

Evanston, Illinois

Central Street Master Plan



THE LAKOTA GROUP
Gewalt Hamilton & Associates
Infrastructure Engineering Inc.

FINAL DRAFT FOR COMMISSION/COUNCIL REVIEW

June 2007

Overview

In 2006, the City of Evanston engaged The Lakota Group, Gewalt Hamilton Associates, and Infrastructure Engineering Inc. to create a Master Plan and Streetscape Design for Central Street. The City’s planning mission was to evaluate Central Street’s land use setting, physical conditions, and streetscape, and make recommendations for enhancing its mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented character. The planning process included the following phases:

State of the Corridor: An inventory of existing conditions were created through fieldwork, meetings with City staff, stakeholder interviews, and two community workshops.

Community Visioning: Strategies and concepts for improving and developing Central Street were presented at a community workshop.

Master Plan and Streetscape Design: Preparation of a final Master Plan, with preferred development strategies, as well as a refined streetscape approach for enhancing Central Street’s character.

The Master Plan, which was completed in the Summer of 2007, will be used by City officials and staff as a guide for planning and development decisions along Central Street over the next 5 to 10 years.



Specialty shops and services on the retail blocks between Hartrey and Green Bay.

Background



Northwestern University's Ryan Field, located at Central and Ashland.

Central Street is 2.6 miles long and the primary east-west travel route in northern Evanston, providing access to Lake Michigan, Northwestern University's Ryan Field, Evanston Hospital (ENH), and several neighborhoods. Central Street has a small-scale, "Village feel" with a "funky," eclectic, "hodge podge," quirky character that encourages people to walk, shop and interact. Residents appreciate the "walkability" of the street, the human scale of the buildings, independent "Mom and Pop" retailers, and a varied retail and service base, including auto-service businesses.

Despite its many positive attributes, there are a number of issues and constraints present along Central Street, including:

- Recent developments have caused concerns regarding building height, scale, massing, lack of open glass storefronts, narrow sidewalks, architectural design, poor materials, and physical character.
- Narrow, deteriorated, or non-existent sidewalks and fair to poor streetscape conditions detract from a walkable, pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Some narrow alleys cause conflicts between commercial uses/deliveries and residents attempting to access their garages.
- Alley conditions are generally poor with deteriorated paving, potholes, standing water and drainage problems. Obstructions, including utility poles and loading/service areas, are present in many alleys.
- The Ryan Field parking lot does not drain effectively resulting in pooling water, lacks landscaping, and has fencing, driveways and asphalt in fair to poor condition.
- The commercial area east of Green Bay is less vibrant than other areas due to an inconsistent building "streetwall" and the physical barrier created by the Metra viaduct.
- Parking is perceived as difficult to find in some locations at peak times, including near the retail blocks between Hartrey and Green Bay.
- Most parking lots lack adequate screening and landscaping. Some lots have inefficient layouts or lack proper drainage.
- Congestion is causing some "spill-over" traffic on residential streets.

Master Plan

The Master Plan provides a vision for the enhancement of Central Street and is based on the community’s desire for higher-quality development and streetscape improvements that maintain the area’s “European Village,” “small town” character. The following are key Master Plan goals:

- Sustain and enhance Central Street as an attractive, mixed-use, pedestrian- and neighborhood-oriented street with its own distinct character.
- Encourage commercial development, including office uses, in key locations to provide a diverse mix of goods and services to residents and visitors.
- Enhance existing housing and provide diverse residential opportunities.
- Improve the appearance and use of existing open space.
- Improve the appearance and safety of the area’s streetscape.
- Improve pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular access and circulation.
- Encourage the use of sustainable building and site design, both in new buildings and in adaptive reuse/renovations/ façade improvements.

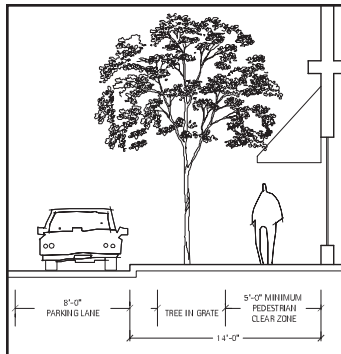


The Master Plan recommends facade improvements, such as the building on the left, and infill redevelopment, such as the building on the right.

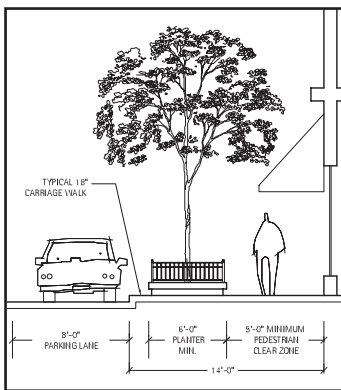
To achieve these goals, the Master Plan recommends the following strategies.

Building Envelope

- Consistent setbacks to create a shopping “streetwall” of buildings façades.
- 14-foot setbacks from curb to building in commercial areas. 20-foot setbacks from curb to building on side streets for corner lots.
- 30-foot setbacks from curb to building for properties abutting the Central/Gross Point/Crawford intersection.
- Upper-story stepbacks to articulate buildings and reduce perceived height and mass.



Optimal 14-foot sidewalk cross-section with tree in a tree grate.



Optimal 14-foot sidewalk cross-section with tree in a low planter.

Sidewalks

- 14-foot minimum sidewalks for new developments in commercial areas.
- Along the commercial blocks west of Lincolnwood Drive, Central Street should be narrowed to allow the addition of 5 feet to the sidewalks on both sides of the street, where feasible.

Zoning

- Rezone B2 district between Hartrey and Prairie to B1a.
- Rezone C1 district on Green Bay to B2.
- See Table 1 for maximum height recommendations.
- Zoning changes to allow mixed-used development and structured parking near Ryan Field.
- Zoning changes to encourage optimal setbacks and shared parking/curb cuts/access drives.
- Consider form-based code approach for Central Street.

Transportation

- Standard alley width of 18 feet, free of obstructions.
- Review parking ratios for office uses.
- Improve drop-off zones at Metra and CTA stations.

Table 1: Maximum Height Recommendations

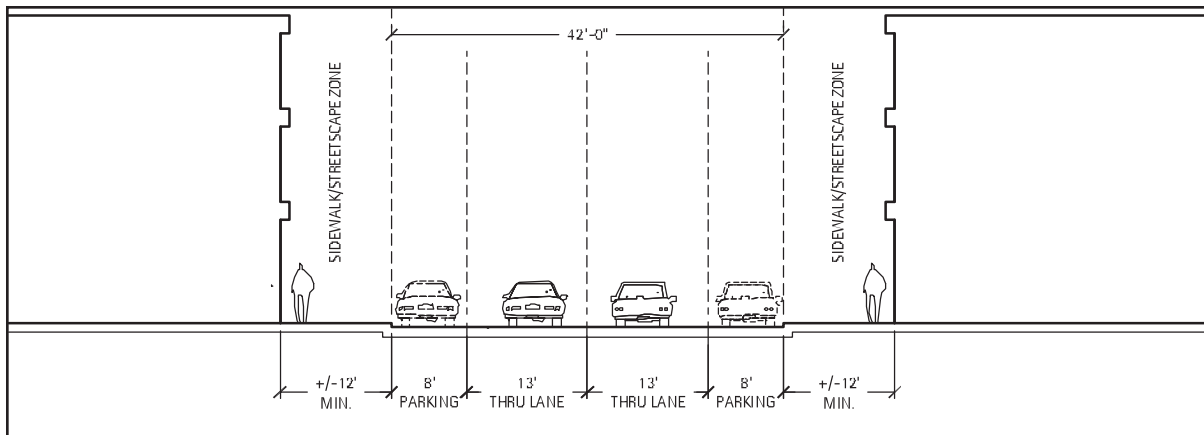
Zoning District	Current Height	Maximum Height (Stories)	Maximum Height (Feet)
R4: General Residential	35 feet/2.5 stories	2.5 stories	30 feet
R5: General Residential	50 feet/5 stories	4 stories	45 feet
O1: Office*	52 feet	5 stories	52 feet
B1a: Business	40 feet/3 stories	3 stories	35 feet
B2: Business	45 feet	4 stories	45 feet
C1: Commercial	45 feet	4 stories	45 feet
C2: Commercial	45 feet	4 stories	45 feet
U2: University Athletic Facilities	45 feet	4 stories	45 feet
T1: Transitional University	35 feet/2.5 stories	2.5 stories	35 feet
OS: Open Space	35 feet/2.5 stories	2.5 stories	35 feet

Recommended heights (in bold) are shown in both feet and stories. Maximum height would be the lesser of the two.

*Height limit "steps down" near adjacent residential uses.

Central Street Master Plan

Report Summary



Proposed cross-section west of Lincolnwood, with narrower travel lanes and wider sidewalks.

- Consider feasibility of expanding frequency of local bus routes.
- Upgrade bus stops with new benches and shelters.
- Reduce roadway width west of Lincolnwood to 40 or 42 feet to calm traffic and reduce traffic merging confusion.
- Encourage bike routes where street width allows.
- Improve and standardize crosswalks.
- Install bump-outs where appropriate.

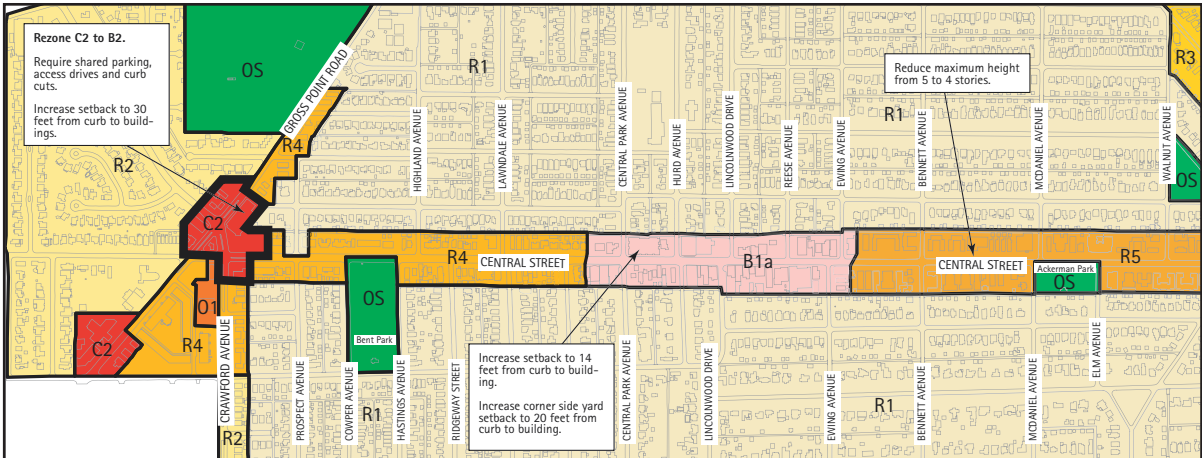
Design Guidelines

To complement the City’s “Design Guidelines for Planned Development,” additional design guidelines should be developed to encourage high-quality development in neighborhood-oriented commercial areas. These guidelines should encourage building articulation and fenestration, minimum retail depths, and landscaping.

Streetscape

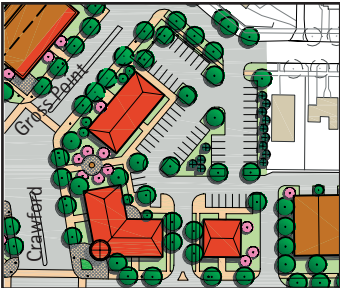
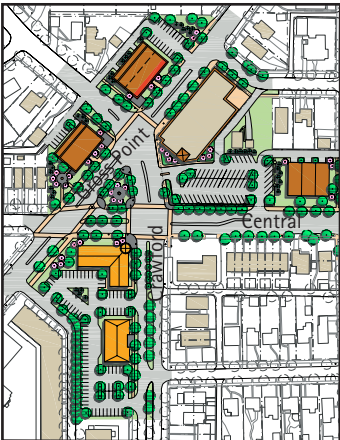
- Improve paved surfaces for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.
- Upgrade quality and increase amount of street furniture, landscaping, street trees, lighting, and crosswalks.
- Additional recommendations are provided in a separate document, “Central Street: Streetscape Design Study.”

Zoning Recommendations

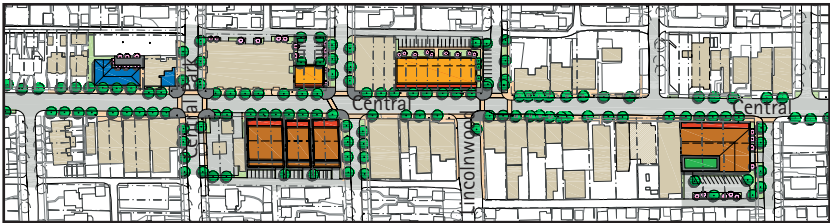


Zoning recommendations for the western half of Central Street include rezoning the C2 district at the intersection of Central/Gross Point/Crawford to B2, and reducing the height of the R5 districts to 4 stories/45 feet.

Development Concepts



At Crawford, Gross Point, and Central, the Plan recommends a green gateway space with signage and/or public art, as well as new development set back 30 feet around the intersections. The Plan also shows an alternate for redevelopment of the CVS site.



The Plan envisions narrowing the traffic lanes west of Lincolnwood to allow for wider sidewalks and streetscape improvements. High-quality, mixed-use development with appropriate sidewalk widths is also recommended for the commercial blocks.

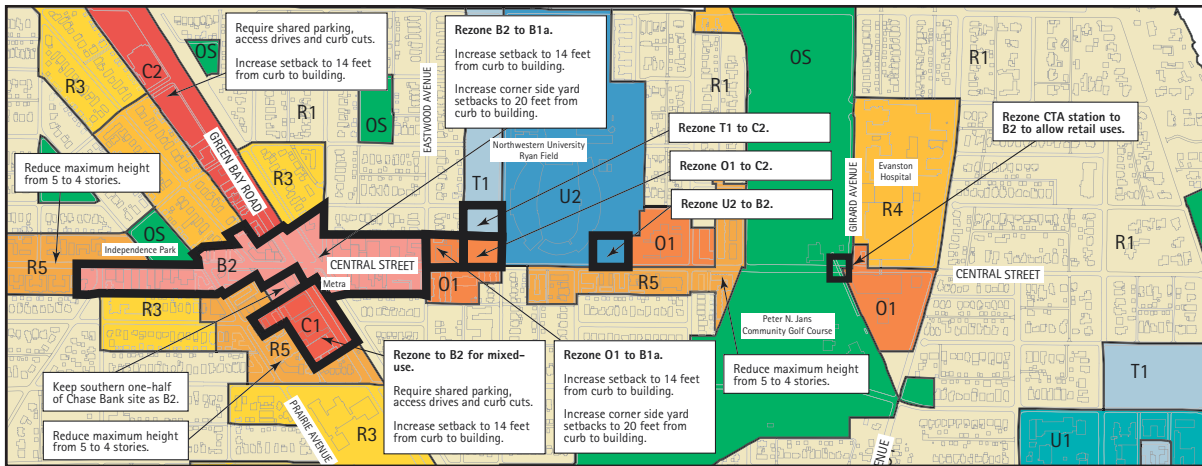


Central Street's main commercial blocks between Hartrey and Green Bay have a successful mix of shops, restaurants and services. The Plan improves the public parking lot, Independence Park, and the streetscape to enhance the existing uses. Mixed-use developments are also envisioned for Green Bay with ground floor retail and upper story office or residential uses.

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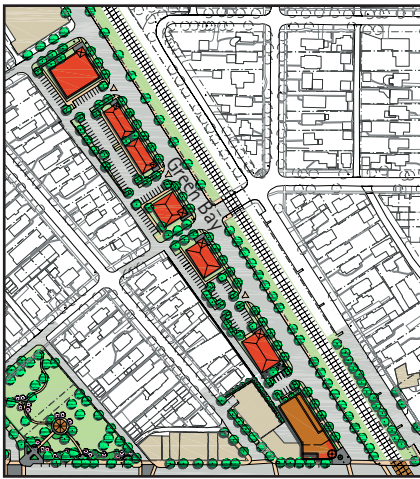
Report Summary

Zoning Recommendations

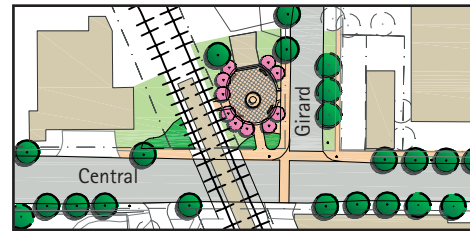


Zoning recommendations for the eastern half of Central Street include rezoning much of the B2 district east of Hartrey to B1a, and rezoning the C1 district on Green Bay south of Central to B2.

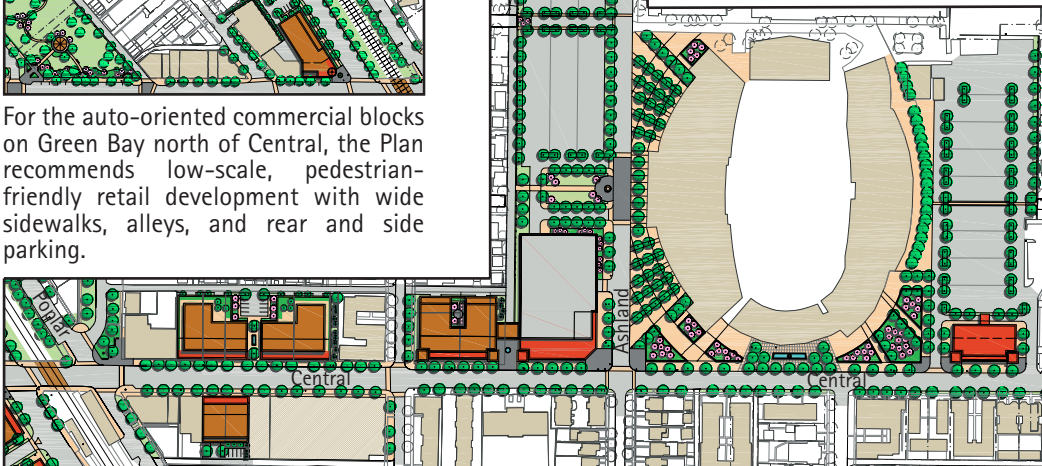
Development Concepts



For the auto-oriented commercial blocks on Green Bay north of Central, the Plan recommends low-scale, pedestrian-friendly retail development with wide sidewalks, alleys, and rear and side parking.



For the CTA station, the Plan envisions a plaza that would create an attractive place for people to wait for transit or to enter the golf course "starter shack."



East of the Metra Station, the Plan envisions changes that would foster more vibrant retail activity. Mixed-use development would create a more continuous and active "streetwall." The Ryan Field parking lots would be upgraded with new paving, landscaping, and plazas. Structured parking with a retail frontage would provide additional parking for stadium functions, hospital and university employees, commuters, and shoppers.

Implementation

The Master Plan recommends the following priority projects and initiatives:

Priority Projects

- Enhance Independence Park’s landscaping and features.
- Reorganize the City’s Stewart Avenue parking lot and realign Stewart to add green space and improve traffic flow.
- Streetscape/gateway improvements, including a green gateway element at Central/Gross Point/Crawford.
- Improve the Ryan Field parking lot.
- Assess the feasibility of developing structured parking with new commercial space at Ryan Field.
- Add 3-hour parking spaces east of Hartrey for longer activities, such as dining out.
- Add 15-minute spaces east of Hartrey for quick trips.
- Improve or reconstruct to the Metra and CTA viaducts.
- Encourage high-quality development of the CVS, Blockbuster/White Hen, and Chase Bank sites.

Priority Initiatives

- Adopt recommended changes to the existing zoning districts to facilitate development consistent with the Plan.
- Study whether zoning recommendations may be applied citywide or will require overlays.
- Create additional design guidelines that apply to small-scale commercial districts.
- Study the potential of form-based code.
- Encourage participation in the City’s facade improvement program.
- Implement design and engineering for the streetscape.
- Identify funding for Master Plan projects in the City’s Capital Improvement Program.
- Consider a variety of funding sources.
- Encourage communication/coordination between the City, local residents, regional authorities, and the State.

Acknowledgments

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The City of Evanston wishes to thank all those who contributed to the content and review of this Plan, especially the Central Street residents, property owners, and institutions.

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