



Revitalization Strategies for East Grand Avenue

Gurnee, IL

July 12-13, 2016

Urban Land Institute Chicago

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Technical Assistance Panel Program

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 multidisciplinary 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

The Village of Gurnee is perhaps best known for its large regional attractions: The Six Flags Great America amusement park, Gurnee Mills, and the more recent, KeyLime Cove Indoor Waterpark Resort. Located along Grand Avenue, right off the exit from Interstate Highway 94, these attractions together draw millions of visitors every year to the west side of the Village.

Not surprisingly, over the past few decades, Gurnee's west side has become the location of choice for retailers keen on capitalizing on the large number of visitors to the area. Near the I-94 interchange, Grand Avenue is lined with shopping centers anchored by big box retailers and offering many national and regional chain options for shopping and dining. Tax revenue from these large, successful developments help fund quality schools, parks, and municipal services, making Gurnee an attractive residential location as well. Many new single-family homes have been built on the west side of the Village.

At the other end of the Village, close to the Waukegan municipal line, however, Grand Avenue is part of a different, older Gurnee (Figure 1). East of Route

41, the homes in the neighborhoods north and south of East Grand Avenue are more modest, most built in the 1960s through '80s, and the commercial buildings are primarily from the same era. Unlike the big-box and other national/regional tenants on the west side, the stores and restaurants along East Grand are mostly small, local businesses located in aging strip centers with declining property values, and account for only 3 percent of the Village's total sales tax income. Uncoordinated signage, overgrown grass, and broken sidewalks are common and the overpasses for Route 41 and the railroad create a visual and psychological barrier, separating the East Grand neighborhood from the neighborhoods and amenities of central and west Gurnee.

The Village of Gurnee is well-aware of these issues and has been and remains very interested in breathing new life into East Grand Avenue. Designated as the "East Grand Gateway" since 2001, the Village hopes to establish this corridor as an attractive and thriving gateway into Gurnee from the east side, and make it an asset for the neighborhood and the Village as a whole.

Figure 1: Location of the East Grand Avenue Study Corridor.

Graphic Credit: Village of Gurnee



The Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Process

The Village of Gurnee requested technical assistance from the Urban Land Institute Chicago District Council (ULI Chicago) to revitalize East Grand Avenue between U.S. Route 41/Skokie Boulevard and Green Bay Road.

ULI Chicago convened a ten-member volunteer panel for a 2-day TAP on July 12-13, 2016 at Spaulding School in east Gurnee to address the questions posed by the Village. The panel, chaired by Janet Protas, long-time ULI member and experienced real estate development and operations professional, included experts from a range of fields including real estate development, market analysis, urban planning, architecture, transportation engineering, and financing.

The panelists reviewed detailed background briefing material to prepare for the TAP. During the TAP, they toured the study corridor and the Village, heard from Village leadership, and interviewed more than forty area stakeholders, including residents, property owners and business owners/managers. The City of Waukegan also participated in the TAP and shared information regarding its plans and priorities for the Grand Avenue corridor. Utilizing this information, the panelists worked together to develop realistic and implementable recommendations that employ near-term and long-term strategies to revitalize East Grand Avenue.

Questions for the TAP

1. What are the opportunities to create an unique identity for East Grand Avenue and to enhance its potential for becoming a local/neighborhood destination? How can the corridor build on the strengths of its current businesses? What is the likely trade area for East Grand Avenue?
2. What is the most appropriate mix of uses for the corridor? What are the best retail sites and best retail uses for these sites?
3. What is the highest and best use for the two adjacent sites (3545-3575 and 3521-3535 Grand Avenue) potentially on the market for sale? What is the potential for a grocery store on these sites?
4. What role can the Village play in building a healthy East Grand Avenue corridor that maximizes benefits for businesses and residents? Is there a need for financial incentives to catalyze redevelopment, and if yes, what are possible funding sources?
5. What are the opportunities for collaborating with the City of Waukegan, located immediately to the east?

East Grand Gateway: Defining the Study Corridor

In the Village of Gurnee, East Grand Gateway is a half-mile section of East Grand Avenue (Illinois Route 132) between U. S. Route 41 and the eastern border with the City of Waukegan. Practically and visually, the municipal border is indiscernible – the commercial corridor continues east unabated through a major intersection at Green Bay Road (Illinois Route 131) and deeper into Waukegan.

To create a successful, viable plan for the corridor, it is important to consider its functional boundaries rather than those defined by municipal jurisdictions. Therefore, the TAP recommendations go beyond Gurnee’s municipal boundaries and relate to the entire stretch of East Grand Avenue between Route 41 and Green Bay Road.

East Grand Avenue Study Corridor: view looking west and aerial map.



Existing Conditions

The East Grand Gateway corridor has many assets that can support a healthier level of economic activity and a transformation into a more attractive corridor that better serves area residents, visitors and businesses. At the same time, the corridor is limited by a number of challenges that must be understood and addressed before change can take root.

Land Use and Development

While the corridor has two senior residential developments, the predominant land-use is commercial. A broad mix of retail and service uses, from a car wash to a paint store to temporary personnel services, are located in small strip centers and free-standing buildings scattered throughout the corridor. Larger chain retailers, including Starbucks and a Jewel Osco grocery store, are located at the

east end of the corridor near the Green Bay Road intersection in Waukegan.

Retail rents in the corridor, especially in the Gurnee portion, are low – at an average of \$10/square foot, they are significantly lower than those in the western end of Gurnee. While low costs have brought in tenants and there are barely any empty storefronts, the current mix of uses on East Grand Avenue, as a local stakeholder put it, is “random retail.” There is little synergy between uses, and even though many of the businesses are locally owned and operated, their offerings do not cater to the area’s ethnically and age diverse population. Additionally, property values along the corridor have been declining – on an average, assessed valuation went down nearly 15 percent from 2009 - 2013.

Older commercial strips with independent businesses are pre-dominant along East Grand Avenue (bottom left); newer developments include a commercial strip with national tenants (top left) and senior housing developments (right).



Roadway and Accessibility

East Grand Avenue is a high speed five lane roadway with four through lanes and a central continuous left turn lane throughout the study area. The only signalized intersection between Route 41 and Green Bay Road is at Belle Plaine Avenue. More than 26,000 vehicles travel through East Grand Avenue daily making it an attractive location for many retailers. However, the roadway's high speed, high volume traffic and excessive curb-cuts in and out of the numerous shopping strips, create an uninviting and unsafe environment for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Traffic congestion is often cited as a problem in the area and it has been exacerbated by the spate of recent construction projects, both by the State to improve the area under the overpasses, and by the Village to improve the local street network. While expected to improve traffic flow once they are complete, the roadway construction projects have had a significant impact on corridor businesses – one uses its website to recommend alternative routes to avoid

Frequent, wide curb-cuts (left) and narrow sidewalks that often abut traffic lanes (right) create a challenging environment for pedestrians and bicyclists along East Grand Avenue.

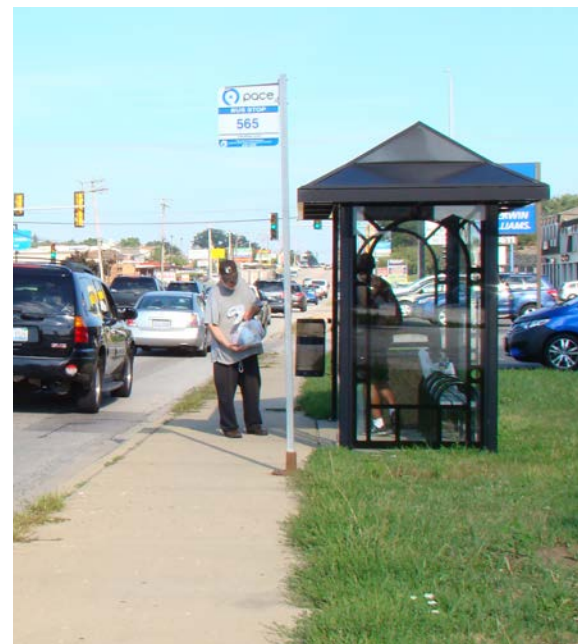


East Grand Avenue, and another estimated that sales have dropped more than a third due to snarled traffic in the last few years.

East Grand Avenue is serviced by Pace Bus Route 565 that runs from the Metra train station in Waukegan to the College of Lake County, west of Gurnee, with several stops along the way including Six Flags Great America and Gurnee Mills mall. Currently there is only one bus shelter and few amenities within the study area for Pace users.

Streetscape

The East Grand Avenue streetscape is not inviting or comfortable for most users. Visually the corridor is cluttered with signs of different styles and heights, overhead wires, and varying building setbacks. The narrow sidewalks are uncomfortably close to traffic lanes and frequently interrupted by wide driveways. Landscaping is sparse and inconsistent, providing little opportunity for refuge for pedestrians.



The Neighborhood Context

There are more than 10,000 housing units within a five-minute drive from the East Grand Avenue and Belle Plaine intersection located in the middle of the study corridor. Slightly more than half of the people within this five-minute drive shed that includes a portion of Waukegan, are of Hispanic origin and tend to be working class families. Median annual household income is just over \$50,000, and the median home value for owner-occupied units is \$180,000. In comparison, only 12.1% of the Village-wide population is of Hispanic origin, and the median home value is \$255,000.

The immediate neighborhood in Gurnee that lies to the north and south of East Grand Avenue is almost entirely residential streets with older, modest homes. Only some of the streets have sidewalks, and several dead-end or otherwise don't connect to the street grid making it challenging to access shops and services that are just a couple of blocks away. For some residents, reaching Grand Avenue requires driving several blocks out of the way or walking on informal paths through grassy areas.

Village-wide Demographic Snapshot

Total Population (2014):	31,182
Population Change (2000-2010):	8.5%
Median Age:	39 years
Race and Ethnicity	
White	77.7%
Asian	12.3%
African American	10.5%
Latino origin	12.1%
Average Household Size:	2.71
Median Household Income:	\$85,141

Source: 2014 American Community Survey five-year estimates, 2000 and 2010 Census



Modest, but well maintained single-family homes characterize the residential neighborhoods surrounding East Grand Avenue.

Community Input

Engaging neighborhood residents, businesses and property owners, civic and institutional leaders as well as local elected officials, to understand challenges and opportunities within the study area, is a critical component of the ULI Chicago TAP process. This section includes a summary of the feedback that the panelists received during interviews with approximately forty community stakeholders.

Forgotten East Side

During the TAP process, East Grand residents and business owners told the panel that they did not feel connected to larger Gurnee, both physically and socially. In fact, many people assume that the East Grand neighborhood is part of Waukegan. Most services and facilities for residents including programs for seniors and teens, park district programs, as well as the library are located west of Route 41 requiring East Gurnee residents to negotiate high traffic, frequently congested roadways to reach them. Additionally, even though there haven't been any recent incidents, many participants said there is a perception that the corridor is unsafe that can keep people away, further isolating the East Grand neighborhood from the rest of the Village.

Small businesses in the area feel disconnected from the Village of Gurnee as well – unaware of schedules for road work, for example, and overwhelmed by requirements for approvals and permits that can be excessively cumbersome for small businesses with limited resources and skills, they do not feel supported or valued by the Village.

Community's Desires

Many community members expressed a strong desire for a gathering place for local residents within Gurnee with local shopping and dining options. Village officials reinforced that they frequently hear from residents that the west side destinations are packed with tourists, and there is no place where neighbors can gather and enjoy an “authentic Gurnee experience”. Most of the businesses on East Grand Avenue are currently independent, locally owned and interviewees wanted to keep it that way.

Local businesses shared the challenges of operating an independent business in today's economy dominated by large chain operations and online shopping. They also expressed their hope of receiving additional support from the Village during permitting and initial build-out as well as joint marketing efforts to boost the customer base for the corridor.

Many interviewees mentioned lack of quality multi-family housing as a barrier for younger individuals and families interested in living in Gurnee. Additionally, while residents value the high quality programming offered by the local park district, Warren township and others, they would like to see increased programming within neighborhoods such as regular book mobiles and, events for teens and seniors in local parks.

Past Plans

Over the last two decades, the Village of Gurnee has completed several planning studies and employed a variety of strategies to transform East Grand Avenue into a visually appealing, thriving commercial corridor.

Starting in 1997, when the Village prepared its comprehensive land-use plan, East Grand Avenue was designated as a special development area because of its strategic location at the entrance to the Village from the east, and the potential to serve as an economic driver for the area. In 2001, the Village created a zoning overlay for the East Grand Gateway corridor to include site and building design standards to improve the corridor's aesthetics. The Village also commissioned a revitalization study for East Grand Avenue in 2004 that provided overall

and site specific recommendations for streetscape enhancements.

Additionally, in a housing study completed in 2008 by the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (MMC) and Chicago Metropolis 2020, as a part of the "Homes for a Changing Region" program, East Grand Avenue was identified as an opportunity area for building new multi-family housing in a mixed-use environment.

These plans offer many recommendations for revitalizing East Grand Avenue, but despite many efforts, the corridor has not made the kind of transformation that has been envisioned. What will it take to revitalize Gurnee's East Grand Gateway?

Gurnee Mayor Kovarik addresses community stakeholders attending the roundtable discussion to share their views directly with ULI Chicago panelists.



Panel Recommendations

The ULI Chicago panel proposes a series of recommendations that build upon each other to incrementally transform East Grand Avenue into a cohesive, mixed-use corridor that supports local businesses, serves area residents, and provides an attractive gateway into Gurnee.

Guiding Principles

Recognizing that the west side of Gurnee is the preferred location for large retailers that draw customers from the surrounding region, the panel proposes a different development model for East Grand Avenue that is focused on the local neighborhood and based on the following four guiding principles:

1. Focus on a sense of community, with a preference for independent businesses

Away from the hustle and bustle of millions of out-of-town visitors, East Grand Avenue has the opportunity to create a gathering place with local shopping, dining and entertainment options for residents and visitors who value independent, unique businesses. Local businesses however, will require more support and nurturing from the Village than chain businesses.

2. Tie into the neighborhood

Local residents are the best bet for foot traffic on the street and for customers for new local businesses, especially as they're becoming established. Many of the panel recommendations focus on physically connecting the surrounding residential neighborhood to the East Grand Avenue commercial corridor, as well as attracting businesses that cater to the needs of area residents.

3. Consider mixed-use and multi-family residential uses

By providing housing alternatives to single family homes, the Village can accommodate a younger age-group of residents that favor hassle-free, amenity-rich apartment living while increasing the population base for potential new commercial developments along the corridor.

4. Adopt a multi-faceted perspective and employ both short term and long term strategies

While pro-actively recruiting desirable new businesses to fill any vacancies that arise along the corridor is an important strategy, the Village should work on more near-term, easier to implement strategies at the same time. These could include instituting a coordinated signage program and/or activating a parking lot by hosting a vintage fair or an ethnic festival.

Overall Recommendations

Build a maker's corridor

Even amidst the “random retail” that characterizes East Grand Avenue, there are underlying retail themes that can be embraced and strengthened to create a unique identity for the corridor. The panel recommends reimagining East Grand Avenue as a “DIY/Maker Corridor,” to provide a common unifying theme for many of the existing businesses and to attract new businesses and customers to the corridor.

The Gurnee Garden Center on the west end and Habitat for Humanity's ReStore at the Belle Plaine intersection are popular stores along the corridor for home improvement enthusiasts. Along with the smaller paint, home goods, and tools stores, the corridor provides a strong cluster of home-improvement businesses.

Additionally, as environmentally conscious millennials increasingly embrace the culture of reuse, and seek out “one-of-a-kind” finds for everything from furniture and home decor to clothes, the market for vintage goods is on the rise. The Randolph Street Market and the Vintage Garage in Chicago are highly popular and successful temporary markets, and serve as wonderful models for Gurnee to activate empty parking lots along East Grand. A seasonal vintage goods fair, where DIY-ers can score unique finds, complete with food trucks and local bands, could offer a completely different twist on the corridor's existing thrift shopping options, while embracing the concept of responsible reuse.



East Grand Avenue has several popular home-improvement stores including Harbor Freight (top left) the Gurnee Garden Center (bottom left) and Habitat for Humanity ReStore (bottom right).



Overall Recommendations

(continued)

Transportation Improvements

A strong interconnected street network is a critical component of a successful, multi-modal commercial corridor, and often one of the first places where smart public investment can yield substantial dividends for the neighborhood and the community as a whole (Figure 2).

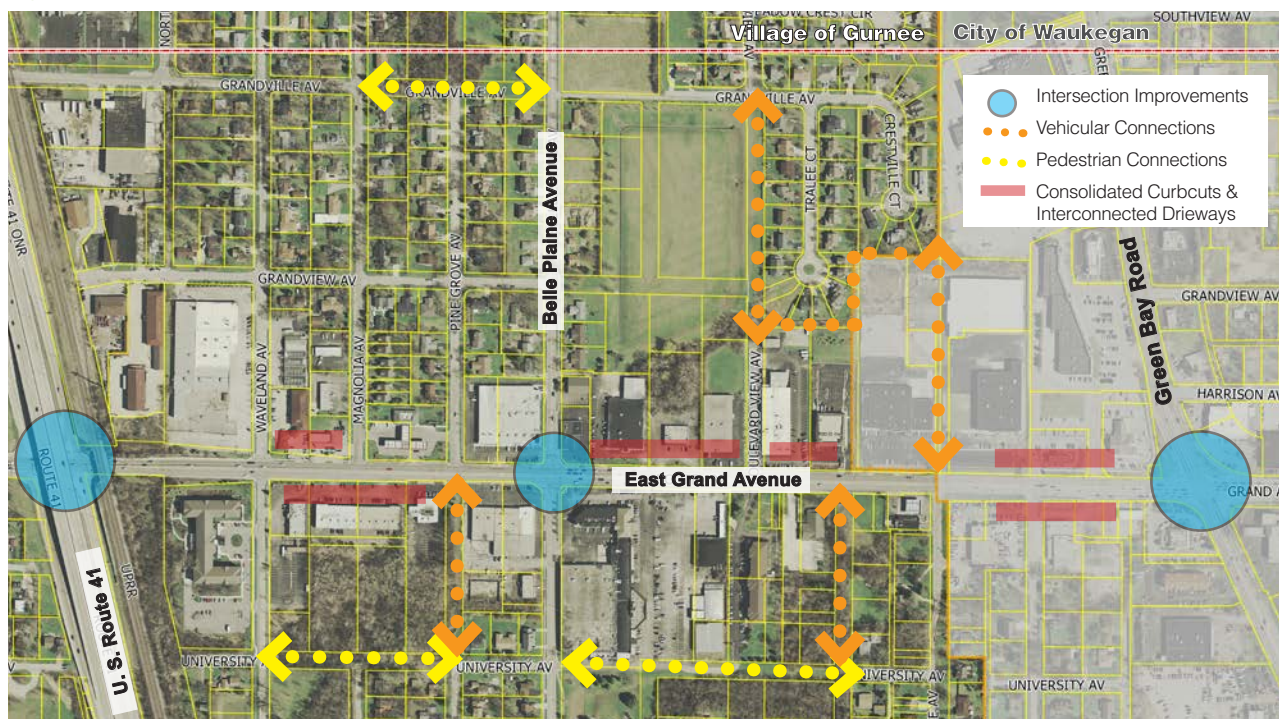
Because Grand Avenue is a state highway under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), it is important for the Village to work closely with IDOT to realize its long-term vision for the roadway. According to IDOT's FY 2017-2022 Proposed Highway Improvement Program published in Spring 2016, the agency is planning improvements to resurface Grand Avenue in the study area and improve ADA accessibility between 2018-2022. This is an excellent opportunity for the

Village to work with IDOT to incorporate all elements of “complete streets” along Grand Avenue, thereby making the corridor safer and more accessible for bikes and pedestrians.

Widening existing sidewalks and providing landscaping buffers from the traffic lanes will require cooperation from property owners along the corridor, especially if the existing public right-of-way is not wide enough to accommodate these safety improvements. That could be a time-consuming process, and therefore the panel recommends the Village get started early. The Village should undertake a detailed access management and parking study to identify opportunities for eliminating unnecessary parking spaces to make room for pedestrian amenities.

Additionally, the study should identify opportunities for consolidating driveways and providing inter-connections between adjacent commercial centers to

Figure 2: Recommended transportation improvements.



facilitate shared parking and improve overall traffic flow. Results of the access and parking study will serve as an important tool in negotiating and coordinating any improvements with property owners as well as IDOT.

The Village should identify opportunities to complete the street grid connecting the adjacent neighborhoods to Grand Avenue and provide direct, safe pedestrian connections to and between uses.

Streetscape Improvements

In addition to building wider, continuous sidewalks and landscape buffers as a part of the Complete Streets program, the Village should work with local stakeholders to create a unified image for the corridor that reflects its re-branding as a “DIY/ Maker Corridor.” Installing banners and signage designed with the corridor’s new logo and tagline can have an immediate positive impact on the corridor’s appearance.

Stamped crosswalks signaling vehicles to slowdown for pedestrians, pedestrian scale lighting, street

trees to provide shade, and designated bus stops with waiting shelters are functional streetscape elements that can enhance the corridor’s appearance and vastly improve accessibility for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Complete Streets are streets for everyone

Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, bicycle to work, and access public transportation.

In 2007, Illinois passed a Complete Streets legislation known as Public Act 95-0665 requiring consideration of pedestrian and bikeways in the construction/reconstruction of State transportation facilities within a mile of urban areas.

Pedestrian and bike facilities along Lawrence Avenue, a busy arterial roadway in Chicago, make it accessible for all users.



Development Opportunities

Opportunities for attracting new development along the corridor are extremely limited in the near term because current market rents are not high enough to cover the cost of new construction and provide the return on investment typically required by private developers. However, by investing in strategic transportation and streetscape improvements, and by activating underutilized sections of the corridor with “pop-up” concepts, the Village can rejuvenate interest in the corridor and start strengthening the long term development potential of East Grand Avenue. Specific suggestions for development opportunities along the corridor (Figure 3) are as follows:

Site 1 (3801-3815 Grandview): The panel recommends redevelopment of the vacant motel sites. These sites can be developed independently, or combined with the nearby former Handy Andy site to create a larger redevelopment parcel.

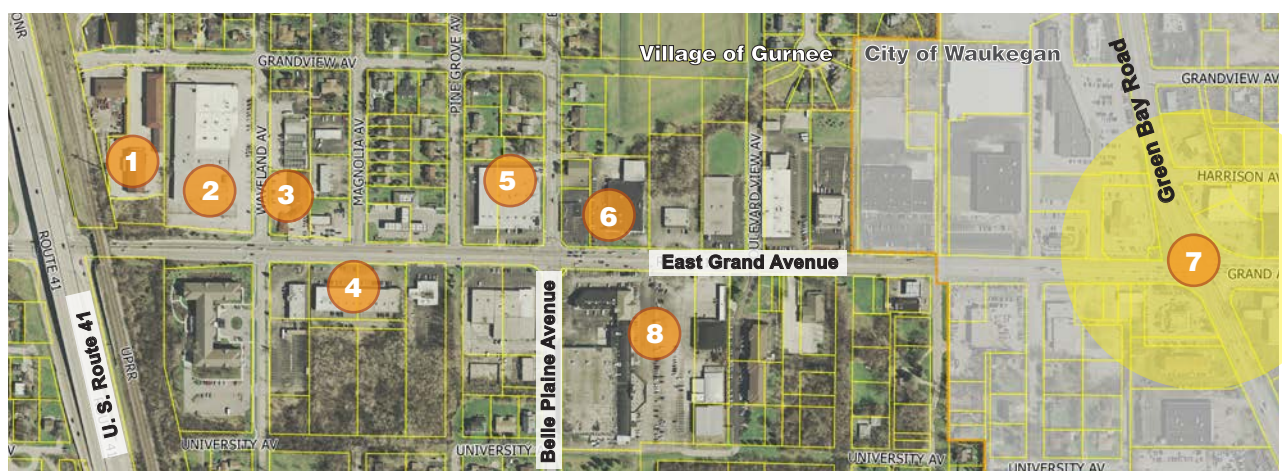
Site 2 (860 Waveland Avenue): This 3.7 acre site at the corner of East Grand and Route 41 has a large vacant building that used to be a former Handy Andy store. The site is currently owned by U-Haul, and they have failed to reuse/redevelop the property for many years. The panel heard conflicting

stories from U-Haul representatives and the Village regarding why the company has not moved ahead with redevelopment. The panel recommends that the Village move as quickly as possible to end the uncertainty at the site, which is currently an unattractive and unproductive introduction to the East Grand corridor on its western entrance.

One option would be to proceed with the U-Haul build-out, which would generate new business and life along the corridor - moving the site from a weed-filled and fenced-off location to an operating business use.

Alternatively, if U-Haul is unwilling to develop the site and is interested in selling, the Village could acquire the site in partnership with other governmental entities including Warren Township and the Gurnee Park District, and reuse the building to provide a much-needed community center for east Gurnee. The site could be combined with the adjacent vacant motel sites to accommodate a range of services for all age-groups ranging from young children to seniors, along with green space and on-site parking. This redevelopment alternative would bring a lively cluster of uses to a key location in East Grand that is not suitable for typical retail.

Figure 3: Development opportunities along East Grand Avenue



Site 3 (3732-3740 Grand Avenue): The Hollywood Inn, which provides an affordable lodging option is a viable use for the corridor especially because of the heavy tourism traffic in western Gurnee. The Village should work with the property owner to ensure that the site and the buildings are well maintained and meet code standards.

Site 4 (3701 Grand Avenue): This site is an example of an opportunity for providing incentives to existing businesses for exterior improvements.

Site 5 (3608 Grand Avenue): New sit-down restaurants and/or food-based businesses such as a local bakery could be viable uses for this site.

Site 6 (3590 - 3500 Grand Avenue): Home improvement related businesses should be encour-

aged on these sites to maintain and strengthen the existing retail cluster.

Site 7: The eastern edge of the corridor near the Green Bay Road intersection is most attractive to retailers, especially national/regional chains.

Site 8 (3545-3575 Grand Avenue and 3521-3535 Grand Avenue): These two sites together represent the most sizable redevelopment opportunity along East Grand Avenue with the potential to catalyze redevelopment along the entire corridor. However, the panel does not see viable redevelopment opportunities for these sites in the near term for many reasons.

The presence of large retail agglomerations just a couple of miles west in Gurnee severely limit the

The large and under-utilized surface parking lot on 3545-3575 Grand Avenue could serve as a site for community events to energize the East Grand Avenue corridor.



The former Handy Andy building, currently owned by U-Haul, offers one of the best reuse /redevelopment opportunities along the corridor.



Site 8 (3545-3575 Grand Avenue and 3521-3535 Grand Avenue) continued:

potential of attracting a big box retailer to this site on East Grand. A full-service Jewel Osco store is located in the Waukegan portion of the study corridor, and Lewis Fresh Market, an independent grocery store that is popular for its quality fresh produce, ethnic foods and competitive prices, is located less than a mile east of the Green Bay Road intersection

on Grand Avenue. The area seems to be adequately served by grocery stores and the panel does not believe the current population base could support an additional grocery store.

As noted earlier, at the current low market rents in the area, new construction for commercial or residential purposes would not bring a rate of return that would be attractive to a private developer. Addition-

Street festivals and markets can activate under-utilized parking lots and energize an entire neighborhood (top)

A modified shipping container can provide a temporary, low cost venue for a start-up entrepreneur and generate potential development interest in a vacant or under-utilized site (bottom).

Photo Credit: Latent Design



ally, the buildings on the sites are almost fully leased – a new discount furniture store was in the process of finalizing its lease agreement during the TAP. When the property owners are receiving a steady income stream from a well-leased center, they might not be as motivated to sell, and even if they are, the difficulty of buying out existing leases could make redevelopment very challenging.

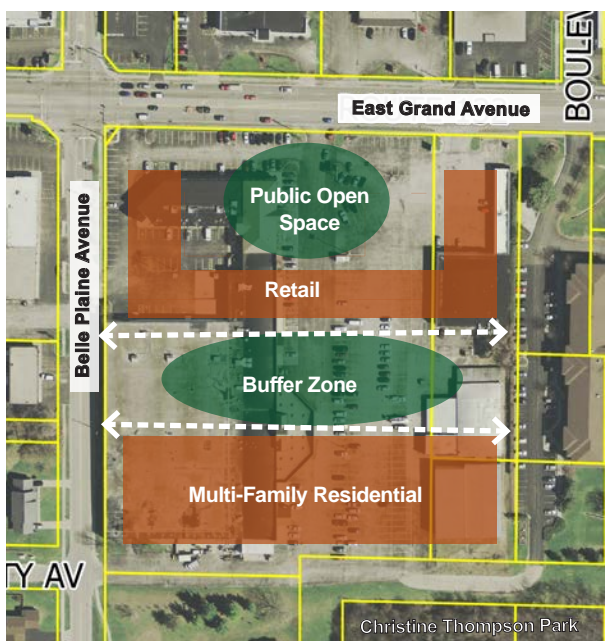
Over the next few years, the panel suggests that the Village work with the property owners, particularly the larger 3545-3575 Grand Avenue site, to activate the large underutilized parking lot as a key location for the placemaking activities recommended by the panel. These could include ethnic fairs celebrating the Hispanic heritage of the neighborhood residents and vintage fairs to reinforce the DIY/ Maker Corridor brand for East Grand Avenue. Temporary structures such as modified shipping containers could serve as venues for pop-up stores or restaurants to promote local entrepreneurs and test out the viability of new business ideas within the corridor.

Over a longer time period, after these near-term strategies have helped raise the corridor’s profile, the panel believes that there might be potential for assembling the two sites to create a sizable development parcel. A potential redevelopment scenario could include local, non-chain retail/service businesses with public open space closer to Grand Avenue, and multi-family development at the south end of the site, close to the park. This mixed-use development would bring together public space, local retail and additional housing options to the East Grand corridor.

Public open space next to retail/ restaurants creates an attractive environment for customers (top).

The south end of the site, next to Christine Thompson Park, could be an ideal location for new multi-family development as a part of the long term redevelopment of the site (bottom).

Figure 4: Potential long-term development opportunities for 3545-3575 and 3521-3535 Grand Avenue sites



IMMEDIATE PLACEMAKING

Creating an Inviting Environment Along East Grand Avenue



Connecting pedestrian amenities and placemaking elements currently present only in isolated pockets, can create a unified environment along East Grand Avenue (top left and right).

Relatively low cost improvements such as stamped crosswalks, continuous sidewalks (left), decorative banners (bottom left), plantings, and street art (bottom right) can help create a unique identity for the corridor, setting the stage for longer term improvements.





Murals bring blank walls to life in Chicago's South Loop neighborhood as a part of the Wabash Arts Corridor's "Big Walls" Initiative..



Unique festivals that celebrate the Latino heritage of neighborhood residents, such as the "Fiesta Del Sol" in Pilsen, Chicago, can strengthen sense of community and draw people to the East Grand corridor.

Photo Credits: Fiesta Del Sol



Village's Role

Reaching the multifaceted, interlocking goals outlined in this report will take effort and cooperation between the Village of Gurnee, other government agencies including the City of Waukegan and IDOT, private property owners, local businesses, and neighborhood residents.

Create a Joint Overlay District with Waukegan

The Village of Gurnee should work with Waukegan to define a cross-municipality corridor area for a joint overlay district. By defining standards for site and building design and streetscape design including wayfinding and signage, the two municipalities can help create a unified, attractive corridor that is inviting for businesses and patrons.

Establish a Grand Avenue Corridor Committee

A Grand Avenue Corridor Committee consisting of officials/staff from both municipalities, property and business owners, and residents should be formed to serve as champions of the corridor. This community-led and staff-supported group would provide key input in decision-making for a range of issues affecting the corridor such as branding, local events/fairs as well as negotiations over parking, curb-cuts etc. Currently East Grand Gateway does not have a Chamber of Commerce or a merchants' association – the committee could also serve that purpose, providing peer-to-peer support and a unified, amplified voice for local business owners.

Assign a Municipal Liaison

The Village of Gurnee should assign a liaison from the Village Hall to work directly with the businesses on East Grand Avenue. There are striking differenc-

es in the development patterns on the west and east sides of Gurnee – national developers compared to local small businesses, new construction compared to retrofitting decades-old properties, mega malls compared to half-acre sites. A liaison can give the extra time and support to help new entrepreneurs open a business on East Grand Avenue – from permitting to inspections to marketing – and provide timely, clear notifications to businesses/residents when major projects are planned.

This extra care may seem burdensome at first compared to working with national retailers on the west side. However, if the Village is interested in reaping a different set of benefits for Gurnee – an interesting local gathering place that provides residents with a homegrown, local shopping and dining experience – it will need to be ready to go the extra mile and provide the supportive environment that small businesses and start-ups need to thrive.

Funding

The panel recommends identifying a combination of local and federal funding sources to finance the improvements needed within the public right-of-way on East Grand Avenue.

Federal funds might include grants from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program and TIGER grants. The Village of Gurnee should consider assigning a portion of its retail sales tax revenues set aside for infrastructure improvements to enhance East Grand Avenue; the City of Waukegan should identify available funds to finance improvements within its city limits.

Conclusion

In their presentation to the Technical Assistance Panel and subsequent meetings, key officials from the Village of Gurnee exhibited a deep interest in revitalizing East Grand Avenue and an openness to consider ideas outside a typical suburban strip-mall strategy. This focus is a notable asset in a campaign to change and improve the commercial corridor.

Turning the area in a new direction will require a strong commitment on the part of the Village to understand the needs and desires of the surrounding neighborhoods, and actively promote that change while staying grounded in market reality.

Many of the recommendations in this report – including partnering with Waukegan and local residents and businesses, promoting placemaking activities in the area, investing effort to attract and support entre-

preneurs, and maintaining a long-term strategy that starts with short-term tactics – will require the Village to invest more deeply in the East Grand Gateway. In the end, though, the results can be a new, attractive, different part of Gurnee that is an asset to local residents from the east and the west sides of the Village.

The panel emphasizes that for revitalization plans to be effective and successful along East Grand Avenue, local residents and businesses will have to be active participants and work hand-in-hand with government agencies to create a realistic and unifying vision for the corridor, and to implement that vision.

The Legions of Craft Beer Fest brings craft beer and cider, wine, food trucks, and live music to the parking lot of Gurnee Mills attracting attendees from all over the region.

Photo Credit: Village of Gurnee



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