Planning for Implementation
Opportunities and Strategies

Implementation turns plans into action. Turning plans into action requires action on many fronts with the support of many different agencies and individuals. Fortunately Oak Park already enjoys a strong tradition of active government and citizen input. We offer some suggestions about how to take the planning ideas offered in this report toward completion. These include important tools and programs Oak Park already has on hand to complete the plans for commercial district improvement. Additionally we identify and describe some action ideas that will enhance the coordinated use of existing tools, as well as introduce new strategies. Implementation will require careful study, informed public debate and strong support from local public officials. Such coordinated efforts are necessary to overcome the following obstacles:

1. Difficulties convincing residents, especially those in the district, that future changes to ownership and land use will benefit them and others in the Village.
2. Difficulties faced in assembling parcels of land large enough to attract new mixed use development to meet the ambitious goals of the district plans.
3. Difficulties financing infrastructure and other public improvements needed to expand commercial activity, improve residential quality, increase parking, calm traffic, and enhance pedestrian access and so on.
4. Difficulties assessing the financial and market risks of commercial and residential developments within the districts.

Unique Opportunities - Capping the Ike
The addition of a cap on either side of the current expressway bridge would be especially beneficial to the future improvement of the two Commercial Districts. The additional land would create opportunity for more ambitious station improvement plans. Assuming the prohibition of large structures from the cap surface, low density park and open space friendly uses will likely prevail. In such a scenario the currently depressed land values for property adjoining the freeway will skyrocket in value making the construction of higher density mixed use buildings more attractive and less detrimental to current neighbors as new resident activity will be less concentrated along the commercial corridor. The cap would provide opportunities to foster destination recreation and entertainment uses that would enhance commercial activity along the corridor. The future impacts of some of the difficult tradeoffs between improvements in density and accessibility that accompany the character plan recommendations would be reduced with the large increase in land area.

The plan recommendations, however, do not rely upon the approval and development of the cap.

Planning and Regulatory Strategies
Staging Plan Improvements
The timing and order of implementing the character plans depends upon careful administrative review and coordination with current Village development priorities. Participants in the planning process envisioned changes over a twenty year period. We recommend that in both districts that efforts to implement the plans start with the areas adjacent to the rail transit stations at Austin, Lombard and Oak Park Avenues. These properties offer the greatest opportunity for attracting developers and investors who can balance density and quality of life on valuable transit accessible sites.

Planning for Other Commercial Districts
The approval of this plan could stimulate the adoption of similar character plan development activities for the remaining commercial districts in the Village. The tools and process ideas generated through the year long process provide resources that staff can use to improve collaboration with each other and citizens, as well as guide preparation of Requests for Proposals to hire consultants.

Zoning
The Village should revise the zoning ordinance to enable owners, investors and developers to carry out the commercial district plan improvements in a fair, consistent and effective manner. In some cases parcels within the character plan districts need to be re-zoned to allow for different uses in the future. Such re-zoning might be done by changing the existing zoning or creating an overlay district that would identify additional uses and regulatory requirements within the boundaries of each commercial district. These changes would allow for:
- Mixed uses in areas currently zoned for exclusive residential or commercial use.
- Shared parking agreements to meet commercial and residential parking standards
- Street facing setback requirements along commercial corridors
- Density bonus awards for open space and pedestrian friendly improvements

Transportation and Parking Improvements
Linking Commercial Development
Improvements to Infrastructure Improvements
As a whole, the plans at build out will have considerable impact on the operation of the road system in the Village. Mitigating traffic impact within the study areas will not by itself remedy

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improve other parts of the roadway network. We expect that a comprehensive traffic analysis will identify locations for spot improvements such as intersection widening or installation of traffic signals and stop signs; and perhaps require major changes in the functional classification of streets or generous use of one-way couplings. The cap may provide an excellent opportunity to address some of the circulation issues that have prevented the one-way couple involving Harrison Street and Garfield Street in the past.

Planned improvements at other commercial districts will also require additional traffic study. The Village should consider using local transportation management associations (TMAs) for neighborhoods to provide ride-matching, transit information, telecommuting-support, parking management, high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) preferential parking, transit use subsidy, showers and lockers for cyclists, shuttle bus service and guaranteed ride home service. The Village should also coordinate closely with the CTA and PACE to ensure that transit services are satisfying the needs of the residents. Changing long standing attachments to auto reliance will, at a minimum, require sustained efforts to promote the use of practical alternatives.

Accessing the Ike

Streets in both commercial districts, but especially Harrison Street, accommodate a large amount of through traffic accessing the Ike. The traffic problem on Harrison could be greatly mitigated by diverting most of the through traffic to other East-West streets, especially Madison Avenue. This might require use of aggressive traffic calming methods such as chicanes, raised intersections, chokers, and cul-de-sacs.

Traffic at the I-290 interchange at Austin Avenue will experience severe congestion during peak periods. IDOT plans to widen the Ike should include rebuilding the Austin interchange to properly handle the expected increases in volume.

Parking Impacts

Parking deficits remain at build out for each plan. The plan assumes commercial parking demand for stores in mixed use buildings will be met by new garages. However, height limitations limit the number of spaces in the new garages. One alternative would be to require additional parking spaces based on the square footage of commercial floor space in each new mixed use development. Such spaces would be reserved for commercial patrons during the daytime and for the residents overnight. Also, using market based strategies such as charging extra fees for second parking spaces, and time-variable parking prices can be used to curb the demand for parking without harming the businesses. Ultimately, the construction of parking garages needs to be phased to accompany expansion and increase in commercial activity, but such supply should not lead development.

Fiscal and Economic Strategies

Implementing the proposed character plans will require a substantial amount of private and public investment. The Village must determine whether it should offer inducements to developers and if so, how much financial assistance it is willing to provide.

The answer to this question is likely to depend on the type of land use in question. Given the shortage of vacant land, high housing prices, steady appreciation, and the attractiveness of Oak Park as a cosmopolitan and easily accessible suburb on Chicago’s border, it is likely that the market will take care of the proposed residential development on its own. With interest rates at historic lows and property values high, returns are likely to be sufficiently high to attract developers for the multi-family component, and the new condominiums and rental units be absorbed quickly. The Village could provide some of the suggested open space and infrastructure, or it could require the developer to provide it in exchange for zoning variances, density bonuses, or assistance with parcel assembly.

In order to preserve affordability in the area, however, the Village may have to offer some inducement or partner with area non-profits to access Low Income Housing Tax Credits or other source of gap financing. Affordability is critical to the success of these projects because the housing and commercial activity must appeal to the younger households upon whom the future of the Village depends to replace the current surplus of mid stream family households as they become empty nesters.

The relatively low commercial rents in the two business districts and surplus of underutilized space means that the Village could consider different forms of public assistance for the proposed commercial development. In order to make the retail and office space more attractive to potential destination tenants or developers, the Village will need to solicit and review land acquisition and parcel assembly for potential development projects. It could market existing financing programs (below-market loans and grants for façade improvements and commercial rehabilitation) to potential developers. Designating the areas as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts would provide the Village with the power to use property tax revenues as (or
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even before) they are generated. Such a move, however, would need to be weighed against the potential impact on school districts and other overlapping jurisdictions.

Even without TIF, the Village could access capital markets at competitive rates to float bonds to finance the rehabilitation or redevelopment of select portions of each district. The Village could float non-referendum, special service area bonds for the payments of public improvements, the benefits of which include moving some of the developer's costs from a taxable borrowing rate to a tax-exempt rate; allowing amortization over 20 year period and reducing the amount of private mortgage on the property. The Village could also experiment with other innovative techniques, such as co-development/profit-sharing and sales tax rebates.

Citizen Participation

The UIC-Oak Park project has successfully demonstrated that it is possible to integrate different voices into the typically contentious processes of plan-making in a diverse and dynamic community such as Oak Park. In order to implement this process in other planning projects and communities, the Village (as it has done this past year), must continue to embrace and adopt open and inclusive planning processes.

Our process provided citizens and elected officials the tools and strategies to understand the trade-offs that citizens and elected officials must make together to plan the future of the community. We have provided many opportunities for citizens to understand the reasoning and logic behind a particular plan as it was being developed and help them identify the trade-offs that are being made to accommodate competing demands.

In order to implement the character plans developed for the two business districts, the village must continue to work closely with the stakeholder group in its current form. Changes or additions at this stage are likely to be detrimental to the sense of community that has developed over the past few months.

The Village can apply this process to the planning and revitalization of other retail business districts in Oak Park by considering the following issues. The planning department needs additional support and resources to be able to sustain the level of activity that is prescribed in these guidelines.

Information and Communication

The community planning project should maintain a dedicated and refined database that includes property owners, business owners, as well as residential and commercial renters. The database's accuracy must be verified periodically.

In the absence of a complete database, conventional organizing techniques should be used to encourage citizen participation. For the UIC-Oak Park project, students and faculty walked the two districts before every major event putting up flyers, knocking on doors of business owners and renters, and sending out emails to discussion groups.

Digital Communication Portal

The project should build and launch a digital communication portal (website) for each specific project that is directly linked and accessible to the main village page. The website should be available and ready for use before the first project meeting. The website should provide opportunities for interaction such as on-line discussion forums, surveys etc. The website should provide opportunities for citizens to provide direct feedback to planners, not only for one-way information dissemination. The UIC-Oak Park project maintained a project website starting September 2002 until June 2003.

Participation Techniques

The project should create different opportunities for meaningful participation. There should be a mix of activities that occur at different levels of scale. For example, some meetings can be among small groups to work through a specific aspect of the project while other meetings can be focused on information sharing to a larger group. Moderated forums can also be used to make sure that citizens who are not always directly involved have an opportunity to be heard. Each meeting must be widely advertised. A more complete description of the participation process and details about different activities and levels of participation are described in Chapter IV.

Stakeholders

The selection and establishment of a stakeholder group must not be seen as an automatic and bureaucratic process. Each project must go through a stakeholder selection process. The act of applying to become a stakeholder prompts citizens to think about the time commitment they would make to participate in the project and help planners understand individual motivations for wanting to become involved. It is imperative that the Village staff get to know the community before the formation of the stakeholder group so that new participants are included. The Village staff must ensure that individuals who are overburdened with other community responsibilities are not involved in the stakeholder group. No stakeholder should serve on more than two official village committees at any given time. In addition to maintaining economic and racial diversity, the stakeholder group must be balanced to include younger residents and older citizens,
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new comers to the neighborhood and long
time residents, youth, as well as professionals
with different experiences and skills. Once the
stakeholder group is established, staff must work
with stakeholders as a group, resisting demands
to meet with them one-on-one. Staff must
encourage stakeholders to work through and
with the group and conform to group norms.

Adoption and Use of Digital Technologies

The project and process have been built
on the premise that access to information
and appropriate forms of interactive digital
communication will enrich traditional methods of
citizen participation and provide a more satisfying
experience for those citizens who typically are not
involved in participatory processes.

Over the course of the year, three types
of interactive applications were developed
Visual Preference Surveys, Navigational and
Representational Applications, and On-Line
Planning Applications, more completely
described in Chapter V. These applications can
be used both individually and as a complete suite
of tools to facilitate a planning process. Their
adoption and use cannot be separated from other
planning activities. The experiences gained over
the course of the project year must be firmly
embedded into the day-to-day life of the Village.

Hardware and Software

The village will need to invest in appropriate
software to run the various applications that
have been developed. This investment must
be distributed among all staff involved in
planning activities. In addition, the Village
will need to invest in laptops, digital cameras,
and high resolution data projectors to facilitate
collaborative planning in community meetings.

Maintenance, Updating and Security

Additional resources and technical staff will be
needed to support the maintenance and updating
and analysis of data that is generated through
these interactive digital applications. Project
websites will need to be updated in order to
be responsive to citizens’ expectations. The
implementation of surveys or other analysis tools
must take into account issues related to individual
privacy as well as the security of the system as a
whole.

In summary, The UIC team recommends that the
Village continue to invest in further strengthening
of the capacity of its staff to use interactive digital
technologies by identifying a pilot project that
would allow staff from different departments to
work together to use these applications as part of
a planning process.

Reflections on Knowledge Management

We live in a time when employees, consumers and
citizens expect information to serve their needs
and answer their questions. The combination of
vast computational power and speed feeds this
expectation as it favors digital information. Local
municipalities face difficulties trying to meet
the increasing public demand for speedy digital
information delivery given the legacy of printed
materials. Anticipating and coping with this
demand not only requires a thoughtful shift to
digital forms of information collection, reporting,
storing and retrieval, but also changing how
different organizational units of a municipality
create and use information. Major improvements
in information management require that different
units learn to coordinate and share data that was
previously an exclusive possession. Overcoming
longstanding attachments to such possession
requires strong evidence of improved benefits
from coordination and sharing.

Over the course of the year, we learned that:
The planning efforts tapped participation and
expertise in many different functional domains
(e.g., engineering, economic development,
community relations, planning, etc…). However,
the wealth of information in the Village, the Oak
Park Public Library, the Township office and the
Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest
proved difficult and challenging to find and gather.
There was little coherent coordination and sharing
of data across government units. Additionally,
there were similar problems among departments
within the Village. UIC team members spent
much time and energy hunting down maps,
reports and other important documents in the
files of individual staff. Creation of a public web
site early in the project generated disappointment
as promised information proved more difficult to
find and deliver than first anticipated.

The Village would benefit from an overall
records management system complete with an
online catalog of materials providing location
and description. Also, the Village would profit
from a partnership between Village Hall, the
OPPL, and the Historical Society to design and
implement an overall knowledge management
program for official data, information products
including born digital documents, and public
records. This system potentially could improve
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access between the Village and businesses by linking grants, small business loans, regulations, standards, etc. The system also would provide a communication channel for the Village and its commissions and citizens.

The large quantities of paper documents produced by local government often pose a serious problem not only due to the volume of storage required, but the difficulty in classifying and cataloging the information for changes in use and users over time. As we move to the digital age, physical storage becomes less of an issue, while classifying and cataloging grow in importance. It is not enough to simply digitize physical documents for easy storage. We must also develop intelligent means for identifying, sorting and selecting the information in the future.

Since digital information is quick and easy to store, the temptation to store everything will prove hard to resist. One strategy for local governments is to distinguish official public records from other unofficial information. Public records deserve both preservation and access. The Illinois Compiled Statutes, Municipal Adoption of Codes and Records Act\(^1\)(50 ILCS 220/1) offers the following definition in section 1 (c) and 1 (d):

(c) “Public record” means any municipal, state, or federal statute, rule, or regulation adopted prior to the exercise by any municipality of the authority to incorporate by reference herein granted; provided, however, that this definition shall not include the municipal ordinances, rules or regulations of any municipality except those of the municipality which is exercising the right to incorporate by reference, nor shall this definition include the state laws, rules, or regulations of any state other than the State of Illinois;

(d) “Published” means printed, lithographed, multigraphed, mimeographed, or otherwise reproduced (Source: Laws 1961, p. 1369)

Ironically, this legal definition will not satisfy the growing public appetite for knowledge about local government activities, policies and reports. So local governments would be wise to develop a system for identifying and classifying what they keep; and then make the effort to have staff learn how to use the system on a routine basis. Initially these changes might be introduced using internal committees with benefit of outside consulting. Eventually, it may prove necessary to employ a full time information manager or Chief Information Officer (CIO).

Adopting a more robust set of information definitions and policies would also improve the quality of public use. For instance, the Village Web Page would continue as an electronic vehicle for delivering official information. However, non-official information would be communicated using an intermediate shared web space with other public partners. This Village endorsed but non-official site would circulate draft policies, preliminary plans, and other works in progress that would benefit from public review and input – not only from Village employees and local residents, but from interested web users.

The UIC team librarian will leave the Village with taxonomy and structure for organizing the information collected and created during the development of the year long planning project. The information includes a mix of electronic and printed material that will be stored at the UIC Library, accessible via the internet through the University Library web site. We recommend that the Village adopt and use this taxonomy to organize and manage planning project information for future projects.

\(^1\)http://www.legis.state.il.us/legislation/ilcs/ch50/ch50act220.htm