

VI. The BNSF Railroad Corridor Subarea Plan

The Village of La Grange, its business community, and civic and institutional partners, have worked hard to realize the success of Downtown La Grange. This Subarea Plan is intended to focus on strengthening and sustaining the Downtown for the long-term, and expanding its positive impacts throughout the BNSF Railroad Corridor by building upon successful initiatives already undertaken by the community.

While the Village has had substantial development and economic success within the Downtown over the last decade, the BNSF Railroad Corridor Subarea Plan will help position the Downtown for economically sustainable growth over the next 10 to 15 years. It also addresses long-term community service and facility needs.



The Subarea Plan for the BNSF Railroad Corridor reinforces the role of Downtown La Grange as the community’s mixed-use center, an important regional shopping and entertainment attraction and an intermodal transportation center. The real estate market will continue to place redevelopment pressure on the Corridor; this Subarea Plan clearly defines the Village’s preferences to allow for the proactive management of this expected change.



The Village has diligently guided the renaissance of Downtown La Grange over the last decade. Recent emphasis has been placed on the “core” of the Downtown, the main core of the Downtown in the eastern portion of the area, and the community has realized substantial success. However, work remains to define the future role and character of the West End Business District. The purpose of the Plan is to build upon the Downtown core to influence and strengthen the area as a whole.

Over the last 10 years, a variety of improvements have been made in the Downtown and BNSF Railroad Corridor. Some of these improvements are briefly described below.

- The Downtown has realized the addition of 67,275 sq. ft. of new retail and commercial space.
- Over this period of time, the Village has seen approximately 31 Downtown facade renovations valued at 1.3 million dollars investment.
- In total the tax increment finance district has leveraged 40 million dollars in private real estate investment. From the period 1986 to 2003 the incremental increase in sales tax revenues has gone from \$20,000 to \$ 350,000 in 2003.
- 29 million dollars has been invested in public improvements.
- A total of 173 new residential dwellings have been added to the Corridor and to the community's inventory.
- Recent studies estimate that 30 commuters reside in the Spring Avenue Station development¹, and that 25% of Beacon Place residents commute to Chicago². These “transit-oriented” residents support La Grange retail and service businesses with minimal increases in vehicle traffic.

This Subarea Plan seeks to leverage the inherent strengths of the Corridor, expand its intermodal transit functions, and ensure that the Downtown continues to serve its mixed-use community center functions. It builds upon working relationships between the Village, business organizations, local institutions, and property owners which have already significantly contributed to the success of the area in recent years.

¹ Data from “Fall 2002 Origin-Destination Survey” conducted by Metra.

² Data from “Lemont Station Area Plan” (separate RTAP study completed in 2004).

WHAT DOES THE PLAN ADDRESS?

The Plan focuses on the unique character of the Downtown and the BNSF Railroad Corridor. The Downtown is comprised of a variety of stakeholders, each serving an important role in the day-to-day functions of the Downtown. Most activities are organized around the community's business associations. It is this unique public-private partnership which has enabled the Downtown continued success and prosperity. The Plan builds upon this historical community model. The map on page VI-1 delineates the study area boundary for the BNSF Railroad Corridor.

The Plan also focuses on several key aspects of the Corridor to ensure that change is consistent with community aspirations for the area and the community as a whole. These key considerations include:

- Establish a land use guide to ensure compatible development within the Corridor as well as adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Focus and direct expected redevelopment demand to priority locations within the Corridor.
- Creatively provide off-street parking for both business and commuter parking needs, as demand warrants and opportunities arise, that is appropriately located and sized to minimize impacts on surrounding areas.
- Continue to reinforce the implementation of a cohesive and high quality visual image for the Corridor through well designed public improvements and careful review of proposed private redevelopment projects.
- Accommodate community facilities that support the mixed-use function and also contribute to the overall vitality of the Corridor.
- Proactively respond to economic development opportunities, to ensure a healthy and varied mix of businesses and services within the Corridor to serve local residents, commuters and regional visitors.

A. TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE DEVELOPMENT & IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Developing the linkage between land use and multi-modal transit services in the BNSF Railroad Corridor is an essential element of the BNSF Railroad Corridor Plan. Improvements and initiatives focused on improving the relationship between these elements will maximize land and transportation resources serving the Corridor. There is a difference between development which is "transit adjacent" and that which is "transit supportive." The greater the



dependency between a land use and transit, the more transit supportive it is. For example, reductions in off-street parking for market rate uses that can rely upon transit are one way of creating greater land use interdependence and making more efficient use of land resources.

Thus, it is important that the special needs of transit facility development, transit users and multimodal connections be given special attention in the BNSF Railroad Corridor Subarea Plan. The Plan organizes transit supportive planning principles around the three dimensions, or "3D's," of transit oriented development (TOD). They provide a means for the Village to evaluate and judge the appropriateness of private and public investments that may be considered in the future. The "3D's" include: *density*, *design* and *diversity*.

Density

Pertinent transit-supportive principles related to *density* include:

- Encourage higher housing densities within one-quarter mile, or a five minute walk, of station areas. In La Grange this area covers much of the Downtown and West End Business District.
- Densities should respect community sensitivity relative to building height, especially adjacent to single family neighborhood areas.
- Minimize mass and bulk in building design through the use of pedestrian-scaled detailing, facade variation and upper-story building setbacks.

Design

Key principles related to *design* are:

- Maintain and emphasize pedestrian and bicycle improvements and access.
- Consider reductions in required off-street parking standards for commercial and residential uses in areas well served by transit – especially land use areas within one-quarter mile of station areas.
- Extend a pedestrian oriented streetscape on all BNSF Railroad Corridor streets.
- Develop wayfinding improvements which serve the needs of cyclists and pedestrians, as well as motorists.
- The Village should seek opportunities to provide or encourage shared parking facilities.
- Street hierarchy should be addressed with a focus on pedestrian needs, rather than on typical vehicle capacity considerations.

- Develop intermodal transit facilities for transferring passengers, including sensitive design of facilities, access, and safety. These facilities include bus stops, bicycle storage areas, “kiss and ride” lanes and commuter parking facilities.
- Amenities, services and facilities which cater to the commuter/pedestrian should be considered at key intermodal facilities.
- Roadway space should be allocated for required circulation, but signal timing and cross-walk right-of-way priorities should favor the pedestrian.
- Public spaces should feel secure, with adequate lighting and visibility. Such lighting and visibility should not encroach on residential properties.

Diversity

The following principles are related to *diversity*:

- Mixed-use developments are highly desirable.
- Mixed-use might not always be accommodated within one building, but can be reflected in the transit station area as a whole.
- Maintaining a strong presence of public facilities within TOD areas is crucial to sustaining a vibrant, mixed-use environment.
- Varied housing types should be located within walking distance to transit facilities.
- Retail, office and residential land uses generate the greatest ridership and are most mutually supportive in a TOD area.
- Retail development must be market driven; transit access strengthens the market but does not create it.
- Density combined with mixed land use creates the most effective and successful TOD, particularly with regard to generating increased usage of transit facilities.

Recommendations, policies and other actions that support these principles are provided throughout the Plan.

B. LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

The existing pattern of land use is a strong influence on future land use patterns. The existing physical pattern impacts opportunities for sustaining or improving the overall land use mix within the Corridor, the intensity of land use, and the cohesiveness of the urban design image of the area. Community facilities are a key consideration as well. This section of the Subarea Plan describes the existing land use pattern within the BNSF Railroad Corridor, identifies key issues and opportunities with regard to land use and



development, establishes overall land use and development planning policies, and presents the BNSF Railroad Corridor Land Use Framework. Further background information with regard to land use and community facilities within the Corridor can be found in *Memorandum No. 1*, *Memorandum No. 2* and the *Market Assessments* report.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND LAND USE ISSUES

Figure 5, BNSF Railroad Corridor Existing Land Use, illustrates the range of land uses within the Downtown and West End Business District. Consistent with overall zoning patterns in the Downtown, the Downtown area includes the strongest concentration of retail uses, while the West End includes a strong mix of commercial and service uses.

There are several key community facilities within the Corridor, including the Village Hall at La Grange Road and Harris Avenue, the Police and Fire Department facility on Burlington Avenue between Kensington and Ashland Avenues, the United States Post Office at Hillgrove and Ashland Avenues, and several municipal parking lots throughout the Downtown core area. At the perimeter of the Corridor, there are several other key facilities, including Cossitt Elementary School on Cossitt Avenue between Ashland and Madison Avenues, the La Grange Public Library at La Grange Road and Cossitt Avenue, and the North Campus of Lyons Township High School west of Brainard Avenue and south of the BNSF / Metra Line. Several churches are also located at the edges of the study area. With the exception of Public Library plans to construct a new facility within the confines of its current property, officials have not indicated any plans for expansion of these facilities that will impact the Corridor in the coming years.

In the early stages of the planning process, feedback from the community was solicited regarding the planning issues and opportunities confronting the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Issues related to land use and development that were identified, and which this Subarea Plan will address, include the following:

- Current underutilization of the West End Business District.
- A lack of retail activity in the West End Business District.
- Establishing and maintaining an appropriate mix of retail and service uses.
- Defining an appropriate height, bulk, and density for redevelopment within the Corridor.

Figure 5 BNSF Railroad Corridor Existing Land Use



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- A non-uniform development pattern along Burlington and Hillgrove Avenues.
- The need to plan for additional off-street parking for both business and public transportation.
- Addressing the potential for redevelopment.
- The need for an open space for community events within the Corridor.

Opportunities related to land use and development that were identified include the following:

- The potential for revitalization of the West End Business District.
- Maintaining a vibrant and cohesive Downtown.
- Accommodating continuing retailer interest in La Grange.
- Accommodating new housing.
- Establishing well designed Corridor “entryways” (La Grange Road / Cossitt Avenue and La Grange Road / Ogden Avenue).
- Introducing an arts and cultural focus in the Downtown.
- Accommodating existing and new community facilities in the Corridor.

The success of the public – private partnership between the Village and the business community will likely lead to continued investment interest in the Downtown. An important issue discussed as part of the planning process was “where and how will new development be allowed to occur within the Corridor?” Related questions of density, off-street parking and others follow.

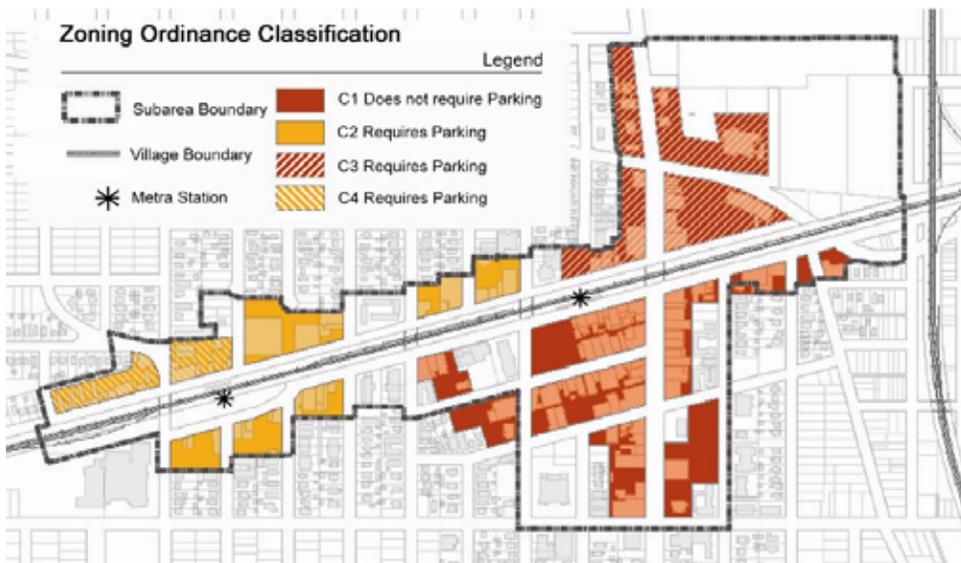
While it can be argued that any site may be potentially redeveloped, or be “subject to change” in the future, clearly some sites are more vulnerable to redevelopment than others. Sites may be subject to redevelopment for a number of reasons, as viewed from the private real estate investment perspective. It is important to realize and proactively address the ways that the market might behave over the course of the Plan’s time frame.

Reasons for which property might be subject to redevelopment include underutilization, such as a commercial off-street parking lot or single story building in an area which can be intensified under current zoning and planned unit development (PUD) regulations. The age of existing structures can also compel the market to seek reinvestment. Obsolescence, in terms of smaller building footprints or outdated construction types, can also be a factor in whether sites are subject to change. Within Downtown La Grange, many opportunities for potential intensification exist. The question is to what level of intensity will change be allowed in the future.



Development regulations within the BNSF Railroad Corridor limit allowable building height to three stories or forty-five feet, with increased height allowable to five stories (or seventy feet) only with additional scrutiny and Village approval through the planned unit development (PUD) process. The height of structures on limited sites within the BNSF Railroad Corridor, those north of Hillgrove Avenue and east of La Grange Road, may reach seven stories or ninety feet in overall height. Currently the tallest structures in the Downtown include the condominiums at 141 North La Grange Road (ten stories), Beacon Place (seven stories), La Grange Plaza (five stories) and Spring Avenue Station (five stories).

As illustrated next, off-street parking is currently required in the West End Business District, but not in the Downtown core. The planning process has established that the West End should reposition itself in the market and intensify with new mixed-use development. This would largely consist of retail uses on the first floor with residential or office uses above. Accomplishing this objective will require relaxing the parking requirements in the West End similar to the Downtown.



LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Listed below are the planning policies that will guide consideration of opportunities for redevelopment and potential changes in the land use pattern within the BNSF Railroad Corridor.

1. While redevelopment may occur generally within the BNSF Railroad Corridor, the Village should undertake an active role in directing redevelopment to appropriate locations in the West End Business District.
2. While off-street parking requirements for the West End Business District should be relaxed overall, through the development process, the Village should continue to seek a share of necessary parking through the development project. In addition, should development displace any current commuter parking lots or spaces, the Village should work with Metra (and the developer, if appropriate) to ensure commuter spaces can be replaced within or near the development, ensuring no net loss in the number of spaces available for commuters.
3. Where an identified need exists and there is a benefit to the Village without over-stressing roadway infrastructure, proactively plan to explore opportunities for congregate parking, in which shared off-street parking areas that serve several businesses and/or other land uses are created.
4. The Village can expect requests for building height in excess of that allowed by right within the zoning code. The potential impacts of increased height should be weighed carefully against other planning considerations, such as the ability to accommodate additional parking and/or open space, and architectural design issues. The existing zoning code height regulations and planned unit development (PUD) regulations are consistent with Plan policies, in that they allow for limited increases in allowable height in exchange for additional project amenities.
5. Existing facade design review procedures should be maintained within the Corridor. The Village should consider the application of more specific design guidelines for new development, including mixed-use and multi-family developments, to more carefully examine issues such as building massing, setbacks, rooflines, open spaces, exterior materials, parking facilities and site improvements.
6. Community facilities are a vital component of the land use mix within the Corridor. The Village should continue to support a diverse mix of community services in the Corridor area. Efforts should provide a special focus on the community's desire to enhance arts and cultural amenities.



7. To provide gathering space for community events within the Corridor area, additional open space of various scales should be provided as redevelopment occurs.
8. Continue to diversify the types of business establishments within the Corridor with an emphasis on a broader range of retail offerings.
9. Coordinate improvement plans and actions with the BNSF Railroad, IHB Railroad, Illinois Commerce Commission, RTA, Metra and Pace, as appropriate.

BNSF RAILROAD CORRIDOR LAND USE FRAMEWORK

In order to meet the Village's land use and development objectives, a refined "system" of land use has been developed to uniquely translate these needs to the physical space of the Corridor. As illustrated in *Figure 6, BNSF Railroad Corridor Land Use Framework*, the system reinforces the land use and development policies described above.

Residential Land Use

- *Medium-Density Residential* - residential areas consisting of multi-family residential dwellings in a low-rise condominium or townhome format, generally with a density of up to 22 dwelling units per acre. This type of housing includes structures that are usually two to three stories in height.
- *High-Density Residential* - residential areas consisting of multi-family residential dwellings in a condominium format (buildings with shared lobbies and centralized parking facilities), generally at a density of up to 33 dwelling units per acre. This type of housing generally includes structures that are four to five stories in overall height. Plan policies would reiterate that structures more than three stories in height would require special approval by the Village.



*General BNSF Corridor
Residential Areas (future)*

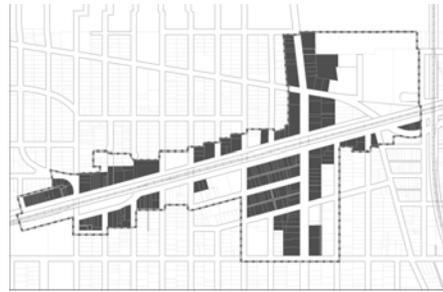
Figure 6 BNSF Railroad Corridor Land Use Framework



Figure 6 back of page

Commercial Land Use

- *BNSF Core Commercial* – This area forms the business and civic core of the Village and functions as a focal point for *mixed-use* activity. It includes retail and entertainment uses on the first floor of buildings, and office, commercial services, and residential uses above the first floor. In order to maximize its pedestrian setting for retailing and entertainment, off-street parking by use is not required for development within this area. Shared parking is provided primarily by municipal parking facilities, helping to encourage pedestrian movement and “multiple destination” shopping trips.
- *BNSF Commercial* – This area includes similar *mixed-uses* to the Core Commercial area, but is intended to be less intensive in character. Any allowable land use could be located on the first floor of buildings (except residential). Because of their perimeter locations within the BNSF Railroad Corridor, these locations would be required to provide dedicated off-street parking for all uses. As a result, redevelopment overall would be less mixed and less dense (building height and lot coverage).



General BNSF Corridor Commercial and Mixed-Use Areas (future)

Public and Quasi-Public Land Use

- *Public and Institutional* - an area containing major community facilities or public buildings such as schools, colleges, hospitals, churches, municipal buildings and cultural facilities.
- *Open Space and Recreation* - an area intended to be maintained as a park, recreation site or open space.



General BNSF Corridor Public Use Areas (future)



Figure 6 illustrates the future land use patterns for the Corridor. The arrangement of core commercial land uses will serve to extend a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development pattern into a “secondary core” within the West End Business District. The Plan reinforces the Downtown core along La Grange Road as BNSF Core Commercial. In this framework, the West End Business District is foreseen as a mixed-use area in which parking is provided primarily through shared parking lots throughout the area that serve all businesses and commuters. Multi-story buildings would be sensitively accommodated within the West End Business District, in order to accommodate ground floor retail and services and residential and office uses on upper floors. The Village should consider direct efforts to facilitate coordinated redevelopment efforts, such as limited parcel assemblage.

This “secondary core” in the West End is flanked by new and existing multi-family residential uses. It concentrates mixed-use activity surrounding the Stone Avenue Metra Station, providing the potential for more new dwelling units, and in turn, more support for retail uses. Areas indicated as “Public and Institutional” uses generally reflect existing facilities within the Corridor.

C. MOBILITY

Mobility encompasses all modes of transportation serving the BNSF Railroad Corridor including automotive, transit, bicycle and pedestrian. The Plan suggests ways in which the system can be sustained and improved to best serve both the Downtown core and the West End in the future.

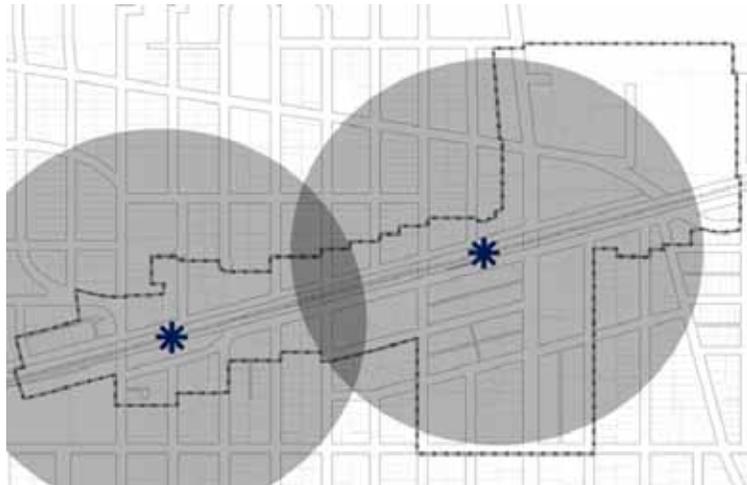
The efficiency of the transportation system directly bears a relationship to maintaining and strengthening the economic vitality of the Corridor. This section of the Subarea Plan identifies key mobility issues and opportunities, and establishes transportation planning policies. It also identifies key transportation system initiatives that will improve access throughout the Corridor, and the roles of responsible agencies to realize them. Further background information with regard to transportation infrastructure within the Corridor can be found in *Memorandum No. 1*, *Memorandum No. 2* and the *Market Assessment* report.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND MOBILITY ISSUES

Downtown La Grange is both a local and a regional destination. Primary access to the community is by Ogden Avenue and La Grange Road, both of which transect the Downtown area. These streets establish continuity with I-294 and I-290.

Traffic congestion in the Corridor is an issue during peak periods in isolated locations. These include La Grange Road and Brainard Avenue during the morning and evening peak hour periods. Congestion will be exacerbated by continued redevelopment in the Corridor, and must be proactively addressed.

The two Metra stations are major assets within the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Stations are located in both the Downtown (La Grange Road) and the West End Business District (Stone Avenue). The Downtown station is also served by Pace suburban bus service and Amtrak, providing the nucleus for transit supportive land use and development. Many local residents rely on this system today primarily for employment access. Metra weekday boardings at both stations in 2002 averaged 2,355.



The BNSF Railroad Corridor is just under one mile in length on an east-west axis. From an average pedestrian's point of view, this is considered too far to walk whether for shopping or commuting. In general, a walking distance up to one-quarter mile is comfortable for most people (a radius of one-quarter mile around each Metra station is depicted on the map on the previous page). During the first phase of the planning process, the West End Business District was identified as having a need for a greater mix and diversity of



land uses, and to encourage additional activity and commercial viability in the area.

While local residents generate a high level of pedestrian traffic within the Corridor, visitors from beyond the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the Corridor arrive to the area by automobile. As redevelopment occurs, sufficient and convenient parking will remain a challenge. Redevelopment should consider consolidating and expanding commuter parking within parking facilities of new development sites and to look for opportunities for shared-use parking between commuters and other users, such as retail, business, visitors, etc. The Village should continue to work with Metra to ensure that there is not a net-loss in the number of spaces available for commuters.

Commuter parking at the La Grange Road Station is provided through a combination of 170 on-street diagonal parking spaces and 169 off-street spaces (in municipally owned parking lots at Sixth Avenue and Seventh Avenue south of the BNSF tracks, and Locust Avenue north of the BNSF tracks) for a total of 339 commuter-designated spaces. There are a total of 222 regular and four disabled permit spaces in the station area; the remaining 113 on-street spaces are metered. According to Metra's October 2003 parking counts, these spaces are fully occupied.

Commuter parking at the Stone Avenue Station is provided through a combination of 315 on-street diagonal parking spaces and 160 off-street spaces (in a municipally owned parking lot at Brainard and Burlington) for a total of 475 commuter-designated spaces. According to Metra's October 2003 parking counts, these parking spaces are fully utilized. The off-street lot spaces and some of the on-street spaces (total of 346 spaces) are available by monthly permits administered by the Village. The remaining on-street spaces are metered. It has been noted by the Village that, due to the proximity of this station to Lyons Township High School's north campus, some of the permit and metered spaces are occupied by high school students rather than by commuters.

Fifty-two (52) additional on-street commuter parking spaces will be created in 2005 as part of the planned reconstruction of Hillgrove Avenue from Kensington to Gilbert Avenues. These additional spaces are likely to be utilized by Stone Avenue Station commuters. As part of Metra's long-term facility planning process, the need for an additional 200 commuter parking spaces by the year 2030 to serve the two La Grange Metra stations has been identified.

The Village also issues parking permits for two other types of parking users: Downtown residents and employees/business owners in the Downtown. For employees/business owners in the Downtown, a parking pass can be purchased that allows month to month parking in designated off-street spaces. Overnight permits are available to residents of the Downtown area who reside in apartment or condominium buildings constructed prior to 1991, as many of these buildings do not provide off-street parking adequate to accommodate residents. Resident permit users are hard to quantify as some may purchase a day pass as well as a night pass.

Parking for shoppers and visitors to the BNSF Railroad Corridor is available through a combination of on-street parking and several municipally owned off-street parking lots, with time limitations enforced through ticketing. On-street parking is generally provided in the Downtown with the exception of some areas along La Grange Road, Burlington Avenue and Hillgrove Avenue. On-street parking is not allowed on Ogden Avenue, or on La Grange Road north of the BNSF tracks. Only a few buildings within the Downtown provide dedicated off-street parking areas for customers, clients and/or employees. Within the West End Business District, however, dedicated off-street parking lots for private uses are more prevalent and are frequently underutilized throughout the day.

In the early stages of the planning process, feedback from the community was solicited regarding the mobility issues and opportunities confronting the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Issues related to mobility include:

- Non-vehicular linkages between the Downtown and West End Business District are weak.
- Increasing traffic congestion.
- Congestion and safety along Brainard Avenue at LT High School.
- Pedestrian safety and comfort will become more of a concern as activity increases (intersections, railroad crossings, kiss-n-ride areas).
- Parking throughout the Corridor (quantity, location, management).
- Competition within the West End for available parking (commuters, LTHS students, business patrons).



Opportunities related to mobility include:

- Both Metra stations create “hubs” of activity in the Corridor.
- A comfortable pedestrian scale exists within the Downtown and West End Business District.
- Future Pace service upgrades could help accessibility.
- Daily Amtrak inter-city rail service stops in La Grange.
- A potential Inner Circumferential Service commuter rail / transfer station at the IHB Railroad could impact commuter traffic patterns east of the La Grange Road Metra station.

MOBILITY POLICIES

Planning policies that will guide improvements and initiatives within the BNSF Railroad Corridor are presented below. These policies are general to provide overall direction to decision making. More specific improvement recommendations follow in the next section.

1. Consistent with the principles of transit supportive development, future improvements within the Corridor will place emphasis on the needs and comfort of pedestrians and cyclists.
2. Mitigate peak period congestion along La Grange Road, Brainard Avenue and other heavily traveled local streets, while ensuring pedestrian safety and minimizing “cut-through” traffic.
3. Improved bus transit service within the Corridor will help to relieve congestion, and should be actively pursued. A continued and strong working relationship with Metra and Pace is essential in this regard. Where appropriate, the Village should coordinate with Pace on its *Pace Vision 2020* improvement program.
4. While balancing other BNSF Railroad Corridor development and improvement needs, continue to explore ways of expanding and increasing the number of commuter parking spaces without over-stressing roadway infrastructure. Redevelopment should consider consolidating and expanding commuter parking within parking facilities of new development sites and looking for opportunities for shared parking between commuters and other (off-peak) uses. The Village should continue to work with Metra and to ensure that there is not a net-loss in the number of spaces available for commuters. Metra parking is but one factor in the overall parking inventory and use mix of the BNSF Corridor, with the same timing and development review issues as private redevelopment proposals.

5. Ensure that sufficient off-street parking is provided to serve new development within the West End Business District.
6. In the development review process, seek to minimize unnecessary traffic and circulation impacts on surrounding residential areas.

MOBILITY FRAMEWORK AND IMPROVEMENTS

A variety of mobility improvements have been identified for the Corridor area. These improvement recommendations are consistent with and support Land Use Plan and transit supportive development recommendations. The *Mobility Framework* is illustrated in *Figure 7*, and described in more detail in the recommendation improvements below.

Transit and Multi-Modal Systems and Facilities Improvements

Several improvements should be made to the Stone Avenue Station. Improved platform paving and passenger amenities, outdoor seating and trash receptacles should be provided. The shelter structure at the outbound (north) platform should be upgraded to be visually compatible with the landmark station structure. Kiss-n-ride and pedestrian access routes to the station and both platforms should be clarified and upgraded, to minimize pedestrian/vehicle conflicts and facilitate traffic movement during busy periods. These improvements should be made consistent with the urban design plan discussed below.

1. Kiss-n-ride and bus stop facilities at the La Grange Road Station platforms and operations could be better defined through improved signage and pavement marking improvements, to minimize pedestrian/vehicle conflicts and facilitate traffic movement during busy periods.
2. Convenient, secure and clearly marked ADA-accessible parking spaces should be provided in close proximity to both Metra stations.
3. Convenient, safe and, where feasible, weather protected bicycle parking should be provided in close proximity to both Metra Stations, and elsewhere throughout the commercial areas of the Corridor. The zoning code could be amended to require bicycle parking.



4. The Village, through coordination with Pace, should pursue installation of “traffic signal priority” (TSP) technology to aid in the movement of both emergency vehicles and Pace buses in the Downtown.
5. Pace bus routing should be reconfigured to minimize the need for Pace routes to cross the Metra / BNSF Line at La Grange Road, while still considering convenience for transferring passengers from Metra trains. To this end, the Village should study the feasibility of grade separated pedestrian access along the Corridor.
6. As a more intensive mix of uses develops in the West End Business District, a shuttle bus between the West End and the Downtown would increase access and reduce unnecessary traffic movements. The shuttle would likely run only during peak activity periods such as weekends and during special events. The Village should work with Pace, the La Grange Business Association and other key institutions in developing the system should the need arise.

Access and Circulation Improvements

7. Improvements to traffic operations will be warranted as parcels within the West End and Downtown are redeveloped, particularly improvements at and near at-grade crossings of the BNSF / Metra Line. Pedestrian/vehicle conflicts occur within the area during peak periods of Metra train activity and at the beginning and end of the school day. A Village-wide street capacity study should be undertaken to assess current conditions, exploring both potential improvements for vehicle and pedestrian movement, and potential impacts of redevelopment in the future.
8. There are a few local north-south residential streets which enter the Downtown and the West End Business District which could potentially be closed to vehicle access, or subject to traffic calming measures, as redevelopment occurs. Traffic calming or street closure can often benefit adjoining neighborhood areas by reducing “cut-through” traffic and providing greater neighborhood privacy. Street closures can also support redevelopment interests by providing new locations for off-street parking, common open space or enlarged redevelopment sites.

Figure 7 BNSF Railroad Corridor Mobility Framework



Figure 7 back of page

Any locations within the BNSF Railroad Corridor considered for future street closure or traffic calming would first require the input and support of the immediate surrounding property owners and the neighborhood. It is important to note that, even if vehicle access is restricted, pedestrian access should be maintained.

Pedestrian Access Improvements

9. There are additional locations in the BNSF Railroad Corridor which would benefit from the use of pedestrian activated crosswalk signals, including: existing La Grange Road signal locations, and Brainard at Burlington/Hillgrove/the BNSF Metra Line. Existing and new pedestrian activated crosswalks should utilize a “countdown” signal which depicts the number of seconds remaining in the green signal phase before the light turns yellow, and should include a “pedestrian-only” period within the regular light cycle.
10. Ideally, pedestrian walkways should be a minimum of 10’ to 15’ in width. Additional public right-of-way should be acquired where feasible as redevelopment occurs to facilitate the provision of generously sized and well-designed sidewalks and pedestrian crossings.
11. A wayfinding program is an important tool to assist residents and visitors alike in orienting themselves in an unfamiliar area. It can support the community’s “branding” effort through the incorporation of logos and other features which reinforce the “theme” developed for the Downtown. If desired, it could assist in introducing a new theme for the West End Business District. Local business associations should be actively involved in designing and funding the wayfinding program.
12. The “pedway” network should be maintained and further enhanced, to provide clear and complete pedestrian access to all areas of the Corridor. As redevelopment occurs, care should be taken to protect existing pedestrian pathways and consider the need for additional connections to municipal and commuter parking locations.
13. The Village should study the feasibility of grade separated pedestrian access along the Corridor. One or two grade separated access points along the Corridor, most likely below grade, are desirable. These improvements would provide greater flexibility in accessing the stations and would assist Pace



in minimizing crossing the Corridor. It would also enhance the efficiency of the parking system.

Parking Facilities Improvements

14. The Village should proactively consider the need for additional public parking within the West End Business District as redevelopment occurs. Parking facilities could accommodate shoppers, commuters, employees and LT High School parking needs. Further, if there is additional redevelopment within the Downtown, there will eventually be a need for additional public parking within the existing core, as well. While most developments will typically provide off-street parking for residential uses, it will be difficult to meet demand for commercial parking requirements on-site. The provision of shared shopper parking in convenient locations throughout the West End, rather than on a site-by-site basis, will in fact generate a more vibrant and successful venue for smaller retailers by encouraging the “multiple destination” shopping patterns currently supported in the Downtown core. The approach further facilitates a transit-oriented center as well.
15. Where additional parking is created within the Corridor, whether in surface parking lots or parking structures, care should be taken to minimize the visual impact on surrounding residential areas. This can be achieved by limiting access to parking areas to primarily non-residential streets, concealing parking areas behind or within developments where feasible, and designing visible structures to coordinate visually with adjacent structures.
16. Consideration should be given to the potential for shared parking between off-street commuter parking spaces and off-peak uses within the Corridor as an effective way to accommodate additional commuter parking capacity. Remote “park-n-ride” facilities are another potential alternative.
17. The Village should review its zoning code requirements regarding off-street parking. Provisions for individual on-site parking requirements in the West End should be eliminated. Further off-street parking requirements for residential uses should be reviewed to determine if they should be reduced consistent with transit supportive policies. Again, consistent with paragraph 16 above, any potential impacts to commuter parking should first be discussed with Metra.

18. Working with the business community, the Village should develop a map which illustrates business parking, public parking, commuter parking and other features for public distribution.

D. URBAN DESIGN

Urban design is a critical element of the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Community preferences on urban design will have strong influence on the level of pedestrian orientation in the Corridor and the degree to which Village objectives for transit supportive land use can be realized. Together with land use regulations such as the Village's zoning code, urban design decisions affect the perceived quality and character of the Corridor.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND DESIGN ISSUES

The Village of La Grange and its business partners have successfully sustained the Downtown with a balance between older structures and newer styles of development. La Grange has undertaken a streetscape improvement program which reinforces the charm and ambience of the Downtown. Aesthetic improvements combined with the bulk regulations of the Village's zoning code, have created a Downtown area that is highly pedestrian oriented, and "walkable". Significant streetscape upgrades have been undertaken within the Downtown since the inception of the Downtown Tax Increment Finance District in 1986, including the extension of wide sidewalks and streetscape amenities north of the Metra / BNSF Line along La Grange Road at the La Grange Crossing development.

The commuter station platforms at the La Grange Road Station have also been improved consistent with the Downtown streetscape theme through the provision of bench-height concrete planters along the south platform east of the station building that provide additional shade and seating. Most municipal parking lots within the Downtown are attractively landscaped, frequently including decorative wrought iron fencing, and with consistent Downtown signage.

Design review standards are in place requiring review by the Village prior to any exterior renovation work. The design review regulation encompasses most of the Corridor. This tool helps ensure that changes to existing structures and new development are compatible with surrounding conditions in the Corridor.



Early in the planning process, the Village solicited input regarding key planning *issues* and *opportunities* confronting the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Issues related to urban design include the following:

- A lack of pedestrian continuity between the Downtown and West End Business District.
- A lack of adequate wayfinding and entry signage.
- Many outdated building facades.
- Poorly marked/designed walks across the BNSF Railroad Corridor right-of-way.
- The scale of some of the Corridor’s newer structures.
- A need for additional open space within the Corridor, of various scales.

Opportunities related to urban design that were identified include the following:

- An established visual identity (streetscape) to expand, and to enhance with additional amenities.
- A Design Review Overlay District mechanism for design review is already in place.
- Several attractive buildings and facades.

URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND POLICIES

The following principles and policies should guide design decisions with regard to both public and private improvements within the Corridor to facilitate a consistent visual image and pedestrian-friendly character. An illustration of several of these principles relating to building facades is shown in *Figure 8, Facade Design Principles*.

Architectural Design

1. Buildings should not exceed five stories in height within the Corridor, and should be sensitively designed to be compatible with their surroundings regardless of height.
2. The overall mass and bulk of buildings should be broken down with vertical “storefront” divisions and/or changes in exterior materials, to remain compatible in scale with older structures.



Figure 8 BNSF Railroad Corridor Facade Design Principles



Figure 8 back of page

3. Rooflines should be varied for visual interest—parapet wall construction is most appropriate for commercial and mixed-use structures.
4. Architectural details—such as facade accents, balconies and awnings—can also serve to break down the scale of larger buildings and provide visual interest.
5. Masonry, stone and other natural exterior materials are most appropriate within the context of the Corridor.
6. Commercial storefronts should be located along the “street wall” and have large windows for merchandise display, encouraging a window shopping and strolling atmosphere.
7. Small scaled and non-illuminated signage is most appropriate within the Corridor; large and garish “box signs” or signs with moving parts are not in keeping with the character of the area.
8. Outdoor off-street parking spaces and garage entrances for multi-family residential developments should be concealed from view along public rights-of-way.



Transit Facilities

1. Provide shade trees, ornamental trees and attractive plantings in the vicinity of Metra stations and platforms to provide visual relief (subject to railroad and Metra Technical Services parking design guidelines and standards regarding sight lines and clearances at tracks and crossings).
2. The design and appearance of station shelters and information kiosks should be coordinated with the architectural design of the primary Metra station, and the overall streetscape.
3. Passenger amenities—such as benches, newspaper boxes, refuse receptacles and bicycle racks—should be visually coordinated with the overall streetscape theme of the Corridor.



Open Spaces and Streetscape

1. Provide generous sidewalks that allow for a “walking zone” adjacent to storefronts and an “amenity” zone at the curb to accommodate planters, street trees and benches. Ideally, sidewalks should be at least fifteen feet in width.



2. Integrate plazas, rest areas and open spaces of varying scales in the Corridor to provide rest and relaxation opportunities for shoppers and other visitors. Spaces should be strategically positioned and of high quality design.

3. Larger open spaces should incorporate lawn areas, defined walking paths, shade trees and focal points such as water features or public art displays.



4. Provide ornamental lighting sufficient to ensure secure walking conditions after dark, especially at off-street pedways and pedestrian crossing areas.
5. Street trees should be provided throughout the Corridor, in either grates or planted parkways, as appropriate.
6. Benches, water fountains, trash receptacles and other pedestrian amenities should be visually coordinated.
7. Color should be introduced through the use of plantings in low planters/planting beds, storefront awnings and pole-mounted banners.

Parking Lots and Structures

1. Lots and structures should be buffered from their surroundings with perimeter fencing and plantings, where visible from public rights-of-way.
2. To the extent feasible, parking lots should be visually concealed behind or beside



buildings, but be easy to find and access (see illustrative diagram below).

3. Clear signage and adequate lighting for wayfinding and security should be provided at all parking areas.



4. Parking lots should incorporate shade trees within planted islands for visual relief and user comfort.
5. Parking structures should be open in design, partially below grade if feasible to minimize overall height, and treated on the exterior with high quality materials and vines to blend in visually with their surroundings.

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK AND IMPROVEMENTS

There are a variety of additional urban design improvements which could be undertaken in the future, to enhance existing improvements. *Figure 9, Urban Design Framework* illustrates the desirable extent of the Corridor streetscape treatment, suggesting some expansion in the years ahead.

There are currently few open spaces or plazas within the BNSF Railroad Corridor. To function as a “full service” Downtown and Corridor, it is essential that pedestrians be provided with small outdoor “retreats” where they can rest, hold conversation, appreciate public art, or be entertained. Plazas and small open spaces can fulfill this need.

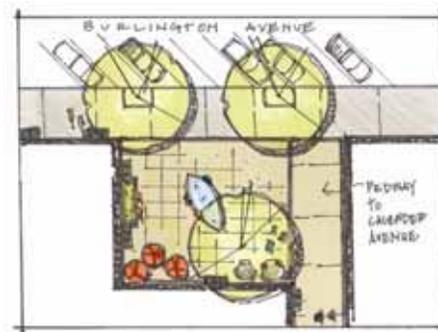


Figure 9, Urban Design Framework illustrates potential locations for future consideration.

The Village should remain flexible on these locations, and take advantage of opportunities arising from private development proposals where possible. For example, should the Calendar Avenue parking lot redevelop in the future, the Village could accomplish several functional and urban design objectives. The pedway connection between Calendar and Burlington Avenues should be maintained, while creating an urban plaza amenity (see illustrative diagram above). These spaces would not only perform



the functional role of providing rest and retreat, but would add to overall visual interest and the pedestrian experience throughout the BNSF Railroad Corridor.

Key to maintaining pedestrian continuity, and supporting the Village's TOD development efforts, is the continuation of the pedestrian-oriented "street wall" where buildings are developed up to the front lot line. Continuing to maintain and develop attractive storefronts is critical to sustaining the pedestrian character of the Corridor. Locations where it will be important to develop or maintain the Corridor's "street wall" character are illustrated in *Figure 9, BNSF Railroad Corridor Urban Design Framework*. Listed below are other potential aesthetic improvements, both public and private, within the BNSF Railroad Corridor.

1. Expand the established streetscape palette into all areas of the Corridor, as indicated below in the Urban Design Framework. Consider the addition of benches and other additional amenities in areas that are already improved, where space permits, to enhance the comfort of shoppers and other visitors to the Corridor.



2. Improve the open space surrounding the Stone Avenue Metra Station with new walkways, seating areas and plantings, to encourage use of the area and tie it into overall streetscape upgrades throughout the area (see illustrative diagram above).

3. At both Metra stations, provide additional seating, trash receptacles, attractive newspaper vending machines, information kiosks, plantings and other amenities to visually coordinate station and platform areas with the overall streetscape theme of the Corridor.



4. Establish gateway treatments, as indicated in *Figure 9*, to announce arrival into the Corridor at key locations and aid in orientation, in conjunction with the wayfinding signage system.

Figure 9 BNSF Railroad Corridor Urban Design Framework



Figure 9 back of page

5. Municipal parking lots and structures should be sensitively designed and well buffered from their surrounding through the use of careful siting, landscaped and fenced setbacks, and high quality materials.
6. Community input in the first phase of the planning process indicated that public art could be an important component of the Corridor. The market analysis indicates that there is a potential for arts and cultural facility development in the downtown. A high quality public art program could support this initiative. If and when it is pursued, the community will need to define a public arts program in more detail.
7. Encourage new private developments to adhere to the Urban Design Principles outlined below with regard to architectural design and site improvements, to provide a consistent and transit-supportive built environment throughout the Corridor.



STRATEGIES FOR BNSF CORRIDOR FACADE IMPROVEMENTS

The current La Grange Facade Renovation/Restoration program serves properties within only the current Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District. Eligibility for loans includes owners, contract purchasers, or tenants. The Village offers zero-interest, fixed rate loans for facade renovations not to exceed a loan amount of \$40,000. Owner participation is not a requirement of a loan award. Submittals and awards are made on a first-come, first-serve basis. La Grange specifies six general rehabilitation standards. The applicant must clearly identify how the renovation meets each standard. As mentioned earlier, to date approximately 31 renovations have been completed at an estimated value of 1.3 million dollars of investment.

Clearly, the program is substantial, and has worked well. However, because the Plan recommends the facade program be expanded throughout the entire Corridor, Village funding becomes an issue. The current TIF district covers only a portion of the Corridor and entirely excludes the West End Business District. Typically there are two ways that communities fund facade renovation programs. These include a Tax Increment Finance district (TIF) or a business improvement district (BID). Both tools provide the administrative



mechanism needed to administer a program. Further, both tools sustain plausible application throughout the BNSF Railroad Corridor.

Frequently, communities enroll the assistance of local finance institutions to provide a below market rate loan pool to serve a project. Most often, zero interest rate loan programs are underwritten by both the lender and the host community. Either a TIF or BID approach would be appropriate in La Grange. As mentioned earlier, however, the selection of the tool will likely be tied to the overall Corridor redevelopment finance strategy selected by the Village.

E. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Village of La Grange and its business partners have worked hard to reinvigorate the Downtown, develop a special marketing and branding program, and secure new real estate and business development investments. This effort has largely been successful due to a strong public-private initiative between the Village and community business organizations. Economic development activities defined in the Plan build upon this successful model.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

The Downtown now contains a wide variety of shopping and eating establishments that enhance the overall quality of life in the Village and will be an ongoing source of revenue. These coordinated efforts must now begin to encompass the Corridor as a whole, dedicating significant attention to encouraging additional commercial activity within the West End Business District.

In the early stages of the planning process, feedback from the community was solicited regarding planning issues and opportunities confronting the BNSF Railroad Corridor. Issues related to economic development include:

- The existing TIF District in the Downtown area expires in 2009.
- Rising rents may occur with redevelopment, threatening the long-term viability of smaller, local businesses.
- Business hours of operation are not coordinated or late enough to coincide with restaurant peak use periods.
- Avoid attracting too many “generic” chain businesses; maintain a unique local shopping experience.

Opportunities related to economic development include:

- A strong La Grange Business Association.
- LTHS-generated customer traffic that can be captured in the West End Business District.
- A targeted entertainment marketing strategy to attract regional patrons.
- “Showcase” area businesses / events at the Metra stations.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

Listed below are the planning policies that will guide consideration of economic development opportunities within the BNSF Railroad Corridor.

1. Continue to work with and leverage the organizational assets of the local business associations, including the LGBA, toward Downtown goals.
2. Identify and selectively recruit businesses the Village desires to see within the Downtown and West End Business District.
3. Through redevelopment in the West End, capitalize on the market potential of LTHS students, parents and employees in the West End Business District.
4. Continue to support the *Economic Development Strategy for the Village of La Grange*, prepared by the Economic Development Advisory committee,
5. Balance locally owned businesses with national chains in achieving a sustainable and mutually supportive business mix. While national chains can generate needed regional traffic, the Village should actively discourage the loss or displacement of local businesses that provide uniqueness and variety within the Corridor. While there are no easy, “patented” solutions to this issue, the Village and the local business associations should consider actions that might be taken on a case-by-case basis.
6. Expand existing, and create new, community events in the Corridor to generate both local and regional interest in patronizing the Downtown and West End Business District. Showcase these events to Metra commuters and a larger regional audience to build awareness and patronage of the Downtown and West End Business District.



7. Include West End Business District off-street parking and traffic studies as part of a comprehensive Village-wide street capacity study. Although this item is discussed under Mobility, it is also an important economic development issue as well. Developing consensus on a strategy to manage parking in the West End in the long term will benefit all interested parties. The Village should actively develop traffic and parking strategies that target improved circulation patterns prior to redevelopment occurring.

8. In view of the fact that the Downtown Tax Increment Finance District will expire in 2009, the Village may need to seek new financial resources to support public improvement projects. Part VII, *Implementation* includes several ideas. One approach would be to consider the adoption of a new tax increment finance district for improvements in the West End Business District.