and appetite to continue growing. At this stage, companies may be looking to right-size their space or broaden the reach of their brand. This is where the City can play a more meaningful role as a partner and resource.

ACTION

Establish regular communication and set goals in partnership with NU.

- ▶ Identify public-private partnership opportunities and begin working toward shared goals and ideas.
- ▶ Establish a schedule of regular check-ins between the City and NU.

ACTION

Raise the profile of Evanston among the tech and NU entrepreneurship community.

- ▶ Initiate city-sponsored networking events such as coffee, meetups, and resume Evanston Edge Startup Showcase.
- ▶ Create coordination and referral mechanisms in partnership with NU to focus on stage 2 firms exiting the University to retain them in Evanston.
- ▶ Maintain relationships with office brokers and maintain office space database to accommodate Stage 2 firms.

ACTION

Coordinate efforts with Chamber, key partners and business affinity groups.

- ▶ Convene the various members of Evanston business development ecosystem to better coordinate resources and referral systems, as well as have a management infrastructure for some of these programs. Discussion should include: Coordination of marketing efforts, creation of a clearinghouse on available real estate, and entrepreneurial development and support.
- ▶ Coordinate business education opportunities w/ local partners, library, and NU



UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP EXAMPLE: TSAI CITY ENGAGE -YALE UNIVERSITY & NEW HAVEN, CT

Tsai CITY Engage is a community engagement initiative that provides opportunities for Yale students to collaborate with the Greater New Haven community to foster a vibrant entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem. Tsai CITY Engage projects have included: Participatory budgeting in schools, with budgetary decisions made by K-8 students, community health improvement initiatives with the Yale-New Haven Hospital, and community-based development through participatory land use planning, zoning, and design workshops.

*It's time to bring back
the Evanston Edge
Startup Showcase!*



INNOVATION PROGRAMMING - THE IQ BREW, RICHARDSON, TX

The Richardson Innovation Quarter, also known as simply "Richardson IQ®" or "The IQ®," is a 1,200-acre urban hub with a rich heritage of innovation and entrepreneurship located in heart of the booming Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. In 2021, a dynamic partnership between the City of Richardson and the University of Texas at Dallas was announced to establish a physical presence in the Richardson Innovation Quarter along with an extension of UT Dallas' Venture Development Center and give newly created UT Dallas research centers. The City of Richardson partners with The IQ to support and grow this innovation district.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Pursue strategic opportunities to purchase and market for property redevelopment.

Evanston has a patchwork of outdated zoning and overlays, including the West Evanston Master Plan and related overlay zoning district. At the time of the release of Evanston Thrives, the City is embarking on an effort to create a new citywide Comprehensive Plan which will be a critical tool to streamline land use and zoning guidance.

Once the Comprehensive Plan is underway, special consideration should be given to the future land use and zoning approach within each of the retail districts. The redevelopment and infill potential within the districts will be directly influenced by the comprehensive plan and zoning effort. Once created, other strategic guidance such as a commercial district design guidelines could enable the City to more effectively influence the physical design and integration of sites and buildings in alignment with Evanston's goals for these areas.

It's critical to note that the city's Request for Proposals (RFP) process to solicit development proposals for city-owned properties is the most effective tool the City has today to control the type, quality, and even some management aspects development in Evanston's retail districts. Historically, the City has been opportunistic in its acquisition strategy and uses RFPs to solicit desired development on key properties. Without additional staff and resources, however, the City does not have the capacity to expand its role in property redevelopment.

The City currently has several active redevelopment initiatives for properties in retail districts, including the Gibbs-Morrison Center Community Visioning process led by 5th Ward Councilmember Burns, RFQ 22-68 Evanston Skate Park at Twiggs, and 1805 Church RFP for redevelopment. These sites and others are highlighted in the Retail Action Plan's District Placemaking section as priorities for redevelopment soon to spur economic development and reinforce identity in these areas.

ACTION

Position city-owned properties for redevelopment.

- ▶ Explore the status of city-owned properties identified as priority parcels. Prioritize redevelopment goals for the next 1-to-5-to-10 years.
- ▶ Identify priority parcels for repositioning/ RFP.
- ▶ Work with Councilpeople and SSA Managers to outline priority acquisitions for the next 10 years in each district. Prioritize potential acquisitions against broader economic development goals.
- ▶ Identify priority parcels for potential acquisition.

ACTION

Build tools that make it easier for the City to guide development.

- ▶ City manages sale and redevelopment of city-owned parking lots in strategic locations identified in each of the Retail Action Plan District Placemaking Action Plans.
- ▶ City acquires property, then solicits sale and redevelopment of property in key locations identified in each of the Retail Action Plan District Placemaking Action Plans.

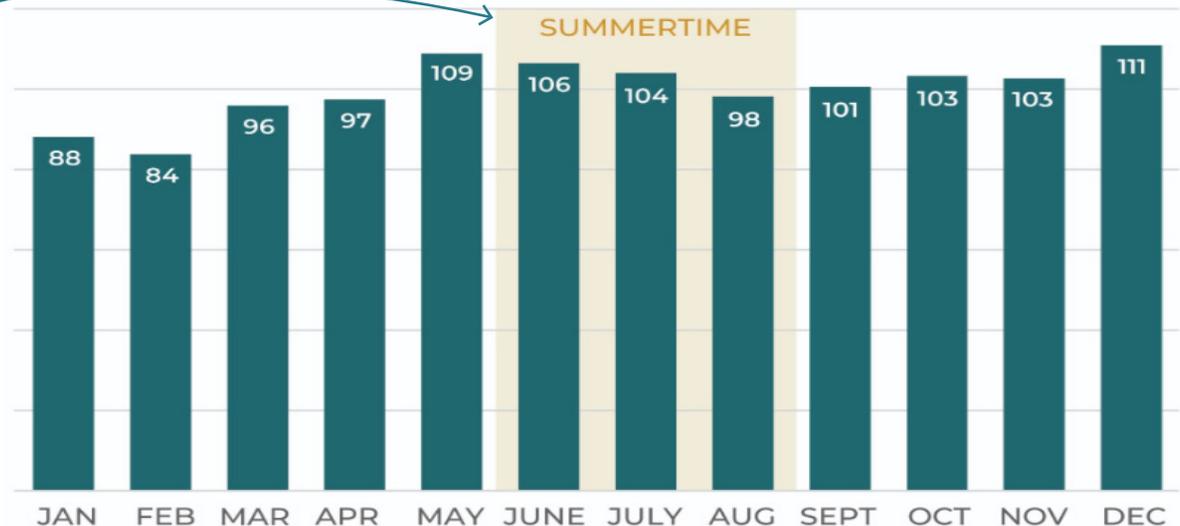
EVENTS & PROGRAMMING

People want more to do in their retail districts and businesses want more foot traffic, especially during slower months of the year.

- ▶ **Staffing:** The North Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau, as well as city staff and longtime residents, recounted the history of changes within the city of Evanston which directed staff and funding away from community events and event coordination. There is no longer a dedicated staff member for special event coordination. All event permits are administered by the Parks, Recreation & Community Services Department.
- ▶ **Lost favorite events:** There is a collective memory of events from years passed that no longer happen, including the Custer Fair and the Ethnic Arts Festival. Evanstonians are asking, “Why?”
- ▶ **Amusement Tax:** The City’s Amusement Tax is the highest among North Shore communities. This is a barrier for social entertainment and performance space/event businesses deciding between Evanston or other North Shore locations.
- ▶ **Events as a marketing tool:** Events have the ability to raise awareness and interest in Evanston, at a level similar to dedicated marketing campaigns.
- ▶ **Events as a way to counteract the “winter slump”:** Evanston doesn’t have a deep “summer slump” like many communities with large universities, but it does have a “winter slump” after the holiday season in February and March (source: Sales Tax Revenue for the City and business owner feedback)

Many cities with large Universities see a notable dip in summer sales. This trend is true for Evanston, but not overwhelmingly so.

MONTHLY SALES TAX REVENUE - 2019
Source: 2019 Monthly Sales Tax Revenue Reports, city of Evanston



The City is not creating events or programs to attract key target audiences to the fullest extent possible.

"One issue is lack of diversity. I know that's a function of who lives there and high prices of shops, but I do wish that our business districts reflected the overall diverse makeup of our town"

- Survey Respondent

"Having a mobile business, I'd love to see more opportunities and spaces for my business to use/occupy for the day. Especially parks & the lakefront. It's such a beautiful setting that could be utilized & appreciated even more. But, also used respectfully & taken care of. I'd be happy to pay a small fee for access to use these areas. As I'm sure other mobile vendors would as well."

- Evanston Business Owner

- ▶ **Race and equity:** There is a perception that Downtown does not cater to Black and Brown residents. They don't feel any ownership or attachment to the Downtown area.
- ▶ **Northwestern students:** Northwestern University is right next door to Downtown, but the students don't seem to think Downtown is "for them". Northwestern students have meal plans and residential amenities that make living and staying on campus at all times the easiest thing to do. There's no incentive to go off campus or explore Downtown. Finally, Northwestern departments host events on campus because Downtown lacks spaces large enough to accommodate them.
- ▶ **Families and children:** Although Evanston is seen as a family friendly suburb of Chicago, there is a perception that there isn't enough for youth and families to do, particularly in Downtown. Middle school and high school students who are old enough to meet friends for after school activities, without parental supervision, have limited options.
- ▶ **The Lakefront:** People see the lakefront as an incredible Evanston asset. Today, there are no food and beverage establishments on the lakefront, and the proximity of the lakefront to Downtown restaurants is not adequately marketed. How do we celebrate the lakefront as part of Downtown? Make it so you can spend a whole day on the lakefront.
- ▶ **Visitors:** Drawing people from outside of Evanston will be critical to increasing the tax base and business activity. Evanston's retail and restaurant mix alone is not enough to attract visitors - neighboring communities have increasingly improved their offerings.

The City's three Special Service Areas (SSAs) lack sufficient funding to improve the quality and frequency of events.

- ▶ **Lack of sufficient funding:** Similar downtown organizations have larger budgets or more funding dedicated to events. In a high tax environment, it may be difficult to increase the SSA budget (a tax increase) to pay for more events. Downtown Evanston allocates \$35k for Events (5% of total budget) and \$65K for Communications & Marketing (6.5% of total annual budget.) - lower than counterpart organizations within Evanston. Downtown Evanston's administration budget (i.e. salaries) is in an appropriate range of 25% to 30%. Sponsorships may be the only way to meaningfully increase the quality and frequency of events.
- ▶ **Public perception:** Although the public doesn't expect Evanston to rival Chicago in terms of attendance or production scale, it does expect Evanston's the quality of events and programming to be reflective of its status as the largest of the North Shore downtown areas. The public finds the events to be underwhelming.
- ▶ **Today, the City of Evanston does not co-sponsor any major event in Downtown or beyond.** In some circumstances limited funding and resources such as security or waste removal are offered at reduced cost to the event host. For non-SSA districts, the primary funding mechanism for events comes from the Great Merchant Grant Program allocation of \$10,000 per district for placemaking initiatives. In order for more fun things to happen, the City needs "skin in the game" and to participate in a more formal and meaningful way in the planning and funding, not just permitting of local events.

RAVINIA, MILLENNIUM PARK AND OTHER EVENT VENUES IN THE REGION LOOM LARGE IN MIND



EVENTS & PROGRAMMING

**TAKE
ACTION!**

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Drive increased activity in retail districts with high quality and frequent events and programming.

The last few years have been tough and Evanstonians need a reason to be excited about getting out and exploring the city. Many stakeholders involved in the Evanston Thrives process recall a time years ago when the City had staff dedicated to special events and the city, overall, had more cachet in the region as a destination for family fun and unique events.

Events can be a powerful driver of change. They can raise the spirit when public opinion and positivity is low. Events can be a reason to break from the ordinary

and get reacquainted with your town. Events can draw people from outside of Evanston to explore and rebuild the City's reputation as a unique destination. Today, all parties hosting events in Evanston are doing so with limited resources. Evanston's SSA Managers know how to host fun events. Successful event examples hosted by Central Street, Main-Dempster Mile, and Downtown Evanston draw crowds and receive positive attention from local news and social media, including the Central Street Halloween Event, MDM Wine Walk, and Downtown Evanston Fall Fest. These events are organized and primarily funded through the SSA's budget, with the help of donations and volunteer time from the local community. But, these organizations and resources are tapped!

ACTION

Adopt Downtown Evanston event as signature city happening or bring major event to heart of Downtown Evanston.

- ▶ Invest in city staff or fund additional Downtown Evanston staff positions to coordinate events and manage event logistics.
- ▶ Establish a funding allocation intended to support signature events in Downtown.
- ▶ Conduct a public poll for input on the priority event for city funding/support in 2023.



PROJECTION MAPPING ON BUILDINGS

ACTION

Evolve / Expand regular Downtown events and marketing to better support brick-and-mortar businesses.

- ▶ Take stock of city equipment / resources available to expand the impact of events (screen, chairs, speakers, lights, etc.)
- ▶ Initiate a series of meetings with Downtown Evanston SSA to determine and plan for expanded downtown event or programming series.
- ▶ Invest in temporary infrastructure for more impactful events in Fountain Square and retail districts.
- ▶ Ensure city-owned event-related equipment is available for use for retail district public events by SSA Managers, Chamber, and other event partners (i.e. improved AV equipment available for use by SSAs or Merchant Organizations, moveable barriers for street closure events)
- ▶ Work with restaurant owners and North Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau(CVB) to re-invigorate Evanston Restaurant Month or find new ways to feature local restaurants throughout the year.

Things to Consider:

- Container stage for Downtown Summer music series in Fountain Square;
- Acquire safety barricades to reduce police barricade for street closures.



As an early action resulting from this plan, the City could conduct a public poll for input on the priority event for City funding/support in 2023. Some event ideas that were suggested through the Evanston Thrives engagement process include:

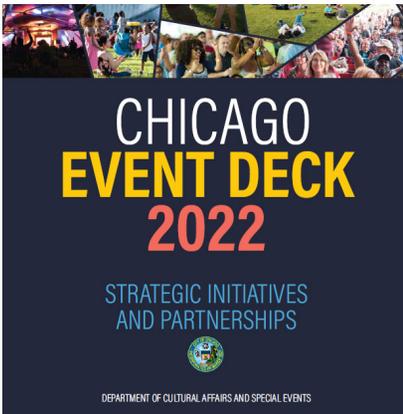
Events or Programming ideas to consider:

- **JUNETEENTH PARADE TO/FROM FOUNTAIN SQUARE** along Church Street to Church & Dodge. **Ensure the route passes north on Dodge and continues to include as much of the 5th Ward as possible.**
- **DOWNTOWN WINTER WALK** from Davis Restaurant Row (lighting), Fountain Square (Ice rink and tree projection) to Arrington Lagoon (light installation of cocoa and warming huts)

ACTION

Draw sponsorship and partners to Evanston.

- ▶ Better define sponsorship strategy for the city of Evanston. Define city events or programs open to sponsorship and the potential impact or reach of sponsorship dollars spent on Evanston events.
- ▶ Define an individual responsible for recruitment and partnership management.
- ▶ Invest in city assets and equipment that make city events more robust and enticing for potential sponsors. Create informational memo with city assets to draw sponsorships. Include information on available spaces, equipment, branding opportunities and media reach.



CHICAGO BLUES FESTIVAL JUNE 9-12

The Chicago Blues Festival is a 4-day celebration featuring the live music performances of national, international and local artists celebrating the city's rich Blues tradition while shining a spotlight on the genre's contributions to soul, R&B, gospel, rock, hip hop, rap and more.

As the "Blues Capital of the World," Chicago has hosted Blues musical legends including Ray Charles, Buddy Guy, Chuck Berry, B.B. King, Koko Taylor, Etta James, Mavis Staples, Dr. John, Bettye LaVette, Keith Richards and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Partnerships with community organizations provide additional activation opportunities in historic Blues neighborhoods.

Millennium Park

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Presenting Sponsor \$125,000
Side Stage Sponsor \$40,000
Space Only Sponsor starting at \$10,000

AUDIENCE PROFILE (2019)
Chicagoan (40%), 26-34 and 55-64 years old (23%), Single (48%), \$40,000-\$59,999 (23%), Female (50%), Caucasian (56%), African American (30%) and Hispanic (1%)

SPONSORSHIP STRATEGY

Corporate philanthropy is becoming more visible and values-driven. One example: Bank of America (right photo) participation in annual PRIDE events has gained notoriety in recent years, following growth of their Bank of America's Ally Program. The company has committed to celebrating LGBTQ+ employees and family members in communities from Boston to North Carolina to California and everywhere in between.

Chicago provides an example of an informational packet available to potential sponsors explaining the value and reach of various events in the City which are open to corporate sponsorships.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Encourage more events, programming, & entertainment in Evanston.

Heard (loud and clear) through the Evanston Thrives public engagement were two key messages: The people want more to do and the City isn't a great collaborator to get new or unproven ideas off the ground. The proposed approach to increasing events and programming has two main goals: (1) Make it easier for the City to approve more events in public spaces, and (2) Improve the City's ability to promote events and programming happening throughout the year. Fortunately, event permitting and promotion are two functions that fall within the current operating paradigm for the City.

Increasing awareness of events and happenings in Evanston will rely on the City's ability to share information simply, quickly, effectively. This will take better coordination on the back-end and a facelift for the city's events calendar - the public-facing tool representing city happenings.

The event permitting process is currently led by Parks & Recreation, convening regular meetings of critical departments - including local Police, Fire, and Health and Human Services - to review and approve event permit applications each week. Evanston Thrives stakeholders offered many ways the overall experience of planning and hosting an event in Evanston could be improved, but internal staff will need to take the lead on implementing improvements that make sense within organizational and funding constraints. Exploring these and other proposed changes is an institutional priority set by Evanston's leadership with the adoption of this plan.

ACTION

Invest in an improved user experience for the City's events calendar.

- ▶ Explore suggested improvement to the city's events calendar. Evaluate the potential to improve the existing tool.
- ▶ Explore 3rd party tools which provide enhanced features for front-end and back-end calendar management and interactivity.
- ▶ Implement a new and improved city events calendar.
- ▶ Maintain up-to-date information from across Evanston's districts and organizations on a combined calendar (Dedicated staff time: ~3 hours per week).

Things to consider:

- *Separate: The municipal calendar of committee meetings should be separate from a calendar of community events.*
- *Filter: Utilize tags to make it easier to search and filter by event type and district. See example from Evanston Roundtable.*
- *Add: Make it easy for organizations and SSA's to submit events to this calendar. Submitted events will still need to be reviewed and approved by the calendar admin.*

ACTION

Rewrite information related to event permitting review and approval process.

- ▶ Remove January deadline for event permit submission.
- ▶ Commit to a scheduled response period for events on a rolling basis.
- ▶ Market event permit process and timeline. Ensure information is easy to find on city's website.

ACTION

Simplify the process to permit events in pre-approved locations.

- ▶ Draw-up a street closure strategy for Fountain Square that minimizes the need for security and/or traffic management staff.
- ▶ Remove public review / feedback period for events held in proven locations without major logistics changes.
- ▶ Identify a central gathering space(s) in each of the retail districts and outline minimum event planning requirements for each to make activation easier for all. *(See: Placemaking chapter)*

ACTION

Re-evaluate local policies that present real and perceived burdens to entertainment businesses and community event sponsors/hosts.

- ▶ Reconsider Evanston's Amusement Tax and impacts on local businesses.
- ▶ Pilot a Community Events Fund to support the local community to initiate more events in public spaces.

Downtown Evanston Winter Programming!



RECOMMENDATION 3:

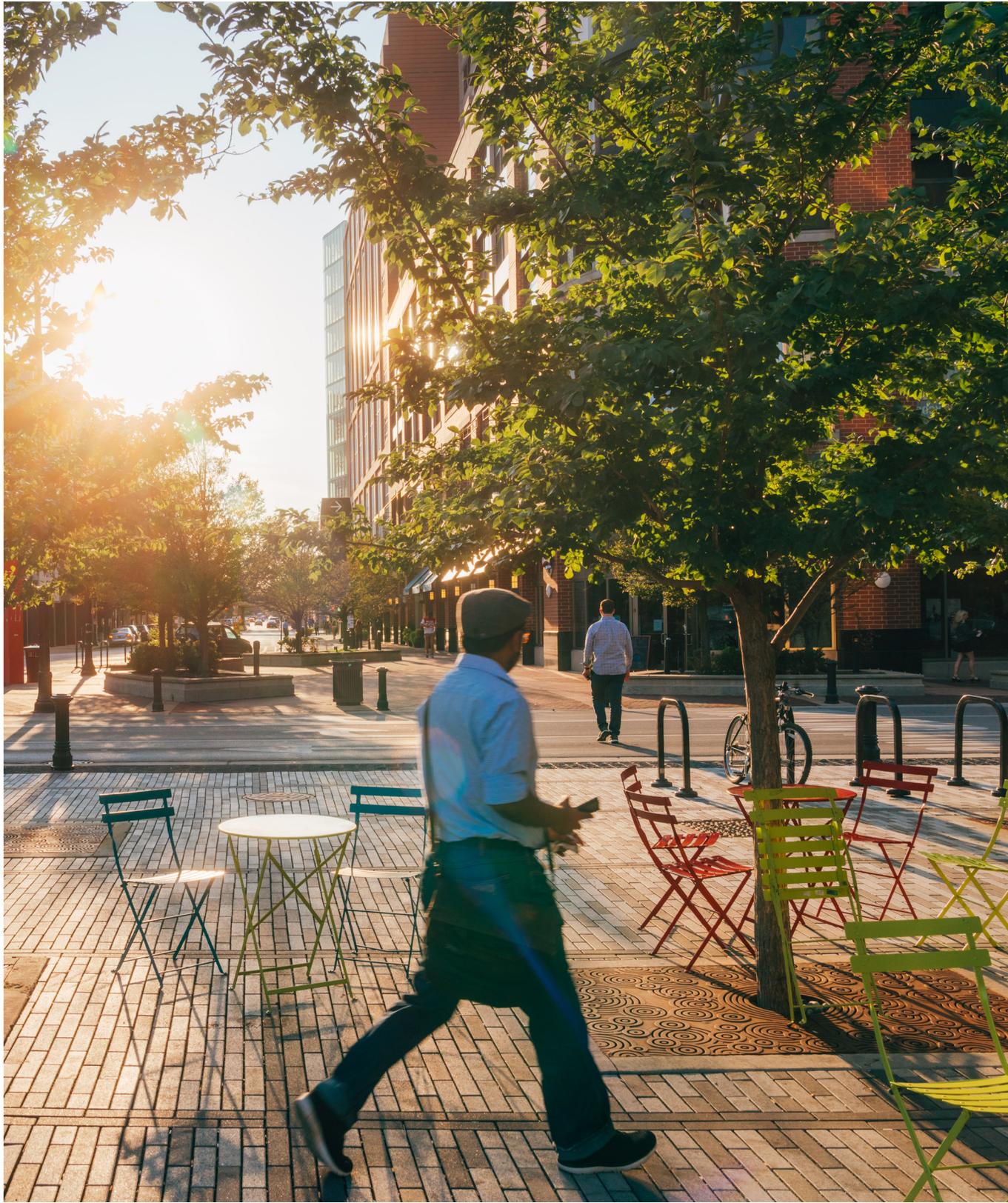
Activate Evanston's most unique public spaces more often.

The “fountain” in Fountain Square is broken....
But the square isn't!

The City invested \$6 million in a premier public space with curbsless streets designed for public enjoyment, festivals and events, most of which have nothing to do with the water element of its' design. Let's recommit to Evanston's most unique spaces and start to generate a real buzz about Downtown Evanston and beyond.

Full utilization of Fountain Square and the Lakefront rely on a city champion. These spaces are incredible assets and uniquely “Evanston”, but both present some very real and challenging limitations on the scale and type of event that can be hosted in each place. In Fountain Square, street closure is required to maximize the utility of the plaza. At the Lakefront not all event types are appropriate in the setting and food and beverage service within this prized recreational space has polarized opinion in the past.

To activate these unique spaces all year long, the City will need to invest in physical infrastructure and planning that will ensure events are a net positive for both areas.



ACTION

Double down on Fountain Square and the lakefront at Church Street as premier event locations.

- ▶ Explore seasonal installations that activate Fountain Square for longer periods of time with interactive seasonal activities. *(refer to following page for ideas to consider)*
- ▶ Identify a strategy to manage equipment storage and public restrooms for events at Fountain Square.
- ▶ Relocate Veteran's Memorial to a featured location in Raymond Park or the Lakefront.
- ▶ Increase use of the Lakefront for signature parks events or programming.
- ▶ Pilot the use of Arrington Lagoon building for food-based vendors limited to packaged goods for a limited period.
- ▶ Build-out restaurant pop-up space for rotating vendors at either Arrington Lagoon building or Church Street Beach entrance structure.
- ▶ Increase the cost of Lakefront event use for private events, but expand the types of events and support for use of Lakefront location for events.



What if the City invested to create a pop-up restaurant space to allow local restaurants to rotate through seasonally and activate the Arrington lagoon!

ARRINGTON LAGOON POP-UP SPACE

New developments are in the works at Arrington Lagoon! Furniture has been selected and approved by the City Council and a small investment to bring it up to food establishment and health code compliance is underway.

Fun for all at Fountain Square in the winter...



FOUNTAIN SQUARE - WINTER UPGRADE!

Businesses in Evanston experience a slow sales period in the winter called the “winter slump”. To counteract this, Fountain Square should be activated with seasonally appropriate activities that invite active participation and passive enjoyment as an onlooker. Elements such as firepits, an ice skating rink, projection mapping on area buildings, and a warm beverage stand could provide a winter wonderland that makes a winter evening a little bit magical and well worth a visit.

... and the summer!



FOUNTAIN SQUARE - SUMMER UPGRADE!

In the summertime, Fountain Square should offer something for all ages. A passive playscape with climbable mounds can make the Square a place to play even without the fountain. Decorative flags with district brands would dance in the wind around lawn chairs filled with casual passersby who stopped to enjoy the summer music series performance featured in the shipping container stage at the top of the plaza.

ACTION

Coordinate programming among districts to activate Evanston all year long.

- ▶ Continue regular event coordination among SSA leaders to reduce event overlap/similarity.
- ▶ Work to activate each month and schedule events in advance for optimal promotion.
- ▶ Engage NU in event sponsorship, planning, and promotion.

ACTION

Consider a pilot to host the Evanston Farmers Market in Fountain Square.

- ▶ Pilot a weekly closure of Sherman for play street series coinciding with Farmers Market at its current location. Rotate activities such as Pickleball courts or other physical activation to encourage market-goers to explore further into Downtown.
- ▶ Engage the Farmers Market coordination team in discussion about the future of the Market.

It's possible to be in Downtown Evanston on a summer Saturday and not even realize the market is happening...



EVANSTON FARMER'S MARKET
The current Evanston Farmer's Market location is bordered by a parking garage, Metra structure, hotel, and office buildings. Image Source: city of Evanston



DOWNTOWN FARMER'S MARKET MADISON, WI
Saturday on the Square - the Dane County Farmers' Market is America's largest producers-only farmer's market taking place every Saturday April-November surrounding the Wisconsin State Capitol Building.



DES MOINES, IA - DOWNTOWN FARMER'S MARKET
Through strategic sponsorships, the Downtown Des Moines Farmers Market takes place each week on the blocks leading to the State Capitol building. This robust market includes experiences with local artists and a Downtown Farmer's Market Incubator Program.

MOVE THE EVANSTON FARMERS MARKET?

Although the city benefits from the notoriety of the Evanston Farmers Market, the City of Evanston doesn't currently own the property where the Farmers Market takes place each week. If the current owner chooses to redevelop that property, the Farmers Market would need to find a new home. Exploring options for a future location makes sense.

It's possible to be in Downtown Evanston on a summer Saturday and not even realize the market is happening. While its current location offers the convenient adjacency to the Maple Avenue Parking Garage, for many, its location also reinforces visitor interaction much like a trip to the supermarket. Drive > Park > Shop > Drive Home. Downtown offers so much to explore and enjoy - a shift in location to Fountain Square could put market visitors at the doorstep of Evanston retailers in the heart of Downtown. Important for post COVID recovery, a relocated market would allow market shoppers to grab a coffee or a pastry, a book, flowers, etc. from Downtown businesses - an experience not unlike traditional market day activities in European squares. Precedents have been set in cities like Madison, WI and Des Moines, IA. Brick-and-mortar businesses benefit from the activity generated by major, regular downtown events.

The Evanston Farmer's Market is a well known, popular, and established in the Downtown area. A shift in location to Fountain Square could be a way build from an existing event to better showcase all that Downtown has to offer.



RECOMMENDATION 4:

Engage Northwestern University in event planning and promotion of Downtown.

Northwestern University has over 18,000 students. They regularly host on-campus events and programming, and could be a powerful partner to our business districts, including Downtown Evanston. Well-known examples such as Brown University's WaterFire event sponsored annually by Brown University or Iowa City's Downtown Block Party cosponsored by the University, are held annually to provide connections to the University and the Cities they call home. Co-sponsored events between Northwestern University and business districts could bring together residents, visitors, and students.

ACTION

Partner with NU to produce one event or programming series each year in Downtown.

- ▶ Pilot Evanston+Northwestern event in Downtown specifically focused on students.
- ▶ Work with Downtown business owners and North Shore CVB to more effectively promote game-day happenings around Evanston.
- ▶ Work with NU Community Liaison, Student Affairs office, and Alumni engagement staff to identify potential event(s) that could take place in Fountain Square.

ACTION

Increase student awareness of the Downtown area and use of Downtown spaces for events and activities.

- ▶ Work with NU Community Liaison and Student Affairs office to identify potential event partnership or promotional opportunities to draw more student interest in Downtown events open to the general public.
- ▶ Conduct annual student engagement to explore new ideas for partnership or participation in Downtown events (focus group, Res-Life guest speaker, etc).
- ▶ Audit and update all student, parent, and employee-facing information about Evanston and Downtown (maps, general information, etc) in partnership with NU.
- ▶ Pursue media attention highlighting Northwestern location and proximity to Downtown as an asset.
- ▶ Pursue inclusion of Evanston restaurant and retail destinations in student meal plans or Wildcard.



BROWN UNIVERSITY SPONSORSHIP OF WATERFIRE PROVIDENCE EVENT (PROVIDENCE, R.I.)

WaterFire Providence on Saturday, Oct. 22— WaterFire Providence is a signature festival sponsored by Brown University as part of its ongoing commitment to and connection with the city of Providence. Since the tradition began in 1975, WaterFire Providence has helped to transform the city culturally and economically over two and a half decades, and offers one of the most unique urban experiences in the nation. The evening featured an installation of 50 illuminated stars above the fires crackling on Providence’s rivers, as well as music and art exhibits designed around the theme of bringing medical research to life. All photos by Nick Dentamaro. Source: <https://www.brown.edu/news/2022-10-22/waterfire>

Community art piece asked event attendees to share their favorite things about the City of Providence



EVENT ON MAIN - UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN HEALTH C.S. MOTT CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

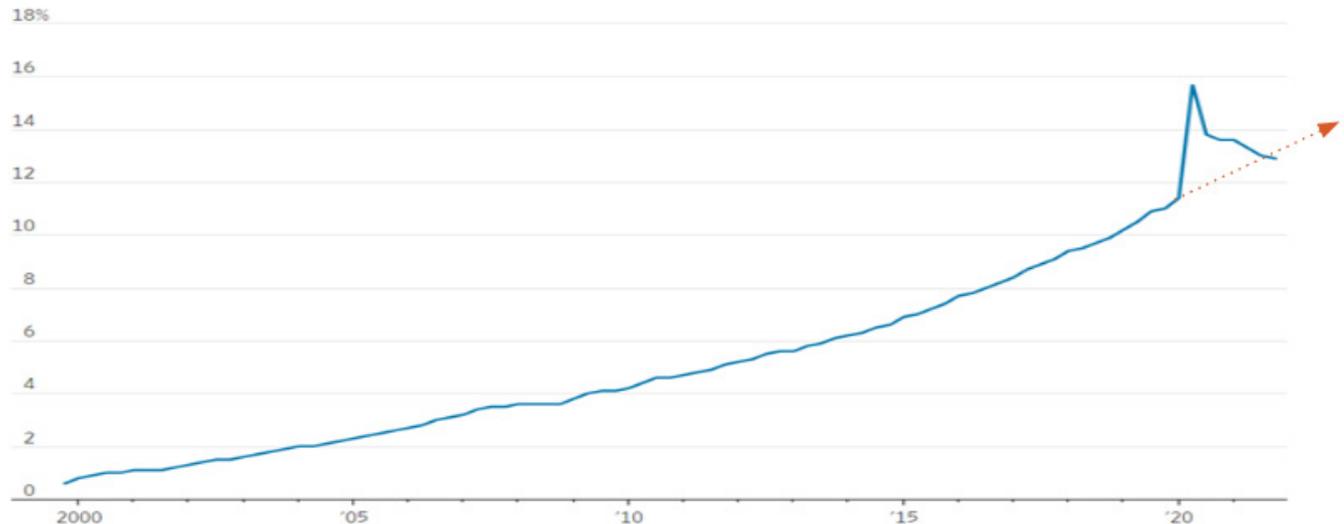
A summer fundraising event supporting the Little Victors Program at University of Michigan Health C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital and benefit the Charles Woodson Clinical Research Fund. Main Street in downtown Ann Arbor is closed to host feature chef-prepared meals and entertainment. This one-of-a-kind experience has helped raise more than \$5 million for the pediatric research and care at Mott. Source: MichiganMedicine.org

TENANTING & ATTRACTION



The “retail apocalypse” doesn’t capture the reality of Evanston business districts.

- ▶ **Nationally, brick-and-mortar retail leases have been growing** - Roughly the same amount of retail space has been leased in the last twelve months nationwide as in 2019. Meanwhile, 2022 was the first year since 2016 that store openings exceeded closures, with the latter declining by 61% year-over-year in the first eleven months of 2021.
- ▶ **Evanston’s retail is stronger than perceived - Evanstonians lost some beloved businesses in recent years, but Evanstonians have plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the future..** While Downtown Evanston no doubt has its challenges and sustained some painful losses during the pandemic, its vacancy rate is just above the 10% threshold for a “healthy” district by industry standards. Downtown also includes major anchors many other downtowns do not have including Target, Whole Foods, World Market and AMC Theater multiplex.
- ▶ **Nationally, e-commerce share of total retail is still only 13%** - Today, e-commerce market share is roughly the same as would have been expected without a global pandemic, given historical trends. Despite early-pandemic projections of ten years of e-commerce growth within the space of three months, the online channel’s market share today – roughly 12.9% – represents just a 1.5% increase from 1Q 2020. Despite a visible spike during peak pandemic months, the trendline year-over-year stayed the same.



ESTIMATED E-COMMERCE AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL RETAIL SALES
Source: US Census Bureau

The impact and potential of different consumers are not always well-understood.

- ▶ **Much anxiety surrounds the impact of remote work on downtown Evanston, but the role of daytime office workers pales in comparison to two other submarkets:** 1) Northwestern students, who are concentrated to its immediate north and have few other alternatives; and 2) the larger regional trade area, which, according to Placer.ai data, encompasses not just the southern zip code of Evanston but the northern neighborhoods of Chicago including Rogers Park.
- ▶ **Many of the retailers that Placer.ai lists as possibilities for Downtown are national and regional brands that cater to these submarkets, including Abercrombie & Fitch, Doc Martens, South Moon Under and Fab'rik.** Others referenced by Placer.ai appeal to Millennial urbanites, like Barry's and Blue Bottle Coffee. Placer.ai is a dataset which uses location analytics including visit trends, trade areas, demographics so form a large and representative panel of customers across the US, then generates statistically significant insights into sub-geographies of interest. Our research focused on Evanston and included other retail centers in the North Shore area.
- ▶ **Is Evanston a leafy suburb of the North Shore or an urban neighborhood more akin to Chicago's North Side?** Your answer provides insight into how you perceive Evanston's business climate and growth potential. In some ways it's an individual's frame of reference for the city more broadly that determines how reactive or sensitive they may be to qualities of the retail environment such as parking congestion, one-way streets, cost of parking, and perceptions of safety.
- ▶ **Both new theaters will be great for Downtown.** While the announcement of and funding for Northlight Theatre's return no doubt represents a huge win, it is worth keeping in mind that the new AMC Evanston 12, even if six screens smaller than the previous Century 18, will likely still generate considerably more foot traffic.
- ▶ **Evanston's Downtown doesn't appeal to all Evanstonians.** The Downtown, at its best, acts as a crossroads for an entire community. In this respect, Evanston's is falling short, and not just with respect to the community's northern neighborhoods. Black people, for instance, account for 16% of Evanston's population but just 8% of the foot traffic in its Downtown (Source: Placer.ai, 2023).
- ▶ **It's density that sets Evanston apart and opens doors for attraction and growth beyond its neighbors on the North Shore.** Evanston's elevated population density, exceeding 10,000 persons per square mile in the 2020 – higher than central cities such as Seattle (9,300), Minneapolis (8,300), St. Paul (6,200), Milwaukee (6,000) and St. Louis (4,800), while not all that far behind Chicago (12,200) – provides a much stronger foundation for the retail mixes in various other business districts across the city than exist in other, more conventionally suburban North Shore communities. Neighborhoods packed especially tight include Noyes and Foster, Main-Chicago, Howard Street, Chicago-Dempster, West Village and the West Side to the north and South Evanston to the south. Also, contrary to stakeholder perceptions, it attracts significant numbers of Northwestern students (and not just for athletic events).

Is Evanston a leafy suburb of the North Shore or an urban neighborhood more akin to Chicago's North Side? Your answer provides insight into how you perceive Evanston's business climate and growth potential.

The relevant competition for customers and prospective tenants varies widely by business district, retail category and consumer segment.

- ▶ **Competition varies depending on retail type.** The most formidable rivals in comparison (e.g. clothing, shoes, home furnishings or decor) and specialty retail categories are Westfield Old Orchard, with its concentration of large brands anchored by Nordstrom; Downtown Highland Park, with its blend of chains and boutiques; and Chicago’s Andersonville, with its bevy of independent shops. Other, somewhat lesser competition includes Downtown Winnetka, with its modest collection of posh shops; Northbrook Court, with its Neiman Marcus; and The Glen Town Center, with its Von Maur.
- ▶ **Trading partly on novelty and free parking, several of the smaller Downtowns across the North Shore have been growing their market share(s) in food and beverage, most notably Wilmette (which also boasts The Wilmette Theatre as an anchor) and Winnetka.** The level of threat which any of them poses, however, seems limited. None can match Evanston’s scale and dynamism, nor can any with the possible exception of Winnetka, be characterized as destinations for shopping.
- ▶ **The nearest clusters of larger-format, value-oriented “commodity” retail are located in the vicinity of Westfield Old Orchard;** along Touhy Avenue, in Lincolnwood and Niles; and along the south (non-Evanston) side of Howard Street, at the Gateway Centre and the Howard & Western Shopping Center.



CONVENIENCE GOODS & SERVICES

Examples: traditional supermarkets, drug stores, dry cleaners



COMPARISON GOODS

Examples: apparel, footwear, jewelry, furniture, sit-down dining



CONVENIENCE as a NON-COMMODITY

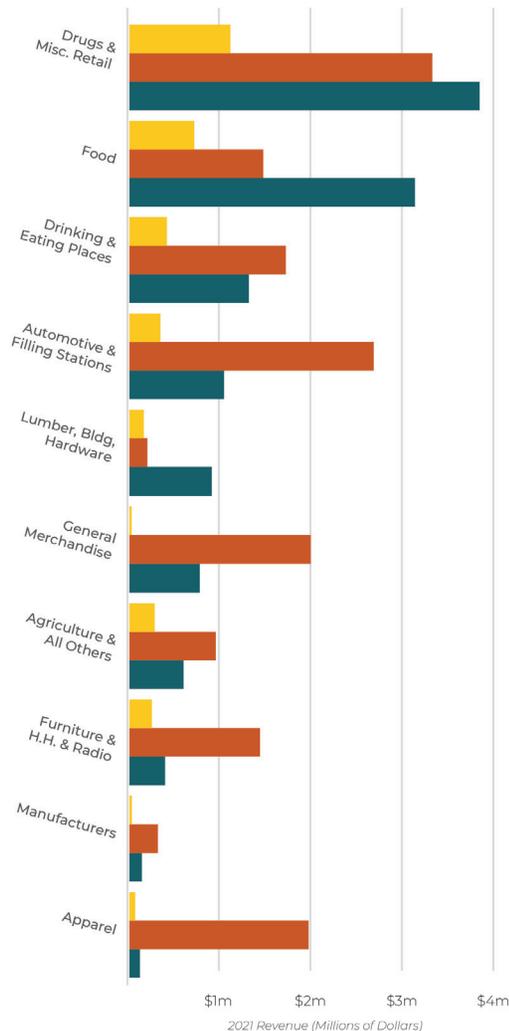
Examples: destination grocery store

RETAIL CATEGORIES
Different types of retailers draw different types of customers. People travel farther for some specialty goods, and value comparison shopping among others.

Retail potential depends not just on consumer demand or competition but also, the particulars of the districts themselves.

Wilmette
Skokie
Evanston

Source: NP analysis of datasets found at <https://www.revenue.state.il.us/app/kob/index.jsp>



- ▶ **Most types of retail need and/or prefer to locate within existing clusters of businesses – even their own competitors.** Indeed, some merchants, especially larger brands, will only consider districts or centers that have already reached a specific level of “co-tenancy”, a “critical mass” of activity and/or certain kinds of anchors. This helps to explain why super-regional malls like Westfield Old Orchard, corridors like Andersonville’s Clark Street and strips boasting popular grocers retain such a gravitational pull.
- ▶ **Recent decades, however, have seen the emergence of a new kind of retail district, one that does not necessarily offer any of these attributes.** Rather, it entices initially with food and beverage, then broadens the experience with a modest yet “browse-worthy” collection of unique shops, all set within a walkable fabric. What at first appears (and what once functioned) as a neighborhood shopping street can thus become a broader destination for daytrippers if not tourists. Evanston has a few of these, with the stretch of Central Street west of Green Bay Road as the most advanced one.
- ▶ **Businesses able to stand alone or in a tiny cluster often either serve a hyper-local clientele (e.g. convenience stores, self-serve laundromats, etc.) or have managed to establish a destination appeal (e.g. barber shops, eateries, etc.).** That said, the importance of visibility has been reduced somewhat by the rise of social media, which, combined with our willingness to suffer all sorts of inconveniences and cross otherwise impervious psychological barriers for distinctive food or a celebrated chef, has enabled talented restaurateurs to develop followings in the most unlikely of places.
- ▶ **The extent to which businesses should worry about – and organize against – new competitors in the immediate vicinity depends on the category in which they operate.** With most types of comparison goods (e.g. clothing, shoes, home furnishings or decor) as well as distinctive food and beverage, additional businesses should be welcomed, as they contribute to the co-tenancy and critical mass, thereby expanding the overall draw. With conveniences and commodities (e.g. drug stores, dry cleaners, sub shops), on the other hand, there is generally a ceiling to the consumer demand based on the size of the nearby population.

SALES TAX PERFORMANCE

Performance by category and community (2021).
Note: groupings are based on state reporting
Source: NP analysis of datasets found at <https://www.revenue.state.il.us/app/kob/index.jsp>

Pricing for retail space is complex. Even well-intended efforts to influence rents can backfire in unexpected ways.

- ▶ **There is a perception that Downtown rents are too high, but given a citywide retail vacancy rate of just 5%, it would be more accurate to say that rents are too high for the tenants some prefer.** Rents are a function of sales; landlords cannot unilaterally set them. Generally speaking, occupancy costs – that is, rents plus pass-through expenses like property taxes – should not exceed 10% of projected gross sales. If a property owner insists on a much higher percentage, the storefront will likely remain empty or struggle with constant turnover – neither of which is of ultimate benefit to the property owner. If, on the other hand, the storefront is able to land and retain a tenant, the space is clearly priced in accordance with what the market can bear.
- ▶ **Business and property-owners engaged in the project point to high property taxes and high alcohol tax as disincentives for businesses in Evanston.** Occupancy costs for building owners trying to lease space consist of rents and pass-through expenses. The largest proportion of pass-through expenses are property taxes. Downtown Evanston retail tenants interviewed by the Evanston Thrives team shared that they pay \$10-\$13 per sq ft per year in property taxes alone. This is something over which the City has some influence, as the City controls 17% of the property tax bill. In addition, Evanston’s tax on alcohol was also touted as a pain point for local, small businesses during stakeholder interviews.
- ▶ **While some initiatives can be beneficial, they also hold strong potential for unintended consequences.** Applying pressure to encourage an owner to lease or fill a vacant spaces quickly can result in an owner seeking businesses with stronger credit, longer track records in the real estate market, and less risk. In short, direct pressure on building owners to lease spaces quickly is likely to result in preference for more established brands or formula businesses.
- ▶ **Turnover can no doubt be painful, but it is ultimately a healthy and indeed necessary process for districts if they are to remain resilient and sustainable over time.** While the impulse to preserve older, so-called “legacy” businesses is certainly understandable, it also comes with risks, potentially offering protection to merchants that have done little to stay competitive – a sort of “moral hazard” – as well as precluding the arrival of others that can more effectively cater to current and future demand.

TENANTING & ATTRACTION



RECOMMENDATION 1:

Keep Evanston Competitive.

Evanston is not on an island. The city is surrounded by communities which offer incentives and programs designed to compete for businesses and market attention. The City must monitor and be conscious of its tax burden, which includes property, liquor taxes, and fees, as well as its regulatory environment. Regulations that add or create business expenses are difficult to offset through incentives.

ACTION

Monitor the regulatory environment within the context of nearby municipalities and respond by adjusting local politics.

- ▶ Regularly review and monitor the impact of local regulations that impact businesses - with an emphasis on small, local businesses in terms of operating expenses and profitability.
- ▶ Consider revisions to local policies that are out of sync with surrounding areas at the expense of local businesses, including higher Liquor and Amusement Taxes.

ACTION

Create incentives to draw businesses to Evanston.

- ▶ Structure incentives to offset higher operating costs. The exact structure of incentives should respond to areas known to be competing with Evanston for businesses. For example, if Evanston will continue to be more expensive to operate in than Skokie, the incentives should work to offset this imbalance within 10% of competitive areas.

COMPARATIVE TAXES AND FEES FOR FOOD/ALC

Table shows comparative taxes and fees among North Shore communities and Chicago. If considered in practical application, a 16.25% tax would be imposed on a beer served at a brewery in Evanston, whereas in Skokie this same beer would incur a 12.25% tax at sale (12.25% is applied to food and beverage in Skokie).

Municipality	Business Type	Sales Tax	Liquor Tax OR *Prepared Food and Bev Tax	Cumulative tax rate for restaurant food	Cumulative tax rate for restaurant alcohol
Evanston	Retail	10.25%	6%	10.25%	16.25%
	Restaurant				
Skokie	Retail	10.25%	2%	12.25%	12.25%
	Restaurant		*2%		
Wilmette	Retail	10.00%	N/A	10%	10%
	Restaurant		N/A		
Chicago	Retail	10.25%	\$0.29-\$2.68 / gal,	10.75%	10.75%
	Restaurant		*0.5%		
Highland Park	Retail	8%	1%	9%	9%
	Restaurant		*1%		

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Market Evanston to the retail development, leasing and tenant community.

Marketing to the retail development, leasing and tenant community requires different approaches and emphases than appealing to would-be consumers and visitors. The retail development, leasing and tenant community needs to hear about aspects and attributes that are usually of little interest to the general public. Examples include area demographics, traffic counts, available incentives, or estimated sales volumes; none of which would likely appear in a marketing pitch to draw the general public to come and spend the day in a given district. These need to be presented in a distinct language, one that conveys both a sophistication on the subject as well as a sensitivity to the unique risks and challenges that such actors face. And finally, such pitches, if they are to be heard by the right people, must be delivered in specific forums and on particular platforms.

The City needs to focus on making it easy to choose Evanston to locate your business. When it comes to filling retail spaces, commercial brokers lead the charge. Getting positive messages and pertinent information into the hands of brokers and others who touch retail development, leasing, and tenanting is critical. The City is uniquely positioned to collect and reflect information about Evanston's retail district personality and performance, as well as available spaces beyond what is easily accessible to individual brokers.

ACTION

(Re)introduce and sell Evanston as a retail location to the retail brokerage community.

- ▶ Design and produce a print / digital brochure for property owners and leasing professionals to help them pitch Evanston and its individual districts.
- ▶ Distribute print / digital brochure to area leasing professionals and property owners for broader distribution.
- ▶ Hold meetings with regional retail brokerages or virtual sessions to share stats about Evanston's market and assets.
- ▶ Attend regional (but not national) trade shows (e.g. ICSC Dealmaking); consider providing an informational takeaway.

ACTION

Generate positive news coverage about Evanston & the business community.

- ▶ Submit articles and push for earned media in prominent mainstream and business publications in the region.
- ▶ Leverage any contacts with mainstream media to generate positive coverage.

ACTION

Create a central clearinghouse for information that is valuable to the retail development, leasing, and tenanting community.

- ▶ Engage local commercial brokers and SSA Managers in a discussion about useful/valuable metrics to display on a publicly accessible Commercial Space Inventory.
- ▶ Solicit for Business Registry / Commercial Space data management software or service to understand the value-add by 3rd party tool.
- ▶ Cultivate deeper relationships and establish trust with local property owners such that they are willing to provide real-time information on available spaces.
- ▶ Create a regularly-maintained and searchable inventory of available retail spaces, complete with contact info which includes items that are difficult for industry professionals to access on their own.
- ▶ Consider a vacant property registry system to feed into the available commercial space database.

ACTION

Lead a series of interactive “Retail 101” workshops with SSA’s, non-SSA organizations, and other community stakeholders.

- ▶ Create a Retail Training course/presentation that familiarizes participants with the basics of how retailers think, how retail revitalization (or repositioning) “happens” and what roles they can play in the process.
- ▶ Use sessions as an opportunity to provide context to challenges, underscore reasons for optimism and create new (or reinvigorate former) “ambassadors” for Evanston as a retail location.



RECOMMENDATION 3:

Promote street-level vitality by tapping Evanston’s entrepreneurial and creative energies.

Evanston’s commercial vacancy rate may not be out of step with the region, but there is still work to do to fill vacant storefronts all over town. The existing, visible ground-floor vacancies detract from the experience of Evanston’s retail districts. Evanstonians want to see these vacant spaces activated, and soon!

Evanston’s businesses and nonprofits are the engines behind placemaking interventions, events, and public art in Evanston. The Evanston Thrives process identified a critical need for the City to be a better partner to businesses and organizations trying to do creative things in public spaces. Recognizing that the majority of retail vacancies in and outside of Downtown Evanston are privately owned, the City’s best near-term course of

action is to spread ideas and reduce barriers to creative and non-traditional uses. The City can be the champion of change, communicate citywide priorities for activating vacant spaces in prime locations, and follow with resources and streamlined permitting to get new initiatives off the ground.

ACTION

Initiate a window treatment art program for vacant storefronts.

- ▶ Identify a local partner outside the City to help build and market this new program.
- ▶ Expand Public Art Funding offered by city and non-profit partners to include artistic storefront installations.
- ▶ Create a public social media campaign to identify storefronts in need of activation.
- ▶ Pilot funding for a short-term activation to the “winner” of the social media campaign. Initiate a window treatment art program for vacant storefronts where a pop-up situation is not possible based on interest of the building owner.
- ▶ If successful, formalize storefront activation for vacant retail spaces as part of the Storefront Modernization Program.



ARTISTIC WINDOW DISPLAY:
Downtown Milwaukee (MKE), Bid 21’s storefront installations called attention to what the empty spaces could be. Photo credit: Retailworks, Inc.



WINDOW TREATMENT ART (EXTERIOR ONLY):
The Evanston Thrives team activated storefront windows with project information using temporary vinyl applique. These installations cause no damage to the window.

Activation can be tailored to owner interest!

ACTION

Create a pop-up leasing program.

- ▶ “Pop-up” space leasing is likely to require regulatory adjustments on city licensing and fees. Pursue regulatory adjustment, if necessary.
- ▶ Explore liability insurance options from the perspective of building owners and explore options for the City to help pay for or assume some responsibility to allow independent or small businesses to more easily participate in pop-up retail leases.
- ▶ Identify spaces that could accommodate food-based pop-ups where key equipment is still in place in a (recently) vacant space.
- ▶ Consider program approach that provide short-term retail leases in empty storefronts or in which City assumes a lease for use as a retail incubator or pop-up concept.

ACTION

Develop and operate entrepreneurial platforms for micro/start-up businesses on or in underutilized, publicly-owned properties in or adjoining existing districts.

- ▶ Explore other such projects in the Chicagoland region; Conduct interviews to identify opportunities to replicate/model. (Food truck plaza, fashion-truck pod, shipping container village, etc.)
- ▶ Identify which of Evanston’s city-owned properties meet requirements based on size, access, and location.

ACTION

Promote non-traditional tenancing strategies to get spaces filled.

- ▶ Revisit ground floor zoning and associated codes to update as appropriate to support hybrid business models (e.g. maker spaces, co-location) as well as non-retail uses where indicated.
- ▶ Provide technical support to owners interested in exploring co-tenancing, including a model sublease agreement.
- ▶ Add question about willingness or interest in co-location on a business license questionnaire.
- ▶ Initiate a call for businesses interested in a co-location model (known as small or micro-businesses, direct messages to home-based businesses, market through arts/creative networks). Economic Development staff should serve as an intermediary for connecting tenants willing to co-locate with one another and with landlords open to such co-tenancing arrangements.



BOXVILLE CONTAINER RETAIL - BRONZEVILLE, CHICAGO, IL
Boxville is Chicago’s first shipping container marketplace that uses modified shipping containers for commerce in place of traditional brick and mortar spaces. Source: <https://www.boxville.org/businesses>



POP-UP RETAIL: GRAMMAR, NEW YORK CITY, NY
GRAMMAR, the e-commerce brand known for its collection of crisp white shirts, opened its first pop-up store in NYC to debut 3 new styles. Booking this space for a week’s duration, the brand created an immersive experience Photo: Chad Jordan Gardella. <https://www.thestorefront.com/mag/inside-the-grammar-pop-up-store-in-les/>

PARTNERS IN BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION - 37 OAKS

Many businesses-owners engaged in the Evanston Thrives planning process expressed a desire for the City to spearhead more business development and educational programming for the business community. External partnerships will be critical to enable the City to respond quickly to this request. Developing educational resources requires time and expertise in both the subject matter and practical applications, a heavy lift for the small Economic Development Division staff working on behalf of Evanston’s business community. There are many independent firms, like 37 Oaks, which partner with cities to do help develop a business development curriculum tailored to local needs.

37 Oaks partners with public & private organizations that drive economic development through small business investment. The organization is focused on education for product-based business owners that prepares them for growth. The 37 Oaks organization offers strategic partnerships, educational resources, including an online ‘37 Oaks University’ with on-demand webinars, 1:1 coaching and business-community knowledge sharing that. An organization like 37 Oaks can work with the city of Evanston and work with the city to develop business education curriculums and fill a missing link in the local entrepreneurship pipeline.



Intro to Pop-Up Markets

On Demand | Live Webinar | Classroom

A great and flexible way to strategically grow your business is to participate in pop-up markets. Learn how to effectively plan and get the most out of these opportunities.

Prerequisites: Intro to Product Assortments; Defining Your Unique Value.

WATCH NOW



Introduction To Storefronts

On Demand | Live Webinar | Classroom

Your business is growing and now you are considering a storefront location. This can be an amazing, yet pivotal decision.

This course provides an overview of the fundamentals, considerations & expectations of launching and operating a product-based, storefront business. You will understand how to prepare and become best equipped for this successful venture.

WATCH NOW



EVANSTON'S OWN MULTI-VENDOR RETAIL CONCEPT - ARTEM POP-UP GALLERY

Artem Pop Up Gallery aims to promote and create enthusiasm about the area’s independent artists. Artem brings handcrafted art by local and regional artists, together in one Downtown retail space.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Enact policies that encourage or incentivize access for small, local, and legacy businesses.

Change is hard.

*Change for a government institution that requires revision of underlying policies and an overhaul of day-to-day operations carried out by municipal staff is **harder**.*

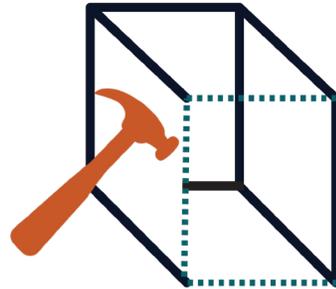
One of the core goals of the Evanston Thrives Retail District Action Plan is to put forward recommendations and actions that are within the realm of reality for the City to accomplish. It's even in the name: "Action plan"!

If the City owns a property setting rents for ground floor spaces is completely within the control of the City. Unfortunately, the City's ability to influence commercial leasing of privately-owned space is limited to a few different levers:

GROUND FLOOR SITE CONTROL:

City/SSA assumes lease or ownership of property to control ground floor use/tenant.

CITY ACQUISITION



City/SSA acquires space and renovates to white box level, ready for a retailer to move in.

PRO: Taking on the master lease or ownership *and the cost of interior improvements* significantly reduces cost barriers for small business tenants.

CON: City assumes risk. A similar benefit with more limited risk would be to fortify the build-out assistance grants and keep the risk on the tenant.

CITY MASTER LEASE



City/SSA assumes or backs a master lease on behalf of local businesses.

PRO: The City is an established institution with a long and low-risk credit history. City involvement would provide significant reassurance to building owners that lease payments will be made, even if the space is occupied by a small business.

CON: City assumes risk and is financially responsible for lease if small business fails; the Economic Development Division or SSA would require additional organizational support to manage such a program. This action by the City is likely to receive significant push-back. As master leaseholder, the City may not be the best operating partner due to legal requirements regarding bidding and liability issues, ability to bring in private resources. A new partnership entity may need to be created.

REGULATORY APPROACHES:

Regulatory approaches would impose development or leasing expectations through restrictions embedded in local zoning policy. Several of these approaches will also require the City to develop a defensible methodology for “below-market” rents.

DENSITY BONUSES

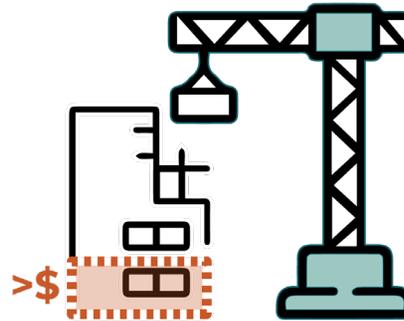


Offer density bonuses to developers willing to commit to below-market rents at street level, assuming that a feasibility study demonstrates the value of such an incentive.

PRO: Approach is within the City’s current control and operating paradigm. Benefit is quantifiable - feasibility studies are a tool that can clearly demonstrate the value of such an incentive for a particular property.

CON: Density and building height are the subjects of concern for some Evanston residents, particularly in the Downtown area. The approach is likely to receive pushback from some residents.

GROUND FLOOR MAXIMUM

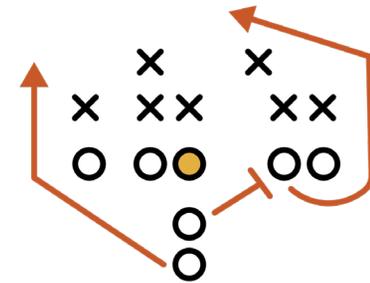


Establish by ordinance for specific districts maximum ground floor space leasable to Formula Businesses defined by the city of Evanston.

PRO: Gives non-formula businesses a clear priority. Does not require city funding.

CON: Limitations like this are advisable only where markets are very strong. For brokers or developers, this can be a major disincentive to invest in higher-risk Evanston properties and districts, and could have the unintended impact of slowing Evanston’s retail market further. Note: This option may make sense for districts with very healthy markets for retail space (e.g. Central) but would be ill-advised in others with higher vacancy (e.g. Downtown).

EXPEDITED PERMITTING



Expedited permitting for developers or building owners willing to commit to lease to a local business or below market rent at street level.

PRO: No additional funding is necessary. Approach is within the City’s current operation paradigm.

CON: City permitting processes aren’t achieving desired outcomes. Additional or altered review procedures may be difficult to implement.

TENANT / LANDLORD SUBSIDIES OR INCENTIVES:

Incentivizing preferred behavior - The City offers resources or benefits to developers / owners who operate in a preferred way. For example, offering below market value rents in prime locations.

ACTION

Consider incentive options and operationalize preferred approach.

LEASE SUBSIDY

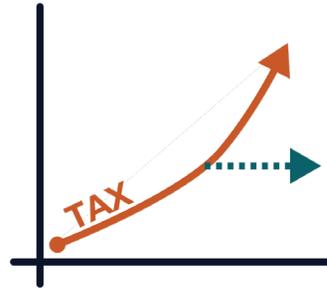


Expand lease subsidies directly to business or building owner to reduce costs to small businesses.

PRO: This could be done through existing grant programs.

CON: Likely to have significant pushback against the idea of the City providing ongoing operational support for businesses. Landlords could take advantage by artificially inflating rents knowing the City will subsidize.

TAX STABILIZATION



Explore new incentives such as Tax Stabilization for commercial owners who lease to non-formula businesses.

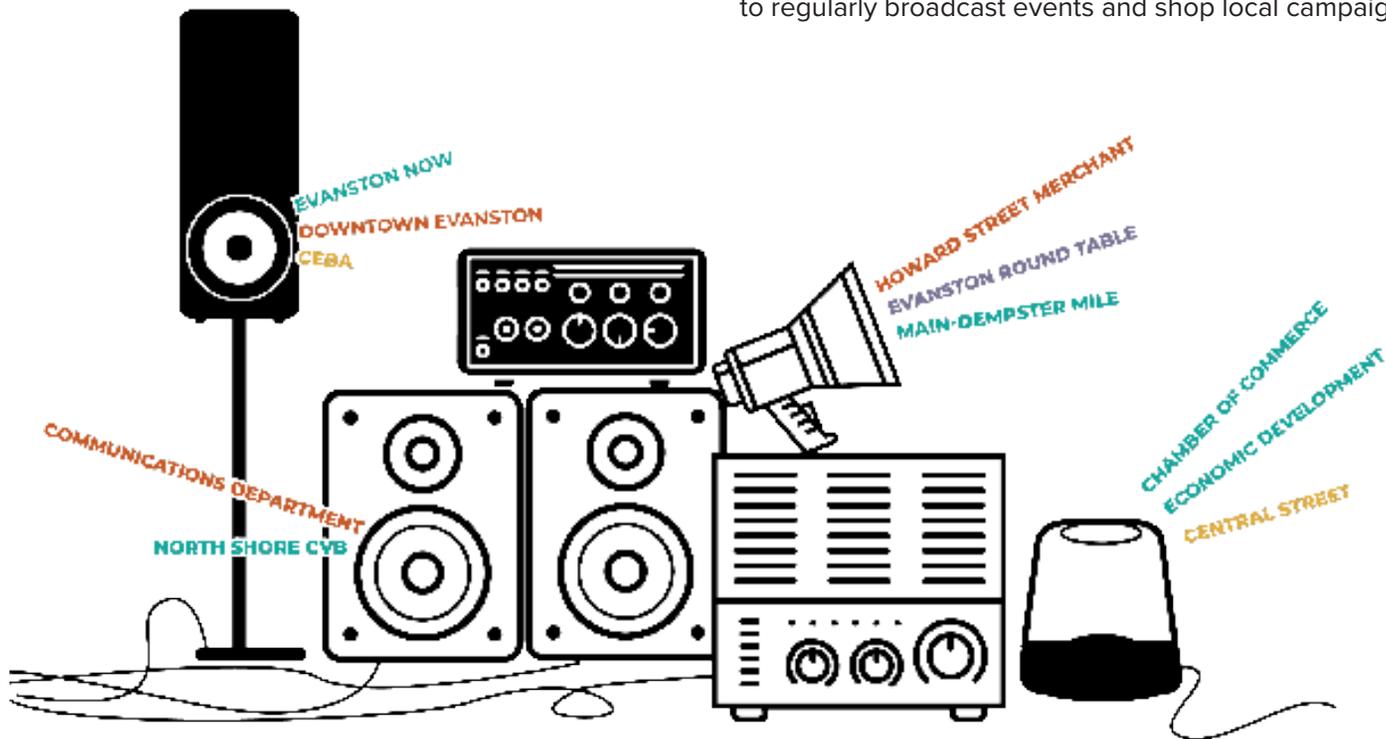
PRO: Manipulation of the local tax rate is within the City's control and operating paradigm. Occupancy costs, after all, consist of rents and pass-through expenses, of which by far the largest is property taxes.

CON: Reduces revenue the City receives from the commercial property which impacts the available resources for other city programs supporting small businesses.

MARKETING

One of the most valuable assets of the Evanston community is the sheer number of organizations, residents, and businesses that are actively working to market, program, and celebrate each of the districts.

- ▶ **Significant efforts are underway to coordinate events and communication across the City and SSAs, and we need to build from that collaboration.** While many competing communications channels can result in confusion and a lack of coordination, this process should also recognize and bolster organizations that are doing it right.
- ▶ **SSA managers, and representatives from non-SSA districts are scheduled to meet bi-monthly to coordinate events and promotional activities.**
- ▶ **The Economic Development (ED) Division is leading conversations and capacity building for non-SSA districts** and maintains a regular newsletter to update businesses and interested residents on development and local business initiatives.
- ▶ **The City's Communications Division also sends out a weekly newsletter that reaches almost 90,000 subscribers** and coordinates with both Economic Development staff and SSA managers to regularly broadcast events and shop local campaigns.



ORGANIZATION	ROLE + CAPACITY	WEBPAGES	NEWSLETTERS	SOCIAL MEDIA	COMMS ASSESSMENT
CITY OF EVANSTON	Manage City social, weekly newsletters, website content, and media outreach. 2 Full-Time Employees (FTEs)	Events Calendar page: avg 2,200 monthly visitors Festivals, Events, and Concerts page: avg 1,000 monthly visitors Holiday Celebrations: avg 350 monthly visitors	Audience Size: 89,891 Audience Description: Evanston Residents Open Rate: 44%	Facebook: 14K followers, posts 4-5 times/week Instagram: 13.9K followers, posts >1 times/week Twitter: 6,588 followers, posts 3-4 times/week	A major communications asset for the business districts. Strong reach across all channels.
CITY OF EVANSTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT	Biweekly ED Newsletter, small business coordination and marketing, manage and support non-SSA business districts (CEBA, Howard, Hill Arts), and Business Attraction. 3 FTEs	Economic Development page: avg 300 monthly visitors	Audience Size: 5,521 Audience Description: Business owners and members of Evanston business community, residents looking for development/business updates. Open Rate: 44%	Facebook: 2.4K followers, posts 2-3 times/week	Critical resource for non-SSA business districts that lack capacity. Newsletter should focus on businesses as their primary audience and more regularly promote resources available.
SSA: DOWNTOWN EVANSTON	Marketing and promotion of businesses within SSA, seasonal events, maintenance and programming of public realm, and merchant coordination. 2 FTEs	downtownevanston.org Homepage: avg 7,400 monthly visitors	Audience Size: ~8,000 Audience Description: Evanston Residents and nearby visitors Open Rate: 43%	Facebook: 11,988 followers, posts 10 times/week Instagram: 12.7K followers, posts 7 times/week Twitter: 5,939 followers, posts >1 times/week	Well-positioned as the primary business district. Strong audience and content across platforms.
SSA: CENTRAL STREET	Marketing and promotion of businesses within SSA, seasonal events, maintenance and programming of public realm, and merchant coordination. 1 FTE	centralstreet-evanston.com Homepage: avg 4,663 monthly visitors	Audience Size: <300 Audience Description: Internal businesses only but external to launch Open Rate: +50%	Facebook: 4.5K followers, posts 8-9 times/week Instagram: 3,640 followers, posts 8-9 times/week Twitter: N/A	Strong social following. Opportunity to reach more residents through newsletter.
SSA: MAIN DEMPSTER MILE	Marketing and promotion of businesses within SSA, seasonal events, maintenance and programming of public realm, and merchant coordination.	maindempstermile.com Homepage: avg 880 monthly visitors	Audience Size: 2,243 Audience Description: Residents + merchants (294) Open Rate: 48%	Facebook: 3,615 followers, posts 5-6 times/week Instagram: 3,346 followers, posts 1-2 times/week Twitter: 468 followers, posts 3-4 times/week	Strong social following.
BUSINESS ORG: HOWARD STREET	Volunteer-led, managed by City ED	N/A	N/A	Facebook: 108 followers, posts >1 times/week Instagram: 19 followers, no posts	Social accounts for the Chicago side of Howard Street are very active with many more followers. Accounts should be combined.
BUSINESS ORG: CEBA	Volunteer-led, managed by City ED	www.goceba.org	N/A	Facebook: 676 followers, posts 2-3 times/week Instagram: 6 followers, posts >1 times/week	Opportunity to market businesses in this area more through social and a web page that lists businesses.
NORTH SHORE CVB	Marketing Evanston as a destination within the broader region. 1 FTE	VisitChicagonorthshore.com Homepage: avg 34,500 monthly visitors	Audience Size: 15,000 Audience Description: Residents and visitors to the NorthShore communities Open Rate: 43%	Facebook: 43,367 followers, posts 10+ times/week Instagram: 17.6k followers, posts 7 times/week Twitter: 5,937 followers, posts >1 times/week	Regularly promote Evanston businesses and events on social media and tag the district, City of Evanston, and Evanston Economic Development. Strong resource for promoting Evanston among other North Shore Communities.



While individual SSAs and the City market events, residents and visitors expressed frustration around the lack of a one-stop-shop for all Evanston happenings.

- ▶ **Newsletters:** There's a need to refine the audiences of the City and Economic Development newsletters and determine frequency. Both are integral in keeping people engaged in the business districts and disseminating information.
- ▶ **Social Media:** Social media marketing offers more flexibility and frequency than an events calendar or e-newsletter. Focusing efforts based on staff capacity can translate to audience growth and directing people to additional information, such as the Events Calendar and the newsletters.
- ▶ **The city's website**—one of the main places that residents go to find information—is difficult to navigate, and the Events page does not include updated events or tags to easily filter based on interests.
- ▶ **Organizational constraints exist**—both within the City, and throughout some of the business districts—to effectively promote businesses, events, and offerings.

"There is a need for cultural communication outlets like Hispanic, Asian, and African cultural news. Not just during the cultural month."

- Survey Respondent

"I don't know what is happening around the city but wish I did!"

- Survey Respondent

"I sometimes find it hard to know what's going on locally."

- Survey Respondent

"I don't get news, but would love to know where to find it! Social media?"

- Survey Respondent



Local pride has taken a hit in recent years despite encouraging trends in Evanston's retail performance among North Shore communities.

- ▶ **In reality, the City and its many partners have many successes to tout.** New corporations are relocating to downtown, vacancy levels are within normal ranges, and residential units and redevelopment efforts are underway Downtown and throughout many other business districts.
- ▶ **The challenge is to change the negative perceptions by sharing the successes of the city of Evanston and the greater Evanston community.**

"It makes me sad that many of the businesses that I enjoyed in Downtown have closed - Barnes and Noble, Panera, the used bookstore on Church, Nevins, etc. I also greatly miss the movie theater and Rhythm Room."

"It's too impersonal. We need more thoughtful ways for people to engage with downtown."

"As a long time resident, it has been incredibly sad to see the business district downtown die. I'm stunned by the number of empty storefronts and the lack of businesses that people can enjoy."

"The empty storefronts and ground-level offices, medical clinics, and physical therapy businesses take away from the vitality of the area."

Above and facing page: Pull-quotes from conversations with residents and business-owners, as well as write-in survey responses.



Evanston lacks a unified identity for the collective business and cultural offerings.

"Evanston needs a focus. We have 4 wards [overlapping Downtown] with very little coordination."

"We really need a unified marketing campaign. We have a food truck and I go to all the business districts with it for various events. The only reason I know about these events is because my truck is there."

"I'm on the Evanston Arts Council and there's a fight to get a central website, where everyone can get the information. It is actually in four different places and none of them are complete."

- ▶ **The average visitor does not think of Evanston as a collective of districts**—it's perceived as one place, whether that is to a favorite restaurant in one district or an event Downtown. When these visitors do not see or understand the breadth of offerings outside of their one destination, they do not explore other areas. This pertains to residents, as well.
- ▶ **Evanston lacks an umbrella marketing & branding strategy for its retail districts:** There's no one defending or defining "The Evanston Experience".
- ▶ **Evanston doesn't have a strong identity among North Shore communities:** Although Downtown is well known, other retail districts throughout Evanston could be a bigger regional draw. The City has not effectively marketed all that Evanston has to offer to visitors.

"Andersonville and Lincoln Square are easy to get to and independent shops. And it depends on what your business is. If the City did promote a place that is worth making a trip to, that you can visit and not just go to one place or one shop, that would be amazing."

"Every place has to have their own identity. But how can there be authentic moments to what each district has? There has to be a framework that allows it to be consistent with other areas."

"Chicago, NY, and LA have hot spots all over that work well with one another. Evanston can do this too. So many opportunities for hot spots!"

Above and facing page: Pull-quotes from conversations with residents and business-owners, as well as write-in survey responses.

MARKETING

TAKE
ACTION!

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Create an identity and narrative for the collective of Evanston's business districts and programs.

To effectively serve all the businesses throughout Evanston, there needs to be one story and identity, serving as an umbrella for all eight business districts. This name and identity should be utilized as the public face of all business district offerings—on the city's website; social media; signage; and potentially, an organizational umbrella to represent the many partners throughout the city.

The following brand story communicates Evanston's unique selling proposition—what makes it one-of-a-kind and appealing to residents, businesses, and visitors. It also communicates the solution to Evanston business districts' core problem—that the many individual districts and businesses that make this place great are better together. This story can be used in its entirety on the district webpage of the Economic Development Division, brochures, and marketing materials that offer space for a longer-form description. It can also be used in bits and pieces on social media, press releases, and visitor guides.

Evanston is one of America's best places to live, but also a place to explore. Our city has eight neighborhoods and commercial districts, each with a distinct personality and flavor. We invite you to step outside of your door, see what each is all about and Enjoy Evanston.

ACTION

Implement Enjoy Evanston brand in the digital realm.

- ▶ **Website:** Rename the Economic Development subpage to Enjoy Evanston and update to incorporate new brand and story.
 - ▶ *Include high-quality photography and a link to each district's own website/webpage (where applicable), along with the sub brands and stories.*
 - ▶ *Include a graphic map of all districts that a visitor can click on to learn more about each.*
- ▶ **Social:** Shift Economic Development social accounts to Enjoy Evanston branding.
- ▶ **Newsletter:** Promote the page via e-newsletter and other platforms, such as SSAs, North Shore CVB, and the Chamber to cross promote the existence of the revamped brand and site.

Enjoy
EVANSTON

ACTION

Implement the Enjoy Evanston brand in the physical realm.

- ▶ **District Maps:** Install a custom map of Evanston and its districts at prime locations throughout the city. The map could live in existing or new kiosks or be printed as brochures, posters, or tote bags.
- ▶ **Info Centers:** Create standard “Enjoy Evanston” bulletin boards at key businesses/locations in each district to reinforce the brand and highlight upcoming events and programs throughout all districts. Our survey results show that flyers in business districts are still a common way people find out about events, as it reaches anyone who passes through existing businesses.
- ▶ **Trash Bins:** Within business districts, incorporate branded trash receptacles. The goal of these branded moments is to not detract from the district brands that will be celebrated through banners and street pole wraps, but to create moments to tie those district brands to the umbrella brand.
- ▶ **Cement/Sidewalk Decals:** During the roll-out phase, install sidewalk decals that promote Enjoy Evanston with a QR code to social media pages.



PHYSICAL MARKETING MATTERS!

37% of survey respondents use flyers and event boards to stay updated on local news, events, and general information. It was the 3rd most selected answer behind City Communications (58%) and Word of Mouth (42%).

ACTION

Implement district brands at the district level.

- ▶ **Storytelling:** Utilize the brand personalities and brand stories as tools to communicate and promote Evanston’s business districts.
- ▶ **Existing Sub Brands:** Build on existing sub-brands (Downtown, Howard, Central Street, and Main Dempster Mile) to bring them under the Enjoy Evanston umbrella. Where needed, shift colors and fonts to align with the overarching brand.
- ▶ **New Sub Brands:** Shift names of certain districts to more clearly align them with their physical locations. For instance, CEBA > Church & Dodge and Hill Arts > Ashland Arts.
- ▶ **Banners:** Install updated banners in all districts to display the updated branding and reinforce a sense of place. Where street pole banners are not feasible, such as Noyes, utilize street pole wraps.
- ▶ **Murals:** Work with local artists to create murals that play off of each district’s brand and unique character, with a nod to the overarching Enjoy Evanston brand. Partner with the Legacy Business Program to ensure public art for this initiative aligns with district branding.
- ▶ **Public Art:** Partner with the Legacy Business Program to ensure public art for this initiative aligns with district branding.



SUB-BRANDS



TYPEFACES

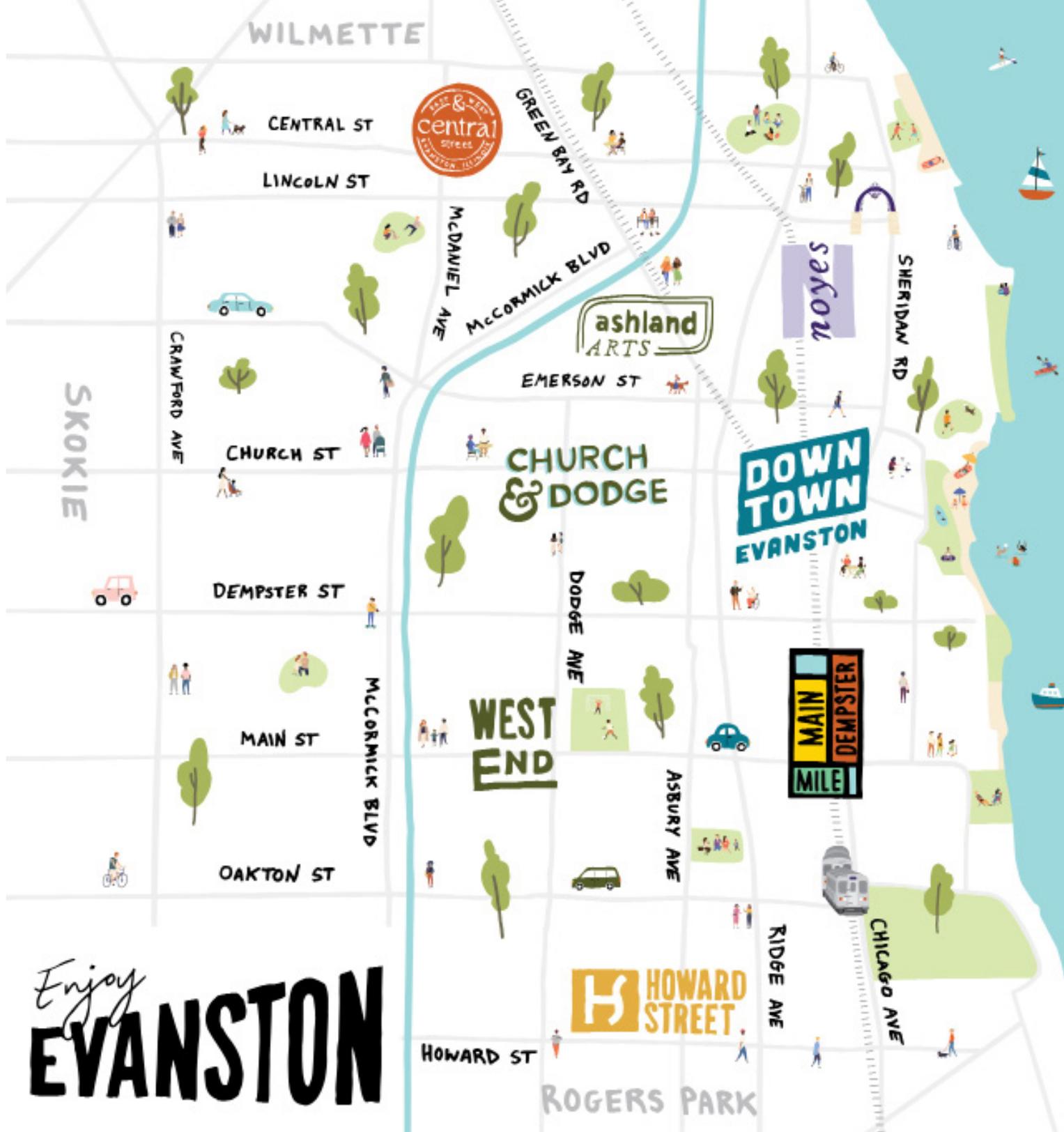
Libre Baskerville
PROXIMA NOVA

CUBANO REGULAR
ALTERNATE GOTHIC

Tan Waverly
Northwell

COLOR PALETTE





Enjoy
EVANSTON

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Design all of Evanston business district marketing and communications to engage with target audiences.

CUSTOMERS: RESIDENTS

Key Characteristics:

- ▶ Are familiar with their own neighborhood district and potentially Downtown, but need one place to get information on everything that is going on throughout Evanston.
- ▶ Feel connected to independent, legacy businesses as part of the character of Evanston.
- ▶ Opportunity to get them to discover areas outside of their neighborhood and share.
- ▶ Want higher production value from events and marketing
- ▶ Utilize the brand personalities and brand stories as tools to communicate and promote Evanston’s business districts.

Communication Strategies:

- ▶ Streamline where to find events and offerings.
- ▶ Tap into and grow hometown pride. Campaigns to eat, drink, and shop here in Evanston.

CUSTOMERS: VISITORS

Key Characteristics:

- ▶ The city’s close proximity to Chicago and the North Shore make Evanston particularly appealing to young adults and families with children.
- ▶ Many visitors are likely familiar with Evanston but are unaware of the breadth of cultural, shopping, and dining options.

Communication Strategies:

- ▶ Create and tailor messaging for different types of visitors, including families (outdoor events and kid-friendly venues) and millennials (art and entertainment, cultural events, and bars/eateries).
- ▶ Highlight the wide range of amenities and package experiences within and between the districts.
- ▶ Streamline where to find events and offerings.

There are four major target audiences for the Evanston business districts. The first three—residents, visitors and students—are organized as customers. These audiences have some overlapping interests, primarily the overall need for information about what is happening in the districts. They need this information to be easy

to understand and easy to share with others. However, each audience may be more likely to find this information in different places, and the language that is used to speak to each audience should also vary.

These audiences all have unique characteristics and different messages will resonate with each

of them. The following matrix outlines the desired action, key characteristics, and lead message for each of the defined audiences. This matrix is intended to provide direction for immediate marketing and communications efforts. Over time, it should include additional audiences and sub-audiences.

CUSTOMERS: NU STUDENTS

Key Characteristics:

- ▶ Northwestern University students have convenient access to downtown, Central Street, Noyes, and Hill Arts.
- ▶ Many come from upper-middle class or upper-class families and have disposable incomes.
- ▶ Students need a reason to leave campus but stay in Evanston (and not go to Chicago), including dynamic public spaces, unique dining options, entertainment venues, and experiential activities.

Communication Strategies:

- ▶ University students need to know things are happening. Cross-promotion with Northwestern will be incredibly important to ensure students are aware of events and offerings throughout the business districts.
- ▶ Promoting the identity of each district to showcase the unique elements of each will help students to program their shopping, dining, etc.
- ▶ Visually connecting the identities of adjacent districts (Noyes, Downtown, and Central) to the Northwestern identity strengthens the feeling of the “college town” vibe.

ACTION

When drafting marketing and promotional materials for the business districts, consider this information.

BUSINESSES: EXISTING

Key Characteristics:

- ▶ Businesses within each of the districts vary widely by offerings and marketing capacity, but will all benefit from increased exposure and coordinated communication efforts.
- ▶ Many current businesses expressed the need for streamlined communications around promotions and events, as well as resources offered by the City.

Communication Strategies:

- ▶ Businesses, whether part of an SSA or not, are a big piece of helping to spread the word. They need shareable bites and a cohesive brand story to serve as ambassadors for their district and Evanston, as a whole.
- ▶ Website and newsletter reorganization, accompanied by a targeted business educational campaign, could raise awareness of city resources and position the City—particularly the Economic Development Division—as a partner and ally for businesses.
- ▶ Additional opportunities for coordination and communication among businesses within a district can advance opportunities for cross-promotion and collaboration.

ACTION

Print out this table and hang it somewhere to reference target audiences and strategies!

BUSINESSES: POTENTIAL

Key Characteristics:

- ▶ Businesses that align with the character and scale of Evanston’s business districts (i.e. modern industrial bowling alley for West End, family owned-bakery for Church & Dodge, fashionable footwear shop for Downtown, and ice cream shop for Main Street.)
- ▶ Businesses with existing brick & mortar footprints in Chicago and surrounding suburbs who are thriving and may be looking to expand.
- ▶ Businesses with existing brick-and-mortar footprints in analogous communities beyond Chicagoland (e.g. university towns, urban-suburban hybrids within major cities, etc.).

Communication Strategies:

- ▶ Highlighting the resources and investments the City is making in its business districts will appeal to potential new businesses.
- ▶ Targeted social media follows of potential businesses, by district accounts and city accounts, can help plant the seed for a future location
- ▶ Direct communication and one-on-one tours and meetings with Economic Development staff and SSA managers to further market available locations within Evanston’s business districts.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Redesign the City and Economic Development websites and newsletters to better support marketing and business development assets.

The current Economic Development website has a number of subpages that make it hard to navigate. The below recommendations outline step-by-step strategies to reorganize the structure, design, and navigability of the department's digital assets. This includes the addition of a filterable events calendar and strategies to boost traffic through the city's e-newsletter.

ACTION

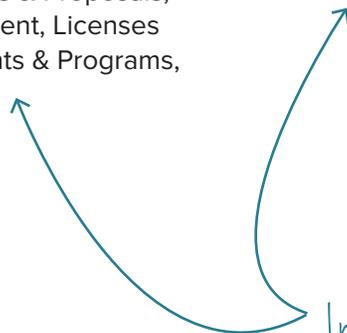
Enhance navigation on the city website.

- ▶ **Content Audit:** Conduct a content strategy audit of existing pages, and remove pages that are no longer relevant.
- ▶ **Organization:** Reorganize sections and pages so there is a clear hierarchy to make it easier to navigate. Create bigger umbrella categories within each section. New categories could include:
 - ▶ **City Government:** Boards and Commissions, Agendas, Municipal Calendar, Departments, Codes, Strategic Plans, etc.
 - ▶ **Living & Visiting:** Enjoy Evanston, Events, Itineraries, Lodging, History & Demographics, New Resident Resources, Farmers Market, etc
 - ▶ **Services:** GIS & Mapping, Bill Pay, Waste Services, Permits & Stickers, etc.
 - ▶ **Doing Business:** Bids & Proposals, Economic Development, Licenses & Registrations, Grants & Programs, Legacy Businesses

ACTION

Invest in an improved user experience for the city's events calendar.

- ▶ **Separate:** The municipal calendar of committee meetings should be separate from a calendar of community events.
- ▶ **Filter:** Utilize tags to make it easier to search and filter by event type and district. See example from Evanston Roundtable.
- ▶ **Add:** Make it easy for organizations and SSAs to submit events to this calendar. Submitted events will still need to be reviewed and approved by the Calendar Admin.
- ▶ **Maintain:** Maintaining up-to-date information from across Evanston's districts and organizations on a combined calendar will require at least 3 hours per week. This task must be clearly designated to a staff person who can act as the Calendar Admin and dedicate time to it each week.



*Integrate Marketing & Events:
Ensure navigation to the City's events calendar is obvious and irresistible from other areas of the City's website!*

ACTION

Update city of Evanston social media accounts.

- ▶ **Audit:** Conduct a content audit of About/Bio sections on various pages to remove outdated links and non-functional pages (i.e. Evanston Edge pages and sites, duplicate Howard Street pages, remove links to Twitter accounts that are not in use).
- ▶ **Cross promote:** Use city of Evanston social channels as a place to cross-promote content from Enjoy Evanston and other business districts.
- ▶ **Photography:** Continue to utilize high-quality photography to promote the city and its districts.
- ▶ **Links:** Utilize Linktree to host many links in bio. Update regularly.

ACTION

Refocus the citywide weekly newsletter and Economic Development newsletter.

City newsletter:

- ▶ Once Enjoy Evanston webpage and social channels are updated, create a consistent Enjoy Evanston section within the City newsletter to promote business districts. Link directly to specific SSA socials or websites.
- ▶ Share links to each newsletter on social channels along with links to subscribe.

Economic Development newsletter:

- ▶ Refocus content to align with business owners and developers as the primary audience.
- ▶ Shift to bi-weekly distribution, focused on recent news, business spotlights, and upcoming events.
- ▶ Create a monthly newsletter to capture bigger picture data trends.
- ▶ Share links to each newsletter on social channels along with a link to subscribe.

Implementing all of these marketing recommendations will be time consuming. This is another place where looking to an outside partner may be the best way to get things done.

The City could explore feasibility of an entity, partially funded by the City that manages all business districts, including SSAs, marketing, and events.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Improve the organization and promotion of non-SSA business districts.

The SSAs have more sophisticated marketing and communications, with dedicated staff and allocated budgets. Yet the non-SSA business districts also have organizational strengths to build on. With Economic Development’s support, these districts can and should promote their offerings through low-lift coordinated efforts, including high-quality photography that can be used for social media and Enjoy Evanston campaigns.

ACTION

Build on existing efforts to bring together groups of business owners to create assigned roles.

- ▶ **Coordination:** Economic Development to establish and lead monthly meetings for merchants of non-SSA districts. Create roles among merchants, including a Marketing Lead and an Events Lead.
- ▶ **Inventory:** Work with merchants to create an accurate inventory of all businesses within the district with contact information. Create a searchable database and map, with all businesses listed, which can be embedded within Enjoy Evanston district sub-pages.

ACTION

Invest in and showcase photography of all districts.

- ▶ **Seasonal:** Hire photographers to capture scenes of each district and its streetscape during different times of the year (Fall, Winter, Spring/Summer).
- ▶ **Businesses:** Hire photographers to visit local businesses and capture images of the business and its offerings, as well as the business owner. Continue quarterly until all businesses within the districts are reached.

ACTION

Establish low-maintenance social media accounts for all districts.

- ▶ **Create:** Economic Development to create social media landing pages on Facebook and Instagram for those that do not have them (West End, Ashland Arts, and Noyes). Utilize the brand story, primary colors, and brand marks provided.
- ▶ **Cross Promote:** Incorporate posts that promote non-SSA districts as a part of Enjoy Evanston’s content calendar and tag accounts.
- ▶ **Maintain:** Set a realistic goal for posting on these accounts—1-2 times a week for West End, Noyes, and Ashland Arts; and 2-3 times a week for Church & Dodge.
- ▶ **Elevate:** Use social media to lift up the stories of businesses and business owners within these districts.
- ▶ **Simplify:** Create simple branded templates on Canva for each district to use to highlight events and promotions. This allows for consistency as well as allows a social media lead to create simple branded graphics.

PLACEMAKING

There are limited tools to support placemaking and district identity outside of SSA-managed districts.

- ▶ **The City has no formalized process to pay for placemaking initiatives.** Although public space activation is a priority for many staff and city leaders involved in this planning process, there is no existing, regular budget allocation for placemaking initiatives in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), nor is there a formalized prioritization for public space enhancements outside of parks (i.e. plazas, parklets).
- ▶ **The \$10,000 annual funding allocated by the City to non-SSA districts isn't sufficient to achieve placemaking and identity-building goals.**
- ▶ **Businesses that don't fall within an SSA area, particularly in the 5th Ward, often conflate SSA services with "city services" and feel they aren't getting the same resources and attention.** Importantly, the SSAs are a taxing body which feeds the funding pool for SSA operations each year. The city's Economic Development staff serve as the support and management for the non-SSA districts, but there are disparities in staff time and resources made available to each place.
- ▶ **The city's retail districts on the west side of town are too sprawling,** which works against the goals to build identity and sense of place around an identifiable location.



INFRASTRUCTURE



STREETS



LAW & ORDER



PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is seen as a "frivolous" investment and not a core City function, but *Placemaking is an economic necessity*

The City can play a stronger role in defining expectations for how retail districts look and feel, as well as guiding businesses towards best practices.

"It would be great to bring more attention to the Noyes Art Center with better signage and branding."

"I have a food truck and do BBQ. We're busy all summer, concerned about implementation and activation January through April."

- ▶ **Food Trucks:** Food truck operating restrictions are stifling business interest in operating food trucks in Evanston. Food trucks are a significant part of the food-based business ecosystem. These small-format mobile restaurants allow businesses to test new ideas or locations before committing to a permanent brick and mortar location. Suppressing creativity in this space means removing an opportunity for creativity and growth in the local restaurant industry.
- ▶ **Parklets:** Local regulation and a slow- or difficult-to-navigate city permitting process are stifling business-owner interest in creating parklets in the parking lane along retail blocks. There is a perception that this type of intervention isn't desired by city staff. Where they do exist, jersey barriers in various states of disrepair present unattractive frontage to the sidewalk.
- ▶ **Signage:** City staff involved in the Evanston Thrives process shared that the current sign permitting and review process isn't producing the quality product that the City desires. To remedy this, the City has two courses of action: (1) Tighten restrictions; or (2) Streamline the process for signs with preferred attributes. Tightening restrictions was not seen as a desirable or prudent path forward by most stakeholders who weighed in on the process.
- ▶ **Design guidelines:** The City does not have an updated Future Land Use Policy or Urban Design Guidelines as tools to control the type of development that happens in different areas.
(See *Tenancing and Attraction*)

"Having a mobile business, I'd love to see more opportunities and spaces for my business to use for the day, especially parks and the lakefront."

"Storefront Modernization funds to help install a new awning and sign would add a lot."

Above: Pull-quotes from conversations with residents and business-owners, as well as write-in survey responses.

Vibrant districts can benefit from improved public spaces and connections between destinations.

- ▶ **Some districts, such as Downtown, have public spaces that aren't living up to their full potential** (e.g. Fountain Square). Others, such as Church & Dodge, lack high quality public spaces that can host programmed events, visitors, and other events designed to draw people to the district and bring people together.
- ▶ **The Metra/UP/CTA rail lines and viaducts create barriers for pedestrian traffic** in multiple locations in several districts.
- ▶ **Streetscape enhancements and wayfinding along critical pathways between transit, parking garages, and nearby destinations are needed** to improve pedestrian flow in districts in select locations.
- ▶ **The new Northwestern University Stadium, Ryan Field, is likely to increase visitor foot traffic along Central Street.** Enhancement reinforcing the proximity of Ryan Field to dining and retail will be necessary.

"Signage downtown to direct people for a much more positive Evanston experience."

"I would appreciate more lighting on the street between the L station and the metra for those of us who walk this path to and from work."

"Do something to enhance the sidewalk leading to the L station; maybe public art?"

"When you are on our block, it has a very awkward, I don't want to walk down that street kind of thing."

Above: Pull-quotes from conversations with residents and business-owners, as well as write-in survey responses.

PLACEMAKING

TAKE ACTION!

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Invest in transformative physical interventions to support retail districts.

ACTION

Invest to achieve three primary placemaking goals in each district and Downtown:

Placemaking Goals:

1. Maintain superior standards for the upkeep, and maintenance of public spaces.
2. Create a mix of permanent and temporary central gathering spaces for events or seasonal activations.
3. Invest in new, cohesive equipment and infrastructure for retail districts and Downtown.

ACTION

Upgrade infrastructure to improve the visitor experience.

- ▶ Remove/Reduce redundant wayfinding signage in key gateways and around central gathering spaces.
- ▶ Prioritize streetscape enhancements along critical pathways (from transit, parking, or a nearby destination)
- ▶ Establish clear gateways and at the entrances of each district.
- ▶ Implement larger, more consistent and visible public parking signage and wayfinding.

ACTION

Invest in connections with Northwestern University (NU).

- ▶ Establish priority investments to strengthen information and wayfinding between NU student residential campus and downtown amenities. *[Refer to Downtown Placemaking Plan for concepts - Note that placemaking project concepts shown on private property are for illustrative purposes and do not imply that owner agrees to proposal nor suggests the City will acquire for plan purpose.]*

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Provide better design guidance and support for pedestrian-facing elements of small businesses that contribute to a great public realm.

ACTION

Encourage parklets and sidewalk cafes.

- ▶ Critically reconsider the need for crash rated jersey barriers (concrete barricades) for every proposed on-street parklet.
- ▶ Explore engineering alternatives for jersey barriers and/or purchase new barriers or alternatives for use in public ROW.
- ▶ Create a Parklet Design Guide (continue effort that began in 2019). Reference other successful guidelines, including the Chicago Alfresco Design Guide & Make Way for People - People Spots on street level.
- ▶ Create a design competition to paint parklet jersey barriers / safety barriers.
- ▶ Reduce or remove the business-owner’s responsibility to cover the cost of parking from a parklet initiative.



**CREATE PARKLET /
SIDEWALK CAFE GUIDANCE
& OFFER INCENTIVES**

ACTION

Create clear expectations for business signage.

- ▶ Create signage design templates which align with preferred scale, material, and position for business owners to simplify permit/review of signage by Community Development.
- ▶ Distribute/Promote “preferred” signage design, scale, and positioning through the city’s permitting information.
- ▶ Conduct sign guidance training and create a promotional campaign for local architects who work with local businesses.
- ▶ Create design guidelines that are short, targeted and graphic.



**DEVELOP CLEARER SIGN
DESIGN GUIDANCE
(or broader UD standards)**

ACTION

Redesign the food truck policy.

- ▶ Remove food truck restrictions in retail districts for *Evanston-based* businesses. Establish at least one permanent food truck stall or space to be made available to any permitted truck in the city of Evanston. *(Location recommendations included in District Placemaking Plans).*
- ▶ Expand the period of time that food trucks may remain in one location in alignment with neighboring municipalities.
- ▶ Expand the time of day to include early morning (coffee service) and late night.
- ▶ Consider specific permit locations for late-night food truck operation supporting area event centers, entertainment businesses, and sporting event venues.



**RELAX FOOD TRUCK
PARKING REGULATIONS**
& Create Food Truck stalls at key
locations

- ▶ Review distance limitations around schools and parks. Consider an amendment to allow operation during sporting events or other limited operating opportunities, by right.
- ▶ Consider a food truck plaza at Robert Crown for use during sporting tournaments that activate the outdoor fields for long periods on weekends.
- ▶ Create a pop-up restaurant space in a high-profile location in Downtown. *(refer to Business Supports)*

QUESTION POSED TO TAKE FORCE:

Would the proposed changes to food truck policies make it more desirable to operate a food truck in Evanston?

"A food truck Plaza at [Robert Crown] or on lakefront would be great"

- Business Task Force Member

"I'd like to be able to park next to Ryan Field on game day. I currently park inside Ryan Field and have to pay 'Northwestern'"

- Business Task Force Member



SOUL & SMOKE FOOD TRUCK

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Better define non-SSA retail districts in Evanston to more effectively distribute resources.

ACTION

Redraw the district maps to focus on the most identifiable/legible blocks and nodes, and consider the following changes to city-sponsored placemaking initiatives:

- ▶ Revise place-based grant funding policy to correlate directly with visible placemaking investments to benefit/reinforce the district identity in physical and digital spaces. Decouple these funds from small business education or maintenance purposes.
- ▶ Pilot allocation of place-based funds to each of the defined retail district areas based on the revised map. *(right)*
- ▶ If the revised program is successful and all funds are fully utilized, consider increasing program funding.

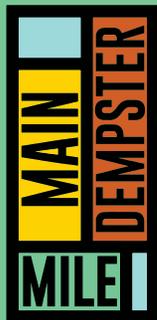
PROPOSED REVISION TO RETAIL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES



This plan proposes that within these refined areas the City would take on maintenance and landscaping responsibility in the public way. This would free up Great Merchant Grant funds for placemaking and events!

Enjoy
EVANSTON

RETAIL DISTRICT PLACEMAKING PLANS



INTRODUCTION

Placemaking is more than maintenance and seasonal decorations. Effective placemaking and placekeeping require a strategy that lifts the most identifiable characteristics of a place to the surface. They should be creative and designed to bring people together and support local businesses. They require collaboration among business owners, residents, and the City to make strategic investments that help distinguish and feature what makes them special and unique. Placemaking interventions presented in the Evanston Thrives Retail Action Plan are tailored to each individual retail district. The following elements played a role in shaping the recommendations that follow:

Public opinion: Evanston Thrives Survey asked participants to think about the districts they know best and share their perceptions and opinions of the district today as well as ideas and ambitions for the future. The 2,000 survey responses returned feedback for every retail district.

Identity analysis: Each district has its own unique personality and strengths. Through surveys, conversations, and market research, these personalities were captured in brand directions (word identifiers, a district story, primary color palette, and logo) to help each district tell its story through communications, banners, and the placemaking initiatives.

SSA Manager and business-owner insight: An internal working group of city staff and SSA Managers helped to guide the process. These conversations, alongside the voices of hundreds of businesses lifted up through the Task Force, surveys, and focus groups, helped to identify the major issues and opportunities facing businesses today throughout the city and within each district. The specific placemaking plans outlined here are critical interventions to help support business owners and bring more vitality to each district.

Walking Tours with stakeholders: Many miles were logged walking around each district with stakeholders to see, note, and collectively brainstorm creative improvements.

The content for “Market Strength” and “Market + Development” recommendations were derived from mini-analyses of each district that incorporated assessment of existing mix and spaces, interpretation of Placer.ai data, consideration of competing districts and centers, review of newspaper articles or blog posts as well as other forms of secondary research.

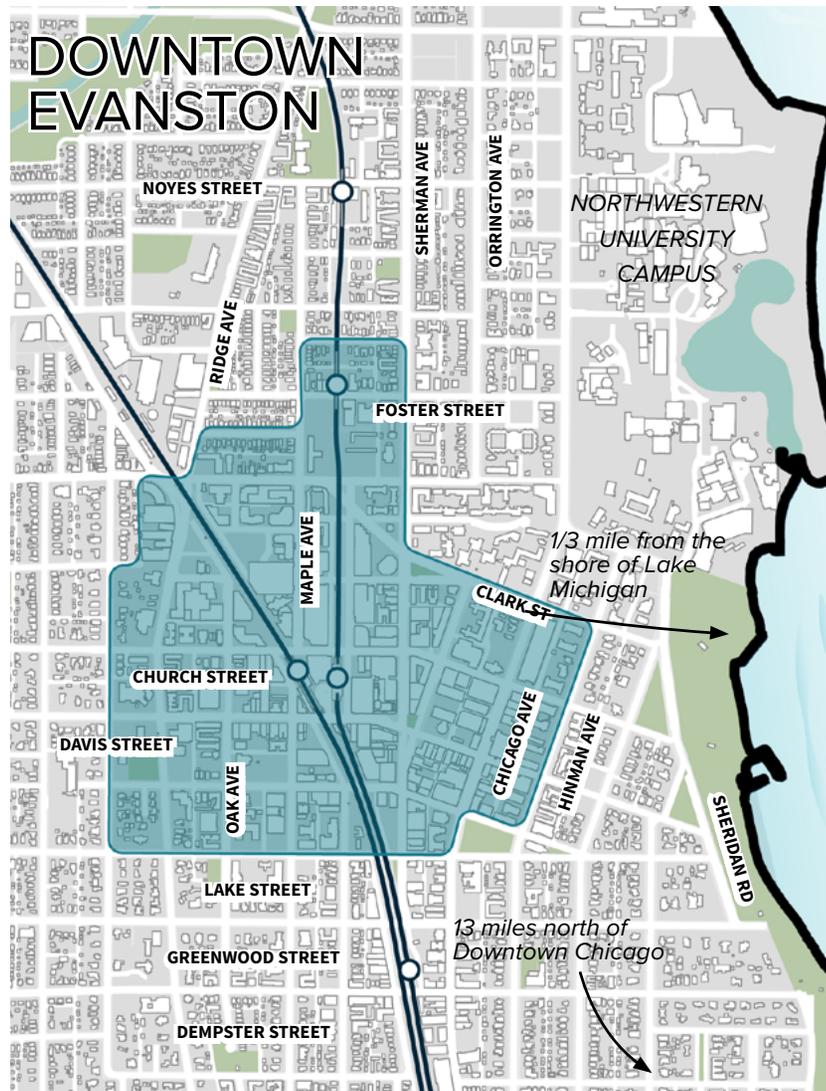
These plans require prioritization and champions for implementation within each district. Community members, business owners, local merchant organizations, and SSAs are invited to take the brand elements and placemaking strategies and determine what speaks most to the future they are working toward in their district. To be a partner in change, the City must use the action recommendations to guide them as a collaborative partner, dedicate resources to placemaking projects, and oversee implementation.

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DOWN TOWN EVANSTON



DOWNTOWN EVANSTON FEATURES THE CITY'S MOST DIVERSE MIX OF RETAIL BRANDS, OVER 60 RESTAURANTS, AND ROOFTOP BARS WITH A VIEW. ITS WORLD-CLASS ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT—including EVANSTON'S CINEMA AND ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX AND THE NORTHLIGHT THEATER (COMING SOON)—ARE RIPE FOR (RE)DISCOVERY. ONLY A ½ MILE FROM THE SHORES OF LAKE MICHIGAN AND NORTHWESTERN'S CAMPUS, YOU CAN SEE WHY OVER 6 MILLION PEOPLE VISIT DOWNTOWN EVERY YEAR.



THINGS TO KNOW

- Downtown Evanston is the urban core of Evanston. The Special Service Area is managed by Downtown Evanston.
- Downtown is home to Fountain Square. The water feature in Fountain Square is currently not operational, but the plaza, public seating and seasonal events and decor enliven the space year-round.
- The Northwestern University main campus hugs the northeast corner of Downtown with undergraduate residence halls clustered closest to Elgin Road. Northwestern University also owns several administrative and medical buildings located in the downtown area.
- Many streets in the downtown area are one-way. Residents and visitors find it tough to navigate Downtown—and know where they are—with one-way streets and lack of identity around the major intersections.
- Twenty new businesses have opened since 2021! Northlight Theater (1012-1016 Church Street) and the recently reopened AMC Evanston 12 (1715 Maple Ave) will generate new activity along Church Street near Maple Avenue.
- Downtown office occupancy has not yet bounced back to pre-pandemic levels. Several central office buildings are operating at 60% headcount or lower. This has a direct impact on the daytime activity in the downtown area.

BOLD + CONFIDENT

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY
COLOR

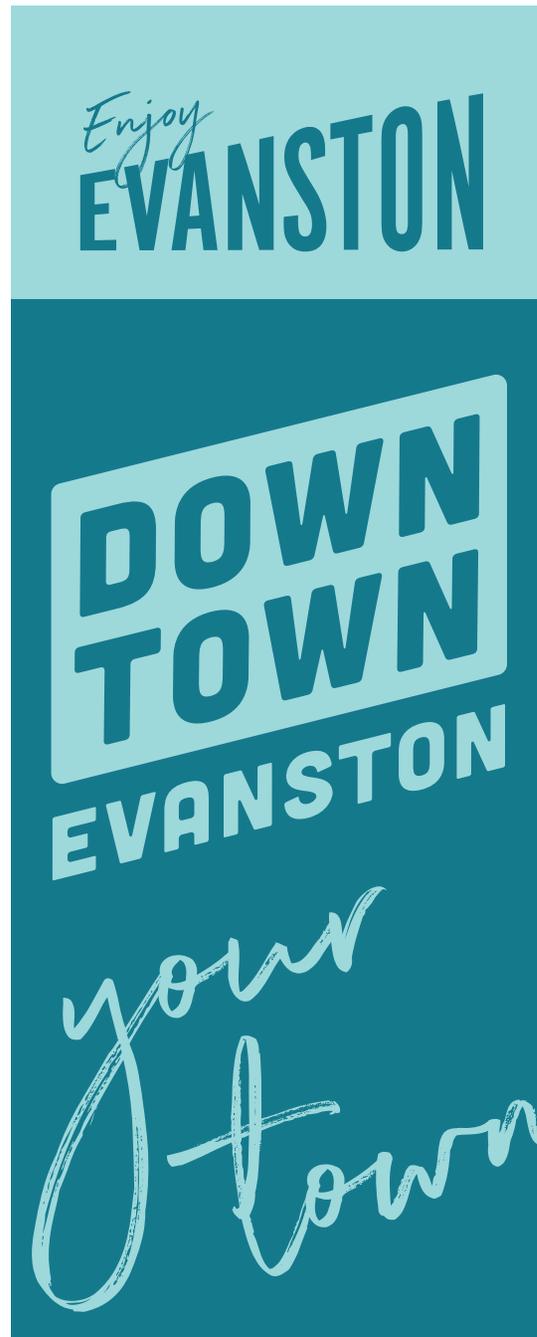


SECONDARY
COLOR



EXISTING LOGO

The upward tilt of the logo (created before this process) manifests the next chapter of this district while the curved type and finework speak to the welcoming nature of the area.



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

MARKET STRENGTH

Unlike the other business districts across Evanston, Downtown draws on a constellation of demand generators, though there is some confusion as to which ones are most critical to its retail prospects. Northwestern is the most important and indeed the most reliable, inasmuch as students have relatively few alternatives (and, at least according to the survey data, actually rely less on e-commerce than other cohorts within Evanston). Daytime workers are relevant as they typically spend in just a narrow range of categories, most notably quick-service food and beverage as well as some select conveniences. Non-student city residents loom larger, especially those from Wards 4 and 2, which identify most closely with Downtown.

Westfield Old Orchard eclipsed Downtown Evanston as the North Shore's shopping destination decades ago. And yet, until recently, Downtown still boasted an assemblage of national brands, including Lululemon, North Face, Urban Outfitters, Gap and Jos A. Bank. Even today, notable co-tenancy still exists, like Crossroads Trading, Gearhead Outfitters, Benefit Cosmetics and Cost Plus World Market, as well as two anchors in Whole Foods Market and Target. Meanwhile, the regional leasing community generally views Downtown Evanston in positive terms and does not dismiss its potential. With the possible exception of Highland Park, the North Shore's village centers are not viewed by the leasing community as especially competitive in this space, given their relatively small scale. And while some stakeholders strongly oppose the presence of larger chains in the district, the survey data suggests that this is not a widely-held view or priority, nor is a mix dominated by small businesses necessarily realistic in light of Downtown's typical occupancy costs.

Today’s Downtown Evanston contains no small number of food and beverage establishments, particularly in the fast-casual and ethnic subcategories. This is not uncommon in university towns and indeed, the selection in Evanston’s case is arguably more appealing than the standard. At the same time, it has lost market share in upmarket sit-down dining to North Shore village centers like Wilmette, and it also suffers from a noticeable lack of nightlife offerings – perhaps a remnant of its history as a “dry town” or, more likely, an outcome of its high liquor taxes – at a time when that space has diversified with a host of new concepts and operators (which, incidentally, do not mimic the loud and rowdy “dive bars” of old). The reopening of a multiplex anchor should help, driving considerably more evening foot traffic than the far more celebrated (and indeed, very exciting) return of the Northlight Theatre.

Downtown Evanston	
Wards	1, 2, & 4
District Area	229 acres
Licensed businesses (all)	400
Ground floor businesses (estimate)	140
New businesses (2022-present)	20
Recent closures (2022-present)	11
Street frontage	8.32 miles
Downtown Evanston Average Monthly Website Visitors	7,400
# of Downtown Evanston Newsletter Subscribers	8,000
# of Downtown Evanston Facebook Followers	12,000
# of Downtown Evanston Instagram Followers	12,700

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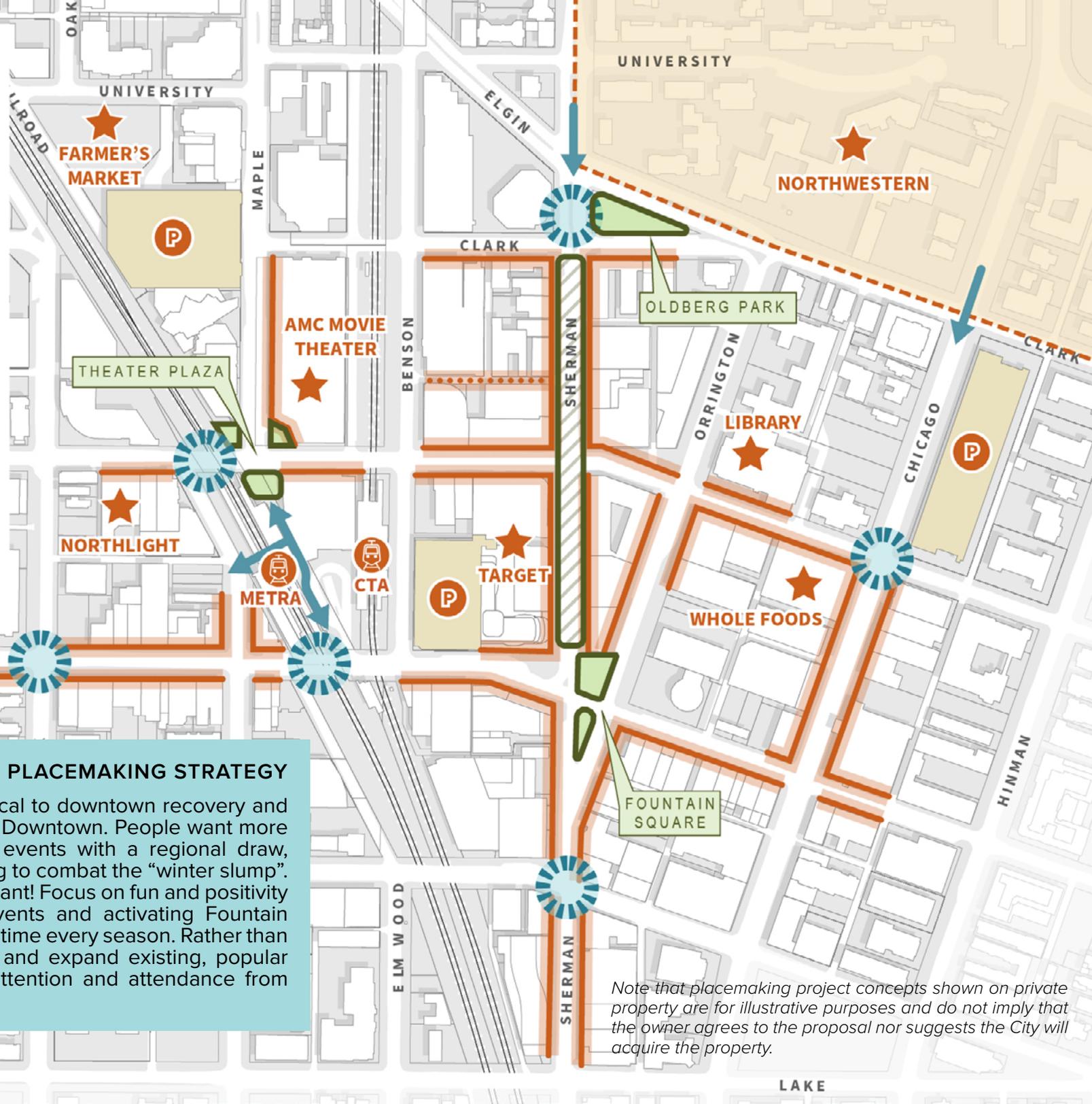


EXISTING VISITOR TRAFFIC DRIVERS

-  DENSE RETAIL CORRIDORS
-  LARGE ANCHORS
-  COMMUTER RAIL STATIONS
-  MUNICIPAL PARKING GARAGES

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

-  KEY GATEWAYS
-  PUBLIC SPACE INVESTMENTS & ACTIVATIONS
-  TEMPORARY PLAYSTREET ACTIVATION ON SHERMAN
-  PEDESTRIAN PATH IMPROVEMENTS



DOWNTOWN EVANSTON PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Increasing foot traffic is critical to downtown recovery and will improve the vibrancy of Downtown. People want more entertainment, high-quality events with a regional draw, and wintertime programming to combat the “winter slump”. Give the people what they want! Focus on fun and positivity by hosting more visible events and activating Fountain Square for longer periods of time every season. Rather than reinvent the wheel, evolve and expand existing, popular events that already draw attention and attendance from Evanston and beyond.

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CONCEPT: REGULAR PLAY STREET ON SHERMAN

Examples of playful spaces come in many shapes, sizes, and costs.



RIVERPLAY - MEMPHIS, TN

A number of cities have used temporary street closures paired with placemaking activations to draw foot traffic to their downtowns and appeal to diverse audiences. RiverPlay in Memphis turned a busy street along the waterfront into a pop-up play space with murals, planters, basketball, skating, DJ nights, and more. Court Street Plaza paired a major capital project redesigning the street to be more pedestrian friendly with temporary uses like vendors, seating, and a roller rink. Every summer, Philadelphia's Parks & Rec Department takes over a downtown parking lot, paints a giant mural on its surface, and installs amenities like sandboxes, water features, and music lending libraries to activate the space all summer long. Lastly, Winter Walk is a pop-up plaza in San Francisco that created a vibrant gathering space with light projections, food trucks, and playful light-up seating. The secret sauce to the success of all of these efforts are the partnerships with city agencies, small businesses, designers, artists, and others that bring these spaces to life.

The rink surface is used as pickleball courts outside of rink hours.



**COURT STREET PLAZA - POP-UP ROLLER RINK
CINCINNATI, OH**
Photo: Facebook.com/mobilerollerrink

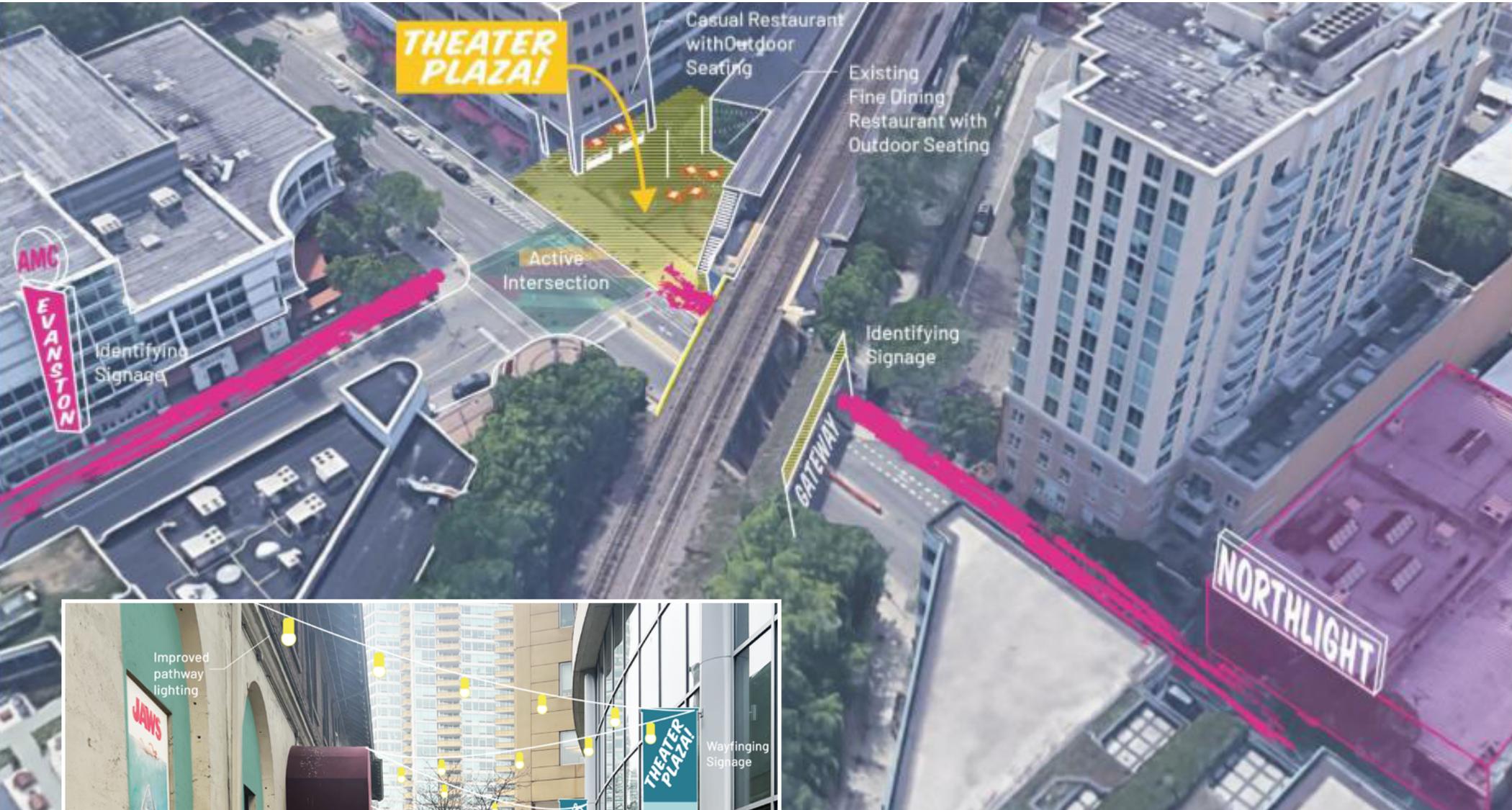


WINTER WALK - SAN FRANCISCO, CA
Photo: Inhabitat



THE OVAL- PHILLY, PA
Photo: Interface

That's a temporary sand box.



THEATER PLAZA CONCEPT:

Create a Theater Plaza designed with performance activation in mind at the intersection of Church Street and Maple Ave that enlivens the open spaces that connect Northlight Theater, the AMC, public parking facilities, Davis Street/Evanston Metra Station and alley walkway, and local restaurant destinations at the surrounding corners and connection pathways. Include enhancement of the Church Street viaduct with lighting and paint.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Incorporate Enjoy Evanston branding throughout the district. Given the recent investment in branded banners, focus on other elements, such as trash receptacles (100 bins throughout the district).
- Downtown Evanston has the highest digital reach among all districts. Utilize this platform to lift up other districts. Regularly tag other business districts and Enjoy Evanston accounts in social media content and cross-promote materials through shared posts.
- Maintain the online events calendar to feature ongoing and special events hosted by the SSA as well as businesses.
- Invest in regular seasonal photography throughout Downtown's public spaces as well as photography of key businesses.
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high-traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events Downtown as well as in other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page to link to the Downtown Evanston website.

Placemaking + Public Space

- Invest in semi-permanent improvements to enliven Fountain Plaza during the summer and winter months.
- Experiment with closing Sherman between Davis and Clark on weekends and activating with games and activities that appeal to a variety of audiences.
- Consider restricting Davis Street between Sherman Ave and Orrington Ave to only pedestrians and emergency vehicles in order facilitate walkable events on the square.
- Pilot the summer season of the Evanston Farmer's Market at Fountain Square.
- Undertake streetscape cleanup and repair including more attractive rat abatement interventions in landscape planters and tree pits along the street.
- Replace damaged trash receptacles and remove all temporary signage throughout the district to reduce signage clutter.
- Implement the Theater Plaza concept at Church and Maple.
- Improve gateways on key retail corridors leading into the heart of Downtown.
- Bridge the gaps created by the Metra/UP/CTA rail lines and viaducts (incl. safety improvements to enhance critical street crossings or pathways from transit).
- Reimagine the intersection of Elgin, Clark, and Sherman, and pair it with improvements at Oldberg Park, to create a safer and more attractive gateway from Northwestern University.
- Explore the potential to convert Downtown one-way streets to two ways (Davis, Church, Sherman, Orrington). Pilot temporary two-way conversion during events that close Sherman.

Targeted attraction efforts might include:

1. Select digitally-native and other on-trend brands as well as national chain-lets that cater to a youthful customer profile, including ones specializing in fashion resale as well as "gorp-ware" (i.e. associated with the outdoor-recreational lifestyle);
2. existing chains at Westfield Old Orchard looking to relocate to spaces with a better value proposition or willing (and able) to open an additional store in Downtown;
3. name-brand factory outlets with a track record of taking freestanding locations (separate from a larger outlet mall like the Fashion Outlets of Chicago);
4. additional locations for Chicago-based streetwear and sneaker chain-lets;
5. craft brewpubs; and
6. "eater-tainment" concepts.

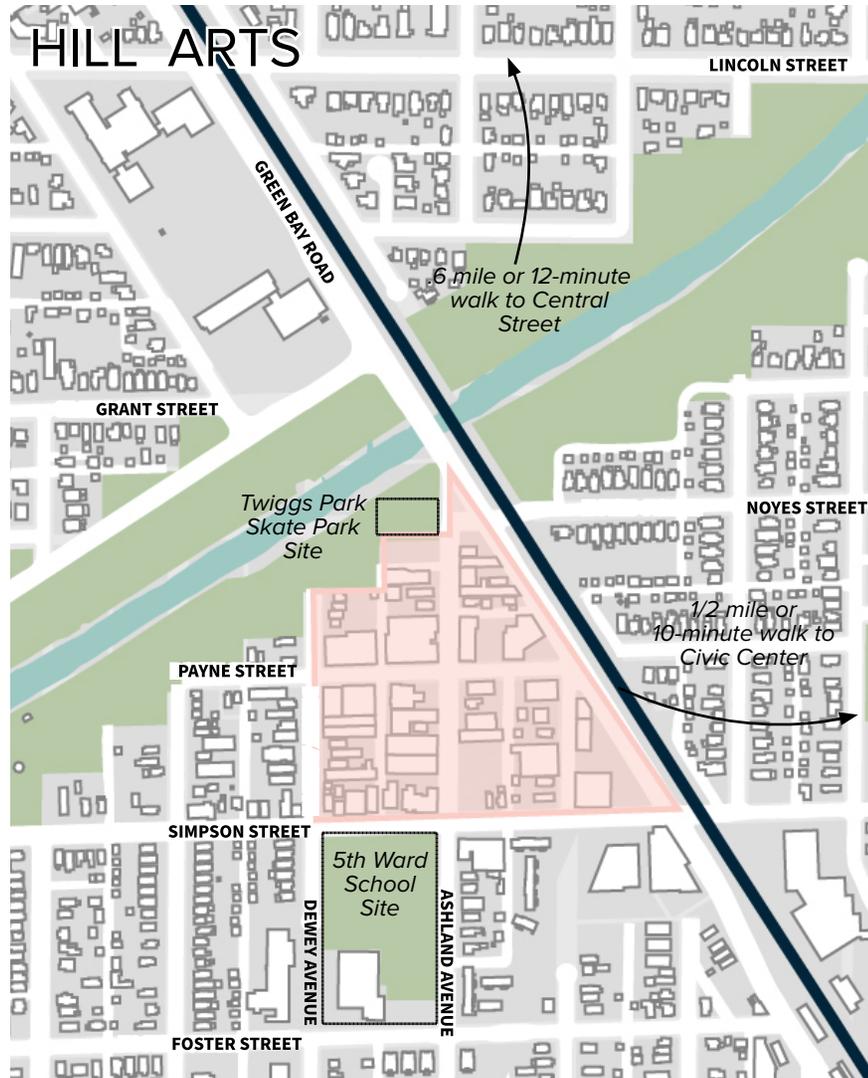
Market + Development

- Target attraction efforts. *(refer to callout above)*
- Plan on a larger role in prospect sourcing and vetting for the Downtown Evanston SSA, first increasing internal capacity to undertake such efforts, then securing buy-in from local landlords and their brokers.
- Systematize the approach to retail attraction, with a focus on the kinds of tenants identified above, including canvassing trips to analogous university towns elsewhere in the Midwest and beyond.
- Cultivate and strengthen relationships with Chicagoland tenant-rep brokers, attend local and regional (not national) ICSC events, and engage industry publications so as to generate (earned) media attention.
- Partner with Northwestern on an expansion of the "Cat Cash" program to Downtown businesses.
- Market Downtown's food and beverage establishments to attendees of events at Ryan Field and the Welsh Ryan Arena.



ashland *ARTS*

THIS HIDDEN GEM OF EVANSTON IS JUST WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED. SEVERAL WAREHOUSES HAVE BEEN RE-IMAGINED TO HOUSE DOUBLE CLUTCH BREWERY, SOUL + SMOKE BBQ, A NATIVE AMERICAN WELLNESS CENTER, AND VARIOUS ART STUDIOS. WITH NEW INVESTMENT COMING TO THE AREA, INCLUDING THE CITY'S SKATE PARK AND A COMMUNITY SCHOOL, THE DISTRICT IS POISED TO BECOME A HAVEN FOR FAMILIES, FOODIES, AND MAKERS.



THINGS TO KNOW

- The district is a “hidden gem” within Evanston. Many people don’t know where it is because it is tucked behind Green Bay Road.
- The current name (Hill Arts) is not rooted in geography like the other districts in Evanston. Some have even described the district as “behind the Walgreens”.
- Big changes are planned around the district. Plans to construct a Fifth Ward School to the south and the public skate park to the north in Twigg's Park will change the pattern of activity in the area.
- Businesses want more visibility and a platform to share information about events and offerings. They don’t know where to post or go to spread the word.
- The public expressed a desire for a central gathering space within the district to host events, feature local businesses, and serve as a draw to the district.

Hill Arts	
Ward	5
District Area	21.3 acres
Licensed businesses (all)	53
Ground floor businesses	49
New businesses (2022-present)	3
Recent closures (2022-present)	0
Street frontage	5,024 ft

EMERGING INDUSTRIAL+ ART

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY COLOR



SECONDARY COLOR



BRAND MARK

Existing signage and banners in the district are pink and purple with an art nouveau aesthetic. The updated design honors that with a modern update.



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

MARKET STRENGTH

Ashland Arts may be tucked away from view, but a small subset of operators are capable of overcoming their limited visibility from major arterials with the word-of-mouth generated by a stellar product, a distinctive concept, a savvy marketing strategy and/or a loyal following. Indeed, the off-the-beaten-path location and unassuming setting can be part of the allure. And while challenges facing such businesses remain high, their prospects have no doubt improved in recent decades with the rise of social media, GPS and ride-sharing.

Awareness of the district has grown in recent years with the expansion of Soul & Smoke, which has benefited from earned media, and the opening of Double Clutch Brewing Co., from CCM Management (owners of Downtown Wilmette's Napolita and Pescadero, among others). The district has a hipness that offers a unique potential to stand out among Evanston's more conventional retail corridors.

PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Build the Ashland Arts placemaking strategy around the sense of being tucked away and special. Placemaking improvements should emphasize the sense of enclosure along Ashland and emphasize elements that draw people in. Where possible, integrate artistic visual elements and color in the streetscape. Lighting should play a key role - additional after-school activity at the school and Twiggs Park will bolster the evening activity already generated by the anchor restaurants. People passing along Simpson or Green Bay Road should catch a glimpse down the Ashland view corridor and want to double back and explore what Ashland has to offer.

With the construction of the Fifth Ward School to the south and the public skate park to the north, public improvements—pedestrian, identity, and public spaces—should be focused on creating connections between the two along Ashland. Double down on physical interventions that expand and enhance the pedestrian experience along these two blocks.

ASHLAND ARTS PHYSICAL PLACEMAKING CONCEPTS



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CONCEPT: MURAL VISIBLE FROM GREEN BAY ROAD (TOP)

Large mural calling attention to Ashland Arts. Location: Simpson at Ashland, entrance to the district.

CONCEPT: RESIDENTIAL CONVERSION TO CAFE (BOTTOM)

Examples like Ada's Technical Books and Cafe in Seattle offers an example of a residential property turned community asset. This project is a conversion of an older home into a small retail shop with a café.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Invest in photography of the key businesses throughout the district.
- Establish a simple social media presence. This should include pages on Facebook and Instagram that include the updated district branding, the description of the district, and photography of the district and its businesses highlighted through 8-12 posts. Once this content is set up, businesses and the Enjoy Evanston account can tag the handle and the location.
 - *Aim to post to these accounts twice a week, as well as sharing posts from business and citywide accounts.*
 - *The goal for this account is to have a presence that allows others to tag it and begin to grow a following.*
- Replace existing banners with Ashland Arts / Enjoy Evanston branded banners.
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events within Ashland Arts as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Replace existing receptacles with Enjoy Evanston receptacles (~6 bins)
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page with an up-to-date list of businesses in the district.

Placemaking + Public Space

- Reinforce Ashland as the core of Ashland Arts through gateway signage and visible and consistent streetscape enhancement between Simpson and the planned skate park at Twiggs Park / Noyes St. Explore pavement paint throughout or at the Ashland/Simpson and Ashland/Payne intersections.
- Explore a lighting element such as festoon or sidewalk swag lighting to tie the main two blocks together.
- Address broken sidewalks, potholes, and overflowing dumpsters and increase number of bike racks in the area.
- Redefine the geometry of the Ashland and Simpson intersection to establish a clear priority for pedestrians and signify a transition into the district. Reinforce the sense of arrival to the Ashland Arts District and slow vehicles along the northern frontage of the planned 5th Ward School (Foster Park).
- Pursue opportunities for additional murals fronting or visible from Ashland.
- Create a central gathering space for events. Coordinate with landholders to explore removing physical barriers between parking lots adjacent to Double Clutch to create shared parking / plaza (parcels owned by Double Clutch, Jehovah's Witness, and First Church of God) along Ashland which could be used for events or programming.
- Pursue potential redevelopment at the corner of Simpson and Ashland in collaboration with First Church of God (owner) with parking, commercial, and mixed-income housing.

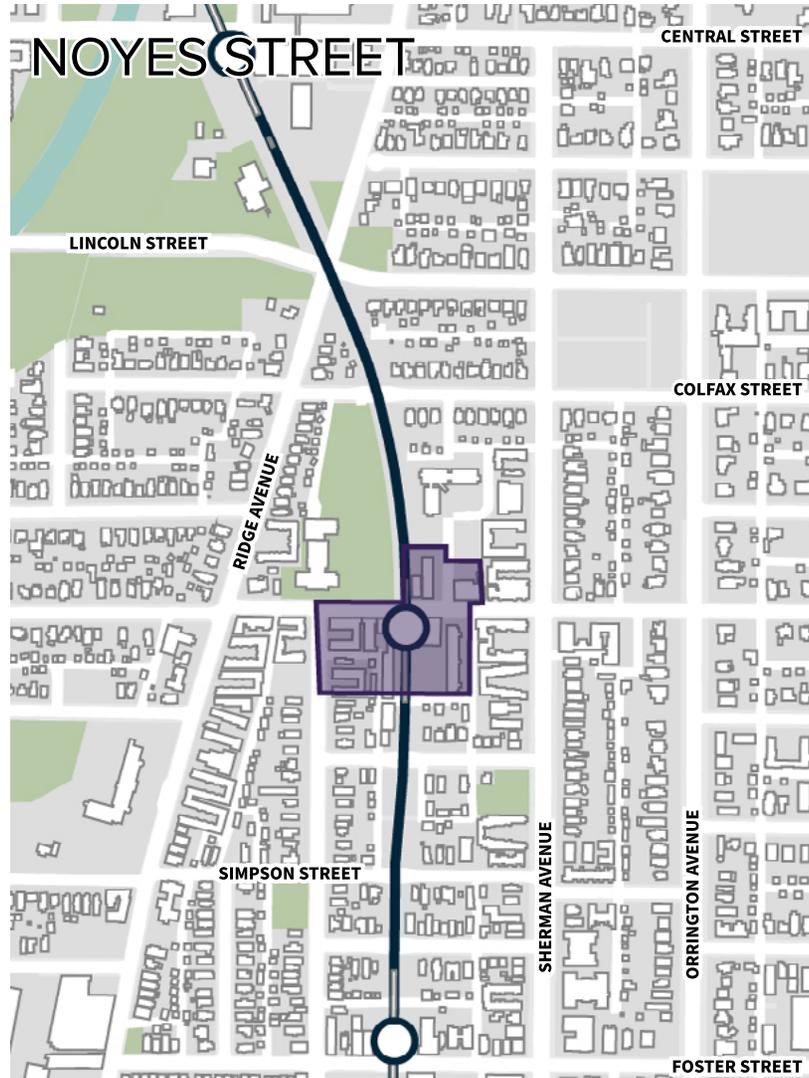
Market + Development

- Food and beverage is the category most commonly able to gain traction in the absence of traditional visibility and foot traffic, especially today with the rise of social media (e.g. Yelp) and blogging (e.g. Eater).
- The relative absence of nearby housing may allow for a greater entertainment component than would be possible in more thickly-settled neighborhoods elsewhere in Evanston.
- The light industrial nature of the district could accommodate types of production / retail hybrids. Pursue and support redevelopment of a "makers zone" - and area with spaces that accommodate small-scale craftspeople are able and can afford to design, make, sell and/or fulfill their products in the same space.
- A planned skate park in Twiggs Park introduces the possibility of a new "third place" for that community - for example a combination coffeehouse, skateboard / streetwear concept. These concepts often rely on a well-known figure already in the local scene, but seeding the idea may draw interest to the table for a unique concept.

A note about redevelopment...

Ashland Arts is a small district with a mix of single-family residential properties and commercial and light industrial buildings. This area presents a unique opportunity to explore and encourage adaptive reuse of residential properties for retail use. Unique rehabs to infill retail gaps would reinforce the sense that Ashland Arts is truly unique among Evanston's districts. The City must demonstrate support for this type of reuse to give the private market confidence to pursue a redevelopment type that is less common in the area.

A STONE’S THROW FROM NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY, THIS COZY DISTRICT IS HOME TO LONG-STANDING EVANSTON EATERIES, INCLUDING AL’S DELI AND DAVE’S ITALIAN KITCHEN, AS WELL AS NEW INSTITUTIONS LIKE STACKED & FOLDED. AFTER GRABBING SOME HOT BREW FROM COFFEE LAB, WALK THROUGH TALLMADGE PARK AND THE NOYES CULTURAL CENTER, WHICH HOSTS SEVERAL PERFORMANCES, EXHIBITIONS, AND EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.



THINGS TO KNOW

- Noyes Street is home to the Noyes Cultural Center and Tallmadge Park and playground.
- The Noyes Purple Line CTA Station anchors the center of the district, but the station entrance is in need of maintenance.
- Residents love the “cozy” and “quaint” feel of the street.
- The adirondack chairs, placed along Noyes by Tallmadge Park, have been a big hit!
- Existing light poles in the area cannot accommodate banners, but there are a number of opportunities to infuse a sense of place and identity along Noyes.
- Stacked and Folded’s temporary outdoor seating and parklet is popular when the weather permits.
- The area surrounding Noyes offers a variety of housing densities and types. Though surrounding residents are mixed, the area is known to be popular with Northwestern graduate students and older undergraduates living off-campus.
- People want more reasons to visit Noyes—nightlife scene, events, and upscale dining and retail options.

Noyes	
Licensed businesses (all)	13
Ground floor businesses	13
New businesses (2022-present)	0
Recent closures (2022-present)	0
District Area	5.2
Wards	1 & 5
Street frontage (linear miles)	483.9

LAID BACK + COZY

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY
COLOR



SECONDARY
COLOR



BRAND MARK

While Noyes is the closest district to Northwestern University, it also has a vibrancy all of its own.



STREET POLE WRAP

MARKET STRENGTH

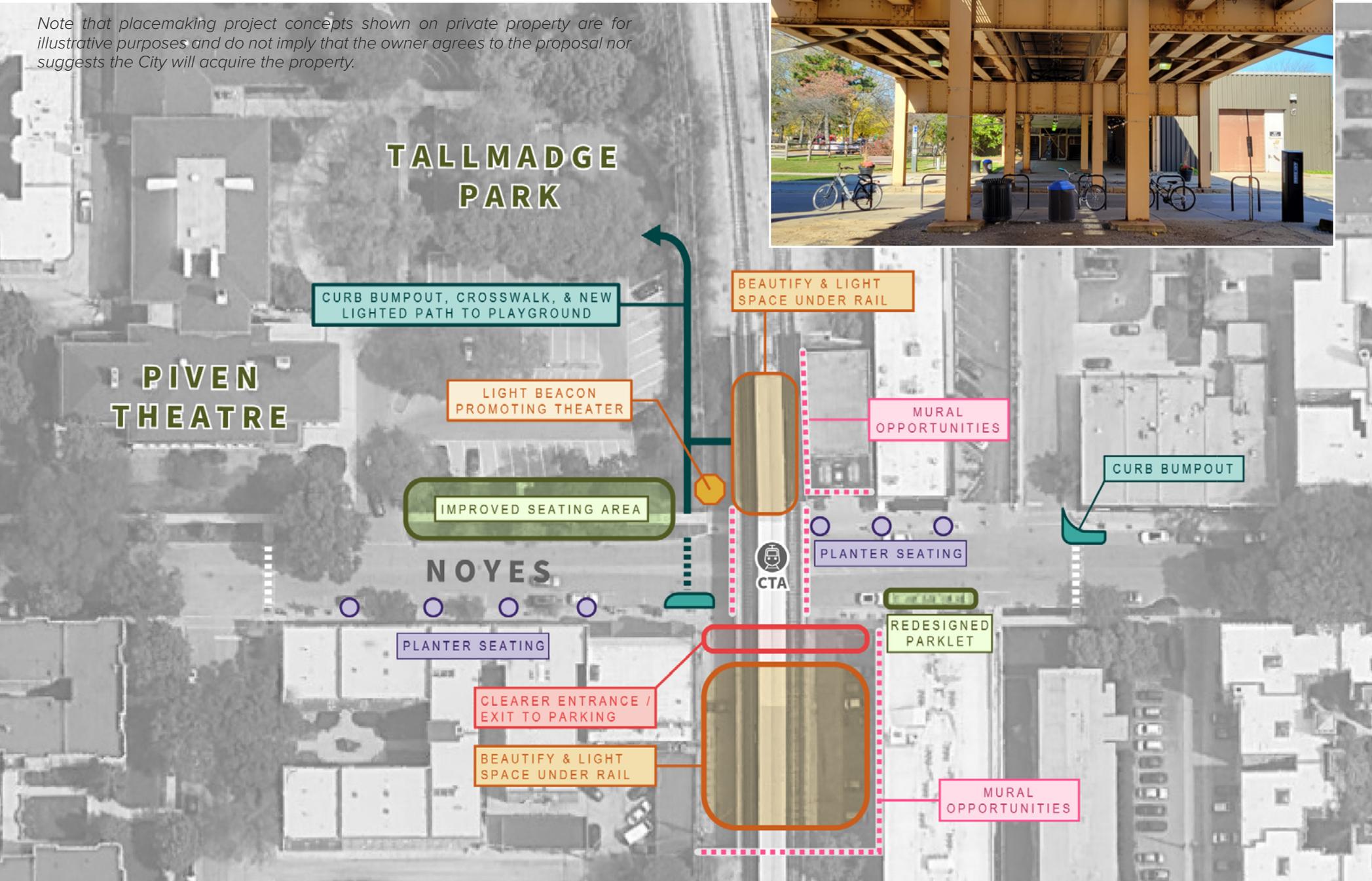
Noyes' two strongest attributes are (1) its proximity to Northwestern and (2) its stop along the CTA's Purple Line. As a result, the area is lively with North Campus students, drawn to its mix of food/beverage/"third place" venues (e.g. Coffee Lab Evanston, Stacked & Folded Social House, Tomate Fresh Kitchen) and basic conveniences (e.g. D&D Finer Foods). The retail potential in this area is constrained by this submarket's seasonality and "grab-and-go" orientation. The district is the smallest of Evanston's current retail districts and offers limited opportunities for growth.

PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Businesses want a stronger, more playful identity for the area to draw new attention to this small, tucked-away retail district. Placemaking initiatives in the Noyes area should create more visible street-level activity and reinforce Noyes as a living room for the surrounding community. The casual setting should welcome visitors to spend a little extra time enjoying the outdoor seating at area businesses or park-like setting in front of the Noyes Cultural Center. Focus streetscape interventions around ways to elevate and create more cohesion in the physical environment. Opportunities to enhance and beautify the CTA station entrance and its surroundings can improve feelings of safety in the underpass and make a stronger impression for those entering or passing through.

NOYES PHYSICAL PLACEMAKING CONCEPTS

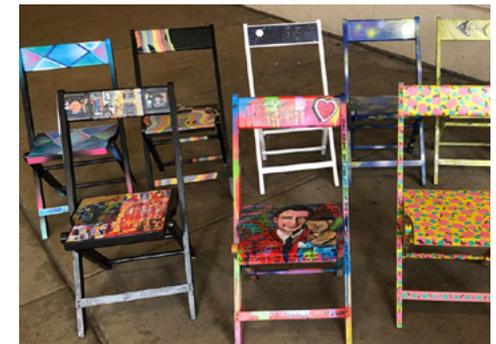
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NOYES PHYSICAL PLACEMAKING CONCEPT: ENHANCED CTA PLAZA



CONCEPT: PUBLIC SWING SEATS



CONCEPT: "PAINT THE CHAIR" CAMPAIGN.

Drawing on the district's "cozy" identity, the success of the adirondack chairs that have been placed along Noyes, the proximity to the Cultural Center, and the desire for the community to activate the streetscape, Noyes could launch a "Paint the Chair" Campaign that invites artists, residents, and organizations to participate. Reference photo and inspiration from Pittsburgh, PA - 90 Painted Chairs campaign invited local artists to paint 90 parking chairs to be ultimately sold at auction. 90 chairs have been painted in creative designs, and some were out on display outside of the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. This public art campaign was inspired by VisitPittsburgh's "Pull up a chair, you're welcome here" campaign for the City.



CONCEPT: INTEGRATED ART & LIGHTING



CONCEPT: FREESTANDING LIGHT SCULPTURE

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Invest in photography of the key businesses throughout the district.
- Establish a simple social media presence. This should include pages on Facebook and Instagram that include the updated district branding, the description of the district, and photography of the district and its businesses highlighted through 8-12 posts. Once this content is set up, businesses and the Enjoy Evanston account can tag the handle and the location.
 - *Aim to post to these accounts once a week, as well as share posts from business and citywide accounts.*
 - *The goal for this account is to have a presence that allows others to tag it and begin to grow a following.*
- Install Street Pole wraps along Noyes adjacent to the CTA station.
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high-traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events on Noyes as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Replace existing receptacles with Enjoy Evanston receptacles (4 bins).
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page with an up-to-date list of businesses in the district.

Placemaking + Public Space

- Install bumpouts at Noyes Court extending outdoor cafe space for the 821-815 row and in front of Coffee Lab Evanston (912 Noyes). Consider directional entrance/exit drives from the public parking lot to simplify vehicle turning movements.
- Improve the CTA entrance and access to Tallmadge Park and playground:
 - *Activate facade of 837 Noyes Street (CTA-owned) with mural. Integrate night lighting as part of welcoming entrance to the district in the evening.*
 - *Lighting art installation at the southeast corner of the Noyes Cultural Arts Center property visible from the CTA entrance.*
 - *More movable outdoor seating along Noyes Cultural Arts Center.*
 - *Formalize a walkway to the playground north of the parking lot.*
- Install mural on the west side of 824 Noyes St (facing parking lot).
- Pursue repainting of CTA structure and overpass with gateway mural and signage to reinforce the district brand.
- Invest in larger planters with integrated seating along the retail frontage southeast and northwest of the CTA overpass.
- Improve the quality of the physical structure enclosing Staked & Folded's patio and parklet. Use Staked & Folded's parklet cafe as a pilot location for alternative or enhanced safety barriers to enhance the look and feel of the streetscape.

Market + Development

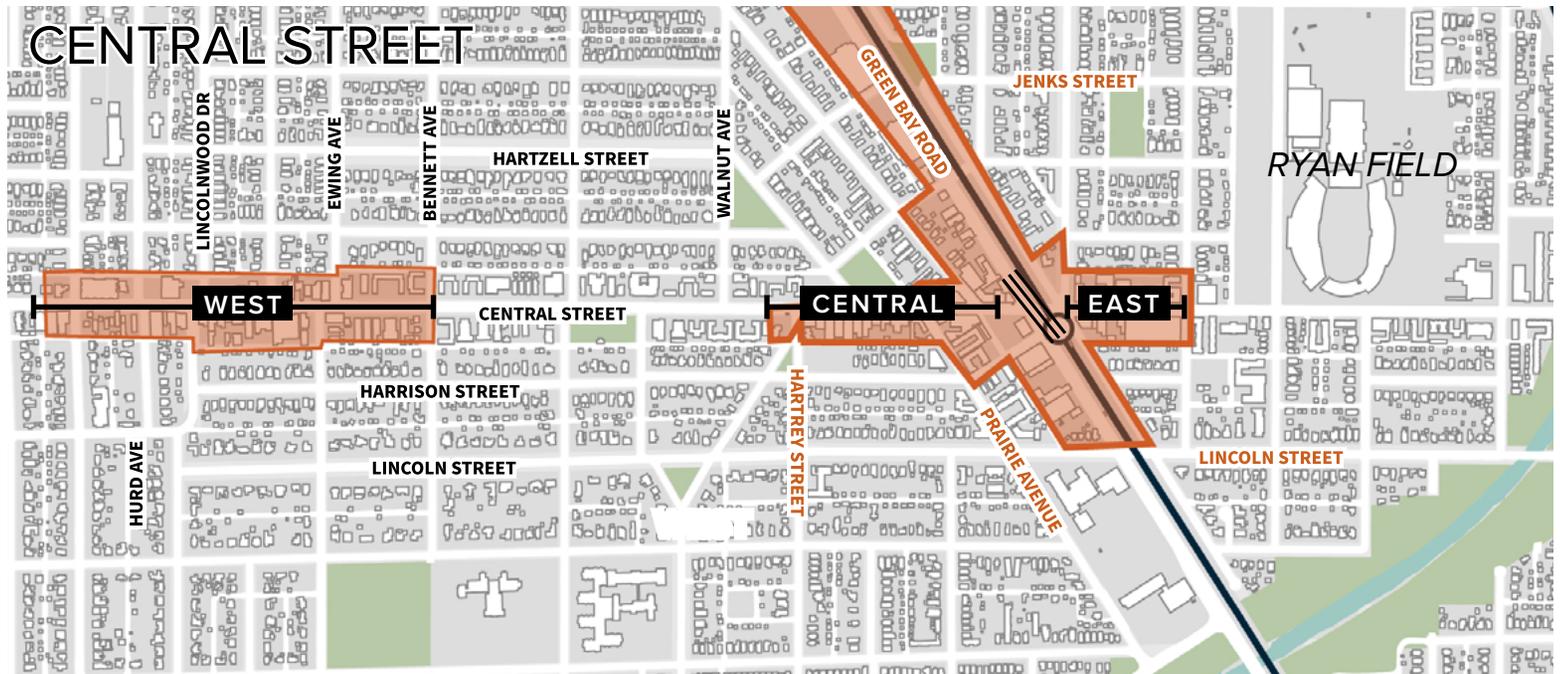
- Consider restrictions on non-retail uses in ground-floor space to reserve precious street-level real estate for businesses, like shops and eateries, with the greatest need for such visibility.
- Identify potential partners to create and manage small pop-up markets beneath the CTA viaduct during peak periods of foot traffic.

EAST & WEST
central
street
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS





THIS NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT’S NAME SAYS IT ALL— IT’S A CORRIDOR CHOCK-FULL OF INDEPENDENT STORES, BAKERIES, COFFEE SHOPS, BOUTIQUES, AND RESTAURANTS. BOOKENDED BY TWO MUSEUMS—THE EVANSTON ARTS CENTER AND THE MITCHELL MUSEUM— AS WELL AS NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY’S STADIUM, YOU’LL FIND PLENTY OF CULTURAL, CREATIVE, AND BIG TEN INSPIRATION HERE.



Central Street has three distinct areas within the District—East Central (from Eastwood Avenue to the Metra Station), Central (from the Metra Station to Hartrey), and West Central (from Ewing to Central Park Ave.) The West Central and Central/East areas are two separate SSAs managed by the same organization, Central Street Evanston.

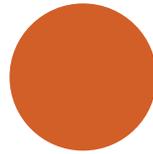
Central Street	East area	West area
Licensed businesses (all)	65	35
Ground floor businesses	39	24
New businesses (2022-present)	4	
Recent closures (2022-present)	0	
District Area	40 acres	18.4 acres
Ward	7	6
Street frontage	1.95 miles	.77 miles
Central Street’s Avg Monthly Website Visitors	4663 (district-wide)	
# of Central Street’s Newsletter Subscribers	300 (district-wide)	
# of Central Street Facebook Followers	4500 (district-wide)	
# of Central Street Instagram Followers	3640 (district-wide)	

THINGS TO KNOW

- Home to the Evanston Arts Center and Mitchell Museum, Central Street is a cultural hub for the city, but is not always known for its arts and cultural offerings. Placemaking and public art should help tell this story.
- The district's crown jewel is a large park, Independence Park, that fronts Central Street and active businesses. Pedestrian connections should be strengthened from the park to the businesses across the street.
- With the possibility of a renovation of Ryan Field, Central Street is uniquely positioned to capture increased foot traffic from event goers. Businesses within the district, especially those in the Central and East Central areas, expressed concern that visitors would not travel down to their businesses without enhanced connectivity and raised concerns about parking management during major events.
- People want more outdoor dining options and experiential activities throughout the entire district.
- Parking management is a pain point for local businesses, particularly in the Central and East areas. Business owners and visitors complain that street parking is over-enforced. Many believe Evanston's street parking costs (including tickets) are driving customers to Downtown Wilmette where parking is free.
- Business owners and residents on the West side want to see more activity, fewer vacancies, and more placemaking love shown to their area.
- Central Street is IDOT jurisdiction and bike lanes and parklets have not been welcomed. Despite being home to a high concentration of food-based businesses and a locally owned bike shop, past efforts to allocate space for bikes or re-imagine the parking lane have been non-starters.

INDEPENDENT + CREATIVE

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY
COLOR

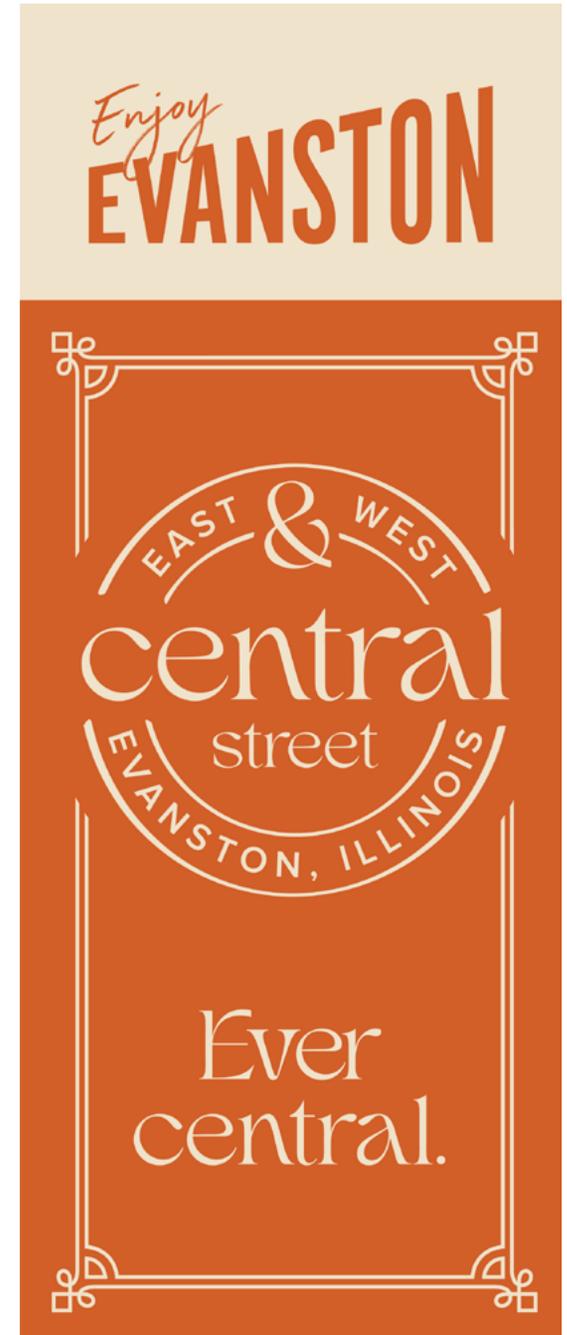


SECONDARY
COLOR



EXISTING LOGO

This district is classic and whimsical, inspired by the times a streetcar ran through it. Color is integral to this area, honored in the stripes and brand that were in place before this process.



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

MARKET STRENGTH

By far the strongest of the three sub-districts is Central (from the Metra Station to Hartrey), which offers what might be called a “**browse-worthy**” **specialty experience**. Unlike a more conventional enclosed mall or shopping center, it does not appeal on the basis of wide selection or “critical mass”, but rather, as an interesting blend of unique boutiques, eateries, and cafes set within a walkable space.

Pedestrian traffic along this stretch consists largely of highly-educated, affluent white homeowners. Yet while they patronize upscale department stores like Nordstrom, they also shop at off-price fashion retailers like T.J. Maxx, Marshalls, Ross Dress for Less, Nordstrom Rack, and Off Saks 5th as well as Target, Walmart, and Trader Joe’s. In addition, they value independently-owned boutiques. Students appear in significant numbers as well, though their presence is likely concentrated to the east of the Metra station, on game days at Ryan Field and Welsh Ryan Arena.

Downtown Wilmette exerts a powerful draw to the northeast, primarily in the evenings with its sit-down restaurants (e.g. Valley Lodge, Fuel). However, **Wilmette presents far less of a threat in the daytime and generates less visitation overall.** WS Development’s acquisition and re-tenanting of Plaza del Lago might be more concerning in that respect, though its apparent focus on traditional luxury targets a different market.

From the retailer’s perspective, **Central is a coveted location**, especially for small-scale and aspiring chain-lets from analogous submarkets like Highland Park, Oak Park, and Andersonville. It enjoys a steady stream of desirable customers throughout the week. Its existing tenant mix suggests a welcoming and supportive environment for boutique entrepreneurs. As a new Special Services Area, its marketing and events are now overseen by a professional place manager.

Arguably the biggest challenge for Central is a lack of available inventory in desirable locations. The retail fabric continues—but the activity drops considerably—to the east of the Metra station as well as north and south along Green Bay Rd. Meanwhile, West Central’s assortment of ground-floor uses offers little in terms of relevant co-tenancy or brand identity that would appeal to the kinds of businesses considering Central. The first of these, East Central, is likely the most promising of the three, especially if Northwestern plays a proactive role (in addition to the new stadium).

PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Placemaking initiatives should work to unify the three areas that make up Central Street so that they feel like one place. Gateways and connections are at the heart of Central Street’s placemaking strategy. Make sure visitors have information about all Central has to offer in as many formats as possible. Focus on critical gateways and desire lines and integrate highly-visible place identifiers to encourage visitors to meander a few blocks in each direction.

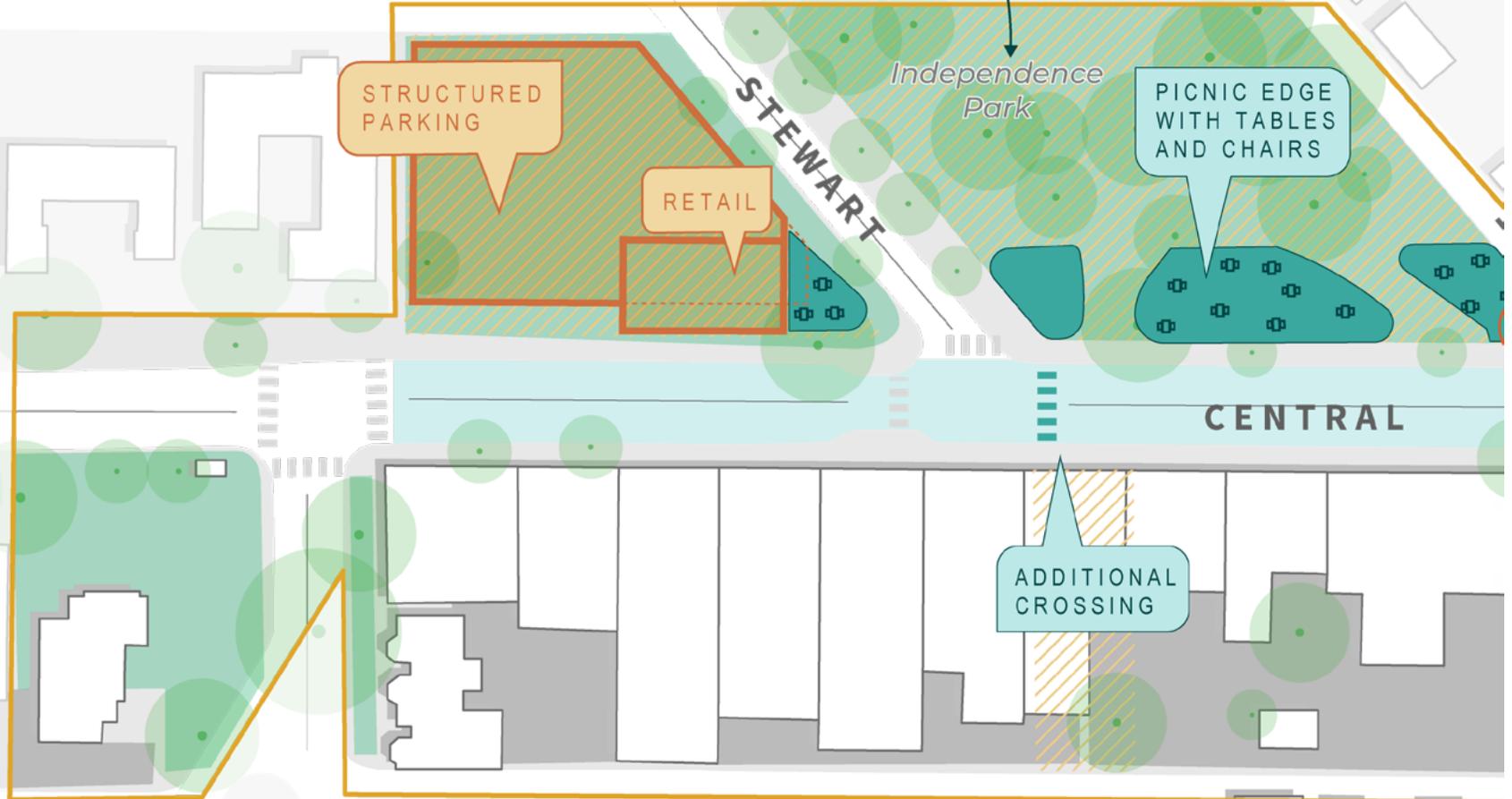
Central Street stands to gain the most from additional foot traffic and notoriety around the Northwestern University Stadium project. Information will be key in maximizing the potential benefits and minimizing any impacts of concern to local businesses. Implementing gateway enhancements and wayfinding to transit, retail destinations, and parking will be critical. Digital communication to effectively plan for and manage event-day activity will play an equally important role.

CENTRAL STREET EAST PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

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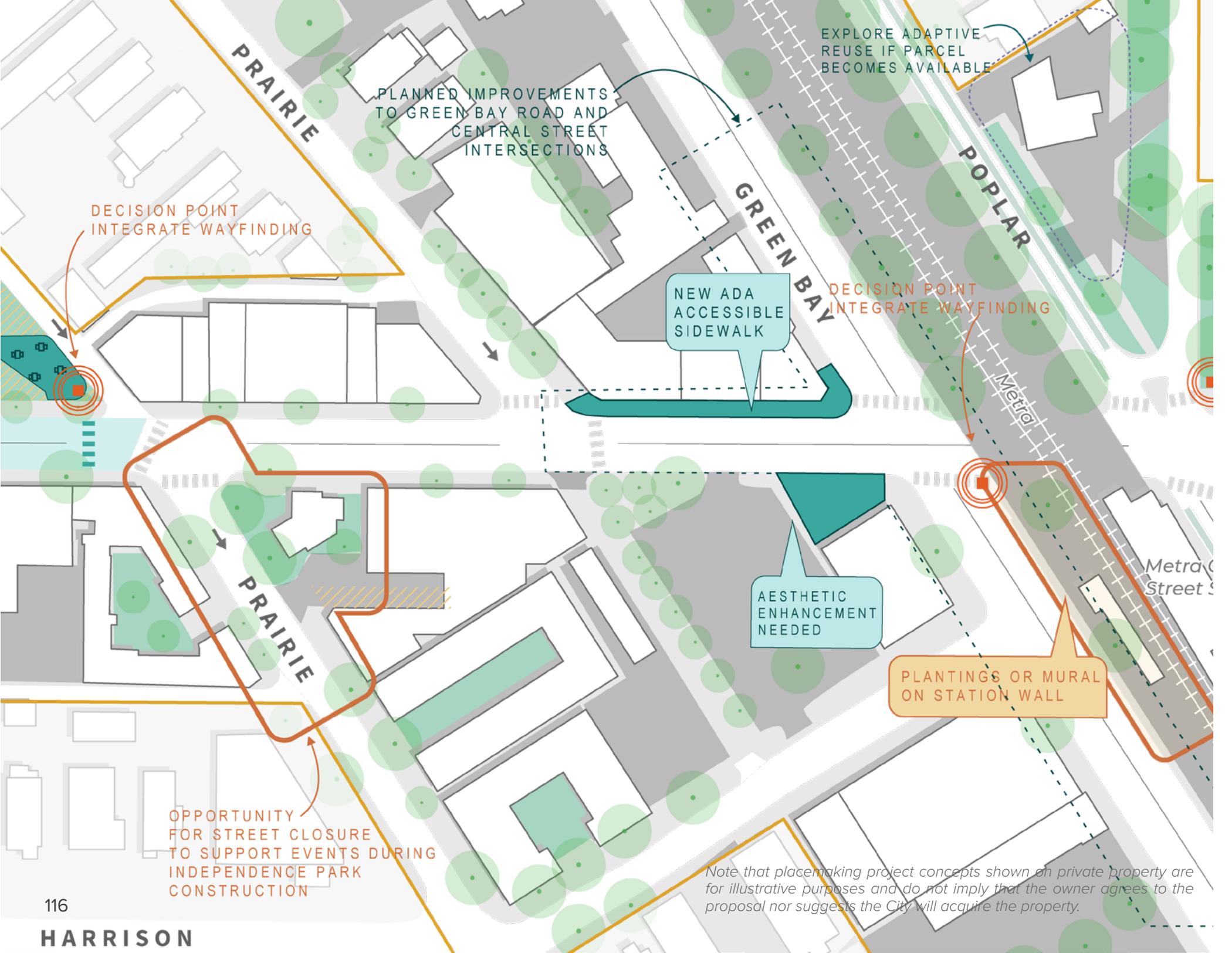
PLANNING UNDERWAY FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO INDEPENDENCE PARK

CENTRAL STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT



CONCEPT: STRUCTURED PARKING & POP-UP RETAIL SPACE

Central Street's position as a specialty retail destination makes it a great option outside of Downtown to pilot a permanent pop-up retail space or non-traditional multi-tenant model. Create a space where smaller independent retailers can gain exposure and incubate new small businesses until they are ready to break out into larger spaces.



PRAIRIE

PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS TO GREEN BAY ROAD AND CENTRAL STREET INTERSECTIONS

EXPLORE ADAPTIVE REUSE IF PARCEL BECOMES AVAILABLE

DECISION POINT INTEGRATE WAYFINDING

NEW ADA ACCESSIBLE SIDEWALK

DECISION POINT INTEGRATE WAYFINDING

GREEN BAY

POPLAR

PRAIRIE

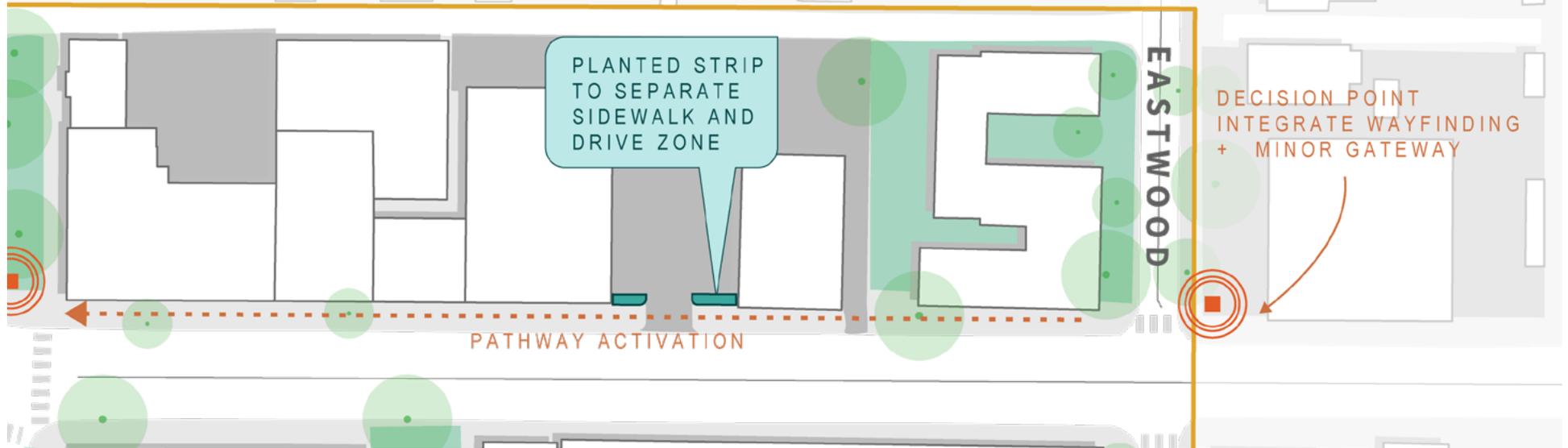
AESTHETIC ENHANCEMENT NEEDED

PLANTINGS OR MURAL ON STATION WALL

OPPORTUNITY FOR STREET CLOSURE TO SUPPORT EVENTS DURING INDEPENDENCE PARK CONSTRUCTION

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CENTRAL STREET EAST PLACEMAKING STRATEGY



CONCEPT: INFORMATION EVERYWHERE

Wayfinding for Central Street has to work really hard to communicate all of the different areas and offerings. Install full map panels integrated into public spaces and walkways and at key decision points (like the Metra Station exit). There should be information everywhere.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Launch a bi-weekly (every other week) newsletter for residents and visitors, including features on small businesses and updates on ongoing projects.
- Incorporate Enjoy Evanston branding throughout the district. Given the recent investment in branded banners, focus on other elements, such as trash receptacles (31 bins throughout the district).
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high-traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events on Central as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page to link to the Central Street website.

Placemaking + Public Space

- Improve Independence Park. Integrate public picnic seating along Central Street edge within the park to serve nearby food establishments with limited sidewalk space. Identifying new places for events during Independence Park reconstruction should also be a high priority.
- Reinforce Independence Park investment with enhanced crossings and/or a new midblock crossing connecting to the park across Central.
- Implement gateway signage at the Metra Train Station (both directions) and near the eastern edge of the district closest to the NU Stadium, and at Independence Park. Include large visible map panels integrated into the wayfinding strategy at these key decision points.
- Activate the corner of Central and Prairie and Central and Chase Bank parking lot to improve the quality of public space.
- Create visible outdoor seating wherever possible. Work with IDOT and institutional stakeholders to push toward an in-street parklet solution that supports critical transportation functions.
- Remove all temporary signage throughout the district to reduce signage clutter.
- Increase visible Central Street banner signage and wayfinding between CTA/Poplar and Ashland in preparation for the NU Stadium project.
- Support a Central Street Trolley pilot for event-day traffic management.

Market + Development

- Attraction efforts should focus on small-scale and aspiring chain-lets from analogous submarkets like Highland Park, Oak Park and Andersonville.
- Consider redevelopment of the city-owned parking lot to create additional parking and introduce new retail space.
- Maximize synergies with storefront businesses along Central in the redesign of and improvements to Independence Park.
- Provide information on existing landlords to the Special Services Area so that it can cultivate relationships with them and create a spreadsheet of available spaces.
- Continue intentional efforts to market Central Street as a specialty shopping experience.
- Strengthen alternative locations for prospective retailers (“spill-over zones”) by introducing new drivers of consistent foot traffic as well as reinforcing existing ones, in partnership with Northwestern.



EXIT

FOUR FINCHES
Home Goods & Lifestyle

GORDON
REALTY

P
PAY HERE



SWAN LAKE
CLEANERS

DRAPERIES

Expert Alterations

WEDDING GOWN

Curt's Cafe

Curt's Cafe

Coffee - Pastry - Sandwiches - Salads - Catering

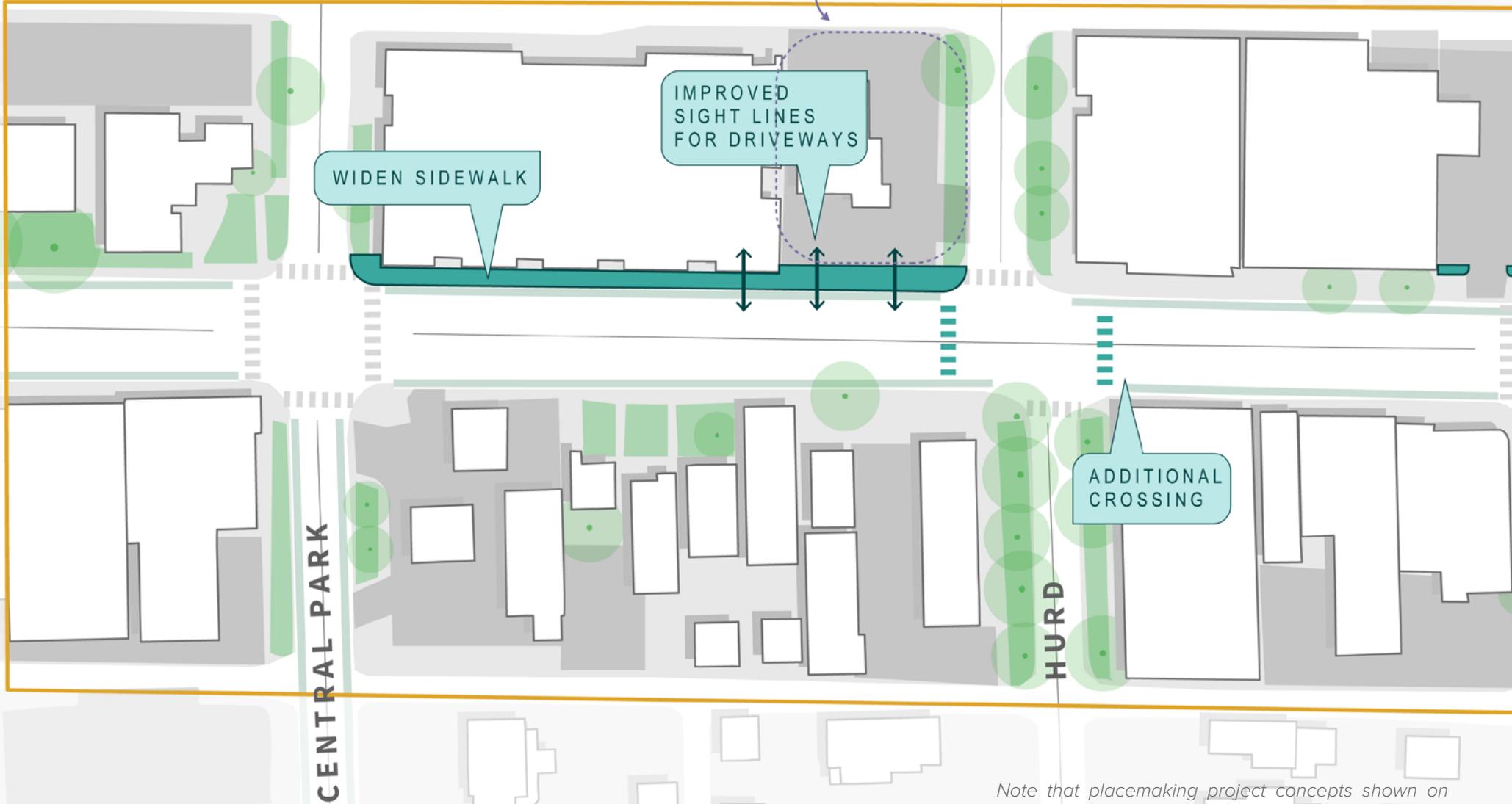
2922

BAIRD & WARNER

B&W Baird & Warner REALTY

CENTRAL STREET WEST PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

CENTRAL STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT



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CENTRAL STREET WEST PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

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REESE

EXPLORE ADAPTIVE REUSE IF PARCEL BECOMES AVAILABLE

PLANTED STRIP TO SEPARATE SIDEWALK AND DRIVE ZONE

ADDITIONAL CROSSING

CENTRAL

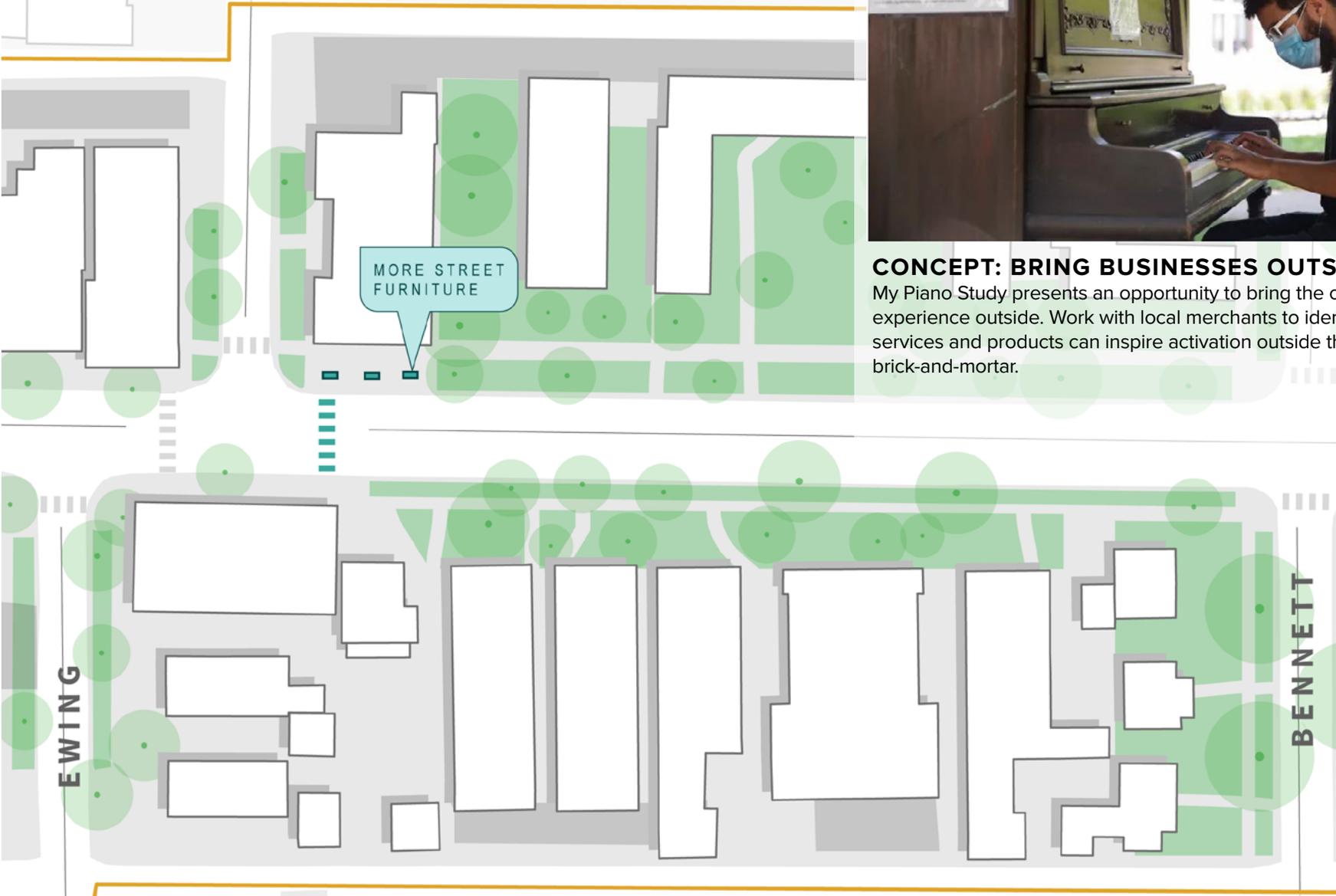
FIREHOUSE INTERSECTION NEEDS BETTER MARKING

BRING RETAIL OUTSIDE WITH PARKLETS

LINCOLNWOOD

EWING

EWING



CONCEPT: BRING BUSINESSES OUTSIDE!

My Piano Study presents an opportunity to bring the customer experience outside. Work with local merchants to identify ways services and products can inspire activation outside the walls of a brick-and-mortar.

EWING

BENNETT



RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Continued representation in marketing materials and information is key. Be consistent with the language used to reference the western end of the district. Clear and consistent messaging about the relationship between the eastern and western portions of the district is critical.
- Ensure that west-end businesses are welcomed and featured at major events that occur at the east end of the Central Street District. Consider providing tenting, tables, or other resources at no cost to reduce barriers to participation.
- If new wayfinding signage or informational panels are installed near the NU Stadium or Central Street Train Station, ensure west-end businesses are represented.

Placemaking + Public Space

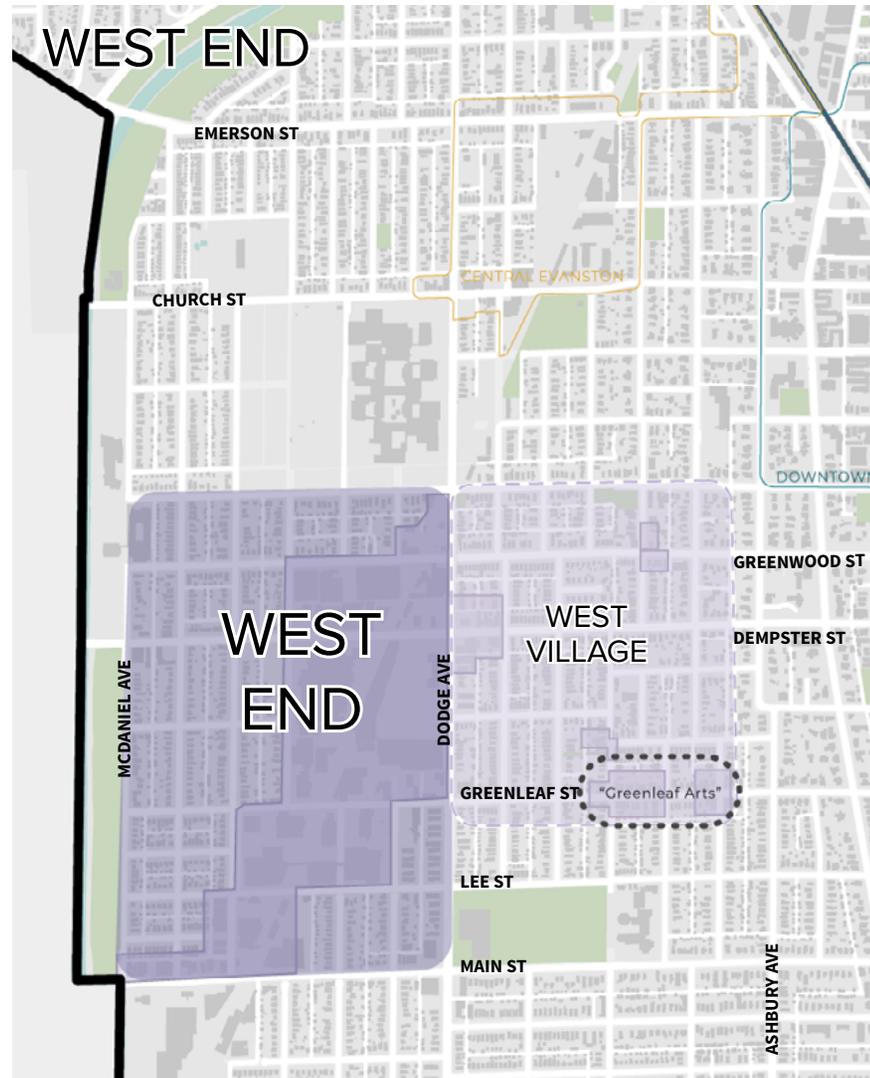
- Some blocks have more generous sidewalk width and corner/sideyard spaces-- particularly compared to the eastern end. Follow Hartigan's lead! Encourage businesses to use every inch of visible, outdoor space as possible.
- Bring businesses outside! My Piano Study and Mack's Bike and Goods (soon to relocate) present opportunities to bring the customer experience outside. Work with local merchants to identify ways services and products can inspire activation.
- Work with local merchants to identify ways services and products can inspire activation outside the walls of a brick-and-mortar.
- Pursue installation of a striped bikeway and bike-focused wayfinding along Central Street connecting the two ends of the district. At the very least, an enhanced Sharrow along this segment would increase driver awareness and visibility of bikers.
- If an NU Stadium Trolley is piloted along Central Street, ensure the loop includes and promotes west-end businesses.

Market + Development

- Central Street is an established destination in Evanston and the surrounding communities. In some ways, the west end of Central Street benefits from the fact that the east and central segments are well-occupied and book-ended by established residential areas. Central Street West offers opportunities for infill and expansion beyond what's possible in the other sub-districts without a major demolition on the western end.
- Pursue strategic acquisition of properties as they become available with the potential for repositioning as destination retail or restaurant. (*refer to Central Street West End District map*)

WEST END

THIS AREA HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN HOME TO EVANSTON'S INDUSTRIAL AND MANUFACTURING BUSINESSES. TODAY, THE NEIGHBORHOOD INCLUDES TEMPERANCE BREWING COMPANY, EVANSTON REBUILD, AND OTHER MANUFACTURING COMPANIES. SIT OUT ON TEMPERANCE'S PATIO AND PLAY BOARD GAMES OR CHECK OUT THE DISTRICT'S COLLECTION OF BUSINESSES FOCUSED ON RECREATION, WELLNESS, AND THE ARTS. AND WHILE THERE, DON'T FORGET TO VISIT THE VALLI PRODUCE GROCERY STORE, FEATURING INGREDIENTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD.

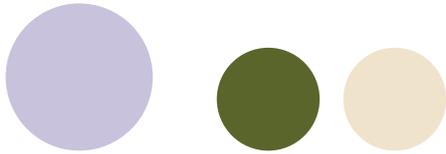


THINGS TO KNOW

- Evanston's former industrial quarter, the West End today contains three of Evanston's largest shopping centers – Main Street Marketplace (1978), Evanston Plaza (1990) and Home Depot / ALDI (1996) – while sitting directly adjacent to a fourth, Evanston Center (1993).
- The public appreciates the West End area for its convenience and ease of access.
- Many aren't aware the West End area is a defined "district". Opportunities exist to strengthen the district's identity and connections to its businesses. Robert Crown and Greenleaf Arts blocks are also within this district today.
- Evanston Plaza retail complex, especially Valli Produce, has a huge draw. Evanston Dance Center and Heartwood Center are also unique destinations within the complex.
- The area does not have a formal social media presence and would benefit from tying into the Enjoy Evanston community to promote events and offerings.
- People want larger sit-down restaurants, streetscape improvements, and public art throughout the district.
- Large groups of students from Evanston Township High School walk down Dodge after school to patronize fast casual dining and retail in the area. Not all sidewalks and crossings along their path are in a state of good repair.

LAID BACK + COZY

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY
COLOR

SECONDARY
COLOR

WEST END

BRAND MARK

*The type treatment references
the area's industrial character and
connects to the existing purple banners.*



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

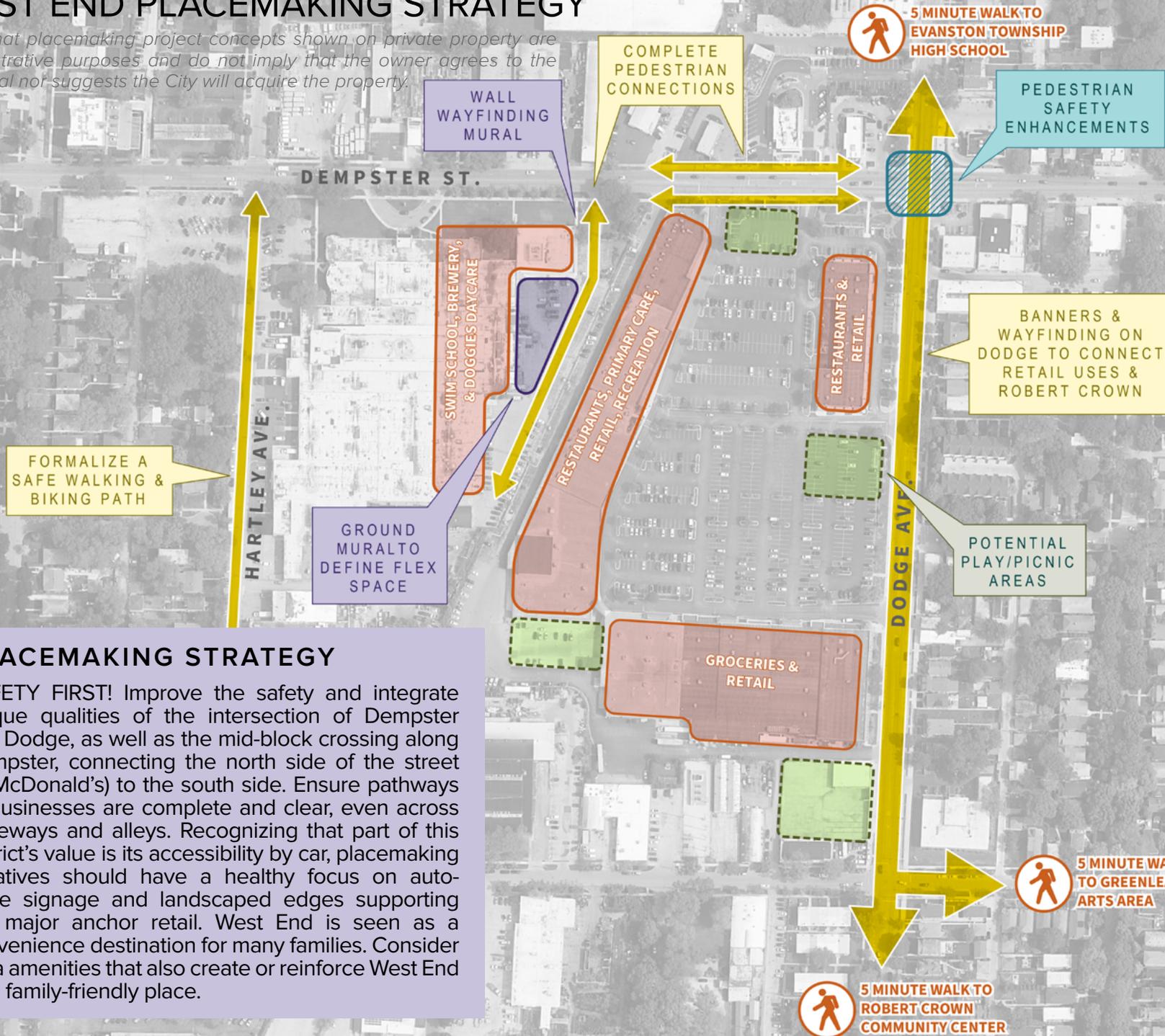
MARKET STRENGTH

Combined, the more than 900,000 sq ft of West End Retail space boasts a host of major anchors, including four supermarkets (Food 4 Less, Valli Produce, ALDI, Jewel-Osco), three big-box stores (Target, Sam's Club, Home Depot), two off-price fashion retailers (Marshalls, Ross Dress for Less) and a Best Buy. West End commands a densely-packed trade area that is ethnically and socioeconomically varied, where the average household consists of well-educated, middle-income Gen X'ers and Millennials. Though characteristically different from other retail districts, West End's cluster of automobile-friendly commodity retail enables the city of Evanston to retain consumer expenditures and tax revenue that would otherwise leak to nearby competitors along Touhy Avenue in Lincolnwood, Skokie and Niles.

The retail node at the intersection of Main St and Dodge Ave is more modest in scale and limited in potential. Expansion there is constrained by surrounding residential, and combined traffic counts in the low to mid 20,000's are middling. While the Robert Crown Community Center is said to have a big draw, industry professionals are unlikely to view the location as much more than a convenience retail opportunity for nearby residents, even with the existing Walgreens. Note that while there is no specific evidence that it will close, the chain has been shrinking its footprint in recent years. Assuming, though, that the large-format drug store remains and that public sector assistance is forthcoming, some sort of casual sit-down eatery geared towards families and kids could be a realistic aspiration.

WEST END PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Note that placemaking project concepts shown on private property are for illustrative purposes and do not imply that the owner agrees to the proposal nor suggests the City will acquire the property.



PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

SAFETY FIRST! Improve the safety and integrate unique qualities of the intersection of Dempster and Dodge, as well as the mid-block crossing along Dempster, connecting the north side of the street (at McDonald's) to the south side. Ensure pathways to businesses are complete and clear, even across driveways and alleys. Recognizing that part of this district's value is its accessibility by car, placemaking initiatives should have a healthy focus on auto-scale signage and landscaped edges supporting the major anchor retail. West End is seen as a convenience destination for many families. Consider area amenities that also create or reinforce West End as a family-friendly place.

West End	
Licensed businesses (all)	177
Ground floor businesses	86
New businesses (2022-present)	2
Recent closures (2022-present)	0
District Area	436
Ward	2
Street frontage (linear miles)	74349 ft



CONCEPT: ENHANCE PATHWAYS

(Above) Some of the West End’s destinations are tucked away from view. Use cement decals or paint to create wayfinding to destinations. (Below) Enhance moments where sidewalks cross driveways to commercial properties. Use material, lighting, paint, and signage to ensure pedestrians have priority where any potential conflicts exist.



CONCEPT: NEXT LEVEL FAMILY-FRIENDLY DESTINATION GROCER

Grocery stores are often a natural community gathering place. Valli Produce is a beloved store and the first thing people associate with the West End area. Take queues from Austin’s Central Market (Austin, TX) and create an outdoor picnic and play space that can make a trip to the grocery store a reason to spend a little more time in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Establish a simple social media presence. This should include pages on Facebook and Instagram that include the updated district branding, the description of the district, and photography of the district and its businesses highlighted through 8-12 posts. Once this content is set up, businesses and the Enjoy Evanston account can tag the handle and the location.
 - *Aim to post to these accounts 2-4 times monthly, as well as sharing posts from business and citywide accounts.*
 - *The goal for this account is to have a presence that allows others to tag it and increase visibility around the name.*
- Replace existing banners with newly branded West End / Enjoy Evanston banners.
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events in West End as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Replace existing receptacles with Enjoy Evanston receptacles, particularly around Robert Crown Community Center (4 bins).
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page with up to date list of businesses in the district.

Placemaking + Public Space

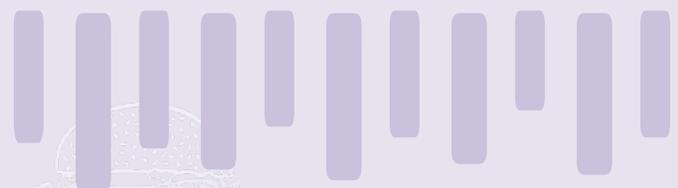
- Pedestrian improvements along pathways to Evanston Township High School and walkways within commercial developments.
- Pedestrian improvements and crossing enhancements at Dodge and Dempster, completing pedestrian pathways to businesses and Evanston Plaza. Pedestrian improvements and crossing enhancements, especially around Evanston Plaza, would directly benefit businesses, including Temperance Beer Co.
- Encouraging private property owners and businesses to create shared entrances to reduce curb cuts.

Market + Development

- Identify, filter and approach prospective operators for a casual sit-down eatery geared towards families and kids at the intersection of Main St and Dodge Ave, then connect them to landlords with available spaces in the 2,500 to 4,000 sq ft range.
- Keep an eye on the future of the Lincolnwood Town Center. The enclosed mall (with nearly 20% vacancy) is currently being pitched for mixed-use redevelopment. If realized, this repositioning could present a more formidable rival for both West End consumers and prospective tenants.
- Work with ownership to consider ways of densifying out-lot areas to more effectively “hold the corner” with residential over commercial on ground floor.
- Use Dempster Dodge TIF district to support creation of housing, environmental remediation.



WEST VILLAGE

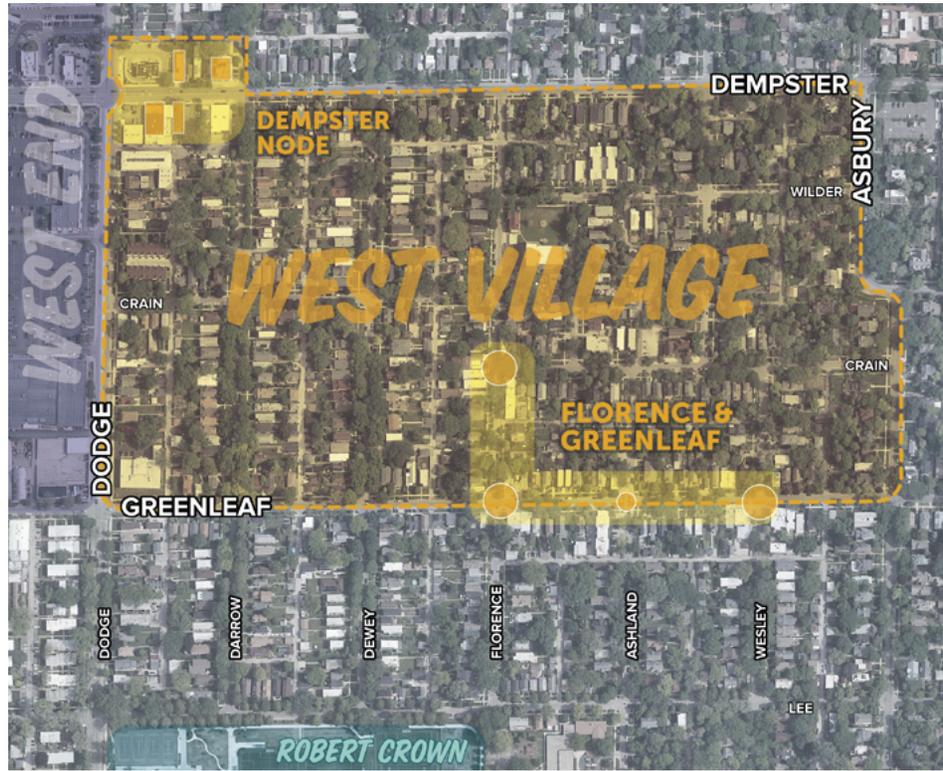


*A Healthy daily
habit since 1933*

*A Healthy daily
habit since 1933*

WEST VILLAGE

THE WEST VILLAGE BUSINESS DISTRICT IS A UNIQUE ARTS AND WELLNESS ENCLAVE OF SMALL ARTISANAL SHOPS, ARTIST STUDIOS, AND GALLERIES ANCHORED BY HEARTWOOD CENTER, THE MIDWEST'S OLDEST HOLISTIC HEALTHCARE CENTER. JOINING THE VILLAGE RECENTLY IS ZENTLI, A MEXICAN RESTAURANT AIMING TO HEAL THE COMMUNITY THROUGH INCREDIBLE MEXICAN STREET FOOD AND INCREDIBLE ART. ONCE A POLISH MEAT SHOP, THE EVANSTON MADE HEADQUARTERS NOW ANCHORS THE GREENLEAF & FLORENCE ART GALLERIES, WHICH HAVE MADE THIS NEIGHBORHOOD DISTRICT A DRAW FOR BOTH LOCALS AND VISITORS.



Following the completion of the Evanston Thrives! Retail District Action Plan, retailers and property owners in the West Village area requested the plan be amended to include their district. This placemaking plan is an addendum to the Evanston Thrives! Retail Action Plan (completed 2023)

GREENLEAF & FLORENCE NODE

- This area features a unique concentration of galleries and arts-based uses/ maker spaces unlike anywhere else in Evanston.
- Once a Polish Meat Shop, the Evanston Made headquarters now anchors the Greenleaf & Florence art galleries, which have made this neighborhood district a draw for both locals and visitors.
- This location is physically distinct and unique from surrounding areas in both scale and architectural style.
- Its neighborhood surroundings have slower streets, mature trees, and established residential areas within a short distance.

THINGS TO KNOW

- The West Village Business District is a small enclave of artisanal shops, artist studios, and galleries.
- The district is within close proximity to major destinations, which include Robert Crown and Evanston Plaza.
- The primary retail nodes surround Greenleaf St at Florence Ave and Greenleaf St at Wesley Ave. This area is also referred to as “Greenleaf Arts”. The retail businesses east of Dodge along Dempster also identify as a part of West Village.

West Village	
Wards	2 & 4
District Area	75 Acres
Licensed businesses (all)	24
In Home Businesses	6*
Business operating out of the Heartwood Building (Oct 2023)	46

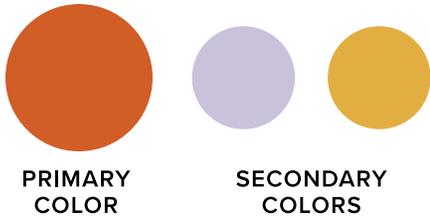
*The City of Evanston is working to improve data and communication with home-based businesses operating in Evanston

DEMPSTER NODE

- This area is adjacent to Evanston’s West End Retail District, sharing a key intersection - Dodge and Dempster.
- Joining the village recently is Zentli (1813 Dempster St), a Mexican restaurant.
- The Heartwood Center, the Midwest’s oldest holistic healthcare center, is a prominent wellness destination in this area.

COLORFUL + CREATIVE

KEY WORDS



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

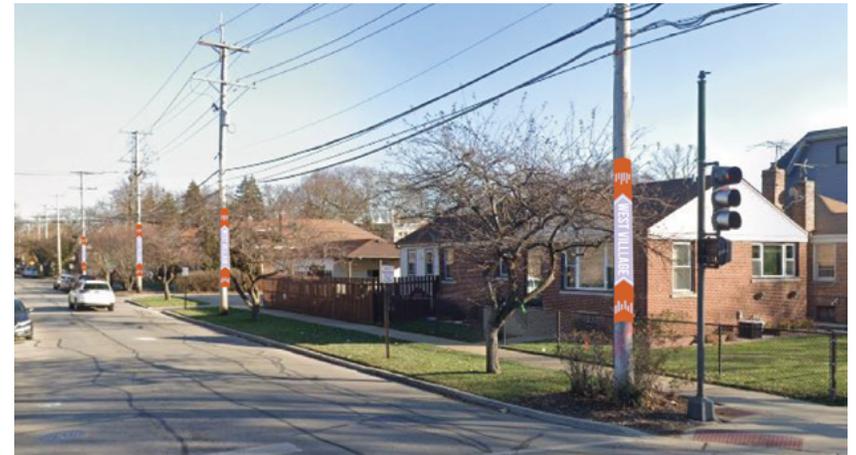
This type treatment references the energy of the neighborhood- full of vibrancy and creativity.



PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Make the cultural and creative, visible through public art. Placemaking improvements should celebrate the unique scale and architectural assets of the Greenleaf + Florence subarea. Where possible, use paint, lighting, and public art to emphasize these details.

Murals and public art—especially at key intersections—should also play a key role in creating a sense of place throughout the district, celebrating its diverse cultural destinations and amenities, and introducing a sense of playfulness and joy to the more arterial-heavy sections.



Above: Consider graphic utility pole wraps designed to highlight the pathway along Greenleaf toward the Florence intersection. Give new purpose to the infrastructure that's already in the area.

WEST VILLAGE: WAYFINDING STRATEGY



CONCEPT: DEMPSTER GATEWAY!



Create a visible gateway into the West Village area with large, lighted mural artwork on the eastern face of the Heartwood and Zentli buildings. Consider sculpture artwork on either side of the street, further reinforcing this important gateway.

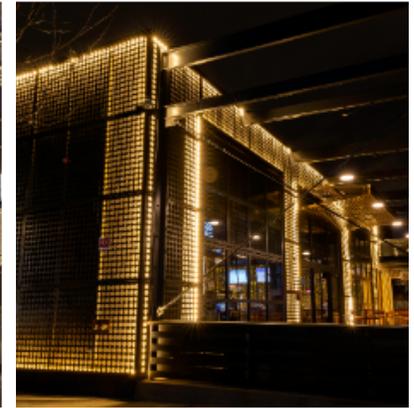


CONCEPT: PAVEMENT PAINT!

Engage local artists to turn the neighborhood intersections around Greenleaf Arts into eye-catching compositions that reinforce a sense of arrival to this area.



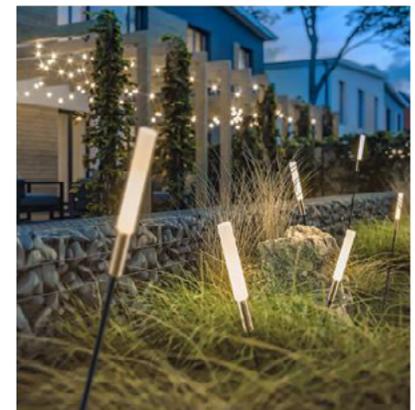
CONCEPT: CELEBRATE THE ARCHITECTURE!



Above: Mature trees and unique architecture set this area apart from other districts in Evanston. Use exterior night lighting on architectural features, uplights, or tree wraps to celebrate these assets in the day and night.

Below: Use temporary movable light-up furniture or walkway lighting like rechargeable or solar lights to make neighborhood events more visible and impactful.

CONCEPT: LIGHT UP EVENING EVENTS!



RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Market and program the district around one of its greatest assets—the visual arts. This could include more frequently-programmed gallery tours, and investment in event infrastructure.
- Invest in photography of the key businesses throughout the district. Capture the faces of artists and local business owners to help tell the story of makers and doers in the district.
- Establish a simple social media presence. Create Facebook and Instagram pages that include the updated district branding, the district description, and photography of area businesses highlighted through 8-12 posts. Once this content is set up, businesses and the Enjoy Evanston account can tag the handle and the location.
- Aim to post to these accounts twice a week, as well as sharing posts from business and citywide accounts. The goal for these accounts is to have a presence that allows others to tag it and begin to grow a following.
- Replace existing banners with West Village / Enjoy Evanston branded banners.
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high traffic business.
- Post flyers for upcoming events within West Village as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Replace existing receptacles with Enjoy Evanston receptacles (~6 bins)
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page with an up-to-date list of businesses in the district.
- Work with the City to identify new ways to celebrate home-based businesses in West Village and throughout Evanston.

Placemaking + Public Space

- Enhance the curb appeal of buildings along Dempster with public art, landscaping, and lighting. Explore opportunities to create outdoor cafe seating with visible/ physical protection (bollards, planters, etc) at the curb to make conditions more comfortable to patrons.
- Pursue gateway sculpture visible from Dempster and Dodge intersection signifying the entrance to the West Village district.
- Install high-visibility crosswalks and crossing signage along Dempster at Florence.
- Explore sidewalk enhancement and/or reconstruction of sidewalk segments south of Dempster along Florence.
- Pursue colorful pavement paint at key intersections at and around Greenleaf and Florence. Explore ways to engage local artists and near neighborhood residents in the painting or tie into a larger community event.
- Pursue City Facade Improvement funds for facade and window display improvements:
 - *Explore exterior architectural lighting, decorative paint, and restoration projects to highlight the unique architecture in the Greenleaf Arts area.*
 - *Continue efforts to create exciting visuals in shop windows in the district, even in non-retail ground floor windows.*
- Work with the City to secure colorful or lighted furniture and streetscape decor to increase the presence of events in the neighborhood.
- Explore multi-media art installations in buildings, particularly in the Greenleaf Arts area of the District. These installations can help set the small retail node apart from the surrounding neighborhood.

Focus on wayfinding

- Create a visible gateway into the West Village area with large, lighted mural artwork on the western face of the Heartwood and Zentli buildings.
- Consider sculpture artwork on either side of the street, further reinforcing this important gateway.
- Install banner signage along Dempster, and Florence, signaling the pathways to the Greenleaf Arts area.
- Install Street Pole wraps along Greenleaf from Dodge to Florence.
- Celebrate the mature trees throughout the area using light wraps or uplighting.

Market + Development

- Gather information about available retail spaces, specification, and ownership contact information for any vacant ground floor retail spaces in the West Village area.
- Identify opportunity spaces and target growth of neighborhood serving food and beverage retailers.
- Continue efforts to establish and grow a core group of local retailers to advocate on behalf of the West Village Retail District.
- Explore ways to increase awareness and visibility of in-home businesses in the area.
- Use community events and happenings as opportunities to gather information about neighborhood needs and future retail opportunities.



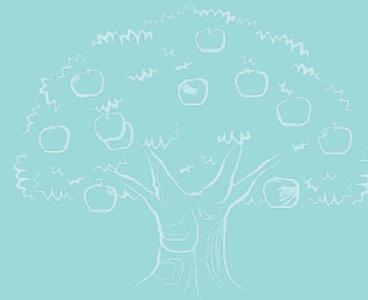
The **PRACTICAL THEATRE CO.**



HOWARD STREET



The **PRACTICAL THEATRE CO.**





DID YOU KNOW?

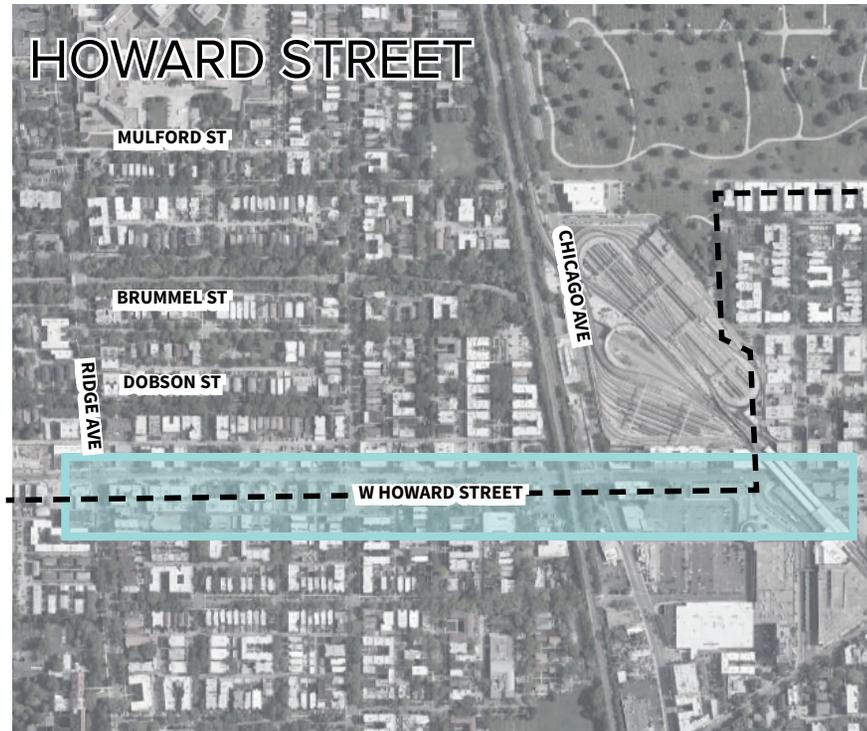
Howard Street is named after Howard Ure, developer of the Howard Avenue Trust and Savings Bank in 1922.

In the 1990's, Chicago built a barrier in the median of Howard Street in an effort to separate the city from Evanston and to keep the mall traffic out of the neighborhoods. A few years later, Evanston successfully sued to have the barrier removed.

The Practical Theatre Co. was founded by Northwestern University students and was active throughout the 1980s. They operated out of a leased storefront at 703 Howard Street and named their theater space The John Lennon Auditorium.



THIS VIBRANT COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR DISTRICT CONNECTS EVANSTON AND CHICAGO AND OFFERS AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF INTERNATIONAL FOOD, INCLUDING JAMAICAN, CAMBODIAN, CENTRAL AMERICAN, AND GOOD OL' FASHIONED WISCONSIN-STYLE FISH FRY. GRAB A DRINK FROM PECKISH PIG OR WARD EIGHT, STROLL THE STREET CHECKING OUT AN AMAZING COLLECTION OF MURALS, AND THEN CHECK OUT A LIVE PERFORMANCE AT GOOD TO GO JAMAICAN OR THEO UBIQUE CABARET THEATER.



Howard Street	Evanston Side (north)	Chicago Side (south)
Licensed businesses (all)	34	46
Ground floor businesses	34	46
New businesses (2022-present)	0	N/A
Recent closures (2022-present)	0	N/A
District Area	13.88 acres	N/A
Ward	8	City of Chicago
Street frontage (linear miles)	4118 ft	

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Howard Street corridor straddles the Evanston and Chicago jurisdictions. This has proven difficult to coordinate maintenance, events, parking meters, and identity building of the one Howard Street.
- A study is underway to assess the feasibility of creating an SSA for the Howard Street corridor in partnership with the Rogers Park Business Alliance. A small group of dedicated business owners is committed to improving the Howard experience but needs funds and resources capacity to make an impact.
- The recently opened Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre (721 Howard Street) carries on the district’s legacy as a place for theater and entertainment.
- The Howard CTA station connects passengers to the Howard Red, Purple, Yellow, and Purple Line Express trains. Although Metra passes over Howard Street, the nearest station is Rogers Park Station to the south.
- Although the streetscape was reconstructed in 2020, residents and visitors feel the pedestrian experience can be greatly improved through safer crossings, landscaping, and general maintenance of the sidewalks and planter beds.
- Planter beds aren’t well kept and continue to attract trash and vermin.
- Good to Go Jamaican’s temporary outdoor seating and parklet have been successful and the City wants to explore a more permanent structure there, or in another higher-traffic area, for outdoor seating.

VIBRANT INTERNATIONAL

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY COLOR



SECONDARY COLOR



EXISTING LOGO



The brand for this district has been implemented on the Chicago side. Embracing it for the Roger's Park side as well means introducing a new color that ties it into the Enjoy Evanston family.



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

MARKET STRENGTH

The stretch of Howard between the Metra tracks and Ridge Ave is similar to Central, Dempster and Main in the pedestrian orientation and fine grain of its retail mix, while it has improved considerably over the last decade and boasts a handful of unique draws (e.g. Good To Go Jamaican Cuisine, Peckish Pig), its reach remains mostly local, with a scattering of more downmarket businesses. In actuality, the foot traffic is solidly middle-income, with roughly a quarter qualifying as affluent, but the corridor must contend with stubborn perceptions rooted in its history and border location.

It seems safe to say that Howard's retail mix caters more directly to Evanston's (and Rogers Park's) Black community than any of the city's other districts, with businesses like Frontline North, Fabulous Doll, Howard Beauty Supply, Forever Beauty, Michelle Lamothe Salon and Monsen's Tally-Ho Pub as well as larger chains such as DTLR/Villa, Citi Trends and Sally Beauty Supply at Gateway Centre Plaza.

At the same time, the corridor's ability to accommodate motorists on several parcels – including, most notably, Gateway Centre Plaza and the Howard & Western Shopping Center – has spawned a collection of large-format anchor stores, including Jewel-Osco, Marshalls, Ross Dress for Less, CVS, Walgreens (two), Dollar Tree, Dollar General and Esporta Fitness, though the competition further west (within Evanston) and to the southwest (along Touhy Ave) acts as a limiting factor going forward, with the possible mixed-use redevelopment of Lincolnwood Town Center adding another wrinkle.

HOWARD STREET

Note that placemaking project concepts shown on private property are for illustrative purposes and do not imply that the owner agrees to the proposal nor suggests the City will acquire the property.

HOWARD STREET PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

People want more investment along Howard Street, with a focus on spaces for people. Today, there are gaps between established businesses like Peckish Pig in active and welcoming frontages. Placemaking interventions should focus on tying the district together. Highlight Howard! Focus on big, bold visual queues that reinforce a sense of arrival and intrigue along the street. At every moment—by car, bike, or on foot—a visitor should see something interesting ahead of them that draws them forward and reinforces that Howard Street has lots more to explore.

Unify the street under a single, visible brand. Even as the management and oversight evolves, continue work with local merchants to unify the district under a single identity. Opportunities exist, especially through murals and other public art, to capture the international and cultural assets of the corridor. Build on the great mural and street art already featured along Howard by filling the blank spaces with color and imagery.

RIDGE

REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

WALL SPACE FOR MURALS

ENHANCED CROSSWALK

HOWARD

CURB BUMPOUTS

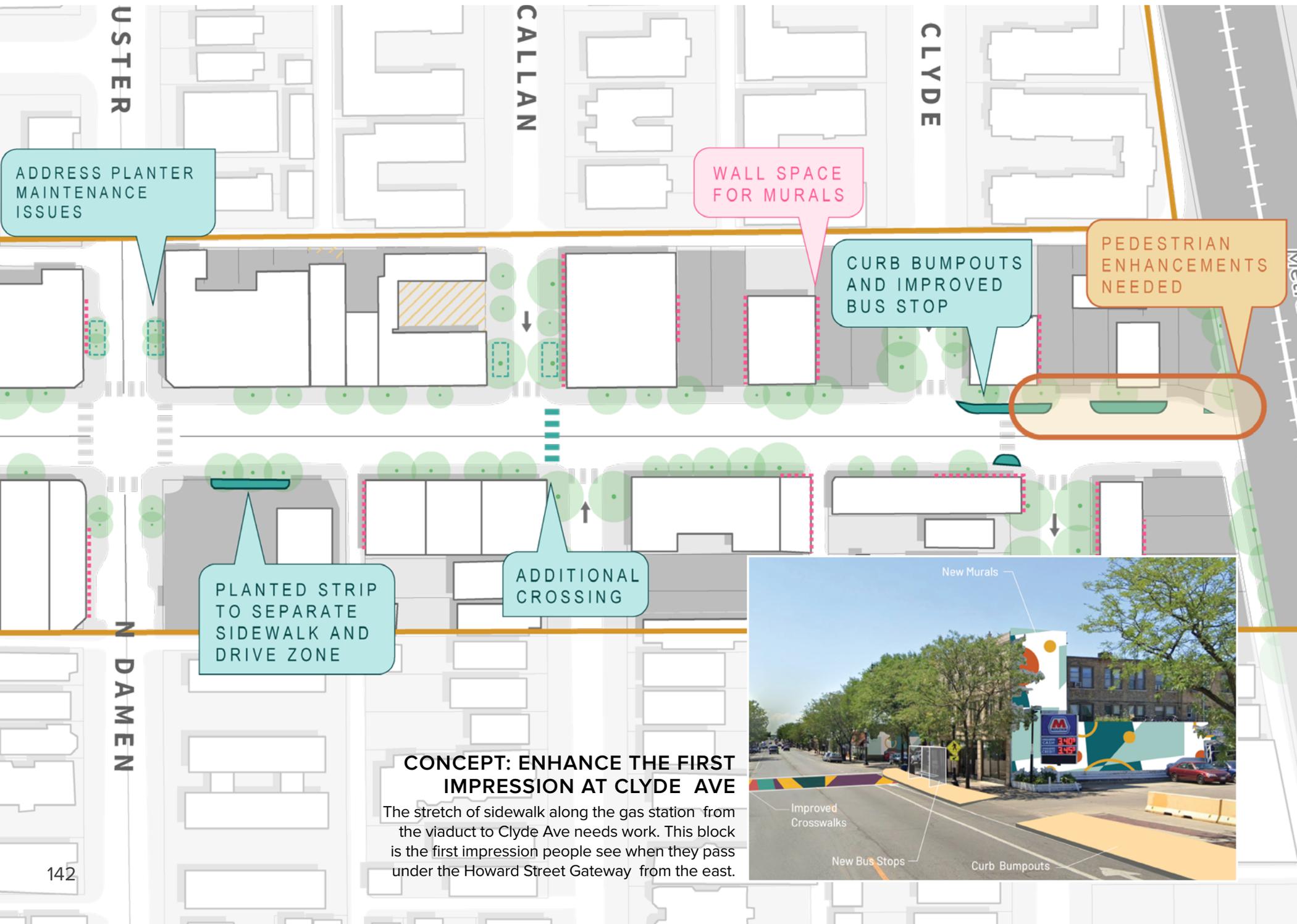
CONCEPT: PILOT ARTWORK OR ALTERNATIVE TO JERSEY BARRIERS

PILOT JERSEY BARRIER ENHANCEMENT ALTERNATIVE

Good to Go Jamaican's temporary outdoor seating and parklet have been successful and the City wants to explore a more permanent structure there, or in another higher-traffic area, for outdoor seating.



HOWARD STREET: PLACEMAKING STRATEGY



theo™

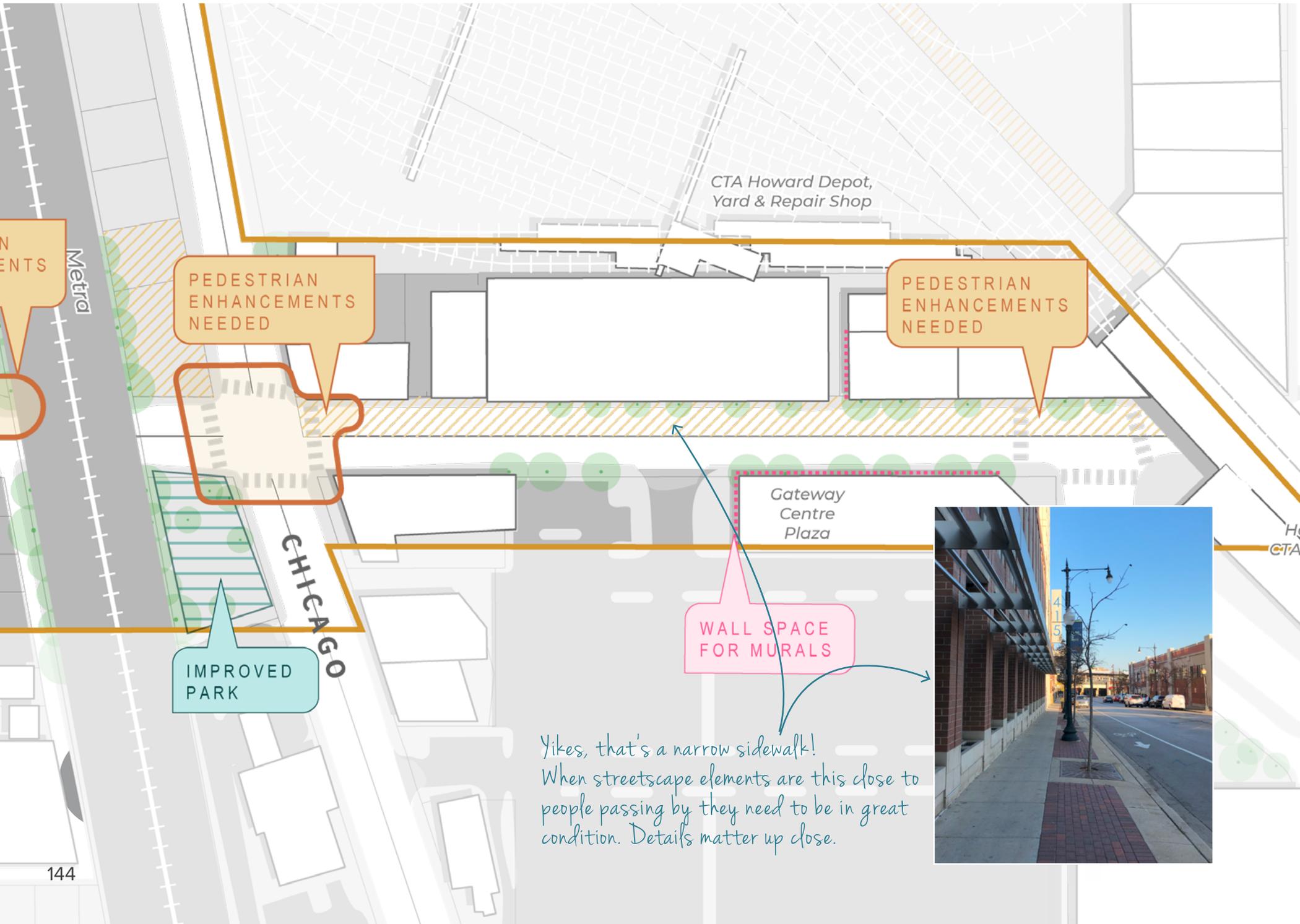
"Great new cabaret/theatre space. It has a full bar and table seating, along with some theatre seats. The show I saw was a first-rate performance"

- Patron quote from THEO website

THEO UBIQUE THEATER

Theo Ubiq storefront theatre was started by Co-Founder Fred Anzevino in 1997. The Howard Street location (721 Howard Street) opened in 2021.

HOWARD STREET: PLACEMAKING STRATEGY



WALL SPACE FOR MURALS

*Yikes, that's a narrow sidewalk!
When streetscape elements are this close to people passing by they need to be in great condition. Details matter up close.*



CONCEPT: ADAPT EXISTING BRANDED PHYSICAL ELEMENTS TO NEW DISTRICT BRAND





RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

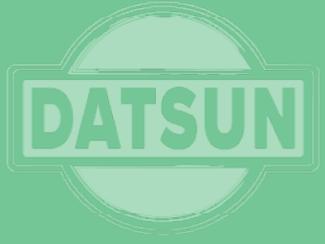
- Begin acting as one district across jurisdictions.
 - *Merge the Evanston Howard Street Facebook page with the Chicago Howard Street Facebook page. Coordinate content for social media between the districts.*
 - *Coordinate with RPBA to update the HowardStreetChicago.org website to incorporate language about Evanston businesses. Incorporate the Evanston light blue as well.*
 - *Update Enjoy Evanston web page to link to Howard website.*
- Invest in photography of businesses along the Evanston side of Howard to complement the existing photography that exists of Chicago businesses.
- Replace existing banners on the Evanston side with light blue Enjoy Evanston banners and Howard Street logo.
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high-traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events on Howard as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Replace existing receptacles with Enjoy Evanston receptacles (13 bins).

Placemaking + Public Space

- Update existing gateway signs to reflect the new identity and colors of Howard Street.
- Invest in public art that spreads messages of positivity and highlights the multi-cultural aesthetic of the corridor.
- Improve crossing quality and safety infrastructure for pedestrians at Howard and Chicago intersection.
- Enhance pedestrian pathway from CTA station to Ridge. Ensure there are wayfinding beacons, signage, and other activations visible from each block along the streetscape. Include bumpouts and landscaping improvements at various locations.
- Streetscape cleanup and repair including more attractive rat abatement interventions in landscape planters and tree pits along the street.
- Enhance the look of on-street parklets / jersey barriers and encourage additional retail activations in the streetscape. Pilot use of an alternative to jersey barriers for parklet applications in partnership with IDOT.
- Continue the collaboration with RPBA to implement coordinated seasonal streetscape decoration on both sides of Howard Street.

Market + Development

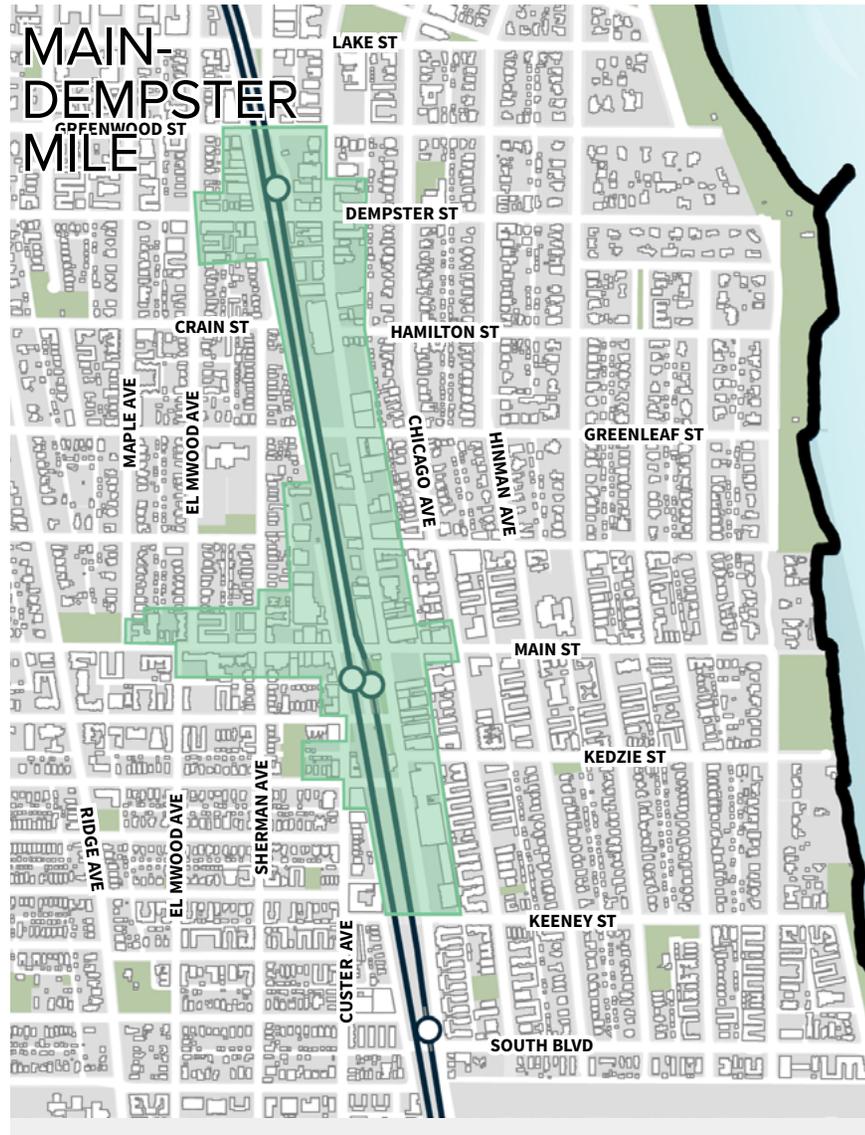
- Howard could conceivably attract additional retailers specializing in urban streetwear and drawn to its existing co-tenancy in that space. Meanwhile, its more vibrant stretches offer the most fertile ground for city-assisted entrepreneurs and other national chain-lets (e.g. Snipes, Slim & Husky's, Thrive Juices, etc.) targeting the Black community.
- Meanwhile, properties or assemblages capable of accommodating on-site parking might be capable of enticing chains and franchises valuing proximity to the corridor's larger anchor stores.



MAIN DEMPSTER MILE



THIS WALKABLE DISTRICT FEATURES SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE—FROM VEGETARIAN FARE TO DETROIT STYLE PIZZA TO ARGENTINE GELATO. CHECK OUT A LIVE SHOW AT SPACE OR BROWSE THE MANY ECLECTIC RETAIL SHOPS, GALLERIES, AND STUDIOS THAT LINE BOTH MAIN AND DEMPSTER STREETS.



THINGS TO KNOW

- The Main-Dempster SSA area is managed by the Main-Dempster Mile community organization.
- Residents associate “walkability” and “small business” vibes to the Main-Dempster Mile. In the survey, respondents ranked this area within the top three for eating, shopping, and taking visitors among all districts throughout Evanston.
- Main and Dempster have Purple Line CTA Stations; only Main has a Metra station platform. Raised structures and viaducts for the Metra and CTA lines bisect the Main and Dempster retail blocks east of Chicago.
- The Main-Dempster Mile SSA programs a number of events and pop-ups throughout the year. The SSA and residents voiced interest in activating smaller, cozier spaces, including alleyways and along/near the train.
- Population density is significantly higher here than Northwest Evanston.
- People want more areas for outdoor dining throughout the district.

MARKET STRENGTH

Similar to Central, Dempster and Main both offer “browse-worthy” specialty experience(s) that blend eateries and cafes with eclectic shops and services in a walkable space, though with uneven tenant mixes that reflect

an earlier stage of district evolution as well as a more diverse demographic profile. Indeed, while the foot traffic features a very affluent contingent, overall household incomes, home values and ownership levels are considerably lower, with large numbers of young singles, including many students.

Dempster and Main also differ from Central in their orientation – less towards the North Shore, from which they draw relatively little visitation, and more towards Downtown Evanston, where nearby residents head often for dining and drinking, as well as the North Side of Chicago. Rather than comparing themselves to a Downtown Wilmette, they are more likely to aspire, say, to Andersonville’s Clark St.

Yet while these two corridors appeal to like-minded customers and connect via Chicago Ave, the aggregation of all three as “Main-Dempster Mile” does not seem natural. With its larger-format businesses and surface parking lots, Chicago Ave is more automobile-oriented and not as walkable. Indeed, the corridor is well-positioned to host these sorts of stores, given its spacing vis-a-vis the city’s other such cluster in West Evanston.

Although constrained somewhat by shallow lot depth, Chicago Ave also seems primed for mixed-use redevelopment on a number of parcels, though such new construction, developed by institutional investors, is unlikely to spawn the kinds of street-level tenancies that would align with the existing mixes along Dempster and Main, with the higher rent levels and greater credit requirements more often resulting in ubiquitous franchises and quasi-retail uses.

FRIENDLY + ECCLECTIC

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY COLOR

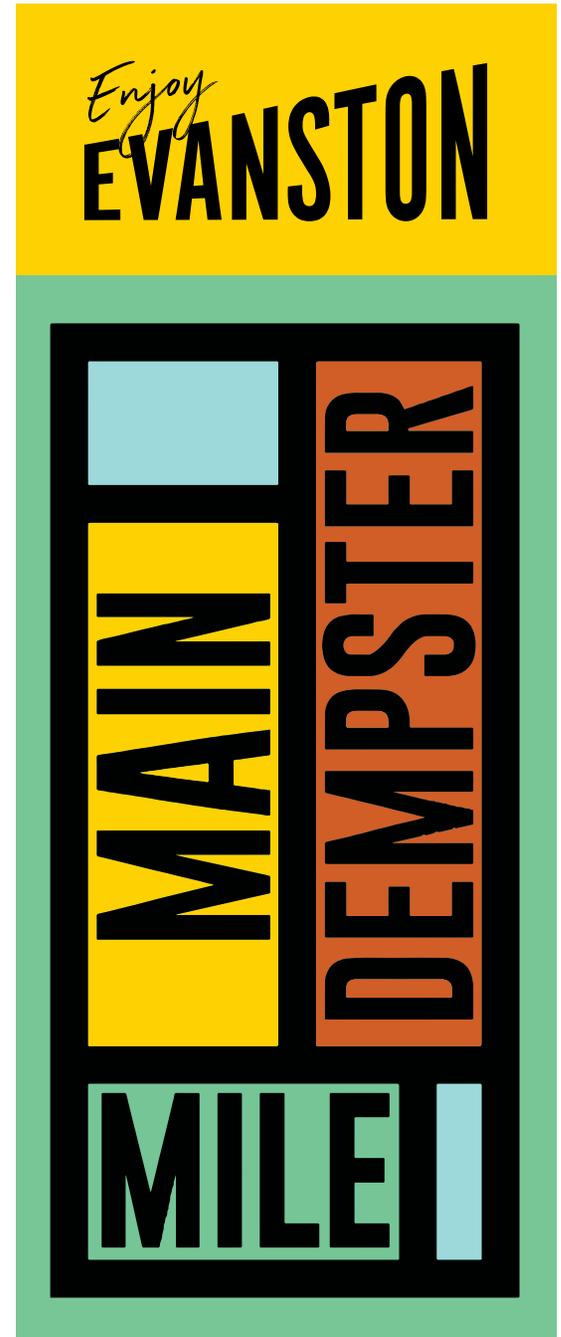


SECONDARY COLOR



EXISTING LOGO

The brand of this district is recognizable and beloved, established before this process began. The colors have been updated to seamlessly sit in with the larger brand family.



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

MAIN PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Note that placemaking project concepts shown on private property are for illustrative purposes and do not imply that the owner agrees to the proposal nor suggests the City will acquire the property.

REDEVELOPMENT /
INFILL POTENTIAL

STREET
ENHANCEMENTS
AND LIGHTING

MORE STREET
FURNITURE

CONTINUE THE
CUSTER OASIS!

IMPROVED
WAYFINDING
FOR STATION

ADDITIONAL
CROSSING

ADDITIONAL
CROSSINGS

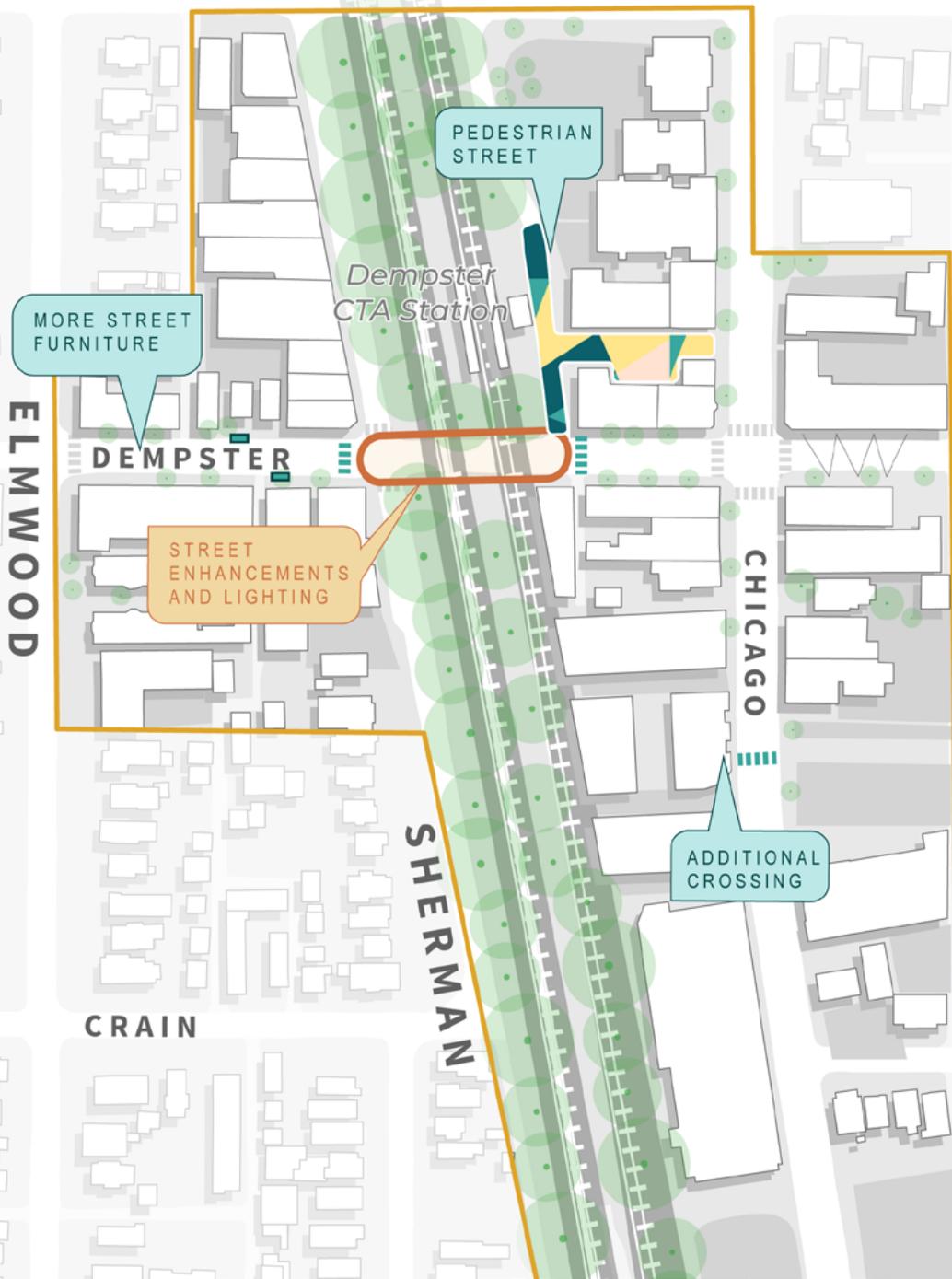
PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

The unified district brand is strong for the Main-Dempster Mile, but placemaking strategy in the physical environment may take more distinct forms along each block. The focus on Dempster Street is to create destinations that draw foot traffic. The draw to Dempster needs to be distinct from Main and intentionally focused on bridging the gap created by transit infrastructure so businesses on the western side get more love.

Bridging the infrastructure gap at the Main Street stations is also important, but with the density and gravity of businesses already pulling visitors west, the focus is on creating more spaces for the merchants to experiment and activate public space.

DEMPSTER PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

GREENWOOD



CONCEPT: NEW GATHERING SPACES

Create a unique gathering space along Sherman Pl at Dempster Street (near the CTA station entrance). This low-volume street is a great opportunity to consider a woonerf or curbless, pedestrianized design. The street could serve as a mid-sized event space for the district or could include/extend into private parking behind 603-615 Dempster.



CONCEPT: UNDERPASS LIGHTING & ACTIVATION

Create a unique gathering space along Sherman Pl at Dempster Street (near the CTA station entrance). This low-volume street is a great opportunity to consider a woonerf or pedestrianized design. The street could serve as a mid-sized event space for the district. Include/extend into private parking behind 603-615 Dempster.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Update brand colors on relevant brand materials. Digital materials should be updated immediately, and print materials should be updated as new materials are printed.
- Incorporate Enjoy Evanston branding throughout the district. Given the recent investment in branded banners, focus on other elements, such as trash receptacles (27 bins throughout district).
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events within Main Dempster Mile as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page to link to Main Dempster Mile website.
- Utilize strong social following to cross promote Enjoy Evanston content and events throughout Evanston.

WHAT'S A WOONERF?

A woonerf is a type of road design blends pedestrian and vehicle space. A woonerf employs strategies like traffic calming devices and low speed limits to force drivers to slow down and safely share street space with pedestrians, cyclists, and others, often without raised curbs separating cars and pedestrians. The image to the right shows a woonerf in Madison, Wisconsin.

Placemaking + Public Space

- Continue to support the Custer Oasis activation in future years.
- Identify other opportunities for public spaces that can be activated by individual businesses or a coalition of businesses, including other alleyways along the Metra/CTA structures.
- Support enhanced storefront display and cafe design at all properties. Any vacancies should be considered for temporary window display art installations.
- Create a unique temporary gathering space or woonerf or curbside shared street along Sherman Pl at Dempster (near the CTA station entrance).
- Remove all temporary signage throughout the district to reduce signage clutter.

Market + Development

- Consider more stringent requirements for interesting street-level uses (e.g. shops, eateries, cafes) at and near the intersections of both Main and Dempster with Chicago Ave, while offering greater flexibility (e.g. services and quasi-retail uses) further away as well as allowing automobile-friendly development along the inline stretch of Chicago Ave.
- Focus attraction efforts on small-scale and aspiring chain-lets from analogous submarkets like Andersonville.
- Augment marketing efforts in neighborhoods on the Chicago side of the border so as to expand the district's trade area.



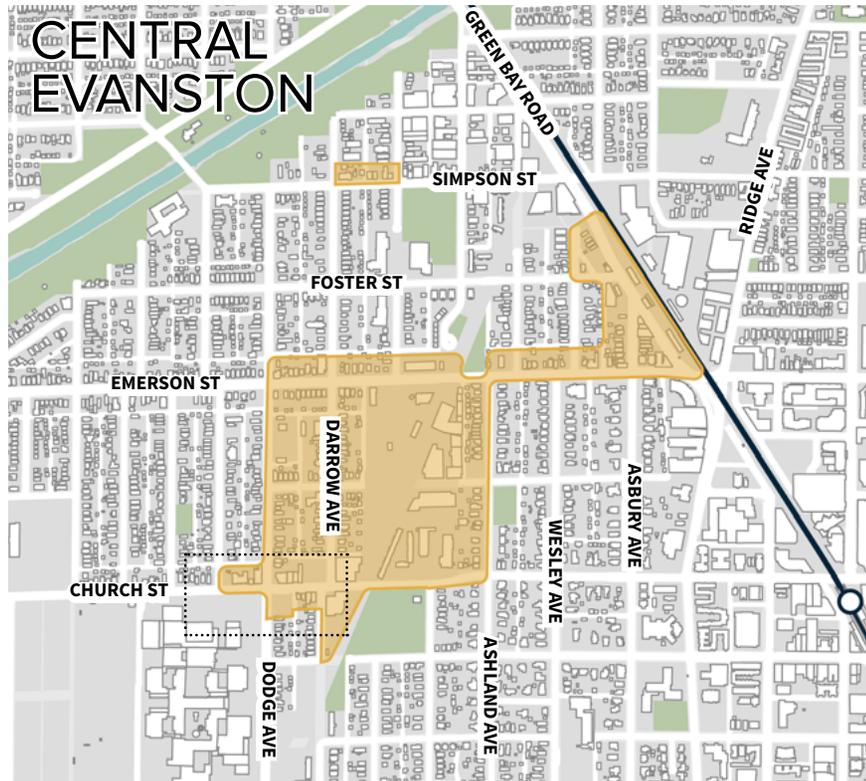
CHURCH & DODGE

Ebony

Ebony



IN THE HEART OF EVANSTON, THIS DISTRICT HAS HAD A LONG HISTORY AS A CULTURAL CENTER FOR THE CITY'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY. MANY OF THE FIRST BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES IN THE CITY WERE STARTED IN THIS DISTRICT, AND SOME HAVE BEEN PASSED DOWN THROUGH GENERATIONS, LIKE EBONY BARBERSHOP. INDULGE IN HOMEMADE ICE CREAM FROM C&W MARKET AND ICE CREAM PARLOR AND EXPLORE THE DISTRICT AND ITS LEGACY.



Central Evanston is located in the 5th Ward and has a rich cultural heritage. C&W Market, a family-owned market and ice cream parlor, opened in 2014 by long-time Evanston residents. Ebony Shop opened in 1962 and, in addition to haircare, has been a community hub for civic engagement, advocacy, and polling since its beginning. The Gibbs Morrison Cultural Center once housed two prominent Black-owned businesses—Gibbs’s Cabs & Service Station and Morrison’s Pharmacy. Many more stories about the legacy of businesses and organizations in this area are just waiting to be told through the implementation of this plan.

Note that placemaking project concepts shown on private property are for illustrative purposes and do not imply that owner agrees to the proposal nor suggests the City will acquire the property.

THINGS TO KNOW

- Church & Dodge is the most identifiable retail node within the Central Evanston retail district.
- Church Street connects directly into the heart of Downtown Evanston. There is only 1 mile between C&W Market and Fountain Square - that’s a 4-minute drive or a 20-minute walk.
- The organization known as Central Area Business Association (CEBA) programs events within the district. The organization is interested in improving the participation, reach, and impact of its events but needs additional support to accomplish this goal.
- People want more food options at the corner of Church & Dodge to balance the residential feel of the area. Survey suggestions ranged from bars to family-friendly restaurants.
- Several parcels (city-owned and privately held) in the area have the potential for redevelopment.
- There are a number of youth-focused spaces in and around the district including Youth & Opportunity United (Y.O.U.), Evanston Township High School, and the Gibbs-Morrison Cultural Center, but a lack of coordination among their goals and programming.
- The district is adjacent to Evanston Township High School, which has over 3,700 students. Pedestrian improvements have been made within the area to enhance safety, but more can be done to improve connections throughout the district.

CULTURAL + HEART & SOUL

KEY WORDS



PRIMARY COLOR



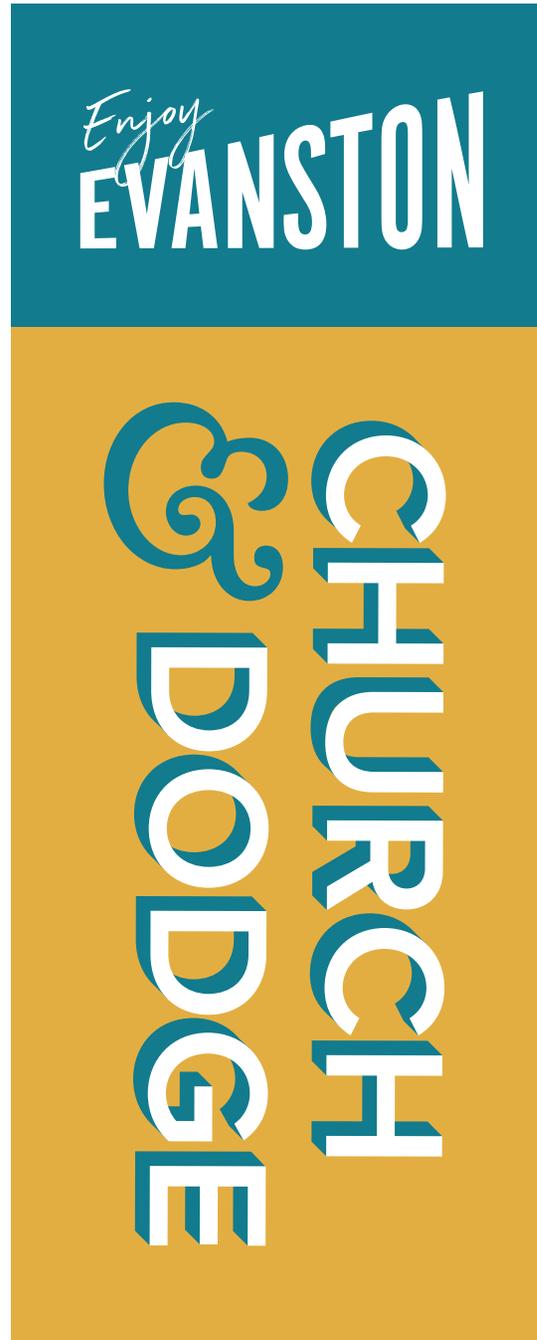
SECONDARY COLOR



BRAND MARK



The design is inspired by the typography and flourishes used in local businesses in the district with an old-school vibe.



BANNER DESIGN (24X60)

MARKET STRENGTH

The Church and Dodge intersection, part of what is currently called the Central Evanston retail district, is the symbolic heart of Evanston’s historic and vital Black community, with touchstone businesses like C & W Market. This district sits within a dense residential fabric, with additional demand generated by Evanston Township High School. Church and Dodge also enjoys decent visibility and access because of its location at the intersection of two arterial roads.

Church and Dodge is hard-pressed to compete for customers and prospective tenants with nearby centers like Evanston Plaza and Evanston Center. The intersection also lacks a site substantial enough for a large new anchor business.

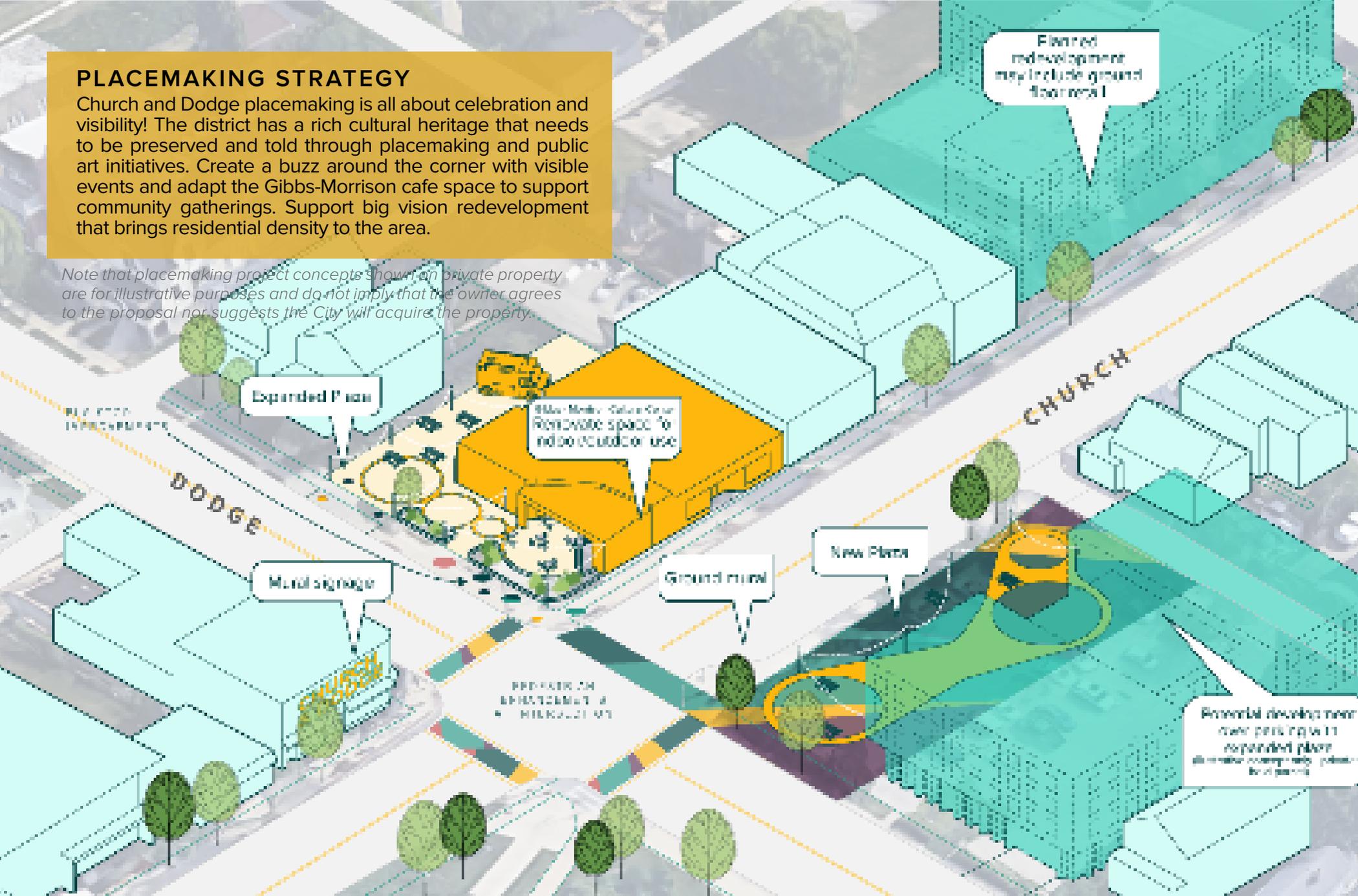
Given this nearby competition and the smaller storefronts, the district’s reach is largely confined to the immediate neighborhood, and its retail potential, mostly limited to convenience-oriented businesses serving the local community.

Central Evanston	Central Evanston	Church & Dodge
Licensed businesses (all)	22	9
Ground floor businesses	11	6
New businesses (2022 present)	0	0
Recent closures (2022-present)	0	0
District Area	69.7 acres	5.48 acres
Ward	5	5
Street frontage (centerline miles)	2.45 miles	2,283 ft

PLACEMAKING STRATEGY

Church and Dodge placemaking is all about celebration and visibility! The district has a rich cultural heritage that needs to be preserved and told through placemaking and public art initiatives. Create a buzz around the corner with visible events and adapt the Gibbs-Morrison cafe space to support community gatherings. Support big vision redevelopment that brings residential density to the area.

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CONCEPT: INFILL DEVELOPMENT WITH PUBLIC SPACE

The parking lot at the southeast corner of Church & Dodge is owned by Y.O.U.. This parcel presents the strongest redevelopment potential at the corner. It's possible that redevelopment could include structured parking along with residential uses with an integrated outdoor park & plaza holding the corner closest to Church & Dodge to reinforce the retail node.

PLACEMAKING STRATEGY CONCEPTS

Make the west side of Gibbs-Morrison a great place for community events



CONCEPT: INDOOR/OUTDOOR EVENT SPACE

Near-term conversion of the cafe side of Gibbs-Morrison would make the building useful for community events today while the future of the larger building is determined.



CONCEPT: BIGGER SIGNAGE

Other 5th Ward businesses, like Double Clutch Brewing Company, offer examples of painted signage that makes a big impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing + Communication

- Update existing Facebook and Instagram pages to reflect the updated name, description, and brand for the district.
- Invest in photography of key businesses and business owners within the district. Share stories of these businesses on social media, tagging the businesses as well as Enjoy Evanston accounts.
- Aim to post to these accounts twice a week, as well as share posts from business and citywide accounts. The goal for this account is to have a presence that allows others to tag it and begin to grow a following.
- Replace existing banners with Church & Dodge / Enjoy Evanston branded banners.
- Install Enjoy Evanston magnet board at a high-traffic business. Post flyers for upcoming events around Church & Dodge as well as other districts. Once a month remove outdated content and update.
- Replace existing receptacles with Enjoy Evanston receptacles (6 bins).
- Update Enjoy Evanston web page with an up-to-date list of businesses in the district.

Placemaking + Public Space

- Continue the public process to explore new future uses for the Gibbs-Morrison Center, but make it useful in the interim. Implement near-term, light-touch renovation to make the space useful for community events in the near term.
- Explore ways to increase the impact of business signage at the corner. Three-dimensional signage and signage lighting should be considered.
- Refresh intersection and parking lane striping. Consider crosswalk paint at signalized intersections.
- Improve the bus loading area on the east side of Dodge north of Church.

Market + Development

- Push toward redevelopment of the available properties. It's more residential density in the area that will allow the Church & Dodge area to reach its full potential. C&D is small but mighty. Now is the time to turn attention to growth in residential density to create more foot traffic for local businesses and support the retail growth desired by residents.
- Establish a partnership between the community and the City that will identify an experienced operator and a visible location for an sit-down eatery or bakery / cafe that serves as the district's "third place", then provide early funding and technical support as needed.
- Approach Y.O.U. to explore redevelopment of the southeast corner parking lot. Incorporate ground-floor retail space fronting on the intersection as part of any redevelopment of the Y.O.U. parking lot while prioritizing a developer / lender that can and will lease such storefronts at affordable rent levels

EVANSTON
THRIVES
RETAIL DISTRICT ACTION PLAN

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