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North York Street Steering Committee

From: Dan Gardner, Principal  
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Date: March 19, 2014

Re: North York Street Corridor Plan:  
Preliminary Issues & Opportunities Memo

This memo summarizes the issues and opportunities identified throughout the preparation of the Existing Conditions Report which are based on discussions with residents, business owners/managers, property owners, stakeholders, and City officials as well as observations made by the consultant team. It is important to note that these issues and opportunities are preliminary and that items will be added, modified, or removed as the planning process for the North York Street corridor continues. While some issues affect all areas of the Corridor, other issues may be confined to a single comment heard in a workshop or a specific site that should be considered for redevelopment. It is intended that the issues and opportunities identified in this memo will serve as a foundation for recommendations developed for the ***North York Street Corridor Plan***.

This memo is not meant to provide specific recommendations or policies. It is simply the culmination of initial observations by the Consultant Team, and the application of best practices for planning and development that will provide focus for future activities, including community visioning, goal setting, planning, and ultimately the creation of a meaningful plan for North York Street. This memorandum is organized into the following sections:

- Market Assessment
- Priority Redevelopment Opportunities
- Division of the Corridor
- Streetscape Design
- Transportation & Mobility
- Cooperation with Service Providers & Supporting Agencies

# MARKET ASSESSMENT

A market analysis was prepared to assess the way in which the North York Corridor functions within the context of the larger competitive market area. The analysis examines how the combination of demographic conditions and trends along with existing and planned retail, residential, office and industrial development creates opportunities and/or presents challenges for the North York Corridor. Market information will be reconciled with physical character, financial/economic feasibility and community vision in formulating plan recommendations for the corridor.

## DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

The demographic changes presented could signal a slight shift in market potential for the North York Street corridor. By 2018, the area's population, or consumer base, is projected to be wealthier, older and more diverse. Growth in population numbers and household wealth suggest an increase in consumer demand, and the aging of the population could translate into a need for further medical and health services, as well as senior housing or multi-family units. Given the corridor's strategic location, North York Street could be well positioned to capture a proportionate share of new demand resulting from the region's demographic shifts.

## EMPLOYMENT

The initial foundation for future job growth within the North York Street market area is already in place. The market area contains over 108,368 jobs in a diversity of industries, and both Du Page and Cook Counties are projected to add 244,200 new jobs between 2010 and 2020. The challenge lies in how to best harness these positive regional trends within the corridor itself. While the corridor is well positioned given to its strategic geographic location, proximity to interstates, transit and O'Hare airport, investment over the past decade has been sporadic. Repositioning sites and creating opportunities for better exposure, access, circulation and improved infrastructure will be a key to attracting new business and employment.

## RESIDENTIAL MARKET

Data and trends indicate that the North York Street corridor may be positioned for limited, small scale multi-family development. The market area population is aging overall, but also may also experience an influx of young professionals resulting from new job growth. Ultimately, these demographic and job trends suggest an increasing need for multi-family housing at a time that the greater market area's total number of multi-family units is projected to decrease.

Ideally, units should be higher end with enclosed parking and in-unit and common area amenities similar to those found in existing condominium properties. This will allow for the opportunity for conversion to owner occupied units when market conditions allow. The Plan will evaluate the potential for quality multi-family sites as stand-alone development or integrated into a mixed use environment along the corridor.

## **RETAIL MARKET**

Currently, the North York Street corridor's land use is primarily retail commercial. While the 10 minute drivetime is fairly saturated, the North York Street corridor may have several retail growth possibilities, depending on a variety of contextual factors.

It is not unusual for a market area that includes several large concentrations of retail including a regional mall, to show indications of being saturated. This does not, however, preclude potential to attract new uses and development. Opportunities will continue to exist if sites can be positioned with better access, exposure and infrastructure to competing locations in the market. Potential, therefore, is more aligned with attracting uses from other areas of the market as opposed to filling voids or underrepresented businesses. To that end, the City must be careful not to detract or compete with existing Elmhurst businesses or attract reinvestment in the North York Corridor at the expense of other locations. New development should be a net sum gain to the City.

## **OFFICE MARKET**

The professional office market is evaluated in two tiers: local office space and regional office space. The former tier is comprised of dental/medical/veterinary clinics, real estate, small law practices, and accounting services, and is shaped by more local forces. The latter tier includes larger office buildings and business parks, catering to a more regional, national, or international clientele, and responds to more regional market forces.

Currently, very little of the North York Street corridor itself contains either office use. However, the area just west of North York Street, along Industrial Drive, Weigel Drive, and Grand Avenue, is home to several strip offices and business parks. While the corridor may be able to tap into both market tiers, the Plan will further evaluate whether this is feasible along the corridor, given local and regional trends as well as existing infrastructure to the west.

## **INDUSTRIAL MARKET**

Like other well located areas in the market, the North York Street corridor, may be positioned to recruit and capture businesses in a variety of industrial markets. However, much of the land just west of the corridor along Industrial Drive, Diversey Avenue, and Spangler Avenue is already being used for industrial and/or business park functions. Accordingly, it may be more realistic to encourage industrial growth in these areas just off the corridor, and focus the corridor on more commercial, office, retail, and multi-family offerings supporting or complementing these functions. The Plan should assess whether industrial uses should occur along the corridor.

# PRIORITY REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

To assist in translating this assessment into tangible action, the chapter also includes a short list of preliminary approach to potential redevelopment sites within the North York Street corridor. The Plan will identify redevelopment sites based on feedback from the residents, business owners, and stakeholders as well as a combination of broader market potential and local “on the ground” conditions such as available land, community input, existing infrastructure, and traffic patterns.

It is important to note, that as development is considered on a case-by-case basis, individual properties must be carefully assessed in order to appropriately consider environmental concerns such as wetlands, steep slopes, waterways, wooded areas, and flooding. Only by examining these conditions for every parcel prior to development can the City ensure that appropriate and desirable development is approved.

## CATALYST REDEVELOPMENT SITES

Areas where the City should focus their efforts in acquiring parcels with the intent to clear them for potential “high-profile” redevelopment opportunities in the short-term. Sites would include the former Waverton Hotel property, former Stephens’s restaurant, and the Mazda/Hyundai Dealer properties.

## REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Areas that are currently built out but could be transformed into a new commercial/mixed-use development are identified as potential redevelopment opportunities. Redeveloping these properties could potentially require more action on behalf of the City to incentivize.

## INFILL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Vacant lots suitable for building and/or properties that could accommodate outlot development are identified as infill development sites. The path to developing these sites is the straightforward since there is little site preparation/remediation is needed.

## POTENTIAL ON-SITE/FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS

Improving on-site conditions and building façades will have a significant impact on the overall appearance of the North York Street corridor.

### ***ON-SITE IMPROVEMENTS***

Many of the parking lots along the North York Street corridor are made up of vast fields of asphalt with little to no on-site landscaping.

The City should establish an ***On-Site Enhancement Program*** to encourage current property owners to reconfigure/resurface problematic parking lots, add pedestrian circulation networks and parking area crosswalks, and provide consistent drive lane widths and painted parking stalls. Parking lots should install perimeter and interior landscaping, planting islands, and vegetated screens/buffers. Adding plant material will also help to break up the views of the expansive paving areas.

### ***FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS***

Façade improvements should include improved signage, windows, painting, shutters and awnings, stairs and porches, walls, cornices, and other exterior components and details.

Many of the older businesses, strip malls, and fast food restaurants have a dated or run down look and are in need of façade improvements. The City should establish a ***Facade Enhancement Program*** to encourage current property owners to update their outdated or worn down buildings.

## RELOCATE INCOMPATIBLE LAND USES

The North York Street corridor contains a few land uses that are not complimentary to the overall function of the Corridor. Many of these uses could be relocated to more appropriate areas within the City creating potential redevelopment opportunities. These areas include:

- Single family detached homes along North York Street. Many of these homes are in an areas zoned for commercial (C2) and commercial (C3) uses. Overtime the City to encourage these uses to relocate into adjacent residential neighborhoods where possible.
- Relocate incompatible large-scale commercial/industrial uses found along North York Street to vacant parcels along Grand Avenue or to the successful industrial parks adjacent to the study area.

# DIVISION OF THE CORRIDOR

Many feel that the North York Street corridor is currently divided into smaller zones due to existing barriers, uses, lot depth, etc. Although the Plan should not continue to reinforce this issue, it may help to break the Corridor up into definable zones when tackling specific issues and opportunities. For example, there are properties north of the I-290 interchange that have a much deeper lot depth compared to properties around North Avenue. These deep parcels create unique challenges for redevelopment if it is determined that industrial/warehouse uses should be relocated of the North York Street corridor. Below are brief description of the potential zones present along the North York Street corridor.

## NORTH ZONE

- The North Zone extends from Grand Avenue to Crestview Avenue.
- Businesses in this area attracts a lot of its market from Bensenville.
- This area is comprised of small, single-lot, commercial and offices uses.
- With the exception of the immediate neighborhoods, Elmhurst residents to not patronize the area.
- Maraino's is a great asset to the corridor and should be catalyst for development.

## INTERCHANGE ZONE

- The Interchange Zone occurs from Crestview Avenue to Crocket Avenue and including the I-290 viaduct.
- This zone contains the largest amount of green space within the North York Street corridor but it is poorly maintained.
- Opportunity to capitalize on the visibility from I-290 and the access ramps.

## SOUTH ZONE

- The South Zone extends from Crocket Avenue to North Avenue.
- This zone most resembles the aesthetics of Downtown Elmhurst.
- Some expressed the desire that the first few blocks north of downtown, should be an extension of the Downtown with higher end shops and restaurants. Others felt that this area should be distinct from the Downtown.

# STREETSCAPE DESIGN

Many of the issues identified along the Corridor can be resolved with developing and implementing a coordinated streetscape plan. The recommendations provided below will be further examined in the development of the Corridor Plan.

- The I-290 interchange green space has great potential to create a visual and environmental asset utilizing best management practices, native restoration and landscape enhancements in areas adjacent to York Street. The combination of bridge architectural façade upgrades and landscape improvements have the potential to improve the aesthetics of this highly visible focal point along North York Street.
- New gateways and wayfinding signs should be provided at appropriate locations and scaled to the Corridor.
- In appropriate locations, coordinated with required access, raised planter medians should be considered for improved corridor aesthetics, branding opportunities, and enhanced traffic flow.
- Pedestrian crosswalks and warning signage should be provided at all side street locations at a minimum.
- New street lighting, including a combined roadway / pedestrian standard, should be incorporated into the overall plan.
- Pedestrian landscape features should be incorporated into key locations such as new developments, major intersections or at the Com Ed crossing.
- Business signage should be horizontal in nature and not conflicting with architecture and streetscape elements.
- The stretch of York Street from North Avenue to I-290 has many signs posted as “No Parking this side of street”. Yet, it is obvious by the 5-lane pavement section that on-street parking is not allowed. The City should consider removing the “No Parking” signs.
- Overhead wires lead to unattractive corridor vistas and limit the types of vegetation allowed in the parkway. Over-time, relocating all overhead utilities underground should be explored.

# TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

## TRAFFIC CONGESTION

York Street is traveled by many user groups; local business and industry autos and trucks, regional through traffic, and supporting retail / restaurant pass-by traffic. Congestion occurs during peak morning and evening peak periods at major intersections, such as at Grand Avenue, North Avenue (IL 64), and the I-290 interchange that also includes the Lake Street (US 20) frontage roads.

Although IDOT has classified York Street as a minor arterial, the traffic volumes and 5-lane pavement section are consistent with guidelines established for major arterial routes. The City should coordinate with IDOT to ensure that the most efficient traffic signal timings are provided at the York Street intersections with North Avenue (IL 64), Lake Street (US 20), I-290 / Crestview Avenue, Industrial Drive / Belden Avenue, and Grand Avenue.

From a roadway capacity standpoint, the City should coordinate with IDOT to consider constructing separate right turn lanes along York Street at the Grand Avenue intersection.

## PACE

There are very few posted Pace bus stops along the Corridor although the bus generally stops at every block. In addition, the lack of rider shelters and designated bus pull-out areas detract from the desirability to travel via bus. The bus schedule is infrequent making it hard to use as a reliable commuter source.

The City should work with Pace to encourage bus ridership by providing up-to-date bus stop amenities such as shelters and “real time” scheduling monitors.

## PEDESTRIAN MOBILITY

There are several segments along the Corridor where there are no sidewalks, especially on the west side of York Street. And in many areas, existing sidewalks are narrow and attached (or “carriage”) walks, which make walking and riding bicycles very uncomfortable with the arterial vehicle volumes on York Street; both auto and truck.

A sidewalk program should be established along the Corridor, so that existing disconnects are eliminated. Connections should be made into the adjoining neighborhoods to the east and the manufacturing district to the west to promote non-auto trips to North York Street corridor businesses such as Mariano’s.

## ***PARKWAY SIDEWALKS***

Parkway sidewalks should be utilized wherever possible due to pedestrian safety concerns. Parkways have the potential for infiltration, rain gardens, and creating tree canopy.

## ***CARRIAGE WALKS***

Carriage walks should be widened wherever possible and include paver bricks at key locations. Tree canopy should also be incorporated into designs installing trees in tree grates.



## **PROPERTY ACCESS**

There are two sections within the North York Street corridor that are cluttered with multiple driveways. These locations include the stretch from North Avenue to I-290 and the several blocks south of Grand Avenue, both areas having multiple driveways that are problematic. Driveway consolidation should be encouraged with adjacent uses that operate in similar manners. Many of these driveways do not align with one another on the east and west side of the road, resulting in too many vehicle / pedestrian conflict points.

The City should coordinate with current property owners to establish an access management program, whereby adjacent businesses would agree to cross access, so as to reduce the number of curb cuts along the North York Street corridor. This would encourage pedestrian mobility by reducing the number of conflict points, as well as provide the opportunity for landscaped medians in select locations along York Street.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD ACCESSIBILITY**

The neighborhood on the east side of York Street has access via a series of east-west streets that intersect York Street. Diversey Avenue, North End Avenue, and Fullerton Avenue all have full access with Stop control at York Street, but finding adequate gaps in through traffic is often difficult. Belden Avenue has traffic signal control as it aligns opposite Industrial Drive, but access is limited to right turns in / out only. Crestview Avenue has traffic signal control as it aligns opposite the I-290 ramps, and provides full access. Observations indicate that Crestview Avenue accommodates many neighborhood trips that are attracted to the safety and convenience of the traffic signal. To better distribute neighborhood traffic, consideration could be given to providing full access on Belden Avenue at York Street.

## **COOPERATION WITH COMMUNITY FACILITIES & SERVICE PROVIDERS**

As the Plan is being developed, the City should begin to reach out to existing community facilities and service providers present along the North York Street corridor to keep them informed about the City's plans for the North York Street corridor.