

South Chicago Heights

Sauk Trail Redevelopment Concept Plan

November 22, 2002



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South Chicago Heights Sauk Trail Redevelopment Concept Plan

As a work component of the Village of South Chicago Heights' Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Redevelopment Grant, this document puts forth a conceptual redevelopment plan for the intersection of State Street and Sauk Trail, and implementation recommendations to ensure quality design and efficient use of valuable frontage property for the Sauk Trail Corridor from Highway 394 to Commercial Avenue. The following recommendations are based on information gained via a community visit and site tour, as well as a worksession with representatives of the Village Board, and the Planning, Public Works, and Zoning Departments. This worksession was facilitated by VANDEWALLE & ASSOCIATES.

The vast majority of brownfields in the Village are located on, or have excellent access to, Sauk Trail. As the main east-west thoroughfare and primary entrance to South Chicago Heights via Highway 394, development and redevelopment of this entry sets the tone for future development patterns along Sauk Trail and in the Village as a whole. Current development in the Village follows traditional commercial strip and single-family residential patterns. Many of the properties along the Sauk Trail Corridor are underutilized and vacant. Existing development neither follows a coherent hierarchy of land uses, nor adheres to a particular design scheme, and all development is auto-oriented.

Redevelopment Concept

This redevelopment concept plan exhibits potential layout and building massing for the area surrounding the State Street/Sauk Trail intersection. These suggestions would result in greater intensity of uses along this section of the Corridor, thereby expanding the potential of the Village's primary commercial area. These suggestions are intended to prompt further discussion that will result in a community-generated vision for the Sauk Trail Corridor. Following discussion of the redevelopment concept plan is an implementation strategy, which identifies the actions that the Village of South Chicago Heights can take to set the framework necessary to realize the community's vision for the Corridor, as well as actions that would encourage regional planning of Sauk Trail.

Sauk Trail from Highway 394 west is the primary entrance to South Chicago Heights, and it also maintains strong potential for redevelopment in the Village due to the high traffic counts and numerous vacant and underutilized properties. Based on the analysis conducted, the Corridor should be sectioned into four land use areas: Northeast Quadrant, Sauk Trail Commercial Corridor, Southern Quadrant, and Gateway Corridor. A description of each follows. See attached graphic: Concept Plan.

Sauk Trail Commercial Corridor

The Sauk Trail commercial corridor, bounded by State Street to the east, Commercial Avenue to the west, and up to the northern municipal boundary, should be reserved for continued commercial development. This section of the Sauk Trail Corridor can support a mix of uses. The north side of the corridor should focus on service businesses, such as banks, copy shops, and restaurants. Through superior design, office, commercial, and clean industry could all be a part of the mix, and would allow for



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development that is designed to accommodate pedestrian as well as vehicle use. Large parking lots should not dominate the street frontage, so building facades rather than strings of street-side signs can identify uses, and quality design should display community character. The existence of former landfills in this area require development consideration and due diligence for any potential environmental issues.



As development nears Commercial Avenue and the Village's downtown, attention to design detail and development intensity and mixed use should increase. Upon the expansion of a southern Metra line along the Union Pacific Soo Line, a transit stop should be located at Sauk Trail. Development surrounding this stop should be transit-oriented, providing daily services for commuters, such as coffee shops, dry cleaners, a childcare center, a newspaper kiosk, and deli. Particular effort should be put into creating a welcoming, walkable environment between parking areas and the transit stop, and throughout the supporting service areas, which will become the Village center. The supporting service area generally occupies land that lies within one-quarter of a mile from the transit stop and could also include higher density residential. As previously mentioned, and more importantly so in the downtown area, building facades should identify the street frontage, with parking tucked behind structures.



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Northeast Quadrant:

Existing employment infrastructure in the area northeast of the State Street/Sauk Trail intersection should be enhanced and expanded. This area includes Site 13, which was identified as a priority brownfield redevelopment site. Any future development is contingent on conducting environmental assessment and completion of any remediation deemed necessary. Design of this area should maintain quality industrial character, with distinctive site entrances. At the corner of the intersection, site planning should include an image feature that identifies and landmarks the industrial community, as well as provide a formal entrance feature into the Village.



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Southern Quadrant

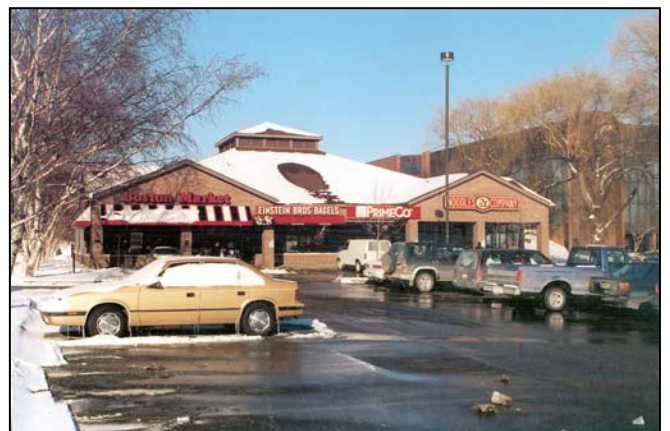
The southeast corner of State/Sauk Trail Intersection should be developed to accommodate drive-up commercial uses, such as mid-sized grocery stores, gas station, or convenience retail, as well as some neighborhood services for the residential areas to the southeast. This area includes Sites 11 and 12, which were identified as priority brownfield redevelopment sites. Any future development is contingent on conducting environmental assessment and completing any remediation deemed necessary.

Moving to the southeast, office space could encourage a smooth transition from retail and commercial, into multi-family residential. Residential development should decrease in density moving away from the major roadways and intersection, eventually reaching the density of existing residential development.



Gateway Corridor

The section of Sauk Trail from State Street to Highway 394 should be developed as a gateway commercial corridor. Design standards should reflect changes in jurisdictional identity and use, and should be coordinated to ensure protection of the wetlands to the northeast of the intersection of Cottage Grove/Sauk Trail by making this natural element a prominent feature in design. The five municipalities that share governance of this section of Sauk Trail should coordinate development goals, and cooperate to implement quality design standards.



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Implementation Strategy

Local Implementation

Like most small communities, South Chicago Heights has a limited budget with which to pursue property acquisition and development. Due to such constraints, the success of this redevelopment plan is dependent upon leveraging private funds to accomplish redevelopment goals. By establishing appropriate zoning districts and design standards for each of the redevelopment sectors, the Village can ensure that new development will be compatible and consistent with the community's redevelopment vision. Additionally, by rezoning these areas, many of the current inappropriate uses could become non-conforming unless owners revitalize their properties to incorporate new design standards. Because successful implementation depends on private sector support, the first step should involve the Village sharing redevelopment plans with property owners and residents.

To encourage development, the Village should streamline its permitting system, to provide "fast-track" project approval. Because private development is very dependent on expedience, the faster the Village can move applications through the permitting process the better. The Village should also work with surrounding municipal jurisdictions to simplify their boundaries. Again, the goal is to lure private development with simple, predictable processes; not to discourage development because of numerous application and permitting requirements for projects that cross convoluted jurisdictional boundaries.

Like most south suburban Chicago communities, South Chicago Heights anticipates continued growth. However, due to the possible development of a third regional airport, the potential differences in rate and intensity of future development require that the Village establish a strong and achievable vision for the Sauk Trail Corridor and downtown area. By taking a proactive stance to direct and manage development now, the Village will be better equipped to shape the increased density and intensity of land uses likely caused by development of the Peatone Airport.

Coordinated Corridor Implementation

As previously identified, the Sauk Trail Corridor is the primary entrance to South Chicago Heights from Highway 394. With continued growth in the south suburbs, the 394/Sauk Trail intersection will eventually be developed into a full-fledged highway interchange. The most common development pattern following such infrastructural expansion is big-box strip commercial construction at the major interchange and smaller scale commercial strip development away from the primary intersection.

This common growth pattern raises two concerns for the Village of South Chicago Heights. First, if this pattern goes unchecked the bulk of the region's retail development will occur outside of Village boundaries, proximal to the 394/Sauk Trail intersection. The loss of tax revenue to surrounding communities will not only place undue constraints on the Village budget, but it will also require residents to travel to other communities for daily needs. Second, each of the five municipalities that share governance of the Corridor has distinctly different zoning ordinances and expectations for the development of this area. To ensure that the retail and commercial needs of each municipality are met, and design and development patterns are congruous and high quality, future development should be coordinated through inter-jurisdictional cooperation.

It is understood that each involved community maintains a different perception regarding Corridor vision and development pressure. Although South Chicago Heights is interested in proactively managing growth and development, other communities may not have considered these concerns in

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their jurisdiction, or along the Corridor itself. The most important issue is to recognize that simply bringing all the players to discussion is an effective method to build relationships that may support stronger coordination in the future. Because South Chicago Heights has taken these initial steps to address issues of growth and redevelopment in its own jurisdiction, it has established a momentum that can elicit the participation of the other municipalities. By sharing the South Chicago Height's vision for redevelopment, the other municipalities will have a stronger understanding of the Corridor's redevelopment potential.

A broad spectrum of coordination methods is available to provide a framework intergovernmental planning efforts. For example, on the least binding end, a committee made up of a representative from each municipality could be organized to discuss development issues. Moving up slightly in commitment, a Memorandum of Understanding could be drafted that identifies the municipalities' pledge to cooperatively address Corridor development, providing simply an agreement to maintain an open discussion forum. Requiring more commitment still, a development agreement could identify the expectations and responsibilities of each community in their pursuit of shared goals and visions for the Corridor. This development agreement should be supported by the adoption of a zoning overlay district, which would provide more technical regulatory implementation of the development agreement.

Directed and managed development, supported by a solid community vision has the marked ability to positively impact surrounding neighborhoods and the community as a whole. This redevelopment concept plan and implementation strategy identify the steps that will lay the foundation for future development of the Sauk Trail Corridor that will ensure compatible uses and superior design which will strengthen community character and identity in South Chicago Heights. VANDEWALLE & ASSOCIATES is available to assist the Village of South Chicago Heights with all of the components of this plan, as needed.