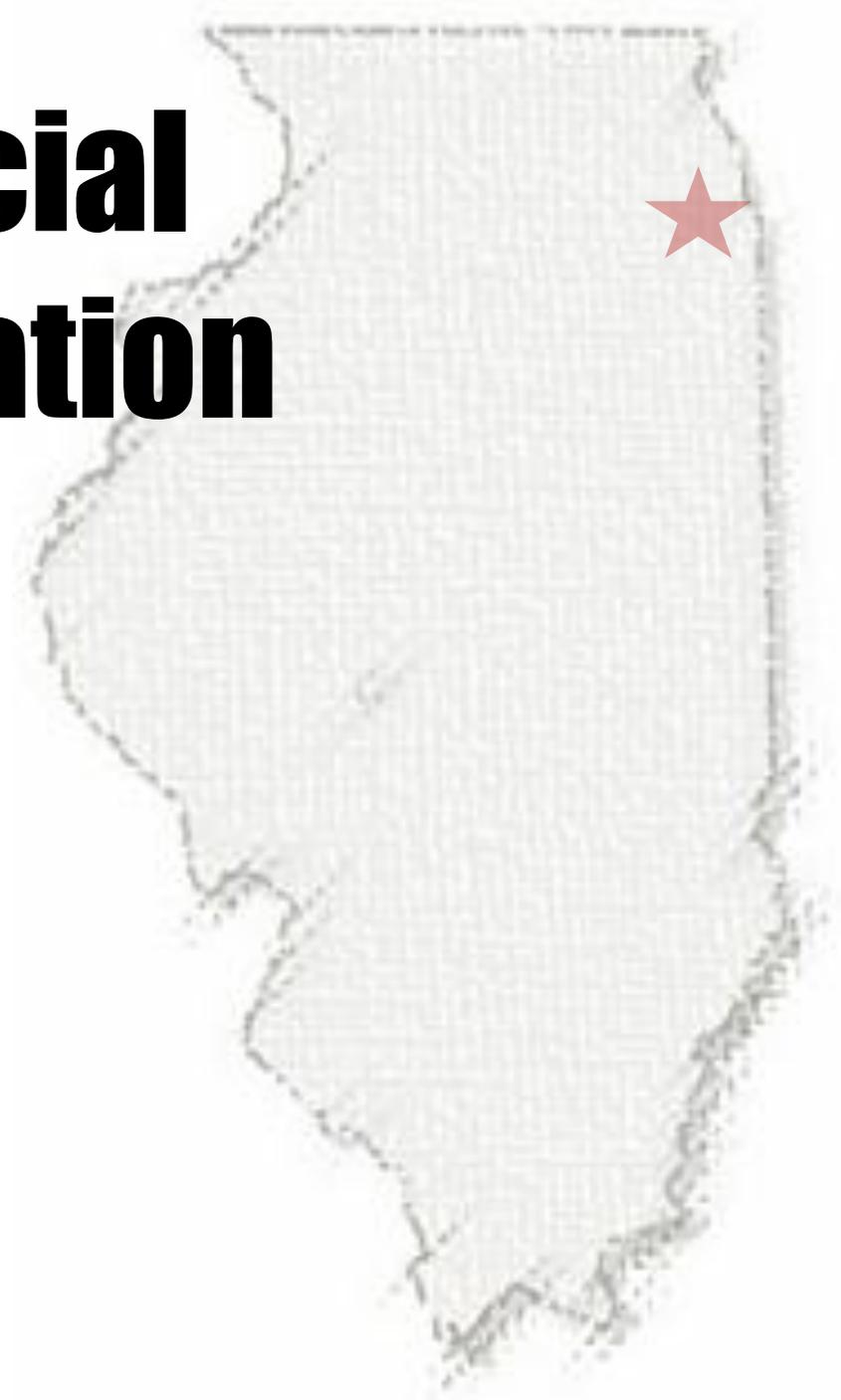


Commercial Revitalization Plan

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Background

The Village of La Grange Park has long strived to promote a healthy economic climate for businesses and residents. Traditionally, the Village has achieved this by providing well-maintained infrastructure and exceptional municipal services. Up until recently, the Village was able to maintain a "laissez-faire" approach towards economic development, allowing market forces to dictate the commercial make-up of the community. However, as the national economy began to stagnate following the financial crisis in 2008, the Village realized the need to take a more pro-active approach toward economic development in order to ensure the stability of the Village's commercial base. As a result, the Village established the Commercial Revitalization Committee (CRC) in 2011 and charged the CRC with creating a plan to revitalize the Village's commercial areas.

Plan Purpose

The intent of this report is to create a multi-year commercial revitalization plan ("Plan") for the Village, which incorporates both commercial and industrial businesses. The Village recognizes that its existing businesses are vital contributors to the success of the community and therefore several of the actions incorporated in the Plan are intended to support and retain our existing businesses. However, there are also areas of the community that are vacant or in need of reinvestment. To address these, the Plan includes strategies for business attraction. It is the Village's hope that the combination of these strategies – both business retention and attraction – will result in a vibrant and dynamic commercial base that will sustain the Village for years to come.

Previous Efforts

While the Village has not engaged in what may be considered traditional forms of economic development, the Village Board has worked diligently to build a foundation for commercial revitalization within the community. Below is a brief summary of some of the previous actions the Village has taken to prepare itself for development of a commercial revitalization plan.

Comprehensive Plan Update

Recognizing that the first step in the process of creating a plan for commercial revitalization is establishing a vision, the Village updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2006. The Comprehensive Plan serves as a guiding document and among other things, outlines the Village's objectives for how property within the Village will be utilized, clearly delineating commercial and industrial areas within the community.

Zoning Code Update

After establishing a collective vision for the community, the Village then proceeded to re-evaluate its regulations governing land use within the community. Over the course of three years, the Village worked to update and modernize its Zoning Code to ensure that its zoning regulations appropriately balanced the needs of businesses with the health, safety and welfare objectives of the Village. The resulting Zoning Code, which went into effect on January 25, 2011, makes opening a business in the community easier and thus less costly and provides clear direction on Village requirements.

31st Street Corridor Redevelopment Study

In 2008, the Village also approved the 31st Street Corridor Redevelopment Study. The purpose of the study was to improve safety for motorists and pedestrians and to maximize the economic benefits of the corridor. The study provides guidance in several areas, including how to strengthen existing commercial uses, improve the marketability and identity of the area and how to make the area more convenient and safe for business patrons.

Recommended Activities

The Village has identified six primary areas in which to focus its future commercial revitalization efforts. These areas include:

1. Internal Processes
2. Planning
3. Relationship Building
4. Resource Development
5. Community Marketing
6. Community Aesthetics

Each of these primary areas are outlined in detail in the following pages and specific action items for each are identified.

1. Internal Processes

The Village should work to improve its internal processes which impact its relationship with new and existing businesses. Communication between departments regarding businesses inquiries, proposed improvements and permit approvals should be enhanced, as should communication with the Village Board. Staff should also work to establish a clear process for handling business inquiries to ensure that businesses' questions and concerns are addressed promptly and comprehensively.

Action items in this category include:

- Create a spreadsheet to track business progress through the zoning and permitting process
- Distribute spreadsheet to Village departments and Village Trustees
- Establish procedures for processing business inquiries, including establishing a primary point of contact for all new businesses
- Consider potential amendments to Village regulations to make them more business friendly



2. Planning

Thriving, dynamic commercial corridors do not happen by accident and do not occur overnight. In order to ensure the long-term success and viability of the Village's commercial areas, the Village will need to carefully plan for the future.

Action items in this category include:

- Considering conducting a retail gap analysis to determine shopping habits and guide future outreach efforts
- Consider conducting a marketability study to evaluate opportunities for redevelopment of the Village Market
- Research and evaluate existing economic incentive programs for applicability to the Village

3. Relationship Building

Developing and maintaining relationships with businesses is integral to ensuring their success within the community. The Village needs to have an understanding of the make-up of the business community, their needs and the challenges they face in order to better serve them. The Village should establish and/or strengthen relationships with business owners and property managers and work to demonstrate our support of the local business community.

Action items in this category include:

- Attend the regular Board of Directors and monthly meetings of the La Grange Park Chamber of Commerce
- Attend La Grange Park Chamber events when possible (both staff and Village Officials)
- Attend new business ribbon cuttings to welcome new businesses to the community and demonstrate Village support (both staff and Village Officials)
- Recognize business milestones at Village Board meetings (i.e. 10 years within the community)
- Periodically meet with business owners and property managers to discuss their successes, challenges and plans for the future
- Reach out to key businesses in times of crisis or emergency to demonstrate support
- Utilize local businesses when possible

- Invite businesses to attend Commercial Revitalization Committee meetings and provide input

4. Resource Development

In order to truly be recognized as a business-friendly community, the Village must have resources that support new and existing businesses. Helping businesses understand Village policies and regulations, directing them to local, state and federal assistance programs and assisting them with promoting and marketing their business to local residents, are all factors that contribute to businesses being successful in the Village.

Action items in this category include:

- Create a webpage on the Village website to serve as a “hub” for key information and resource material for businesses
- Create a “Business Resource Guide” to assist businesses that are looking to locate or expand in the community with understanding Village opportunities and regulations
- Create a “New Business Checklist” to serve as a quick reference guide for new businesses opening in the community
- Publish press releases on new businesses
- Highlight businesses in weekly E-Briefs, and quarterly Rose Clippings, and encourage residents to shop locally

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5. Community Marketing

The key to soliciting new businesses to join the La Grange Park community is to promote the Village and the benefits it has to offer potential businesses. The Village of La Grange Park is a stable community, which is centrally located and has a diverse customer base. The Village needs to better capitalize on its assets by developing a promotional campaign to attract new businesses to the community.

Action items in this category include:

- Maintain membership to International Council of Shopping Centers
- Attend industry events to stay informed of market trends and to promote the community and available properties
- Publish an annual “Top Ten Employers List”
- Develop marketing materials to promote Village assets (e.g. outreach letter, flyer, etc.)
- Develop vacant property site sheets to market existing commercial/industrial space
- Include information on vacant properties on the Village website
- Provide information on vacant properties on a regular basis to the La Grange Park Chamber
- Consider “branding” the Village

6. Community Aesthetics

Continued reinvestment in the Village's commercial areas is key to maintaining and attracting new businesses to the community. Commercial properties must be maintained in a clean and safe manner. Building facades and parking lots that are allowed to age and fall into disrepair project a disheartening image of the community. By contrast, modern, well-maintained and inviting commercial areas attract new businesses and customers alike. Within the Village, there are several commercial properties that could be enhanced to better reflect the values and ideals of the community.

Action items in this category include:

- Establish and/or enforce regulations for the maintenance of vacant space and properties
- Initiate code enforcement against dilapidated properties
- Enhance the existing Village streetscaping efforts
- Encourage property owners to reinvest in facades, landscaping, parking lot
- Consider establishing an incentive program to encourage reinvestment
- Consider having local community organizations assist with various community clean-up and enhancement programs.

Implementation

The Village recognizes that a community revitalization plan is a long-term plan, one that must be accomplished one step at a time in order to achieve long-term results. Additionally, Village staff time and financial resources are limited, necessitating that the Village prioritize its efforts in order to make implementation feasible and ultimately successful. Thus, the previously identified Action Items have been categorized into four categories:

- **Ongoing:** Action items which are either currently underway or once implemented require continual effort.
- **Level 1:** Activities which can be implemented quickly and with minimal staff time and financial resources.
- **Level 2:** Activities which require significant staff time and/or participation by non-Village parties.
- **Level 3:** Activities which require significant staff time and significant financial resources.

In order to ensure that the objectives of the Plan are being met, the Village should strive to continue to implement all activities classified as "ongoing" immediately and should implement at least two level one activities, one level two activity, and one level three activity each year. Staff should update the Implementation Matrix on a quarterly basis to keep implementation of the objectives on track.