



Village of Elmwood Park

Station Area Plan Executive Summary

July 2006



The Station Area Plan for the Village of Elmwood Park, Illinois, was prepared through the efforts of the Village of Elmwood Park, the Regional Transportation Authority, Metra, Pace and the project planning consultants, HNTB Corporation and Goodman Williams Group. Many citizens, staff and officials of the Village of Elmwood Park, too numerous to mention here, participated in the planning process. Their involvement and insights are sincerely appreciated.

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This document summarizes the work conducted for the Elmwood Park Station Area Plan. The document was prepared under contract with the Regional Transportation Authority of Northeastern Illinois. Preparation of the document was financed in part through a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, and the Regional Transportation Authority. The contents of the document do not necessarily reflect the official views of the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, or the Illinois Department of Transportation.



A. INTRODUCTION

The Village of Elmwood Park has adopted this Station Area Plan for redevelopment options and facility improvements within and around its Metra commuter station, located near Grand Avenue and 75th Court. In particular, Elmwood Park wants to create a vibrant, unified downtown environment for Grand Avenue from Harlem to 76th Avenues, including Conti Parkway and the Elmwood Park Metra Station. The Village is committed to transit-oriented development principles that will facilitate future residential, commercial, and mixed-use opportunities and improve Metra ridership.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is generally defined as development with the appropriate design, diversity, and density of uses within a ten-minute walk or one-half mile of a public transit facility, with most higher-density uses concentrated within a five-minute walk or one-quarter mile. One-half mile is considered an acceptable walking distance for most people, and encompasses the area in which the physical advantages of TOD can be best utilized.

The Village of Elmwood Park has many opportunities to leverage and several key issues to address in creating a more vibrant station area. Most significantly, Metra has recently completed a freight track re-alignment and has improved the Elmwood Park Station with a new depot and shelter, platforms, and landscaping. In addition, the Village has completed construction of Central Park and approved a new townhouse development adjacent to the train station on 75th Avenue. Beyond the station, the Village's strongest asset is their well-maintained residential neighborhoods. However, Elmwood Park does not have a vibrant business district adjacent to the station nor does it have a "downtown" identity. Conti Circle is a mixed use district with retail, housing, and public facilities, but it does not have a strong connection with Grand Avenue or the station. In addition, due to competitive market forces and auto dependent shoppers, Grand and Harlem Avenues need a new vision for the future. The biggest issue the Village faces is focusing limited resources on creating a vibrant retail district adjacent to the station, which will attract more residential development, potential customers, and Metra commuters.

Ultimately, the Village of Elmwood Park Station Area Plan is meant only as a guide for the Village and provides flexibility to accommodate real development proposals that can help create a vibrant downtown and improved Metra Station area.



Station upgrades provide a new gateway for Elmwood Park.



B. OVERALL VISION AND PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The Village of Elmwood Park Station Area contains mature and well-maintained residential neighborhoods, strong civic and public amenities such as Conti Parkway and Central Park, and an auto-oriented commercial district along Grand Avenue. The community's vision describes a desired outcome for the station area over the next ten years. The planning principles describe the general guidelines to ensure that new development supports the overall vision.

Vision for the Elmwood Park Station Area

The Elmwood Park Station Area will encompass a strong downtown, new commercial and residential uses, and distinctive bungalow-style residential neighborhoods. The Village of Elmwood Park envisions a vibrant, unified downtown from Grand and Harlem Avenues to Conti Parkway, with strong pedestrian and transit connections to the Elmwood Park Metra Station. The Village will encourage new mixed-use development on Grand Avenue and Conti Parkway that provides modern retailing and new residential opportunities. The Village will also encourage residential in-fill development and redevelopment, where appropriate, to support station use. Ultimately, the Village will work proactively with the public and private sectors to implement this vision for the Elmwood Park Station Area.

Planning Principles for the Elmwood Park Station Area

To revitalize the Elmwood Park Station Area with a vibrant downtown connected to the Elmwood Park Station, adjacent civic uses, and surrounding neighborhoods, the Village supports and promotes the five key planning principles to guide future public and private investment. The preferred concept plan and implementation strategies for the Elmwood Park Station Area build directly upon these planning principles (see sidebar).

**Elmwood Park Station Area
Planning Principles**

Planning Principle 1

Create a downtown identity along Grand Avenue from Harlem to Conti Parkway

Planning Principle 2

Create a unified downtown atmosphere through a streetscape improvement program and a facade improvement program supported by design guidelines

Planning Principle 3

Improve the public spaces along Grand Avenue, particularly the connections with the Elmwood Park Metra Station and Conti Parkway

Planning Principle 4

Create a balanced transportation network in the station area that caters to pedestrians, bikes, transit, and cars

Planning Principle 5

Encourage new development at key activity centers in the Elmwood Park Station Area – the Elmwood Park Metra Station and the Grand and Harlem Avenue crossroads



C. PREFERRED CONCEPT PLAN

The Preferred Concept Plan focuses on redevelopment through the use of structured parking as part of mixed-use projects. This focus will allow the majority of parking needs to be met within garages, and allow for mid-rise residential buildings and higher residential densities. Figures 1 and 2: Preferred Concept Plan highlights key redevelopment sites in the context of Elmwood Park's built environment. It should be noted that the Plan is conceptual only and development sites may be able to accommodate different building and parking configurations based on developer interest and financing options.

A significant feature of the Preferred Concept Plan is its potential for long-term reinvestment in new commercial and residential uses, which will help create a more vibrant downtown district and increase ridership demand for the Elmwood Park Metra Station. In particular, the Preferred Concept Plan potentially accommodates 139,000 square feet of net new commercial uses and 452 housing units in the downtown area.



Grand Avenue needs urban design improvements and more redevelopment.



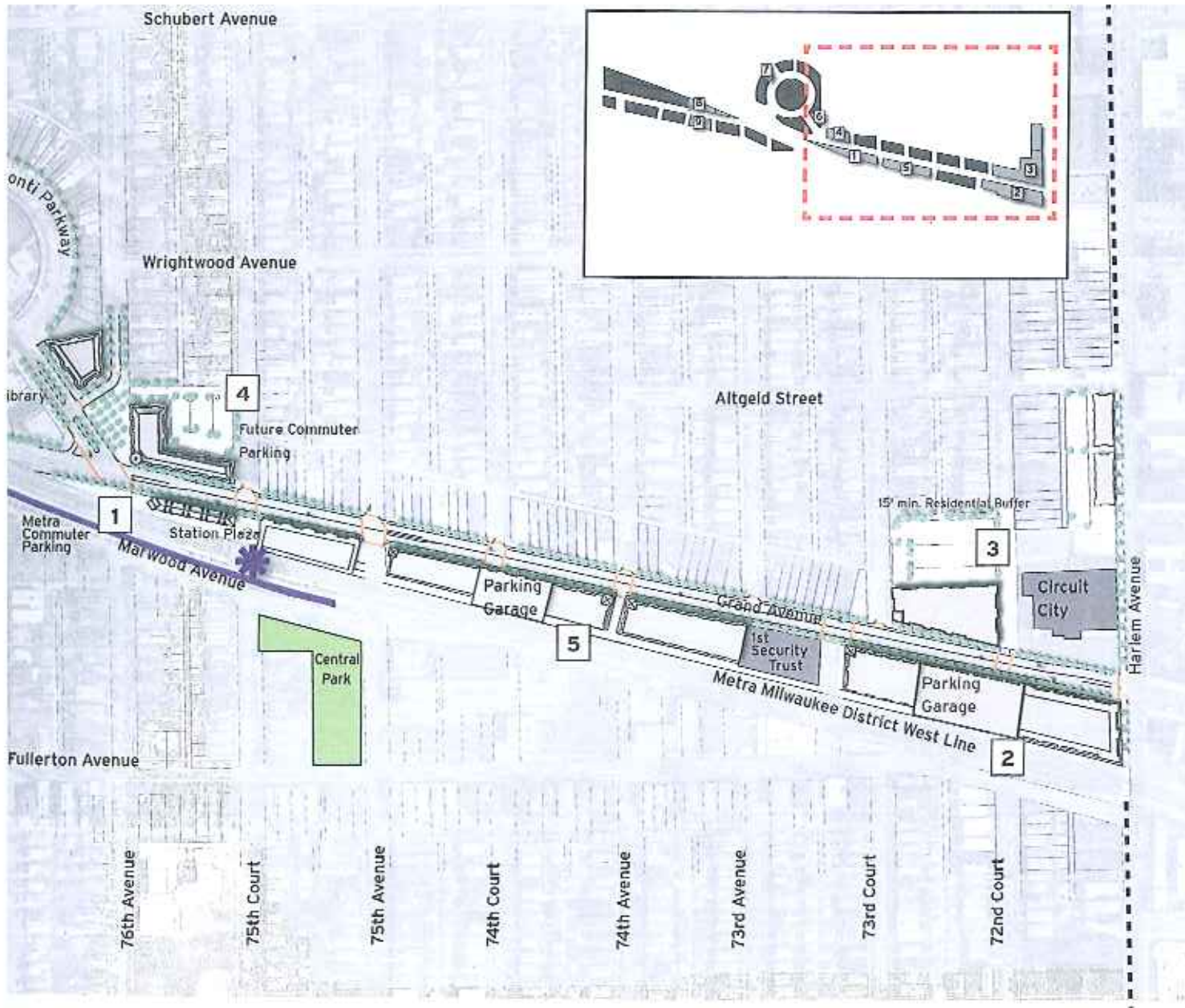
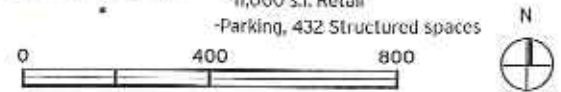


FIGURE 1
Preferred Concept Plan: Sites 1 to 5
 July 2006

Elmwood Park Metra Station

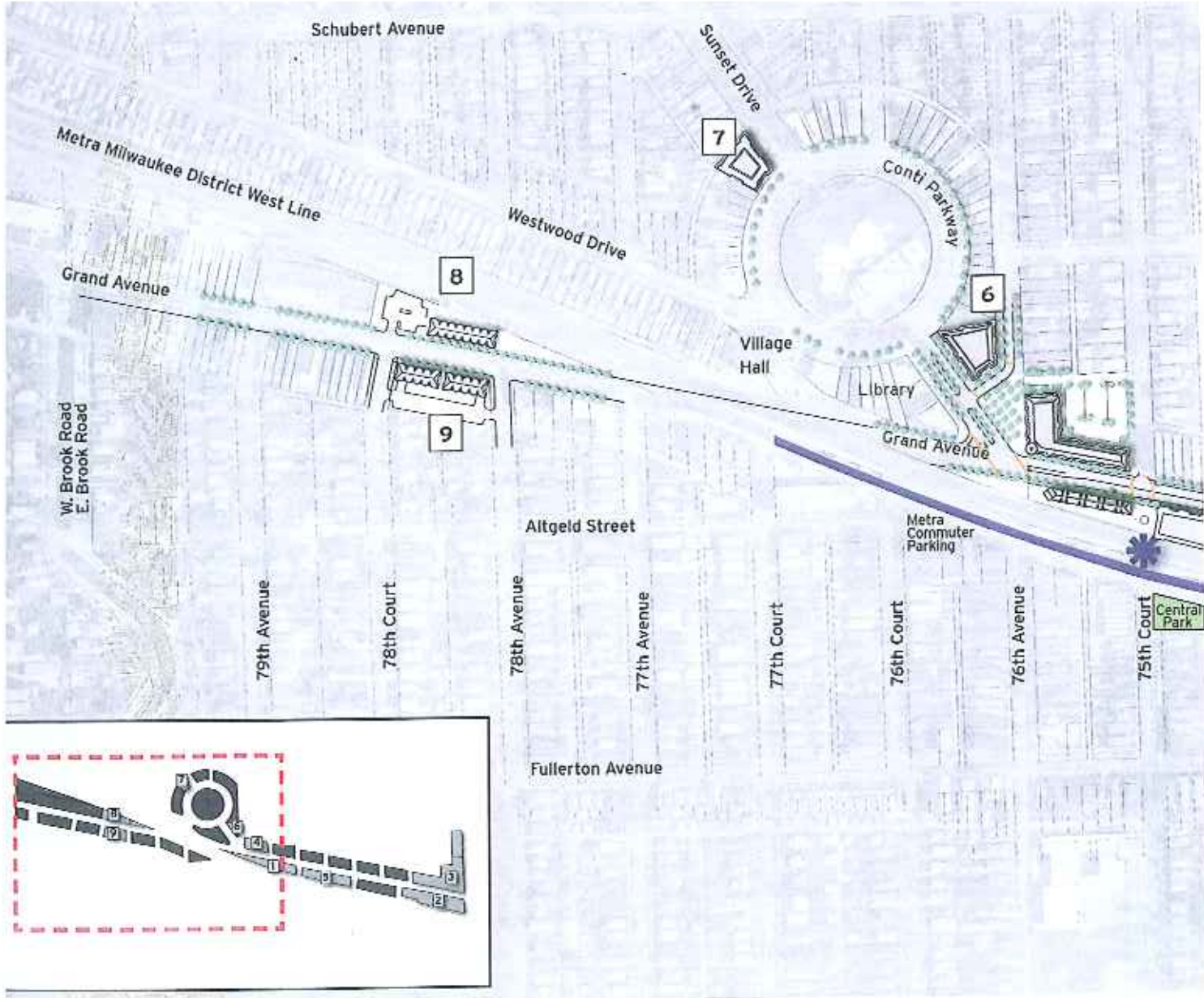
- AREA 1**
- (1) 6,500 s.f. Commercial
 - (1) 12,600 s.f. Mixed-Use (Retail/Condo)
 - 45 Units @ 1,500 s.f. per Unit
 - Parking, 60 Structured spaces
 - Station Plaza with bus pull-out
- AREA 2**
- (2) Mixed-Use (Commercial/Condo)
 - 16,000 s.f. with 40 Units
 - 40,000 s.f. with 100 Units
 - (1) Mixed-Use (3-Story Pkg. Structure/Retail)
 - 12,500s.f. Ground Floor Retail
 - Parking, 395 Structured spaces
- AREA 3**
- 40,000 s.f. Grocery
 - (2) Mixed-Use (Retail/Condo)
 - 7,000 s.f. per building
 - 12 Units per building @ 1,500 s.f. per Unit
 - Parking, 190 Surface spaces
- AREA 4**
- (1) Mixed-Use(Retail/Condo)
 - 18,000 s.f. Retail
 - 45 Units @1,500 s.f. per unit
 - Parking, 90 Surface (for commuters) and 45 Structured spaces
- AREA 5**
- (3) Mixed-Use (Retail/Condo)
 - 10,500 s.f. with 27 Units
 - 20,000 s.f. with 54 Units
 - 13,500 s.f. with 35 Units
 - (1) Mixed-Use (shared-use parking structure)
 - 11,000 s.f. Retail
 - Parking, 432 Structured spaces



STATION AREA PLAN
VILLAGE OF ELMWOOD PARK, IL

Preferred
Concept Plan:
Sites 6 to 9

July 2006



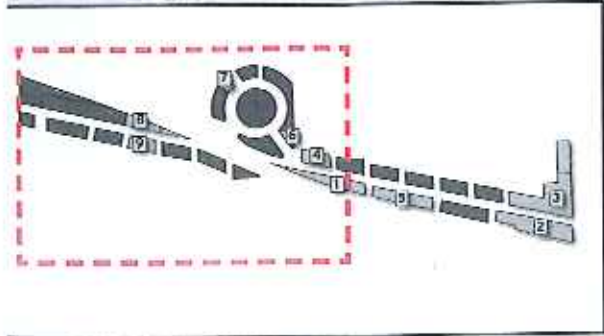
Elmwood Park Metra Station

AREA 6
 (1) Mixed-Use (Retail/Condo)
 -8,000 s.f. Retail
 -24 Units @ 1,500 s.f. per unit
 -Parking, 24 Structured spaces

AREA 7
 (1) Mixed-Use (Retail/Condo)
 -8,000 s.f. Retail
 -16 Units @ 1,500 s.f. per unit
 -Parking, 20 Structured spaces

AREA 8
 (1) Condo Building
 -18 Units @ 1,500 s.f. per unit
 -Parking, 18 Structured and 23 Surface spaces

AREA 9
 (2) Condo Building
 -24 Units @ 1,500 s.f. per unit
 -Parking, 24 Structured and 21 Surface spaces



STATION AREA PLAN
 VILLAGE OF ELMWOOD PARK, IL

D. TRANSIT, CIRCULATION, AND ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

The Circulation and Access Plan describes vehicle, pedestrian, and transit improvements recommended within the Concept Plan. In order to create and sustain a vibrant business district that provides pedestrian-friendly connections to and from the Elmwood Park Station, the majority of improvements relate to Grand Avenue and to Conti Parkway.

Vehicle Circulation, Access, and Parking

Grand Avenue's street paving width is 56-feet wide from curb to curb, but the street's travel lane configuration varies due to intermittent on-street parking, turning medians, and intersection turning lanes. This inconsistent configuration creates a disorienting environment, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with the corridor. The condition also limits on-street parking, which is desired as a pedestrian-friendly buffer between moving traffic and sidewalks.

The Plan suggests Grand Avenue should be re-designed to consistently accommodate four 11-foot travel lanes and two 7-foot parking lanes from Harlem to 76th Avenues. In order to provide safe access to proposed parking structures, new traffic signals are recommended on Grand Avenue at 72nd Court and at 74th Avenue. Since Grand Avenue is under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), the recommended street configuration, signalization, and access patterns will require a detailed engineering study to analyze potential impacts and discussion with IDOT, the Illinois Commerce Commission, and Metra.

Pedestrian Access and Circulation

The current streetscape environment along Grand Avenue contains virtually no pedestrian amenities, and few street-level shopping opportunities. The Plan seeks to improve pedestrian amenities to complement and enhance the proposed mixed uses and residential uses along Grand Avenue. More importantly, the Plan recommends the creation of a unified business district--including Grand Avenue from Harlem and 76th Avenues, Conti Parkway, and the Elmwood Park Metra Station--through a streetscape improvement program with the following pedestrian enhancements: new streetlights, streetlight banners, sidewalks, street trees, street furniture, and wayfinding signage. A more detailed streetscape study should be undertaken to determine the specific types and locations for all of these pedestrian amenities.



Grand Avenue carries 26,000 vehicles per day and contains few pedestrian amenities.



Transit Circulation and Access

As highlighted in the Preferred Concept Plan, the station side redevelopment concept contains a transit plaza, a gateway park, a bus drop-off, a kiss-n-ride location, and pedestrian enhancements. The Village should discuss these concepts with IDOT, Metra, and Pace to determine engineering feasibility.

Due to the proposed transit plaza and gateway park, pedestrians would have greater access to and from the station between Grand Avenue and Conti Parkway. The gateway park would contain open space, sidewalks, and curbs. East of 76th Avenue, five on-street parking spaces would be assigned as a kiss-and-ride location with 15-minute parking restrictions. At Grand Avenue and 75th Court, a bus pull-out would be located at the northern perimeter of the transit plaza with clear views of the train station.



Grand Avenue near the Metra Station is not a pleasant walking experience.



E. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

The overall implementation process for the Preferred Concept Plan will require political support in addition to staff and financial commitments from the Village of Elmwood Park. The Village will need to address the following implementation strategies; amend development regulations, enforce design guidelines, determine financing opportunities, implement major capital improvements, focus on key redevelopment priority areas, and schedule phases for redevelopment. The Village's varying levels of involvement are briefly described in the following implementation strategies.

Strategy 1: Amend Development Regulations

The Village should amend the zoning code and map to align them with the intent of the Plan. The Land Use Framework provides clear guidance on the specific zoning recommendations. Most importantly, regulations for Grand Avenue should allow multi-family residential uses by right and provide more residential development opportunities west of the railroad.

Strategy 2: Enforce Design Guidelines

The Village should require the use of the Design Guidelines as part of its site development plan review, as well as for its facade improvement program. Due to the inconsistent building styles, materials, massing, setbacks, and colors along Grand Avenue, the Village should promote a higher quality and more consistent development pattern for downtown Elmwood Park through the Design Guidelines.

Strategy 3: Determine Financing Opportunities

The Village should investigate funding opportunities to address the costs of major capital improvements, as well as the gap financing needed to make private redevelopment feasible. There are numerous federal, state, and local funding sources that could provide the needed funds for public infrastructure and for private development assistance. A public/private partnership could be formed between multiple parties, including the Village, IDOT, Metra, and interested investors, if the Village pursues the proposed kiss-and-ride, bus pull-out, and parking structure or surface lot for shared uses, including future commuter parking needs.



Strategy 4: Implement Major Capital Improvements

The Village should implement key public improvement projects in the near-term for Grand Avenue between Harlem and 76th Avenues, as well as for Conti Parkway. In particular, the streetscape improvement recommendations for banners, gateways, and public open spaces will provide a positive indication of change in the business district.

Strategy 5: Focus on Key Redevelopment Project Priorities

The Village should act as a development partner and take a more direct role in key redevelopment project priorities to overcome development finance hurdles. The most important areas for redevelopment include the land adjacent to the Elmwood Park Metra Station on Grand Avenue and the remaining TIF properties on Grand Avenue between Harlem and 73rd Avenues.

Strategy 6: Schedule Phases for Redevelopment

The Village should prioritize the recommended phases for the Plan by scheduling appropriate actions into its administrative agenda and allocating funds through its capital improvement budget process.

F. CONCLUSION

The Village of Elmwood Park is now prepared to embark on an exciting course to revitalize its downtown using the Elmwood Park Station Area Plan. The Plan provides a bold vision for a mixed-use downtown with new commercial and residential uses along Grand Avenue from Harlem to 76th Avenues, including along Conti Parkway and adjacent to the Elmwood Park Metra Station. In addition, new residential uses are proposed along Grand Avenue west of 76th Avenue in order to concentrate commercial activity in the downtown area. The Plan also provides recommendations to provide parking garages and improve pedestrian access through a streetscape enhancement program. Significantly, the Plan proposes a redesign of Grand Avenue in the downtown area to provide for additional on-street parking and amenities. The Elmwood Park Station Area Plan will serve as a guide for implementing this overall vision and provides key strategies for the next ten years.



Preferred Concept Plan Perspective, Sunset Drive and Grand Avenue



Preferred Concept Plan Perspective, Grand Avenue and 73rd Avenue

