Revitalizing a Classic American Town: *Wilmette, Illinois*

ULI Chicago

A district council of the Urban Land Institute

Technical Assistance Panel

January 14-15, 2008

ULI Chicago

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Since 1947 the Urban Land Institute (ULI) has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. ULI Chicago brought this same model of technical assistance to the greater Chicago area twelve years ago. Local ULI members volunteer their time to serve on panels. In return, they are provided with a unique opportunity to share their skills and experience to improve their community.

Through Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs), ULI Chicago is able to enhance community leadership, clarify community needs and assets, and advance land use policies that expand economic opportunity and maximize market potential.

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Front Cover: (Left) Wilmette Theatre, (Upper Right) Metra Train Platform, (Lower right) Downtown Wilmette

Revitalizing a Classic American Town: *Wilmette, Illinois*

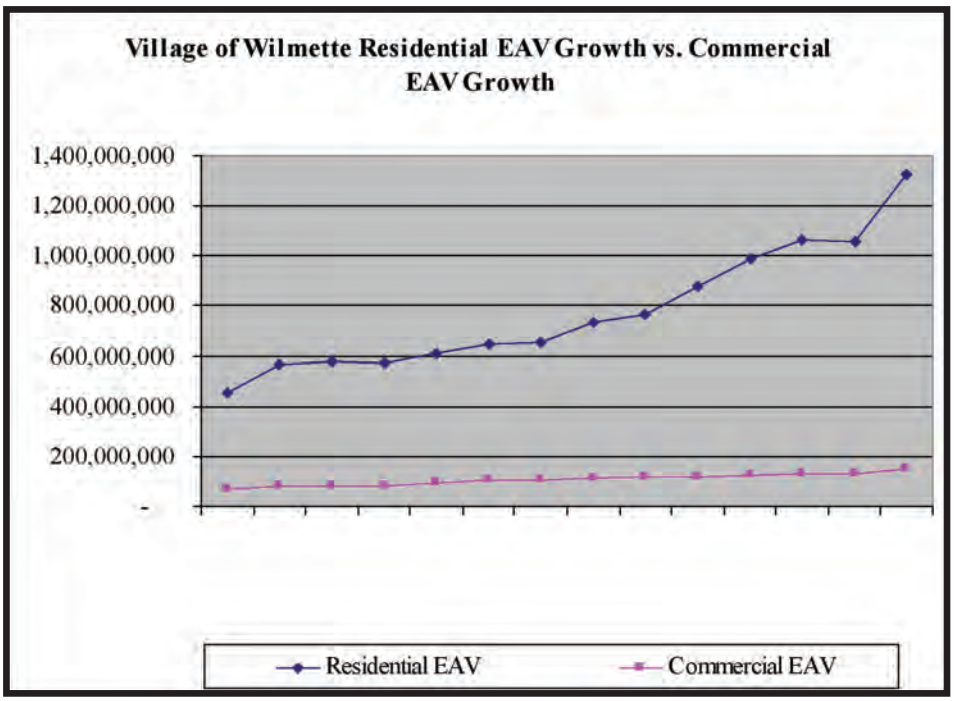
Wilmette is a village rich with tradition and an impassioned sense of community. Although only twelve miles from Chicago's Loop and less than a half hour by Metra, Wilmette is the quintessential American small town. Residents take great pride in the Village's strong schools, civic activities, and niceties – like village-plowed sidewalks – long since forgotten in the suburban landscape. Many residents and local business owners have lived in Wilmette their whole lives, and some are second or third generation. They have deep ties to the area, and take great care to preserve their way of life. As one resident and local business owner stated "We are a small town that aspires to be a small town."

Downtown Wilmette has retained its small town character for the last century.

Yet the small town spirit so vibrant in Wilmette is under increasing financial pressure from surrounding communities. Research commissioned by the Village revealed that significant commercial and residential development in Evanston, a thriving Old Orchard regional mall, increased options for food and dining in Glenview, as well as vibrant retail centers in Hubbard Woods and downtown Winnetka – all within a few miles from the Village Center – have steadily drawn retail, entertainment and restaurant clientele out of Wilmette's downtown, an area that has gone largely undeveloped for the better part of a century. The end result is that Wilmette is no longer a destination for shoppers or diners, save for a handful of iconic stores, eateries and attractions.

Local retailers, restaurants and other businesses – numbering roughly 120 in the Village Center (east of the Metra tracks) and roughly 40 more in the West Village Center (west of Green Bay Road) – are feeling the pinch. They are acutely aware that a revitalization of the downtown area is key to drawing more people – more customers – into Wilmette, but they are also keenly sensitive to the dangers of eroding the small town atmosphere that they have come to cherish along with their colleagues and neighbors.

This paradox reflects the vulnerability of the Village as a sustainable commercial center. Residential equalized assessed value (EAV) has nearly tripled in the last 15 years, while commercial EAV has remained essentially flat. Sales tax as a percentage of total revenues has dropped from over 11 percent in 2000 to less than 8 percent in 2006. The Village Center – potentially a prime retail and restaurant district – contributes only 6 percent of the entire sales tax revenue generated in the Village. These percentages confirm what research has illuminated: that both residents and non-residents alike are spending decreasing amounts of retail, dining and entertainment dollars in downtown Wilmette.



A declining relative commercial EAV and declining sales tax revenue are indicators of the need for economic development.

The layout of the Village itself, and in particular the Village Center, has much to do with the current challenges facing Wilmette. The Village Center and West Village Center were developed due to the location of the rail station along Green Bay Road. In the early days of the Village, the station-area also contained the North Shore Electric, which travelled east toward Linden where there were transfers to the El toward downtown Chicago. Yet, there has been little redevelopment of the commercial center that developed at the time. Today, three of the prime parcels in the downtown area are occupied by Village Hall, the Chase Bank building, and a Metra train station. These parcels are adjacent to each other along the east side of the Metra tracks, running from Wilmette Avenue on the south to Lake Avenue on the north. With their attendant parking, (all of which is surface parking), nondescript architecture and relative lack of use during prime shopping, dining and entertainment hours, these three parcels create a lake of asphalt in the heart of Wilmette that significantly contributes to the deadening of the vibrancy of the downtown area. This is especially true on night and weekends.

These challenges are exacerbated by the gulf between the east and west sides of downtown Wilmette caused by Green Bay Road and the Metra tracks. Green Bay Road parallels the Metra tracks directly to their west, with retail only on its western edge. The slightly raised tracks and

An overhead view demonstrates the extent of unused asphalt impacting the vibrancy and connectivity of the Wilmette Village Center.

the resulting expanse of space between shops on the west side of Green Bay Road, the West Village Center and the Village Center on the east side of the tracks, creates a physical and perceptual barrier between the two sides of the downtown area. Residents reported that they will drive from one side to the other to conduct personal business, despite a distance of only one or two blocks.

The Village has been considering whether to move the Village Hall in order to make room for redevelopment in the triangle bordered by Green Bay Road and Wilmette and Central Avenues. If it were to move, the Village has looked into creating a Municipal Campus on the east side of Ridge Road where the Police Department – which is currently in need of replacement – is currently located. A new building at this site would allow for the offices of the Village and the Police in the geographic center of the Village. The Village believes that a building of appropriate height can be placed on this site since there are four story condominium buildings across the street, St. Joseph's Church to the north, and the possibility of a "Village Green" atmosphere in the adjoining Howard Park. A key detriment to this location is that it would require the Village to purchase the adjacent parcel containing the Atrium, a building housing thirty affordable units, because the Police Station parcel is not large enough.

A Move Toward Revitalization

The Village commissioned two comprehensive studies on the marketability of Wilmette as a retail, dining and entertainment center, looking at both the use of land and the perceptions of nearby residents as consumers. The research conducted by Valerie Kretchmer identified a strong market for retail, residential, and office space, despite the limitations of the area. The research conducted by Calder LaTour, Inc. found that many residents considered the downtown area to be "tired". And yet, they were also very willing to change their shopping and dining patterns, to make Wilmette their destination, if the Village was able to provide a more desirable mix of retail and restaurants. Reactions to the studies revealed that many residents and landlords expressed deep concern over factors such as aesthetics, height and density – factors that need to reinforce the small town feeling that is central to their happiness as village residents.

Recognizing the fiscal and civic implications of the current and future market, leadership of the Village, under the direction of Village President Chris Canning, sought the involvement of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Chicago via its Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) process. This process is designed to enhance community leadership, clarify community needs and assets, and advance land use policies that expand economic opportunity, maximize market potential, and conserve natural environments. TAPs are typically two-day intensive working sessions where an expert panel of volunteers addresses a problem proposed by the sponsoring organization about a specific development issue or policy barrier within a defined geographic area.

ULI Chicago sought applications from municipalities and civic organizations in the Chicago area, to which the Village of Wilmette responded and was selected. Criteria for selection included the following:

1. Strong local leadership capacity.
2. A clearly defined problem statement, and three to four well-articulated questions to be addressed during the two-day session.
3. A clearly defined geographic boundary (a neighborhood, district, corridor, etc.).
4. Transferability to other communities in the region.

As part of the application process, the Village submitted the following vision statement:

"Wilmette's Village Center and West Village Center will be revitalized and reinvigorated through a comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, redevelopment. As a result of this redevelopment, the Village Center and West Village Center will be a more vibrant hub for commerce, dining and entertainment, and housing alternatives than it is today."

The Village also posed the following specific questions related to this vision:

- What techniques may be most effective for the Village to use to encourage private property owners to embrace the redevelopment of both public and private land parcels and properties?

- Given the existing competition from neighboring communities – including Evanston, Skokie and Glenview – what is an appropriate mix of uses (service, retail, dining, housing and entertainment) in the Village Center and West Village Center, and how can the Village stimulate the creation of this mix?

- What type and density of development needs to occur in the Village Center and West Village Center to achieve the vision?

- If the Village moves the Village Hall from its current site to a municipal campus on Ridge Road, how can the current parcel best be redeveloped to accomplish the Village's multi-faceted development goals?

- How does the Village collaborate with Metra and Union Pacific to utilize and redevelop the substantial land parcels that these two entities currently control to effect Wilmette's vision?

- What techniques should the Village use to ensure active and constructive participation by all of the private property owners in the Village Center and West Village Center as well as the residents of our community to achieve the vision?

The ULI Technical Assistance Panel met January 14-15, 2008, to create a plan to "revitalize and reinvigorate" Wilmette's Village Center and West Village Center. The Panel included a group of real estate development experts, urban planning and design professionals, and community development leaders, who evaluated all of the available qualitative and quantitative information related to the community's vision and statement of need, and brainstormed, planned and offered objective recommendations.

In addition to the expertise on the panel, organizers sought critical input through roundtable discussions with community residents, business owners, and current and past Village leadership. The roundtable discussions were designed to elicit the full range of public opinion and stakeholder input. The TAP members also toured the downtown area and any other relevant sites.

Master Plan

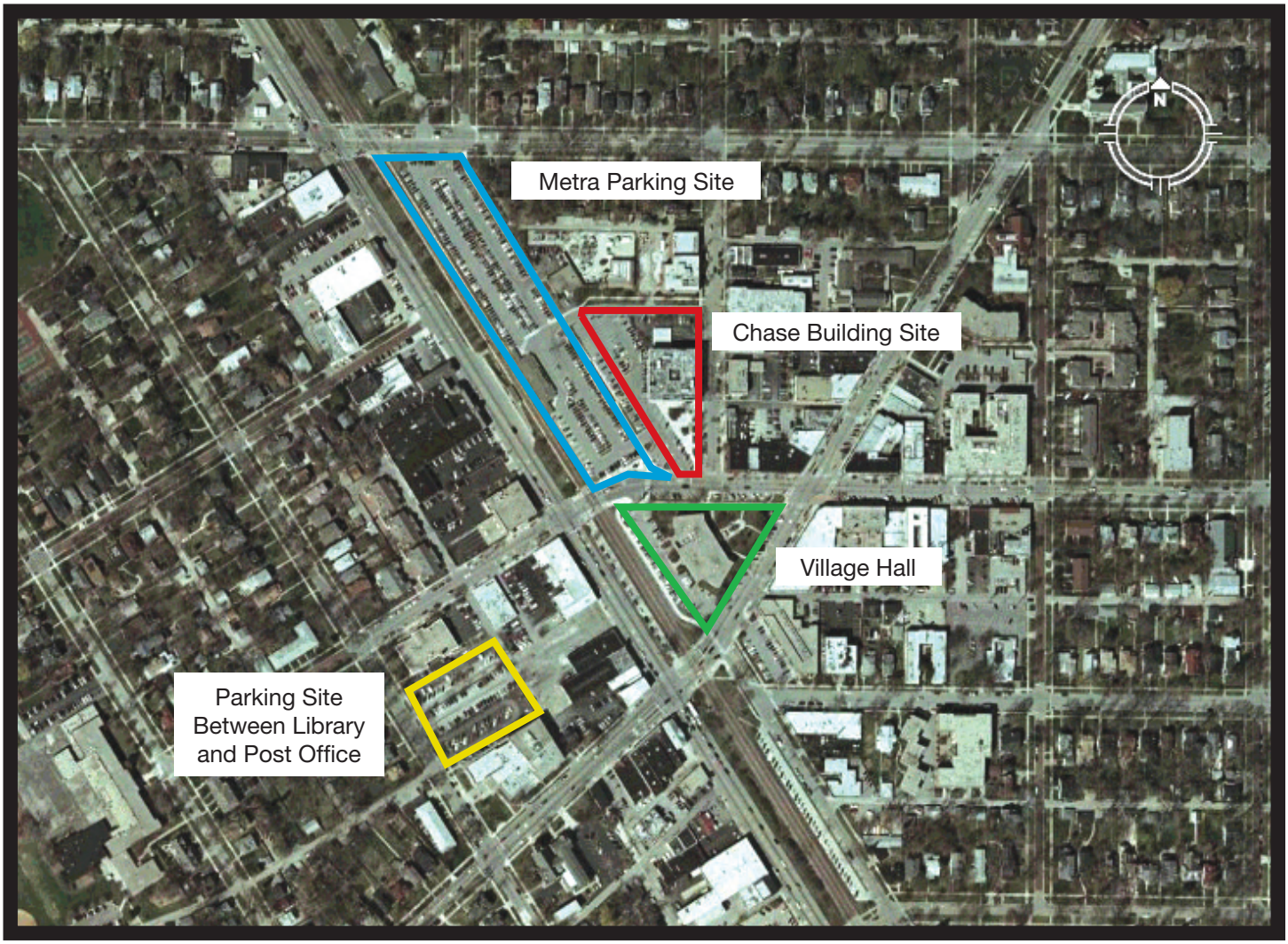
The panel affirmed the Village's belief that any redevelopment in the Village Center needs to be undertaken as part of a cohesive Master Plan. The panel also recognized, as did Village leadership, that local residents and business owners had seen a variety of studies and plans, but there has been a lack of adoption and follow-through. So the panel was clear that a Master Plan did not mean starting from scratch. Rather a Master Plan was to build on the existing research, and define a direction that would guide the Village in all of its downtown redevelopment efforts moving forward. Because of the timing associated with large-scale

development, the Master Plan would perpetuate beyond current Village leadership term limits. The panel emphasized that the Master Plan would necessarily incorporate the feedback of residents, offer financing strategies and might involve revisions to zoning ordinances, but that its adoption did not need to be a protracted process.

The panel also agreed that while the purview of the Master Plan should include the entire Village and West Village Centers, the first phase of the redevelopment should focus on four key sites.

Village Center

Many of the buildings in the Village Center stand as originally built in the early part of the 1900s. The panel agreed that preserving those buildings as is would be instrumental in maintaining the small town charm desired by the residents. The panelists believed that retaining the architectural character of some of the existing buildings would offset new development at higher densities at the key sites described below. The panel agreed that the existing buildings could be made more vibrant with stronger retail sales, with a resulting harmony between the new development and



The Technical Assistance Panel focused their efforts on four key sites in the Wilmette Village Center and West Village Center.

the older buildings in the Village Center, and do not necessarily need to be replaced. The Village's priorities are best spent on some of the larger sites detailed below, where larger buildings are more appropriate. The development of a Master Plan (also discussed below), should define parameters around redevelopment (height, density, architectural character) in advance of private development proposals.

The surrounding shops in the Village Center will help to maintain the small town charm while benefiting from the revitalization effort.

The panel also noted that encouraging redevelopment at the four key sites would begin to build a critical mass of energy and activity that would catalyze surrounding business and create natural market dynamics that would inform and encourage future redevelopment in the rest of the Village Center. One panelist noted that the scale of Central Street in Evanston, an area pointed to by many residents as their primary shopping district, was not substantially different than the one to two story buildings along Wilmette's Central Avenue or Wilmette Avenue. More shoppers, foot traffic, and active storefronts will be brought to the community through a continuous reinvestment strategy, starting with redeveloping key parcels combined with a concerted marketing strategy in cooperation with Village Center and West Village Center businesses. The Master Plan should offer clear aesthetic and architectural design guidelines to property owners in the Village Center and West Village Center so that they know what would be desirable if they did decide to pursue redevelopment.

Village Commitment

The panel agreed that any meaningful development would be difficult if not impossible without a commitment by the Village to lay out clear guidelines and consider offering financial incentives to attract developers and encourage reinvestment. With limited exceptions, the Village historically had not considered such incentives.

In addition, as a result of the roundtable discussions with business and real estate owners, it was clear to the panel that the Village itself would need to adapt its administrative processes if it desired to truly foster and encourage a redevelopment or revitalization effort. There was a general consensus that current administrative processes related to

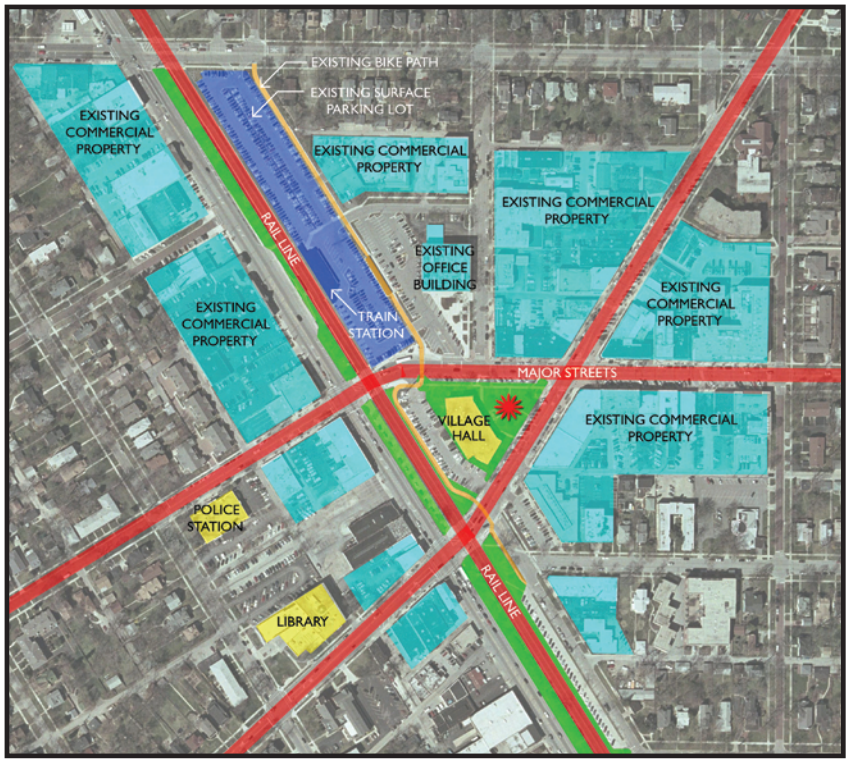
land use, whether in application for a permit, application for a zoning code variance, or a multitude of others, were too time-consuming and too unpredictable to encourage large-scale investment. The panel recommended that the Village create a vibrant public involvement strategy regarding a redevelopment plan to build consensus, draft and pass a Master Plan built on this consensus, streamline processes, and empower staff to implement the Plan with support of elected officials and the public. The specifics of how this strategy would be implemented are discussed in the Recommendations section that follows.

Key Opportunity Sites

The panel quickly identified that four key sites could help drive downtown revitalization. All four sites are either owned by the Village, by another public entity, or by a common owner who is in the process of, or has expressed interest in, redevelopment. The sites are large enough to spur redevelopment without requiring complicated land assembly efforts. Two of the sites – the current Village Hall property and the Metra lot – if developed as retail, dining and entertainment, would result in a 100 percent incremental tax increase from what is currently a zero tax base. The panel also felt that the development of all four of the parcels would serve as a catalyst for future development in both the Village Center and West Village Center. Each of the sites is discussed in greater detail below.

Current Village Hall Parcel For nearly a century, Village Hall has been located on a triangular parcel owned by the Village, and bordered by Central and Wilmette Avenues and the Metra tracks. The current building, erected in 1972, is the primary seat of administration and operations for the Village, and is a workplace for roughly 60 village and park district employees. The Village Hall itself occupies roughly 25 percent of the total land area, with the remainder divided equally between parking and a civic green space,

Wilmette's Village Hall site is a possible location for reuse as a mixed-use development.



Existing land use.

home to a war memorial and many community-wide activities. Despite its central location, Village Hall does not appear to be a catalyst for surrounding retail, and is not a source of sales tax revenue.

The panel was unanimous in its agreement that this parcel of land was the heart of the Village and represented the best opportunity to both stimulate revitalization and maintain the small town atmosphere that they all recognized as critical to the community. The panel recommended that the Village consider moving Village Hall from its current location and in its place seek the development of a signature mixed-use development and accompanying "village green" that could become synonymous with Wilmette and would be clearly visible to traffic along Green Bay Road. The development could include retail, dining, commercial, and potentially residential. It would run the entire edge of the triangular plot fronting the Metra track, with fronts on both Wilmette and Central Avenues as well. The panel felt it was important to create a continuity of retail with the businesses across the street and further down these two main thoroughfares. Importantly, the development would bring storefronts directly to

Development Pros and Cons

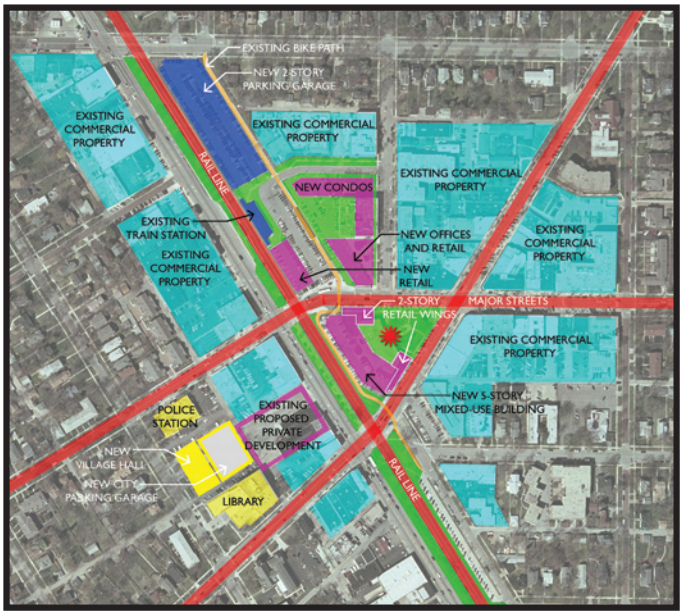
Site Option	Pros	Cons
1. Ridge Road	• Frees up Wilmette and Central site for redevelopment	• Cost of replacement for combined Village Hall and Police Department and the Atrium
2. Civic Campus on Park Avenue	• Frees up Wilmette and Central site for redevelopment • Creates a Civic Campus that would fit in with West Village Center and continue to serve as an anchor for nearby businesses	• Cost of replacement for combined Village Hall and parking structure • Less space would be available for parking in a combined facility
3. Add new development around existing Village Hall	• Intensify use of the Wilmette and Central site • Would reinforce planned mixed-uses across Central Avenue • Would save replacement costs for Village Hall	• Limited space for new development between Village Hall and RR
4. Redevelop Wilmette and Central site to include a new Village Hall within a mixed-use development	• Intensify use of the Wilmette and Central site • Would reinforce planned mixed-uses across Central Avenue	• Complex financing and ownership • Development costs to include new Village Hall within mixed-use development

the sidewalk, with no set back, to maximize the use of the land and create a visual and practical continuity with the rest of the Village Center. The panel recommended that the Village Green space would remain as is, if not expanded, and would continue to serve as the community center of the village and home to events throughout the year including and even beyond those for which the site is currently being used. The panel discussed several options for the location of the Village Hall, including building a new joint facility with the Police Department on Ridge Road, creating a new "civic campus" by building a new Village Hall and parking facilities between the Wilmette Library and U.S. Post Office, or retaining the Village Hall on site, either by retaining the building as a part of redevelopment or retaining the Village Hall use in a new development effort on the parcel. More investigation would be needed to determine whether the existing building or Village Hall use could be incorporated into a mixed-use development on the parcel. More investigation would be needed to determine which option is most desirable by the community, is most financially feasible, and would provide the best municipal services and conveniences to the residents and businesses of Wilmette.

Chase Bank Parcel The Chase Bank parcel is one of the largest in the Village Center, bordered by Washington Court to the north, 12th street to the east, Central Avenue to the south and the south end of the Metra parking lot to the west. The parcel is predominantly surface parking, with no streetfront activity, as the bank itself is set back almost a half-block from Central Avenue. The current owners have expressed their desire to consider redevelopment of the land.

The panel agreed that the site is an ideal location for additional retail and dining, and possibly office use. Moreover, the parcel's

The Chase Bank site and the surrounding parking lot are an ideal location for housing, retail, dining and/or office use.



Existing and proposed land uses.

location directly north of the current Village Hall parcel creates an opportunity for aesthetic continuity with the redeveloped Village Hall site.

The panel recommended the replacement of the Chase building with mixed-use development. Space fronting Central Avenue would be primarily retail with the possibility of an anchor restaurant. As the structure continues up 12th Street and onto Washington, the mix could be more office and residential. A central parking lot for the entire structure could exist in the center of the parcel, with access primarily from Washington Court.

For the purposes of planning, the panel evaluated the Chase parcel in conjunction with the southern end of the Metra parking lot, its neighboring parcel to the west. The panel recommended cohesive redevelopment along Central Avenue on the current Metra surface lot, mirroring the redevelopment on the Village Hall site and creating a point of aesthetic appeal and interest for pedestrians and drivers headed east on Central Avenue from the west side of Green Bay Road.

Metra Station/Parking Lot The Wilmette Metra station - and its accompanying parking lot - is a critical part of Wilmette's transportation infrastructure. While the station building is attractive and serves commuters well, the parking lot occupies the largest parcel of land in the downtown business district, stretching from Central Avenue to Lake Avenue, and accommodating just over 300 parking spaces. The parcel is owned by Union Pacific, headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska. Several other communities in the region have successfully negotiated with Metra to redevelop parking lots if they are replaced by at least an equal number of spaces in close proximity to the station.

The Metra lot sits largely idle on nights and weekends, and its redevelopment is key to adding to the vibrancy of the downtown area.

While the southern end of the parking area at Central should provide continuous retail frontage, the panel saw a unique opportunity with the northern end. Recognizing that Metra parking would have to be replaced, and that parking in small suburban centers is a recurring concern, the panel recommended a parking garage on the northern end of the Metra lot, to accommodate commuters as well as other visitors to the Village Center. Located directly adjacent to the Chase Bank site and just one to two blocks to the center of downtown, the lot could provide night and weekend parking for the stores and restaurants as well as continue to serve as parking for the farmer's market and other downtown events. Based on studies presented to them, the interview process, and their own knowledge of the retail, housing, and office markets in the Wilmette area, the panel estimated that these three properties could be developed over a 5-10 year span, and would result in the following:

- 160 units of housing
- 40,000-45,000 square feet of combined retail and restaurant space
- 10,000-20,000 square feet of office space
- Sufficient shared parking spaces to meet the demands of Metra and all developed residential and commercial properties
- Village green space

West Village Center Directly across the Metra tracks and Green Bay Road from the current Village Hall is a block framed by Green Bay Road, and Central, Park and Wilmette Avenues. The northeast half of this block, fronting Green Bay Road, is currently home to street level retail, but the bulk of the east center of the block, the Ford Property Development, is under development by the same group that owns the Chase Bank parcel. The current plan for the Ford Property Development is for ground floor retail and four floors of condominium units, currently in the pre-sale phase. The southwest half of the block contains the Village Library

The panel recommended several possible development options for the site between the Library and Post Office.

and the Post Office, separated by surface parking. The Village is currently investigating the possibility of erecting a five-story, 400 space parking structure on the site of the current parking lot, at an estimated cost of $10 million. With joint involvement from the library taxing body, the federal government and the Village, this site offers the possibility of shared contribution to development.

The panel concurred that the West Village Center site, with some development already underway, was critical to building overall momentum for revitalization. However, the panel offered suggestions to improve the proposed parking plan, particularly in consideration of the possible expansion of parking at the north end of the Metra lot.

The panel posed two possible scenarios for this site:

- Front Park Avenue with attached residential units, referencing the aesthetics from homes across the street. A parking structure could still be built behind the attached units, to be shared by the staff and visitors of the Post Office and Library as well as the residential and retail development planned for the block. This would improve the sensitivity of the parking structure to residential uses, but would reduce the number of parking spaces available.

- Build a parking deck of 2-3 stories, with the relocated Village Hall along Park Avenue, or above the parking. This would have the effect of creating a civic campus incorporating the existing Post Office and Library.

Bridging East and West

The panel experienced first-hand both the perceptual and actual challenges associated with the Green Bay Road / Metra Track "barrier" between the east and west sides of the Village Center. They unanimously agreed that any bridging mechanism, whether over or under the tracks, was too expensive and impractical given space constraints along Green Bay, Central and Wilmette Avenues. They did, however, feel that architectural and aesthetic improvements could be made on both sides of the tracks to encourage foot traffic and ease the path for pedestrians. Some ideas included matching archways or pavers, improved crosswalks and crossing mechanisms, or even investigating whether it would be possible to add small retail or food establishments or kiosks along Green Bay Road, either just east or west of the tracks.

Recommendations for Revitalizing and Reinvigorating the Wilmette Village Center

The panel offered the following specific recommendations for discussion by Village leadership, community members and other stakeholders:

Marketing

The following recommendations are related to marketability opportunities for downtown revitalization, and the key steps to taking advantage of those opportunities.

- Any revitalization or redevelopment effort needs to be driven by the following guiding principles:
  - The need to better serve both the residents of Wilmette and non residents with retail, housing options and other uses
  - The need to bolster declining sales tax revenues
  - A recognition that Wilmette wants to preserve and enhance its small town character, building off the environment that is uniquely Wilmette

- Regarding implementation:
  - Focus on property that has the ability to be catalytic with the least impact on current landowners

- Focus the initial phase of redevelopment on the current Village Hall site, the Chase Bank site, and the Metra site in the Village Center, and Library/Post Office site in the West Village Center. These properties have a high potential for initiating a village-wide revitalization process and draw in new investments
- Preserve and enhance a strong Village Center identity at the current Village Hall site, to include a village green space at Wilmette and Central avenues to allow for public activities, and a strong architectural marker visible from Green Bay Road
- Enhance pedestrian connections on Wilmette and Central Avenues from the village green to Green Bay Road

- Regarding specific land uses in the Village Center:
  - Any development needs to be directed by the Master Plan and Design Guidelines
  - All parcels developed should support a mixed-use development strategy for the area by providing residential, retail, restaurant, office and shared parking

- Regarding specific land uses in the West Village Center:
  - Continue with the redevelopment of the Green Bay Road site as approved
  - Place a parking garage in the center of the block, with size and number of spaces determined by the following:
    Option 1: Build townhouses fronting Park Avenue, appropriate with residences across the street; move Village Hall to Ridge Road
    Option 2: Relocate Village Hall along Park Avenue or on top of a two-three story shared parking facility

- Current circumstances that limit Wilmette's marketability and need to be addressed in implementation:
  - The lack of long-term village consensus regarding development parameters
  - The absence of proactive public investment in infrastructure required to support redevelopment
  - A cumbersome and unpredictable development and permitting process

Implementation

The following recommendations are designed to ensure that any redevelopment effort is carried forward. The Village has recognized that, to date, market conditions have not driven revitalization, so the proactive approach being taken by the Village is warranted.

- Create a Master Plan and Design Guidelines encompassing both the Village Center and the West Village Center. The Master Plan should build upon prior research and be created with community input

- The Master Plan should be adopted by the Village Board

- The Plan should be accompanied by changes to the zoning and planned development codes to ensure a predictable process for developers, landowners, investors, and the public as relates to expected densities, requirements, fees, approval processes, affordable housing set asides and other key factors

- The priority sites described above should be rezoned after the Design Guidelines have been approved. This action sends a clear message of Village commitment to potential developers

Regarding the Master Plan:

- Engage an independent design firm to develop 3-4 Master Plan concepts which show a variety of streetscapes and mix of densities, drawing on the existing market research and the guiding principles stated above. The Master Plan concepts should include variations on the final location of the Village Hall

- Prior to public comment, test the Master Plan concepts with the development community to make sure they are economically viable

- Present the Master Plan concepts to the community for response, including:
  - A broad outreach effort to capture more constituents than traditional processes (e.g. display streetscapes at meetings at District 39 offices/ schools, Village Library, community center, etc.)
  - Create a simple, visible and empirical way for village residents to respond to the concepts, such as colored stickers

- Once a preferred concept is identified, the Village should adopt a Master Plan with additional specificity regarding the key development parcels. As a part of the Master Plan, the zoning code and/or planned development code should be amended to provide as much clarity as possible to the development community in advance of a proposal

Other Master Plan Considerations:

- Ensure that Master Plan guidelines include development incentives for the inclusion of affordable family/senior housing and green development/carbon reducing development strategies

- Ensure that the Master Plan provides for enhancing pedestrian and bike crossings to link Village Center components across Green Bay Road if appropriate and necessary to achieve the redevelopment goals of the Village

Regarding public investment and commitment to development:

- The Village should explore alternative incentives to encourage reinvestment. This is necessary to compete with other communities and necessary to build credibility in the developer community. These incentives could include:
  - Creation of a TIF district to fund parking structures, street lighting, landscaping and utility improvements – activities to prepare the ground for developers
  - Expedited processing of applications
  - Land acquisition or swaps
  - Reduction or waiver of village fees
  - Reduced parking requirements for new development through shared parking arrangements

- The Village should encourage reinvestment by creating certainty and predictability in administrative processes, which will ultimately benefit the entire Village. For example:
  - Update village codes and administrative procedures to minimize delay
  - Delegate some authority to the staff to make recommendations and decisions on more routine matters to ensure Village Board time is freed up to handle larger projects

Regarding phasing of redevelopment:

- Priority 1 is the Park Avenue site
  - Minimize the traffic impact on Park Avenue by limiting access to the garage from the alley only
  - Explore residential use fronting Park Avenue
  - Explore the creation of a "civic campus" by co-locating a Village Hall with expanded parking between the Library and Post Office

- Priority 2 is the Chase Bank and Metra sites
  - Work with the landowners to pursue redevelopment consistent with the Master Plan and Design Guidelines including an above ground or below ground parking garage at the northern end of the Metra site
  - Work on shared parking opportunities on the Metra site for restaurants and other non-peak uses
  - Plan for physical improvements to draw in foot traffic toward the Village Center from Green Bay, the Metra station, and the West Village Center

- Priority 3 is the current Village Hall site
  - The Village Hall site needs to be developed as the heart of the village
  - The site needs to maintain the community space while maximizing the land value
  - Consider three alternatives for the Village Hall, either retaining on site (through inserting new development and/or parking between Village Hall and the Metra tracks or by incorporating the Village Hall in a new mixed-use building), relocating the Village Hall to a civic campus on Park Avenue, or a joint redevelopment with the Police Department on Ridge Road
  - If the Ridge Road or Park Avenue sites are not feasible for relocation or consolidation, the Village should show leadership in the market by reusing the Village Hall site at Wilmette and Central avenues

In Closing

The panel believes that the most important actions for the Village are to provide a clear framework for development, a predictable process, and expected levels of density. A public private partnership to pursue development in line with community goals will likely require incentives as well, at least for the first stages of development and to position the market for the Village Center. These incentives may take the form of land, TIF, fee waivers, and possible relocation of public facilities and existing municipal revenue. The experience of other similar markets has shown that these partnerships can be very effective tools for attracting development and building the sales tax revenue base, which can have a high return to the Village in the long-term, as well as expand economic development, strengthen the identity of the community, and raise property values.

The Village of Wilmette is a classic small town facing a classic small town challenge: how to respond to the financial challenges facing the Village without erosion of the community values that have rooted families in Wilmette soil for generations. The proposed plan attempts to balance those pressures and bring vitality and prosperity to Wilmette's Village Center. Ultimately, however, it falls to the leadership of Wilmette, its residents and business owners, to chart their course as they seek to revitalize the Village Center and the West Village Center as "a vibrant hub for commerce, dining and entertainment."

Village of Wilmette Public Library...

...and Post Office

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