

1012-1034 Chicago Avenue | Public Meeting Summary

April 4, 2019 | 7p to 8:30p

Approximately 75 attendees

Introduction by Alderman Wynn and an introduction of the two property owners, Richard Fisher, and Oscar Isberian who approached the City about their potential interest in redevelopment of their properties between 1012 and 1034 Chicago Avenue. Both Oscar and Richard wanted to engage the City and community early, before a proposal was predominately finished. They would rather get input and ideas now that can direct the development from the start. The intended goal was to get the community on the same page through a community meeting to get feedback on how future redevelopment would positively impact the community and the neighborhoods surrounding the Chicago Avenue corridor, a corridor which has changed and evolved a great deal in recent years.

The owners view the property as prime for development and they want to make it as productive as possible for the City of Evanston and its residents. Richard and Oscar both want more out of the Chicago Avenue locations and want something that benefits the community and neighborhood to a higher degree than a car dealership can.

Richard Fisher provided some background on his Evanston operations, which opened in 1992 with 22 employees. Now they employ more than 180 (186). He also noted that Autobarn is the last dealership on Chicago Avenue, an area which was once one of the main auto rows in the Chicagoland area. After many long years in the Chicago Avenue location, Richard noted a need to lower his overhead for operations and to consolidate into one location. Richard also noted that the Hinman neighbors have told him many times that they don't like automotive service departments near their houses. Over the years he did everything he could to minimize the impacts of those operations including recently acquiring a new property, the old Shore microphone building. This property is large, and allows the space for expansion.

Oscar Isberian, the owner of one of the oldest businesses in Evanston, Oscar Isberian Rugs, engaged the crowd. Oscar Isberian Rugs have been in Evanston since 1920, originally located further north on Chicago Avenue, and has remained family owned. They built the 1024 Chicago Avenue site right before the Great Depression and remarkably remained in business, surviving and evolving with the times. The company started with 5 employees and now they have 30 in Evanston as well as two additional locations, one in River North and another in Highland Park.

Oscar said that there is a need to make Chicago Avenue prettier. He acknowledged that the 1960's/70's façade on the building is bad and hurt the integrity of the original building, which was/is very attractive. Similarly to Richard, Oscar wanted to make the properties along Chicago Avenue more productive for the City and for the neighbors.

Alderman Wynn introduced Johanna Leonard, the City's Community Development Director. She noted that Johanna grew up in Evanston and has served the City for nearly nine years.

Johanna Leonard addressed the crowd and introduced Cade Sterling, Planner I and Scott Mangum, Planning and Zoning Manager. Scott Mangum noted that the potential development sites were divided across two zoning districts, C1a and C2, and discussed the difference between those zoning districts.

At this time, Johanna asked the crowd to break into groups of 10 or so individuals where more intimate conversations could take place and where feedback can be delivered. After discussing their visions and concerns for the site, the groups were asked to report a summary to the crowd. Afterward individuals were asked to complete a short questionnaire and visual preference survey.

Group Summaries:

- 1) **Group #1:** They like the idea, beautification is good. Concerns about traffic, environmental, birds, fire, and police, congestion, and taxes if this would be a TIF zone. How the project would be financed. Will residential units be affordable? What are the price points? Parking fees. Safety concerns if the area would be walkable. Architecture should fit in with the city character. Would like the development to stick to the zoning rules with no variances. Want setbacks and green space.
- 2) **Group #2:** Strengths of development are more people and vibrancy for business. They would like business and residential to be included. Strengthen the transportation corridor. However, they don't want duplicative retail and want to see experience focused retail establishments. Concerns with a high rise too close to sidewalks. Concerned about congestion and impact on the school and local neighborhoods through parking spill over.
- 3) **Group #3:** Want beautification. This is very important for Chicago Avenue. They are against any tall high rise apartment buildings. Do not want to exceed any zoning rules. Want setbacks and wider sidewalks. Want affordable housing. Want to see condos rather than all rentals. Diversify price points and ownership.
- 4) **Group #4:** Looking for increased light. Improve safety, particularly at night. Want good architecture. Love mixed use. Setbacks and sidewalk width are concerns. Good pedestrian access. Greenery. No surface parking lot. Want adequate parking. Want the project to add life and vibrancy to the corridor. And a roof top restaurant.
- 5) **Group #5:** Concerned with safety for walkers and bikers. Want parking that is consolidated throughout the area. Don't want a lot of surface parking lots. Want beautification. Worry about the dark area and think that more vibrancy and restaurants, would improve this. Would like to diversify housing choices with rental and ownership opportunities. Al fresco dining. Roof tops. Creative ways to extend the outdoor season. The corners should be active. Potential U-shaped buildings to add public space and to be inviting. There was a discussion about integration of public art and murals.
 - a. Rentals can add vibrancy and don't necessarily make a neighborhood less "neighborhoody".
 - b. Want al fresco dining in a creative way. Extend the outdoor season and add experience and life to the corridor in more than just the summer.

Additional Comments:

1. Should avoid the type of brutalist architecture that exists on Main and Chicago. Want buildings with a higher degree of architectural value and high levels of detail.
2. The common theme is that it will be another large apartment building but one resident wants to challenge the City to create something different than what has been done before.

3. A resident discussed a meeting with an Alderman discussing a dearth of office space in Evanston and a market for office uses. Wants to know if this site is viable for office space since it's off the downtown.
4. Residents want interesting shops and retail. There is a want to connect Main, and Dempsters retail cores through Chicago Avenue. There needs to be a reason to get out of the car and walk. Jobs and office space create people on the street who will be patrons at local businesses in the area.
5. A concept of using the Metra and CTA stations to create something built around the train station. Utilizing both sides of the building. Reference to Chevy Chase in Washington D.C. This would connect the Sherman and Chicago Avenue locations.
6. Green and environmental businesses should be considered as tenants for the development. There is potential for this to become a hub for those types of businesses. Referenced a green office building in Logan Square.
7. Potential for North Light Theater or Arclight Theater to come to the area. A small movie theater that would be part of the "Go to" concept. There is a need for experience to be added. Not just restaurants and retail. Something new and different. Give people a reason to come here!
8. Would like the City to provide case studies: Andersonville; The music box theater in Southport; Lincoln Square. Residents want human scale environments, an improved pedestrian space, and do not want a sheer wall high rise.
9. Maximize everything. Go as big as the zoning allows.
10. Level sidewalks!

To summarize the meeting, Richard Fisher made a point that the City is not financially investing in this property in any way. This would be a private project and he cannot make any promises that he will not try to change the zoning if that's what was needed to make the property the best product it could be for the City and for the neighbors. He reiterated that the area as it exists now is a driving area with little experiential value. He asked if people like what's here now and if they're satisfied, because he is not.