

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

# Winnetka Commercial Districts

Winnetka, IL

February 27-28, 2013 and June 25-26, 2013



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The Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) allows local communities or government agencies an opportunity to access strategic advice from experts in development that they could not obtain through any other process.

The goal of the panel program is to convene a multi-disciplinary ULI-member team of experts to examine complex land use challenges and help sponsors find creative, practical and implementable solutions based on community realities and best practices.

The panel process brings together perspectives from current market, land use and design, financing and development strategies. TAPs are typically two-day intensive working sessions addressing land challenges proposed by the sponsoring organization, a local government, non-profit organization, or developer, about a specific development issue or policy barrier within a defined geographic area.

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## Introduction

Walkability, human scale, interconnected street grids, a mix of housing and density, a sense of place—these are the guiding principles of well-designed, livable communities. People today want Main Streets with a mix of shops where they can run into a friend and grab a coffee to catch up, sit in a park and read a book, or walk to the local pub to watch the game. And through these experiences, they want to feel connected to their community.

The goal of this new movement, sometimes called “place-making,” is to create a sense of place, with a unique character that invites shopping, socializing, and belonging. But a sense of place does not just materialize. It takes smart planning. Open-air retail projects, pedestrian friendly urban design, public green space, a thoughtful integration with local neighborhoods, density, and a mix of uses are all elements of this “place-making” movement.<sup>1</sup>

As the tree-lined streets, stately homes, numerous parks, and quaint shopping districts reveal, Winnetka has many of these elements in place already. It has a rich history, which is still evident in the Village’s New England feel, and its three business districts have retained a small-town charm. Large national chains are few and far between. Independently owned retail, from boutiques to restaurants, line the streets, the stores’ Tudor storefronts reflecting the German and northern European heritage of the town’s forefathers.

The rich heritage and the small-town feel of its main shopping districts sets Winnetka apart from many



Hubbard Woods Business District.

other suburbs and also puts the Village at the vanguard of another change: a shift in retailing away from strip malls and larger malls, and toward a “local” or “main street” experience.

However, the Village also faces several challenges. Retail has never been easy, and it’s only getting harder. Today, the small retailer goes toe to toe with big retailers who know not only the size of shoe a shopper wears but when he or she last bought a pair, or even if that person is just considering whether to buy. Customer preferences and buying habits have changed dramatically with online options, and Winnetka’s retail sector and business environment have struggled to adapt to these trends.

Driving a significant part of the change is e-commerce. In eight short years, e-commerce as a share of total sales has more than doubled, to 5.6 percent today.<sup>2</sup> While still a relatively small share of total sales, the pace of expansion is rapid. The Census Bureau reported that U.S. retail e-commerce sales for the first quarter of 2013 totaled \$61.2 billion, an increase of 15.2 percent from the same period one year prior. Meanwhile, total retail sales (not just e-commerce) increased only 3.7 percent in that same time span.

And e-commerce is changing the consumer. As one forecast put it, “The e-commerce revolution has created a newly empowered consumer, who has higher expectations for the retail shopping experience than ever before.”<sup>3</sup>

To remain competitive, retailers must stay attuned to changing market demographics, tenant mix, consumer habits, and they must be vigilant in managing their inventory. They cannot rest on their laurels and risk letting shoppers go elsewhere. They must identify and plug any “leaks” of consumer spending to other shopping districts outside the Village. They must continue to innovate with their products and sales philosophy. To stay ahead of the competition, online and off, retailers today must create an “experience” for their shoppers. As with place-making, retail must create a customized, shopping experience that provides the



shopper with a sense of identification and connection to the store or service.

As a Motorola Solutions white paper puts it:

"Today, retailers are working to enhance their shoppers' experience, knowing that at the same time customers have options to shop wherever and whenever they want, often without stepping inside a store. Retailers ... need to provide a compelling and personalized way to rekindle the special bond between the shopper and their brand."<sup>4</sup>

A second force of change is demographic. Millennials—the biggest and most diverse generation since the Boomers—are the new customer. According to a recent survey by Accenture, millennials want an integrated shopping experience, online and in-store. Contrary to popular impressions that have them buying everything with a click, online, they do like the "real" shopping experience. They might do the research online but they still like to come into shops to touch and feel the product, to try it on, and to have the whole shopping experience. Millennials are also loyal to a product or retailer if, as the Accenture survey put it, they have the right shopping experience.

"They demand a customer-centric shopping experience—one tailored to their wants and needs as valued customers. As one shopper put it, 'You want to feel welcome when you go to the stores.' In describing the ideal shopping experience, a Millennial noted, 'There is [something] about the product and its cost, but there's also a big part about being treated like a valued customer.'<sup>5</sup>

Retailers cannot make this transformation alone. They must find a partner in the local economic development

team. To succeed in this 21st century "place-making," experience-retail environment, retailers need support in developing a smart strategy to attract and retain business and create a healthy retail environment. They need more time to spend on strategy and less on paperwork and red tape. They need grants and programs to spruce up their storefronts and improve the look and feel of their shop. Small business education, support programs, efficient ways to monitor and track trends, and a "friendly" regulatory environment can go a long way to creating a vibrant retail district.

In Winnetka specifically, hurdles include zoning restrictions that deter new development, onerous regulations, and a complicated and opaque process of applying for licenses and permits. The Village is not known for an "open for business" attitude. Over 75% of the residents in the shopper survey wanted more pubs, but the current restrictions on liquor sales prevents pubs from locating here. Storefronts could use a face-lift. These unnecessary hurdles make it even harder to make a living as a retailer and make it difficult for the Village to develop a vibrant, stable, and welcoming shopping district that in turn contributes to the sense of place and community in the Village.

Recognizing the changing face of retail, the Village asked the Urban Land Institute Chicago to conduct two Technical Assistance Panels (TAP). A TAP brings together a group of experts to advise a locale on a challenging land use issue it is facing. In this case, the TAP was convened in two separate meetings to advise the Village, first, on how to reinvigorate Winnetka's three distinct retail districts (Indian Hill, East/West Elm, and Hubbard Woods) and, second, to recommend a longer-term commercial strategy, with potential uses for key development sites, including the Post

1 Linda Laniado, "Place making in New Retail Developments: The Role of Local, Independently Owned Business" (Cambridge, MA: Department of Urban Studies, MIT, 2005).

2 U.S. Census Bureau, "Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales, 1st Quarter 2013." (May 15, 2013), available at [http://www.census.gov/retail/mrts/www/data/pdf/ec\\_current.pdf](http://www.census.gov/retail/mrts/www/data/pdf/ec_current.pdf)

3 Kevin O'Maragh, "The Changing State of Retail: The Effect of E-Commerce on the Retail Value Chain," Real Results Magazine (July 2012), available at <http://www.jda.com/realresultsmagazine/view-article.cfm?did=2868>

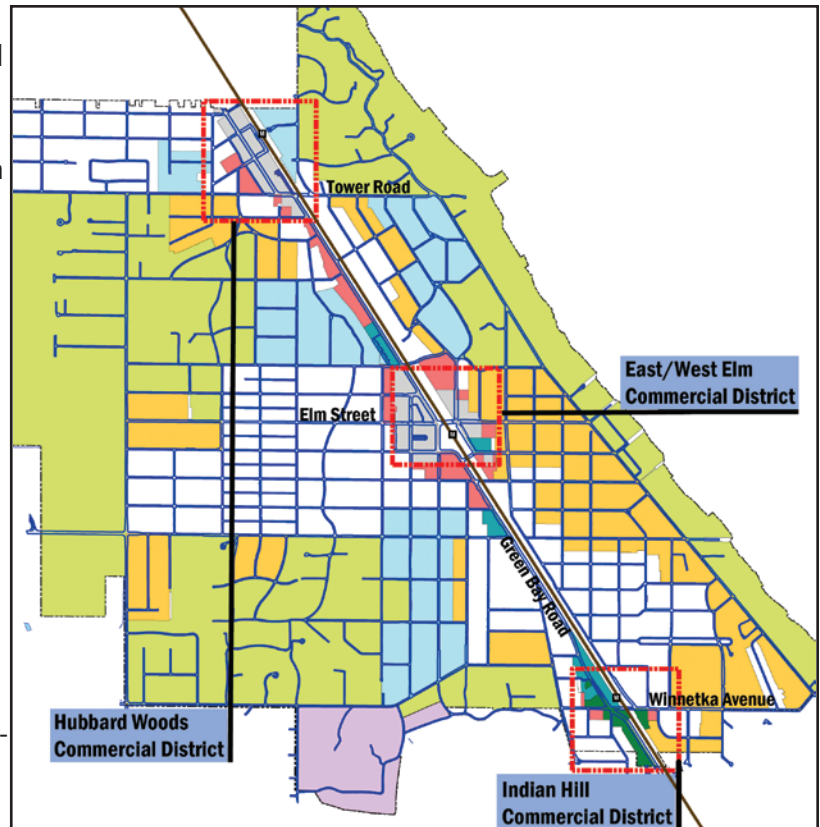
4 Motorola Solutions, "What's Driving Tomorrow's Retail Experience?" (2012), available at [www.motorola.com/web/Business/Solutions/Industry%20Solutions/Retail/\\_Documents/static\\_files/MOT\\_Retail\\_White\\_Paper\\_061912\\_final\\_High\\_v2.pdf](http://www.motorola.com/web/Business/Solutions/Industry%20Solutions/Retail/_Documents/static_files/MOT_Retail_White_Paper_061912_final_High_v2.pdf)

5 Accenture, "Seamless Retail for Millennial Consumers: Getting it Right" (2013), available at <http://www.accenture.com/us-en/Pages/insight-retail-trends-millennial-shopping-behavior.aspx>

6 Accenture, "Who Are the Millennial Shoppers?" (2013), available at <http://www.accenture.com/us-en/outlook/Pages/outlook-journal-2013-who-are-millennial-shoppers-what-do-they-really-want-retail.aspx>

Office site, the Indian Hill section of the Green Bay Road corridor, and Hubbard Woods park and shopping district.

Chaired by John Bucksbaum, CEO of Bucksbaum Retail Properties, LLC, the first TAP brought together a diverse set of real estate and retail experts to recommend targets for Winnetka's commercial health, retail opportunities for each district, and specific recommendations for competitive regulation and partnerships between the Village, retailers, and owners. The panel conducted a series of interviews and listening sessions with local residents and retailers, representatives of four similar communities, and local Village officials over a two-day period, February 27-28, 2013. With this in-depth background, coupled with data from a recent shopper survey of approximately 500 Winnetka residents, the panel presented short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations to the Village.



Winnetka's Commercial Districts.

## Panel 1 Summary Recommendations

- Adopt a streamlined and transparent permitting and approval process for new business, and create one point of contact to guide business owners through the process.
- Eliminate burdensome code requirements such as liquor licensing, restrictions on outdoor seating, and zoning overlay that prevents service businesses at street level.
- Increase marketing and outreach for community activities and events to draw people to shopping districts.
- Institute streetscape improvements through matching grants and other means, including sidewalks and façade improvements.
- Assess the parking needs and repurpose existing parking to better serve retail needs.

*More detail is included in the Appendix.*



Panelists at work.

**The second panel**, held June 25-26, 2013, addressed a broader plan for opportunities to revive the retail districts, draw more shoppers, and address the potential decline in demand for commercial land use and resulting infill for development sites. In this report, we present the recommendations from the second TAP, chaired by Michael Tobin, Senior Vice President, U.S. Equities Realty.

We begin with Winnetka's demographics and shopping district layout, which sets the stage for the more detailed recommendations to follow. We also discuss

overarching issues that are important for revitalizing retail and larger redevelopment efforts. We conclude with the specific recommendations of the second TAP on these larger redevelopment efforts.

## Winnetka's Demographics and Setting

On Chicago's North Shore, Winnetka is home to 12,187 residents, largely white, and affluent. Median household income at \$208,000 is four times higher than the U.S. median. The population skews solidly young-middle-age, with many young families in their early 40's seeking the suburban lifestyle and good schools in which to raise their children.

The three retail districts — Indian Hill to the south, East/West Elm in the center, and Hubbard Woods to the north—are each served by a Metra train station. The train tracks are below grade through most of Winnetka, which helps in maintaining visual connectivity within the districts. Each district also has a unique character with a variety of land uses, building heights and on-street parking options.

### Indian Hill

Indian Hill is bounded by Sunset Road on the north, the Village boundary with Kenilworth on the south, Church Road on the west, Indian Hill Park and the grounds of New Trier High School on the east. The district is more auto-centric than the other two shopping areas. In Indian Hill, Green Bay Road, the main thoroughfare, is wide with parallel parking on both sides of

the street and four lanes of traffic. Traffic speed tends to be the highest of the three districts. Individual uses include a car dealership, a convenience store, a dry cleaning shop, banks, a cellular retailer, a fine dining restaurant, quick service restaurants, for example, sub-shop and pizza, medical and real estate offices, an automobile repair business, and multiple-family residences.

Indian Hill is extremely linear, with buildings only on the west side of Green Bay Road (facing the Metra tracks), plus a 3-1/2 story building east of the Metra underpass at 454-462 Winnetka Avenue. All properties in the Indian Hill Business District are zoned C-1, Limited Commercial. The District does not have the C-2 zoning overlay that covers most of the other business districts in the Village and therefore non-retail uses are allowed on the first floors of the buildings.

### East/West Elm

East/West Elm is the central business district of the Village. Green Bay Road and the below grade Metra line run through the center of this district, and the major connections between the east and the west sides are the Elm Street bridge and the pedestrian bridge at the Metra station. The district extends from Pine Street on the North to Cherry and Ash Streets on the South, Lincoln Avenue on the East to Birch Street on the West. The district provides essential services such as grocery stores and public buildings (Village Hall, Winnetka-Northfield Public Library and Post Office),



Auto-centric Green Bay Road in the Indian Hill District.



Mixed Use Development along Elm Street.



two churches, several banks, real estate and medical offices. Most buildings have retail shops or restaurants on the ground floor and multiple-family dwellings or offices upstairs. The buildings range from single story to four stories.

A central feature of this district, and the community, is Dwyer Park. The park is bounded by Elm, Oak, Birch and Chestnut Court and, on the Fourth of July or during events such as sidewalk sales, it is filled with magical midwestern community vitality. With smart planning, the park could become an emerald jewel in the area, and effectively marry green space and retail for a true place-making space.

### Hubbard Woods

The Hubbard Woods business district straddles both sides of Green Bay Road. It extends from Scott Street on the North to Chatfield Road on the South, from the Metra tracks on the East to Gordon Terrace on the West. North of Scott Street, the district flows seamlessly into a similar retail environment in the neighboring Village of Glencoe and on the south side, the scale and character of the district continues down to Tower Road. At the center of the business district is Hubbard Woods Park, with a gazebo, playlot and ice skating in the winter. A Village-owned parking deck adjacent to the Hubbard Woods Metra station serves commuters and shoppers in the district.

The district has a smaller building scale than the East/West Elm District, giving it a more intimate feel



Hubbard Woods Park at Gage Street.

despite heavy traffic conditions. It has come to be known as the “design district” because of the number of interior design and related stores. The district has a pedestrian-oriented, neighborhood retail character, and the buildings are architecturally similar, with storefronts that encourage window shopping. Several multi-family residential units are located on the upper floors of the retail stores, as are small offices.

## Panel 2 Recommendations

### Indian Hill

The panel contemplated several options for this area, including the prospect of developing all four corners, relocating or developing the Metra parking sites, creating mixed use (commercial and residential) for the area, and whether to incorporate single-family land to the west of the Land Rover car dealership to increase the size of the development parcel.

A first step, however, before any plan unfolds is to open regular communications with New Trier High School and the Village of Kenilworth. In this area the shops flow from Kenilworth through Winnetka, so coordinating plans would be smart. Kenilworth completed a Green Bay Road Transportation and Streetscape Plan and is currently working through preliminary concepts for the entire commercial corridor. Their plan will set the stage for a redevelopment of their central business district, including building more multi-family, mixed-use, transit-oriented developments with an increase in height restrictions to 3.5 stories, up from 2.5 stories previously. In addition, it would be strategic to meet with New Trier about safety issues in the auto-centric area. New Trier is a closed campus and as such does not have a major influence on retail, but it does bring 3,000 students into the district daily, and the safety of students at bus stops and intersections is paramount.

Overall, the panel recommended that Indian Hill retain its auto-centric focus. Unlike other areas in the Village, Indian Hill does not need the pedestrian-based amenities of the other districts. Green Bay Road is the driver of business in the district, and the focal point of the area. The speed and volume of traffic and the layout



### Scheme A - Minimal Redevelopment

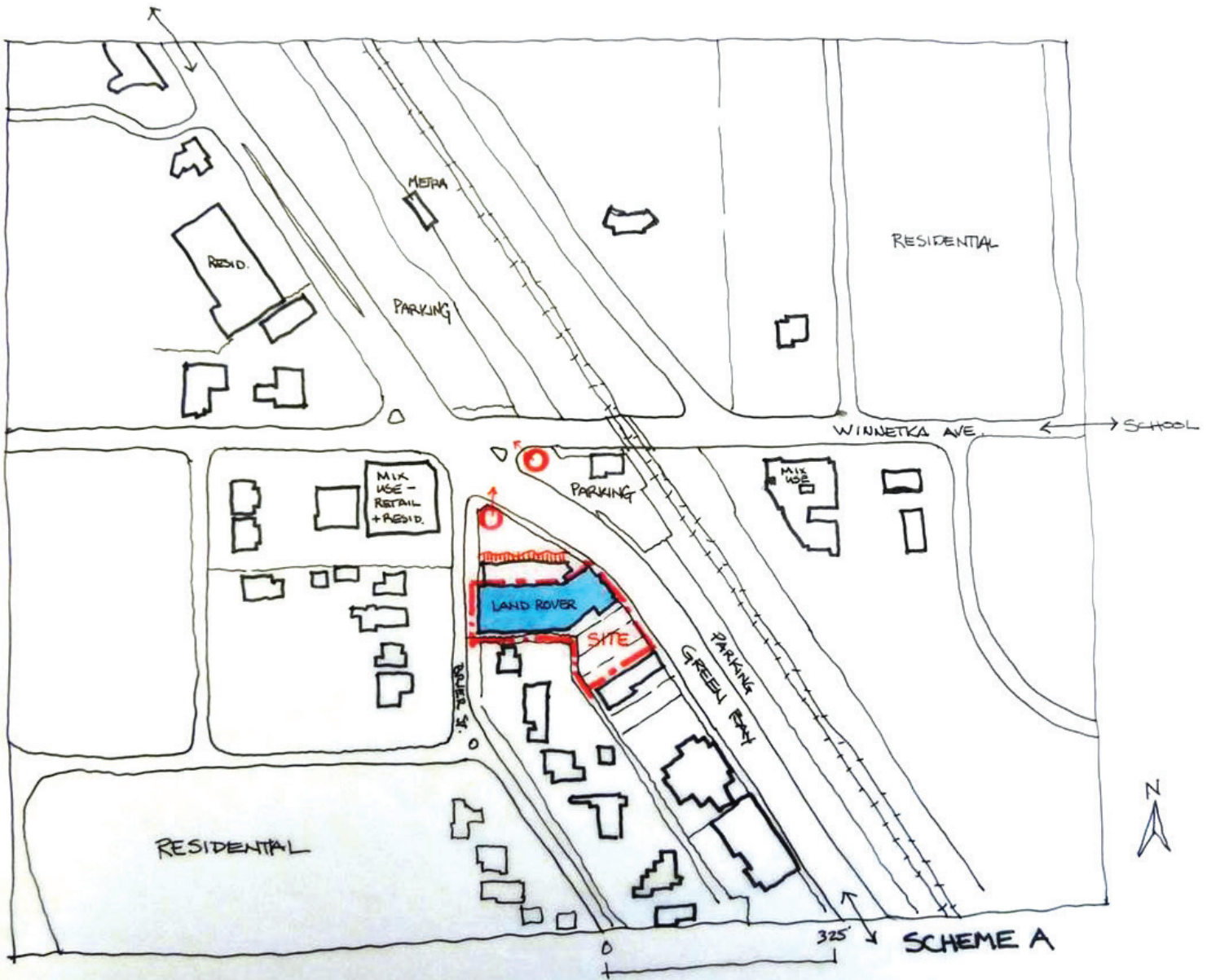


Figure 1: Sketch of Scheme A Indian Hill produced during the second panel.

of the retail are not easy to change, given the narrow lots. With these driving forces in mind, the panel offered three options for development in Indian Hill.

#### Scheme A - Minimal Redevelopment

The first scenario is the least expensive and least extensive of the three. Unlike the other options, this scenario would maintain the current zoning and configuration and let the market dictate retail uses up and down the Green Bay corridor.

The panel recommended creating incentives for 7-11 to improve its signage and landscaping. Incentives might include sales tax rebates for businesses that make specified improvements. Glen Ellyn, for example, offered a 50 percent matching grant for permanent improvement to buildings, including façade upgrades such as awnings and windows. The grant is funded from general funds via sales tax proceeds. A small, pocket park could be added to the parking on the southeast corner of Winnetka Road and Green Bay Road.

### Scheme B - Modest Redevelopment

A more ambitious second plan included working with the current owner to keep an auto dealership in the Land Rover parcel should they move out. An auto dealership is a significant revenue generator for the Village and as such should be encouraged. This approach would retain the retail/commercial use of the site. The panel stressed the need to address the issue of parking space that is hampering the current dealership.

One option to address space is to assemble lots in the vicinity of Land Rover for their use (7-11, the lots to the south of Land Rover including Michaels restaurant, and possibly residential lots behind Land Rover). This would provide a contiguous parking area for the dealership. The corridor would be a mixed use of single-story retail and commercial along Green Bay Road (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Sketch of Scheme B Indian Hill produced during the second panel.



### Scheme C - Significant Redevelopment

A third, even more ambitious, plan would be to both create a more contiguous zone as described in Scheme B, and create a vibrant mixed-use development (retail on bottom floors and condominiums or rental units on the top floors). This mixed-use area could accommodate younger households looking to access the Village's high quality schools for their children and older residents looking to downsize homes as well as those who prefer transit-oriented development, living near easy access to transportation.

The Village could assemble the parcels to create larger developable parcels on the western corners of Winnetka and Green Bay Road (see Figure 3). Zoning variances (in green in Figure 3) would include setback, height, and parking. The current parking requirements meant for retail/office space are overly generous for seniors and transit-oriented development. Seniors who are seeking to downsize, and move into condominiums such as these, rarely need two cars, nor do those seeking to live near transit. Parking is further discussed on page 15.



Figure 3: Sketch of Scheme C Indian Hill produced during the second panel. NOTE: The green areas on the map would require zoning variances.



The goal is to increase density and create a larger development space, and in doing so, from an architectural perspective, firm up the corners, which currently have a mishmash of retail. The highest and best use might be a three-story building with a set-back, accommodating residential units on the top with retail on the ground floor. The set-back eases any overpowering sense of height allowing the development to be higher density while retaining a human scale. Although there is more aggregation of lot spaces in Scheme C, the spaces are still small, and would encourage relatively smaller scale projects.

### East/West Elm

Considered “downtown Winnetka,” the East/West Elm district is where the majority of residents shop and dine. Therefore, shopping and dining should continue to be the main focus. The panel recommended making this sector more vibrant, with a mix of retail and casual restaurants and bars.

A key project in this area is the Post Office Site. The property is large and when combined with Dwyer Park creates many opportunities for creating a vibrant community-centric green space. Currently Dwyer Park is a “jewel” that is cut off from downtown. Removing and re-envisioning the Post Office building could connect the park more closely to downtown and create a visual sight-line from the Village Hall building through the park. If the Village was to go forward with any of the schemes proposed during the TAP and redevelop the current Post Office, it should look at providing an alternate retail location for a Post Office within the business district, so that residents can continue to have

access to this important community amenity. The TAP did not look at alternate locations for the Post Office.

The panel created three options for the current Post Office site, each dependent on how the Village answers several important questions:

- What is the balance between open space and development, knowing there are strong desires for both in the community?
- What is the proper balance between expense and revenue?

### Scheme A - Minimal Redevelopment

The least costly and fastest option is an adaptive reuse of the post office structure. The Village could turn the building over to a commercial tenant with no negative impact on parking and without incurring significant costs. The project would involve some modest additions to the parking site by removing loading docks at the back, which would create additional on-grade parking. Removing the docks would also create more efficient vehicular pattern in parking. The benefits of this approach are a shorter time frame of development by making use of an existing building that the Village already owns. This option also has a potential revenue stream, albeit modest, for the building.

### Scheme B - Modest Redevelopment

This option is a slightly more ambitious project that taps into the asset of the park, and creates a community centerpiece where residents can meet, relax, and shop. This plan would include low-density development by replacing the post office with a similarly sized, 10,000 square foot retail space that would help activate and complete the retail environment at Elm and Chestnut (see Figure 4). The plan would include a landscaped parking lot with a pedestrian walkway to Chestnut Court, and enhanced streetscape on Elm.

The new building would be set back, making way for greenscaping and street-level amenities. Depending on parking needs, the greenway connection could be more or less elaborate. Along Chestnut, parallel parking could become angled parking. Oak Street streetscape would be more green but essentially retain what is currently there.



Dwyer Park.

The panel estimated that this option would take approximately 12 months from approval to completion. It has the potential of being revenue neutral for the Village because the tax revenues from the new retail development could potentially offset the redevelopment costs incurred by the Village.

### Scheme B - Modest Redevelopment

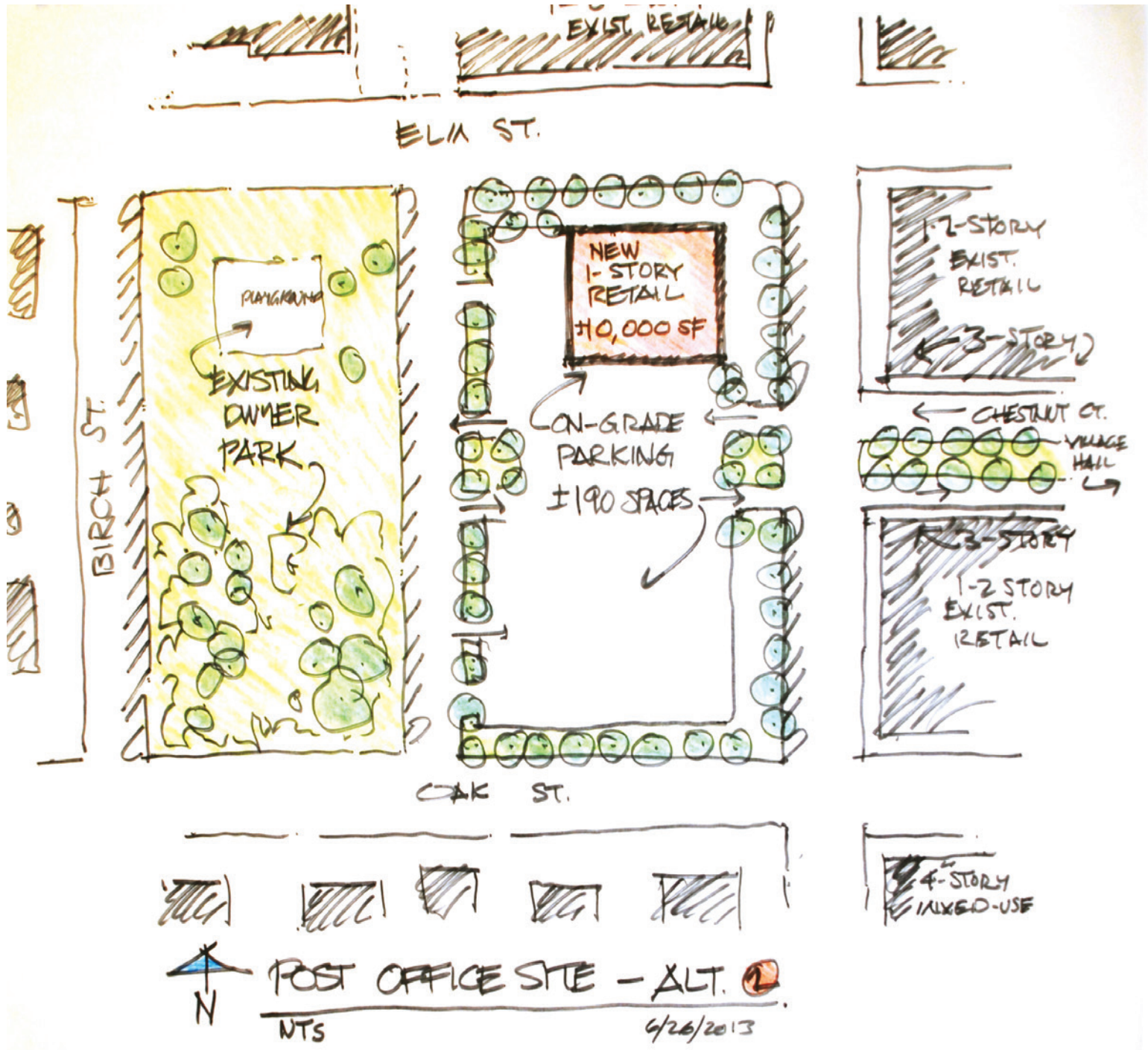


Figure 4: Sketch of Scheme B East/West Elm produced during the second panel.



### Scheme C - Significant Redevelopment

The goal in this option—the most ambitious of the three—is to connect the park visually and physically to Village Hall by demolishing the Post Office building and creating a direct pedestrian connection and sightline from the Village Hall to the park. This option also increases both density slightly and the size of the park.

The proposal includes building two mixed-use buildings with underground parking and expanded civic space. A two- to four-story mixed-use building would be on the corner of Oak and Chestnut, and a two- to three-story mixed-use building would locate on the corner of Elm and Chestnut (see Figure 5). Chestnut, Elm, and Oak streets would be lined with retail in this option. Elm Street could feature a setback, creating a small plaza with



Figure 5: Sketch of Scheme C East/West Elm produced during the second panel.



outdoor dining options. A setback and plaza that shares landscaping themes with the park also create a seamless transition from the park to the plaza to retail.

The plan would extend Chestnut Court as a landscaped pedestrian walkway connecting the Village Hall to Dwyer Park. By providing underground parking, the plan would maximize the number of parking spaces while also increasing green park space. This plan would require financial assistance from the Village owing to cost of constructing the structured public parking and expanding the park. However, it would create a vibrant green space and well-connected shopping/dining area. The time frame would be approximately 24-36 months from approval.

### Hubbard Woods

The first TAP recommended branding this district as the arts, cinema, and design district. In addition to a retail focus on design and related shops, the district could become known as an entertainment venue hosting events such as art and musical festivals in Hubbard Woods Park as well as outdoor movies in the summer, and skating in the winter.

#### Scheme A - Minimal Redevelopment

The panel recommended improving the Hubbard Woods parking deck and reconfiguring the traffic flow in the area to increase accessibility. The panel recommended adding a southbound vehicular exit from the parking area adjacent to Packard Building,

maintaining one-way traffic at east and north sides of the park (Merrill), and providing for two-way traffic on Gage Street south of Park. This latter change would allow vehicles to make an easy left turn from Gage to head south on Greenbay instead of going around the park, and thereby ease the traffic on the north side of Merrill. Finally, the panel recommended maintaining angle parking along retail on Gage Street and removing parking on the north side. The street redesign will still be within the existing 66 feet right-of-way.

The panel also recommended a facelift and improvements to the Hubbard Woods parking deck, including improving access, visibility, signage, and lighting. Currently, the parking deck is underutilized and the best kept secret in Winnetka. With improvements, it might draw more shoppers and commuters, freeing up parking elsewhere in the neighborhood. Currently it is not easily accessible. A commuter, for example, currently entering from Scott Street must walk through a gangway to get to the train station. The parking deck is not well lit or inviting enough for shoppers to park there. Research shows that most shoppers prefer not to park underground, particularly if the parking is dimly lit, like it is in the lower deck of the Hubbard Woods parking deck.

#### Scheme B - Significant Redevelopment

Modeled after Bryant Park in New York City, which has a variety of hardscape and landscape areas, this plan envisions Hubbard Woods Park as a green space with multiple uses, improving the synergy between the park and the commercial district that surrounds it, and making the park a gem in the community. This would be in addition to the traffic flow and parking deck improvements recommended in Scheme A.

As Figure 6 reveals, the Hubbard Woods Park—the design’s centerpiece—would feature a transitional design with unique spaces for different purposes. On one end would be a playlot for children and families with grass and landscaping. The center would be maintained as open lawn for Village events such as farmer’s markets, art festivals, movie nights, and in winter an ice rink. The panel recommended expanding the existing gazebo to provide for a band shell area and a winter warm-



Hubbard Woods Parking Deck.

ing hut. It could also include restroom facilities and limited storage. They recommended keeping the gazebo open air and not enclosing it to minimize utility costs. The park would then transition to a more “urban” site at the south end across from the Gage Street retail, with “hard scape” landscaping, such as gravel or pavers. This area would be a quieter area for eating lunch or reading at small bistro tables. A focal point could be a fountain that provides white noise and nice imagery, similar to the Market Square in downtown Lake Forest.

This plan would create foot traffic for local retail and create a “destination” for families. Using public spaces as gathering spots for community members is a key step in “place-making” and creates a sense of community and belonging among residents. Ultimately, that sense of shared purpose engenders customer loyalty for local business.



Top: Bryant Park, New York City; ASLA Award recipient, OLIN, photos by Peter Mauss/Esto and Felice Frankel.

Bottom: Figure 6 - Sketch of Scheme B Hubbard Woods produced during the second panel.

## Overarching Recommendations for All Three Districts

In addition to the individual focus on each district, several recommendations spanned all three. They include parking and zoning, increased coordination with neighboring communities, and proactive economic development. Village staff should provide recommendations to the Village Council regarding setting definite goals towards implementing these overarching recommendations.

### Parking

Several parking-related issues must be considered in any plan going forward. Retail owners frequently mentioned the lack of parking as a concern (although the majority of respondents to a Winnetka shopper survey said that parking was adequate). As a transit hub for the Metra lines, Winnetka must accommodate commuter parking while also balancing the need for shorter-term parking needs of residents and visitors. In addition, the Village must determine the parking requirements for new residential construction.

A first step for the Village would be to do an assessment of its parking needs. Issues to gauge include:

- the efficient use of parking lots,
- evaluate community parking allocations,
- how to accommodate employee parking,
- how to replace the lost parking should the Post Office be redeveloped, and
- how to update and better use the parking deck in Hubbard Woods.

The Village should also revisit its onsite parking restrictions for residential buildings. The current requirements—for example, two parking spaces for second-floor tenants—are too high. In a neighboring community, parking for a multi-use development is limited to one onsite space for businesses with a second-floor office space while residential units are required to provide 1.5 spaces per unit. The panel also

recommended eliminating the special use for below-grade parking.

A key recommendation by the panel was to increase the parking time for on-street spaces from 90 minutes to two hours, with several short-term (10-minute) parking spaces outside coffee shops and other “pick up” places to keep turnover frequent.

### Zoning

The panel recommended revisiting zoning classifications for the commercial districts, with special attention to height and permitted land-uses. Rather than designing zoning restrictions based on use, the panel recommended thinking of zoning in the context of form-based design, complementary uses, and sales and property taxes.

Revising the zoning code to allow greater building height and density in certain areas can help offset public subsidies for development, particularly at the Post Office site and in Indian Hill. Any negative impacts of increased height in these areas can be mitigated by design features such as upper story setbacks. Located as they are near Metra stations, they are good locales for higher density, mixed-use development.

Adding mixed-use development near transit also draws empty nesters and older residents. Demographic changes bearing down on the United States will create demand for alternative housing so older residents can remain in their communities. (The number of people over age 65 is set to double by 2030 in the United States.) Many of these seniors no longer wish to live in a big house, yet they do not want to leave Winnetka. They may live here only part of the year. They want a well-maintained, smaller condo near retail and the train. They are living longer and are more vital/active in their retirement years. Therefore, zoning for multi-use, higher density buildings can help to accommodate this shifting demographic.



Additionally, the Village should consider revising or eliminating the Overlay District that restricts non-retail businesses at the street level in East/West Elm and Hubbard Woods. The nature of successful retail today is a blend of shops and services, and Winnetka, with its high median income is ideally suited for it. Service businesses such as education services, yoga studios, financial planners, and medical offices, will bring more people to the retail districts, which will help the existing retailers and attract new businesses.

### **Increased Coordination with Neighboring Communities**

Before any plans commence, the Village and the Chamber of Commerce should reach out to neighboring communities to coordinate plans and create a seamless shopping and dining experience for area residents. Hubbard Woods, for example, could easily become a multi-community destination, drawing residents from Glencoe and other communities. Therefore, the Village should make a more concerted effort to reach out to Glencoe merchants and residents and create a boundary-less flow of retail options up and down the corridor. Similarly for the Indian Hill area, the Village should reach out to Kenilworth as well as New Trier. Identifying synergy between the communities' goals through discussions and sharing is always a win-win.

### **Proactive Economic Development**

Finally, to remain vibrant and to continue to draw the right mix of retail, it is imperative that the Village take a more proactive approach to economic development. As noted at the outset of this report, retail success has never been easy and today's demands are greater than ever. Retailers must adjust to changing demographics and shopping habits. No community can rest on its laurels; it requires a smart, coordinated, and continued effort to promote, attract, and support retail.

This can be best accomplished by a strong Economic Development Team that is keenly aware of the many challenges faced by today's retailers, is up-to-date on current market conditions, and dedicated to maintain-

ing a pro-business environment in the community. Typically, an Economic Development Team should consist of an Economic Development Commission, such as the Business Community Development Commission (BCDC) in Winnetka, with members that represent a wide range of business and civic interests in the community, and possess the expertise to make decisions grounded in market realities and consistent with the community's goals. Another critical component of the Economic Development Team is Village staff that is actively engaged with the local business community in assessing their needs and answering questions, and also works directly with the Economic Development Commission to support their goals. The Village of LaGrange, IL, following a similar model, has achieved considerable success in attracting retail and sustaining vibrant commercial districts.

In Winnetka, the BCDC supported by Village staff could form the core of a new Economic Development Team. For this Team to be successful in bringing a new vibrancy to Winnetka's commercial districts, the Village will have to do a thorough assessment of the current roles, responsibilities, and capacity of BCDC members and Village staff, and provide additional support where needed. The panel provided several ideas that Winnetka could undertake to promote economic development, and most of these can be easily accomplished with a strong economic development team in place.

The Village, for example, could institute a system that tracks data such as vacancies, leases coming due, and keeps on file the details of the last 10-12 deals to assist prospective businesses. By maintaining an updated and detailed database, the Economic Development Team can be ready when existing businesses want to expand or new businesses want to locate in Winnetka. Likewise, if an interested developer approaches the Village, they will have a ready list of prospective retailers who are looking for space and match them up with prospective tenants. The Economic Development Team will be more accessible to businesses and developers by identifying a Village staff person as a point of

contact on the team who can be approached directly for questions and guidance.

The Village could also identify what is missing in the retail landscape. The Economic Development Team must become “want” creators—identify and actively recruit businesses that satisfy wants. According to the shopper survey recently conducted, the shopping experience in the Village is “average.” Therefore, to avoid losing shoppers to nearby communities, the Village should identify what people want but cannot buy in the Village. Many in the shopper survey, for example, mentioned a desire for more casual dining where they could grab a beer and watch a game or take the family out for a nice, but casual meal. Three-fourths of respondents to the survey said they would spend more on casual dining and 58 percent said they would spend money if there was a “gastro pub” (a pub with high quality food and liquor) in town. Fewer, but still nearly half (48 percent) would spend more money at upscale restaurants. Other items they mentioned were a bakery, hardware store, and a natural foods grocer added to the mix of downtown retail. The survey results are a good start but should be continually updated.

The Economic Development Team could assume a greater role in promotion and marketing, particularly for events in the parks, such as farmers’ markets, arts and crafts festivals, and movie nights. The goal is to retain shoppers in the Village but also to bring in others from the outside. More attendees for these events could translate into more shoppers for Winnetka’s retailers.

Businesses and entrepreneurs can also use other forms of support. Often small businesses have their hands full and they might find it difficult to visit the Village Hall for every question. Sometimes, they might not even know which department or staff person to approach, or be aware of Village programs/grants available to them. A Village staff person, who is directly tasked with economic development responsibilities, can be a resource to such small businesses by being there in the commercial districts regularly and meet-

ing with them in-person. Such conversations can also help in identifying programs that will be most beneficial to the local business community. For example, the Economic Development Team might see a need and institute training for entrepreneurs, including mentoring and business incubators for those with new retail proposals. It could provide specialty technical assistance such as loan packaging, small business education, merchandising and marketing, staff training, and help with negotiating the vast number of regulations that frustrate small business owners—as well as streamlining those very processes.

## Conclusion

The panel’s recommendations for redevelopment of key sites in Indian Hill, East/West Elm, and Hubbard Woods include modest to significant options for rejuvenation and redevelopment. The more ambitious plans will require more investment and Village economic support (such as the acquisition of land, and construction of parking that might not be supportable by development). As one panelist noted, none of the other North Shore communities have accomplished admirable and desirable changes without significant public money. Greater density in building can offset some of these costs, but not all.

Beyond investment, the success of these recommendations will depend on leadership, vision, and an understanding that development rarely gets done by consensus. In a Village like Winnetka with a rich history and strong sense of place, change can be difficult. Yet the shopper survey and interviews with retailers and residents suggest that many are indeed clamoring for change. The leadership of Winnetka will have to weigh the voices of a segment of its residents against the need to stay vital. The Council is tasked with the responsibility to ensure that the Village remains a vibrant and enjoyable place to live. Change is always difficult, but it is also necessary. A vision grounded in concrete information and reality will ensure the Village can compete successfully in a rapidly changing retail landscape.

## Appendix: Winnetka Commercial Districts Panel 1

The first Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) for Winnetka's commercial districts was chaired by John Bucksbaum, CEO of Bucksbaum Retail Properties, LLC, and it brought together a diverse set of real estate and retail experts to recommend targets for Winnetka's commercial health, retail opportunities for each district, and specific recommendations for competitive regulation and partnerships between the Village, retailers, and owners. The panel conducted a series of interviews and listening sessions with local residents and retailers, representatives of four similar communities, and local Village officials over a two-day period, February 27-28, 2013. With this in-depth background, coupled with data from a recent shopper survey of Winnetka residents, the panel presented short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations to the Village. The results of the survey and interviews, and the first panel's recommendations are included here.

### Shopping Habits

Winnetka residents were encouraged to evaluate the shopping districts, describe their current shopping habits, and provide insights into future retail opportunities by participating in an internet survey. There were 487 responses representing a mix of life styles, ages and locations in the Village.

#### Survey Results include:

Relatively few respondents eat out in Winnetka. According to survey responses, West Elm is the biggest draw for diners, but only one in five respondents say they eat out there weekly. The survey followed up with a question about how the addition of restaurants would affect one's dining habits. The results show strong demand for restaurants, especially casual dining with the opportunity to have a beer or cocktail. Three-fourths of respondents said they would spend more on casual dining and 58% said they would spend money if there was a "gastro pub" (a pub with high quality food and liquor) in town. Fewer, but still nearly half (48%), would spend more money at upscale restaurants.

More people shop than dine out. About four in ten residents visit West Elm weekly, making it the most visited area. Interestingly, online is the second most popular site for shopping, with 34% reporting they shop at least once a week online. Only about one in four residents visit East Elm and Hubbard Woods weekly. Table 1 ranks the top places where residents dine out weekly.

**Table 1.** In an average month, how many times do you eat out in these commercial areas?

Answer Options	At Least Weekly
Hubbard Woods	21%
West Elm Street Shopping District	19%
East Elm Street Shopping District	15%
Willow Road	13%
The Glen	8%
Downtown Evanston	8%

Respondents wanted to see a bakery (78%), hardware store (75%), and a natural foods grocer (60%) added to the mix of downtown retail. Extending hours might draw shoppers. Survey results suggest that if retailers were open on Sunday, they would draw more shoppers. Staying open later, until 9 p.m., however, is unlikely to draw sufficient numbers. However, many did say they would prefer shops remain open until at least 7 p.m. One option would be to devote one night each week to late hours. The bicycle store owner in Hubbard Woods, for example, extended the shops hours later on Thursday evenings and earlier on the weekends to accommodate his "market." The late evening hours could be coordinated with other evening events during the year to promote shopping and greater foot traffic.

Overall satisfaction with shopping districts is "average" compared with a national benchmark on satisfaction with the local shopping experience, including traffic, parking, cleanliness, and pedestrian access. Table 2 combines those who answered "excellent and above average". The results show that with the exception of Indian Hill, nearly two-thirds of



respondents ranked safety, cleanliness, and pedestrian access excellent or above average, while they rated streetscape, bike access and buildings less highly.

**Table 2** Overall satisfaction with shopping districts

Answer Options	East Elm	West Elm	Hubbard Woods	Indian Hill
General safety	68%	67%	59%	31%
Cleanliness	66%	64%	58%	36%
Pedestrian access	64%	63%	53%	22%
Streetscape	50%	51%	46%	24%
Bicycle access	47%	46%	36%	23%
Buildings	44%	48%	46%	18%

## Merchant and Retailers' Views

From interviews with retailers, several key themes emerged as areas for improvement.

- A prime concern is the difficulty in starting a business, owing to the many Village regulations and seemingly subjective nature of decisions concerning those regulations. Whether it's signage requirements or sprinkler codes, the owners want a more transparent, business friendly and faster process.
- A second key concern was the deteriorating streetscape, particularly when many owners feel that taxes are high. As one retailer put it, "I resent paying \$12 a square foot in taxes while tripping on the sidewalk outside my front door." Many feel the districts look "tired."
- Density is also an issue. Many retailers understand that density is good for business, although residents are often resistant to greater density if it means building multi-use developments.
- Several retailers expressed concern that allowing national chains into the business districts would drive local owners out of business.

## Panel Recommendations

The panel directly interviewed and listened to the concerns expressed by over 80 stakeholders in the Village including residents, Village staff and the business community. The panel also interviewed community development directors from peer communities that have experienced recent success breathing new life into their suburban downtowns. The suggestions that follow are only a broad-brush sketch. One thing was clear from the many conversations with residents, Village officials, and business owners over the two days: People are ready to embrace change.

As TAP chair John Bucksbaum said, ["Change brings opportunity. And Winnetka has a wonderful opportunity ahead of it."](#)

The panel offered short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations. As the panel stressed, retail is constantly evolving, and Winnetka retail must respond, or risk being left behind. The pressure from Internet shopping and other changing habits requires nimble retailers who can provide an "experience"—more than just a transaction. In 2012 internet sales grew at a rate of 15% nationally, while traditional stores had a 4% increase. Amazon is opening huge distribution centers while Macy's and Kohl's are shipping internet orders direct from stores. This is not to say that internet sales will be the expectation, but that full integration of internet and stores is the direction retail is moving.

## Short-Term Goals

### Create Identities for the Three Retail Districts

The panel recommended focusing on creating a unique identity in each district as a way to encourage business clustering and distinct marketing and promotional opportunities. With a focus on cinema, arts and culture in one district, and “downtown” retail and restaurants in another, the districts can capitalize on their existing identities in unique ways. Each area might have a unique streetscape, for example, and a unique set of marketing and promotional materials.

**Indian Hill |** The panel recommended that Indian Hill retain its auto-centric, teen focus. The speed and volume of traffic and the layout of the retail are not easy to change. Rather, the sector could capitalize on the auto-centric focus, as well as its proximity to New Trier High School by encouraging more convenient food outlets, for teens and those picking up take-out. This area is not an ideal corridor for sit-down dining and restaurants. Those should be located in East/West Elm. The panel recommended not spending money on pavers and bump-outs given the auto-centric focus.

A key to ensuring a strong tax base is to secure a long-term commitment from the Land Rover dealership on Green Bay Road. The panel was concerned that, without more space to display their autos, Land Rover will begin to look elsewhere for a space – such moves are often driven by the brand, not the dealership. One suggestion to mitigate loss of the dealership is to look at possible land assemblage opportunities to provide a newer, larger auto dealership completely contained on the west side of Green Bay Road. If East/West Elm is to become the downtown of Winnetka the Village might think about moving Michael’s, a local fine dining restaurant, to West Elm thereby providing another parcel to add to the assemblage.

The panel also recommended the Village open regular communications with its southern neighbor Kenilworth. Kenilworth completed a Green Bay Road Transportation and Streetscape Plan and is currently working through preliminary concepts for the entire commercial corridor. Their Plan will set the stage for a redevelopment of the central business district, including building more multi-family, mixed-use, transit-oriented developments with an increase in height restrictions to 3.5 stories, up from 2.5 stories previously. It is important that both Villages work together to coordinate their planning efforts along this stretch of Green Bay Road.

**East/West Elm |** The panel suggested that the East and West Elm districts are a singular district and should be treated equally. They consider this district “downtown Winnetka.” It is where the majority of residents shop and dine. Therefore, shopping and dining should continue to be the main focus. The panel recommended making this sector more vibrant, with a mix of retail and casual restaurants and bars (see below for more on liquor licenses).

As suggested above, if the East/West Elm district becomes Winnetka’s “downtown” then the panel suggested the Village re-visit the discussion around re-developing the Post Office Site and incorporating the surrounding area as an all season gathering space. In the summer, the area could feature outdoor dining and cultural events, and in winter, the area could be a space for ice skating, ice sculpture, and other winter events. This would create foot traffic for local retail and create a “destination” for families. Using public spaces as gathering spots for community members is a key step in “place-making” — creating a sense of home, place, or belonging among residents. It is a central step in creating “community.” Ultimately, that sense of shared purpose engenders customer loyalty for local business.

**Hubbard Woods |** The panel recommended that this district be branded as the arts, cinema, and design district. In addition to a retail focus on design and related shops, the district could become known for its art and musical festivals in Hubbard Woods Park as well as outdoor movies in the summer. Currently the outdoor movie festival is at the lakefront, which does not benefit local retailers. Moving it to Hubbard Woods Park could bring families and shoppers to the area, even if businesses are not open that particular evening. Window-shopping can remind moviegoers that a business exists and they will return later. This district should also be considered a multi-community destination, drawing residents from Glencoe and other communities. Therefore, the Village should make a more concerted effort to reach out to Glencoe merchants and residents and create a boundary-less flow of retail options up and down the corridor.

### Encourage “Experience Retail”

Beyond restaurants, the Village should encourage more “experience retail.” A wine shop might offer a wine-making class on the premises, for example, combining both an experience and retail sales. Currently, zoning regulations do not facilitate these mixed uses. But one fact is certain: competition from the Internet is a new reality for everyone, and one that is not going away. If retailers fail to adapt, business will go elsewhere, especially in a metro area as competitive as Chicagoland. What today’s customer is seeking requires retailers to broaden their view of retail.

Along with these new models of retail, the Village should work to create a sense of place. As noted, place-making—creating a common vision for a place that capitalizes on a community’s assets and potential—is an important element of any successful redevelopment effort. Experience retail plus ancillary events and campaigns can create a sense of identity and excitement about the offerings in their community. Special events in public spaces, from arts festivals to farmers’ markets, for example can build community and a sense of place, as can campaigns to “shop local.”

Beyond creating distinct identities and promoting place-making through vibrant public spaces, the TAP next addressed several barriers to business promotion in the Village.

### Loosen the Regulatory Environment and Adopt a Pro-Business Stance

A first step is to create a pro-business environment in Winnetka. The reputation, the panel noted, is that Winnetka is a difficult place to do business. This was a view expressed by existing businesses new and old. That must change. There are simply too many options on the North Shore for businesses to locate. A clear, concise set of rules and regulations, an approachable “we value you” attitude are critical to attracting and retaining retail. The Village must work as a partner, collaborating and supporting retail and business owners.

A further imperative for change comes from communities similar to (and in some cases nearby) Winnetka. The panel heard from representatives of Glen Ellyn, Lake Bluff, Barrington, and Hinsdale, each of which had, at one time, been in the same situation as Winnetka: heavy on bureaucratic regulation, empty storefronts, and difficulty finding and retaining tenants. Each of the communities revolutionized their approach, and the common element among them was that they had each hung up an “open for business” sign.

Lake Bluff exemplifies this approach. Once a sleepy central business district surrounded, like Winnetka, tightly by residential, it has experienced a downtown renaissance. But it took a mind-shift to make it more vibrant. A first step was to loosen the regulatory environment considerably. The community allowed height variances and a variety of land-uses not previously allowed or even contemplated. They updated the zoning code to allow more “experience retail.” Where a yoga studio was once a special use (like it is in Winnetka) but an insurance office was not, the zoning is now more unified and less arbitrary.

And in the backyard of the Christian Temperance Union, they loosened the liquor code such that customers no longer must buy a meal to have a beer or a glass of wine. They also eliminated the requirement for a fence around outdoor dining establishments that served liquor, which created a more inviting streetscape. As a direct result of these and other changes, today the downtown is a “magnet for activity.” It boasts a micro-brewery public house popular with families, more sophisticated restaurants, cafes, salons, and interior designers, among others. The community hosts a block party every Friday in the summer, closing down the main street, a hit with families and commuters alike. As one panelist said, referring to the only “non-dry” nearby suburb that became a magnet for taverns, “Don’t worry. You won’t become Highwood—because you’re Winnetka.”

The other communities that the TAP interviewed told similar stories. Barrington, for example, has shifted from one of the most difficult communities in which to develop a business to one of the easiest. A 42,000 square foot grocery store was recently issued a permit in a mere two weeks. A representative from Barrington said, “You have to work with busi-



nesses today. Time is money. They can't make decisions if you take too long and there's an opportunity elsewhere. You have to be competitive."

Barrington also encouraged new restaurants and public houses as a way to draw and keep young families. "Young urban professional families moving here from the city want an urban environment. They want to walk to a brewery or restaurant with their kids. Target them. They'll breathe fresh air into things."

### Revisit Liquor Licensing

Indeed, a key recommendation for Winnetka is changing the liquor licensing requirements. As the shopper survey found, 75 percent of respondents wanted more family-friendly dining and pubs. And 96 percent of the survey respondents were over age 35. Like in Lake Bluff or Barrington, residents want a wider choice in restaurants, they want to walk to a brew-pub or public house on a Saturday afternoon to watch a game and have lunch. They want to stop in for a burger and a beer on a Friday night. This kind of foot traffic is good for retail as well.

Once the liquor license regulations are changed, it is imperative to let the world know it has been changed. As the TAP panel recommended, Winnetka must get the word out to prospective businesses and residents that Winnetka has changed and that it's open for business. National restaurant chains, like Lettuce Entertain You, as well as local restaurants, should be the first calls.

### Create Strong Business Leadership and a Streamlined Process

Today's competitive retail environment requires a concerted, coordinated effort among local retailers and the Village. More open lines of communication are vital. This requires effort by both retailers and Village leaders.

The business community must become more proactive and cooperative. Typically an EDC or Chamber of Commerce would take the lead with the Village to preserve local businesses and expand retail opportunities. The Village and the Chamber need to have a stronger working relationship that not only supports current businesses but might even include such things as mentoring and training for young entrepreneurs.

Likewise, the Village must become more efficient and systematic. Currently, a prospective tenant must meet with a chain of individuals from an appearance review to fire code and water code to signage, among others. There are too many points along the chain where communication can break down, creating a bottleneck. New entrepreneurs do not always know the fine-points of village codes and requirements. They don't know what they don't know, in other words, and they often stumble along the way—if they even get started at all.

The Village should establish a single point person whose goal is to support new business and streamline the process of getting up and running. This person would be responsible for shepherding the business owner through the regulatory process, as well as, meeting with all the various Village officials to obtain the necessary approvals for a business to open. In addition, to better organize and speed the process, the TAP panel recommended the Village adopt management software, and the Village is in the process of making this conversion.

The Village should also develop a clear checklist or roadmap (by business category) of the required steps before opening. The prospective tenant could take the checklist to the space with the landlord and the Village ambassador. Currently, the Village does not require an initial conversation such as this, which can lead to confusion later down the line particularly concerning the scope and cost of upgrading older buildings to meet Village code requirements. A formalized checklist familiarizes the tenant with the needed steps so he or she can be better prepared and have a faster and smoother launch and have the information earlier in the process to discuss/negotiate those issues with landlords. This checklist or additional detail could be posted online as well to make the process more transparent and efficient. The key is inserting consistency and predictability into the process. Currently, when faced with the prospect of multiple architectural renderings of their space, one for each department involved, a new owner might simply say, no thanks.

There are other opportunities where Villages make it much easier for prospective businesses to locate within their boundaries.

This new business leadership role should be a full-time position, and should work jointly with the Chamber of Commerce in actively soliciting new business and economic development. The position should be less reactive and more proactive. As the panel noted, Winnetka offers ample opportunities, but it requires selling people on the idea of Winnetka and advertising the changed approach. Identifying pluggable “leaks” of consumer spending in the districts could provide new business opportunities. Understanding the current market, maintaining accurate records on vacancies, and “actively selling” new business opportunities in the districts is imperative.

The Village could also create incentives for successful businesses to open a second store in Winnetka, or move their shop to Winnetka. One incentive, for example, might offer grants to assist in bringing the building up to code or improving the façade for tenants signing longer leases – 3 or more years. Focusing incentives on capital improvements mean the investment remains in the community in the form of an improved building.

### Revisit the Regulatory Code

Zoning and development codes that are not clear and provide for subjective decision-making by a community have a chilling effect on attracting new businesses. The panel recommended simplifying the Village’s codes to encourage broader retail development.

A first step is revising or eliminating the Overlay District. Although it served a purpose in the past, the nature of successful retail today is a blend of shops and services. Other municipalities have done this to great success. Doing so will expand the variety of stores and the market will ultimately determine the proper mix. As a result, infill will improve. Winnetka is ideally suited to draw a mix of service and retail given its high median income. Services such as yoga studios, financial planners or medical offices, will bring traffic to the downtown area and enable the more conventional retailers to continue to thrive and attract new businesses.

The panel also recommended changing the quick service food requirements. The current workarounds, such as requiring Panera Bread to use silverware instead of plastic utensils, are cumbersome. This market is ripe for expansion, particularly in Hubbard Woods and East/West Elm where more casual restaurants such as Pot-Belly or Roti are solid draws for daytime lunch crowds.

In addition to the Overlay, the zoning code should be revisited in certain areas to increase density, particularly in the Fell and Post Office sites. Both are near Metra stations and are good locales for transit-oriented development. Higher density means more people, which is better for thriving retail. Density, however, also requires height, and the current height restrictions should be revisited and expanded. The panel recommended the same height as the condo building to the North of the Fell property as a height restriction to attract developers to this site. As noted above, Kenilworth is embracing greater density and multi-use buildings on Green Bay Road. That effort will be direct competition to Winnetka retailers.

Density and multi-use developments serve another fast-growing population—empty nesters. Adding mixed use near transit also draws older residents. Demographic changes bearing down on the United States will create demand for alternative housing so older residents can remain in their communities. (The number of people over age 65 is set to double by 2030 in the United States.) Many of these seniors no longer wish to live in a big house, yet they do not want to leave Winnetka. Many are also snowbirds. They may live here only part of the year. They want a well-maintained, smaller condo near retail and the train. They are living longer and are more vital/active in their retirement years.

### Repurpose Some Parking

The majority of survey respondents said that parking was adequate. However, the panel recommended several im-

provements nonetheless. Some parking lots are currently not efficiently used and the panel recommended reclassifying certain Metra parking and reclassifying space for employee parking to improve overall retail parking. Currently, there is more than sufficient Metra parking, sometimes at the expense of the retail customer. One example of reconfiguring Metra parking to prioritize retail is in the Hubbard Woods parking deck. Research shows that most shoppers prefer not to park underground, particularly if the parking is dimly lit, like it is in the Hubbard Woods lower deck.

A preferable option would be to designate the second level for Metra commuters, and allow shoppers to park on the first level. Currently shoppers have to drive all the way up to Scott to access the parking deck. Shoppers should be able to drive around Hubbard Woods Park while looking for surface spaces and then be able to park on the first floor in the parking deck. New paint and additional lights will make the parking deck more inviting and feel more safe.

In other areas, parking codes that require parking spaces for ground-floor tenants might have been realistic at one time, but they are outdated today. In a neighboring community, parking for a multi-use development is limited to one onsite parking space for businesses with a second-floor office space only. Residential is allowed 1.5 spaces per unit. Individuals who opt to live near commuter stations do so because they don't want to drive. Therefore, the requirements, for example, for two parking spaces for second-floor tenants is probably too high. Likewise, office tenants are likely leasing near a commuter line because their employees prefer to commute by train. The panel also recommended eliminating the special use for below-grade parking.

On-street parking can also be improved. A key recommendation by the panel is to increase the parking meter time from 90 minutes to two hours, with several short-term (10-minute) parking spaces outside coffee shops and other "pick up" places to keep turnover frequent. The 90-minute limit is too short for those who want to go out to lunch, get their hair done and then browse the stores.

The above recommendations are more immediate and "low hanging fruit" improvements. The panel also recommended more mid- and long-term improvements, which follow.

## **Mid-Term Goals**

### **Improve the Streetscape**

Many of those interviewed expressed concern about the appearance of the streetscape, noting broken pavers and the need for an updated, fresher look and feel. Therefore, a mid-range goal is to focus on streetscape improvements. Safety and lighting should be a priority. The permanent lighting should be updated. To allay the costs, one option the panel recommended is to seek sponsorship for some of the improvements. Banks are willing to sponsor some of the upgrades, such as benches or planters.

Incentives for façade or property improvements are also worth considering. Options include sales tax rebates for businesses that make specified improvements. Glen Ellyn, for example, offered a 50% matching grant for permanent improvement to buildings, including façade upgrades such as awnings and windows. The grant is funded from general funds via sales tax proceeds. This is not an uncommon situation in communities. Some communities have been successful educating those landlords about the benefits of exchanging their property for properties better suited to their current priorities through "1031 Exchanges."

### **Address Larger Zoning Issues**

The panel also recommended revisiting zoning classifications for the entire area, with special attention to height and permitted land-uses. Rather than designing zoning restrictions based on use, the panel also recommended thinking of zoning in the context of sales tax demand, property tax, complementary uses, and form-based design. All of these kinds of decisions can help the retail districts adapt to the changing realities.



## Long-Term Goals

As noted above, the recommendations are to create distinct identities in each retail district. In line with this concept, the panel recommended using streetscape elements as distinguishing features. Here again, local businesses such as national banks or larger firms may help to offset the cost through naming rights. As the panel noted, while many are opposed to increased real estate taxes, they are not opposed to sponsoring park amenities or streetscape projects.

A second long-term project is the redevelopment of the Post Office. Options include shorter-term uses or a long-term land lease, or adaptive reuse. These options create a stronger tax base for the Village. Although the Village owns the parcel, the panel strongly believes that a private developer may be a better option for a complete redevelopment and the sale of the site. Selling to a private developer removes the burden from the Village for the success of the site. A landlord could exchange their vacant property for a newer, income-producing property that requires less capital investment but yields higher income returns.

Finally, the Fell site is a key site to build density in Winnetka. As noted above, density is key to viable retail. Other possible development sites include several vacant lots, the former Gap store in Hubbard Woods, and the Harris Bank building (corner building) in Hubbard Woods.

## Marketing

In the end, the Village can make all of these changes, yet if no one knows about the changes, the effort is sure to be unsuccessful. Keeping the channels of communication open about the status of changes, the reasons for them, and the overall retail plan will ensure buy-in from merchants and residents. Expanding the message to the broader business community will let prospective entrepreneurs know that Winnetka is open for business. The local Chamber of Commerce must play an integral role, along with the Village, in marketing the businesses of Winnetka.

In addition to spreading the word about the “pro-business” atmosphere, the Village should create ample opportunities to draw residents down to the shopping districts. Special events, from arts festivals to farmers’ markets, can build community and a sense of place, as do campaigns to “shop local.” Businesses could work with the Chamber of Commerce to create these campaigns.

Business leaders frequently complained about the cost of doing business in Winnetka. It might therefore help to be more transparent in how taxes are invested. Communicating the proportion of the tax pie that is sales tax and business real estate tax can help inform local businesses about how their tax dollars are being spent. With greater transparency, owners are likely to feel validated that their taxes are returning to them in the form of sidewalk or lighting improvements or building upgrades.

Finally, it is critical to engage with neighborhood communities that border the north and south of the Village (i.e. Glencoe and Kenilworth). Here again, the local Chamber of Commerce could be responsible for this outreach. The above-noted planning ongoing in Kenilworth is a prime example where early discussions and sharing could benefit both communities. Identifying synergy between the communities’ goals is always a win-win.

## Conclusion

Winnetka has “good bones” and great potential. It has an affluent residential base, three Metra stations, deeply rooted families and shopkeepers, and a willingness to change. While some may believe the unofficial motto of Winnetka is “progress without change,” that is not the sentiment the TAP participants heard in their two days of conversations with residents, business owners, and local government leaders and staff. Winnetka is ready for change, and not a moment too soon. With a “pro-business” attitude, streamlined and consolidated regulations, progressive zoning, and a creative and involved business community, Winnetka can easily create a vibrant retail dining scene and be “the” community that everyone wants to live in again.

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