

WPB's rich history, eccentric culture, and diverse community have endowed the area with a unique character, architecture, attitude, and identity, each collectively expressed by the corridors' buildings and signage, shops, bars, and restaurants, residents and customers. Increasingly though, development and construction, new structures and stores, are redefining the WPB streetscape, attracting newcomers to the area, new visitors, and new shoppers, some who bring with them a different aesthetic and set of values – and different sized budgets. Change is only natural, and growth along urban commercial corridors is far more desirable than decline, but where growth is fueled by an area's character and charm as is the case in WPB, such growth must be respectful and reflective of the local vibe and urban dynamics. The strength of the market suggests that development will continue to exert its force in the area for years to come, and a central purpose of this planning study, therefore, is to position the WPB SSA to better negotiate with developers to ensure that new construction preserves WPB's character and identity and that new commercial tenants maintain a diverse and locally-owned business mix.

Guiding development is about managing change by embracing a proactive role in shaping WPB's unfolding future – about establishing upfront expectations for development, redevelopment, and commercial tenant attraction and retention that enable the community to inform rather than respond to proposed changes in WPB's physical form and retail mix. The following recommendations propose target densities and zoning changes along the corridors, outline desired development approaches for key sites within the SSA's district, and detail a commercial development strategy that will ensure that WPB remains home to a full range of thriving, independent, and locally-owned businesses.



Figure 82. Guide Development Overview Diagram



5.1 Adopt an official SSA stance on density and development.

ACTION > Advocate

Work the City's Department of Planning and Development to optimize zoning to leverage transit.

Advocate for more flexibility in ground floor use where there are clusters of vacant ground floor commercial space.

Advocate for the protection of neighborhood-scale retail by extending pedestrian retail street designations, down-zoning M1 and C2 lots to B2 or B3, and considering a new hybrid zoning designation or overlay that limits the size of retail uses.

ACTION > Review

Work with the Alderman, developers, and community groups to review projects with Transit-Oriented Development as a main objective.

For years, Wicker Park and Bucktown appeared to be super-charged with new development which most often took the form of new condominiums. The rapid pace of change and scale of new development has raised many concerns about how, and how fast, the neighborhood was changing. Many residents believe that recent development is simply out of scale with existing residential blocks. Others lament that the end product of new development simply lacks the detail and characteristics that make WPB unique. And amidst these concerns, a growing concern about parking has emerged.

In the past few years, several new development proposals have come before the neighborhood and received very different audiences depending upon



Photo Booth
suggestion from
WPB Open
House.

the community group or business association with which the developer spoke. In the absence of a neighborhood-wide zoning policy to which all neighborhood organizations can refer, it is understandable that different groups espouse very different opinions about new development. Given that the SSA has taken a proactive role in initiating this planning process, there exists an opportunity to discuss density and land use openly and creatively.

We recommend altering the zoning in WPB to adhere to the following principles:

1. **Promote Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)** – TOD is a national movement toward building mixed-use, dense developments within close proximity to rail and transit stations in order to promote additional transit ridership, reduce auto congestion, and enhance our personal health and that of the environment. Wicker Park and Bucktown have three active rail stations nestled within a dense urban fabric, but there are opportunities to increase density around each station and promote active retail storefronts that would better leverage the presence of the rail stations. Properties around each station that are susceptible to change should be carefully redeveloped to create an active streetscape and encourage more living and working within close proximity of each station.

The allowable density should be increased within an eighth-mile of each station along the commercial corridors. These “sweet spots” around each station should be developed at higher densities, allowing structures of up to 10 stories. Ground floor uses must be retail and upper floors should be a mix of housing, office, or other complimentary use. Parking maximums (as opposed to minimums) should be utilized, and no parking structure should be allowed except to meet the parking demand of the development. Current zoning for many properties within an eighth-mile from each station does not allow for this density, capping development instead at 3 to 4 floors. Up-zoning to B3-5 will enable taller development but still require planned development designation for taller buildings. Other key sites within a quarter-mile (1,200 feet) from each station should also be considered for higher densities represented in -3 zones as a means to further promote TOD principles.

2. **Encourage greater density at the Bloomingdale Trail main gateway** – One of the main entryways to the Bloomingdale Trail has been identified at Milwaukee and Leavitt. The current sites, however, are characterized by automobile dominated uses or vacant lots. To visibly mark this entry, zoning should be changed to allow for taller buildings of between 5 and 7 stories.

3. **Allow more flexibility in use where the market is not quite working** – Despite the recent housing boom, there are still parts of WPB that struggle. These areas (along Western Avenue for instance) command lower rents and are less attractive to a wide range of retailers. The zoning approach in these areas should allow for a greater flexibility to jump-start the market. For this reason, existing zoning along North, Western, and Ashland Avenues should be changed to B2, which allows live/work space by right. (See Recommendation 4.3)

4. **Protect existing neighborhood retail** – WPB is unique, in part, due to its retail mix and density. Where appropriate, the density and characteristics of the buildings need to be protected as a means of honoring the past. The Landmark Designation for Milwaukee Avenue is one example of protection sought after by both residents and the City to accomplish this goal. Another tactic is to re-zone existing M1 and C2 lots to B2 or B3 zones. B2 zones are more appropriate for properties along Western and Ashland while a B3 designation should be encouraged for M1 properties along Milwaukee Avenue to protect the character and retail mix of the corridor.

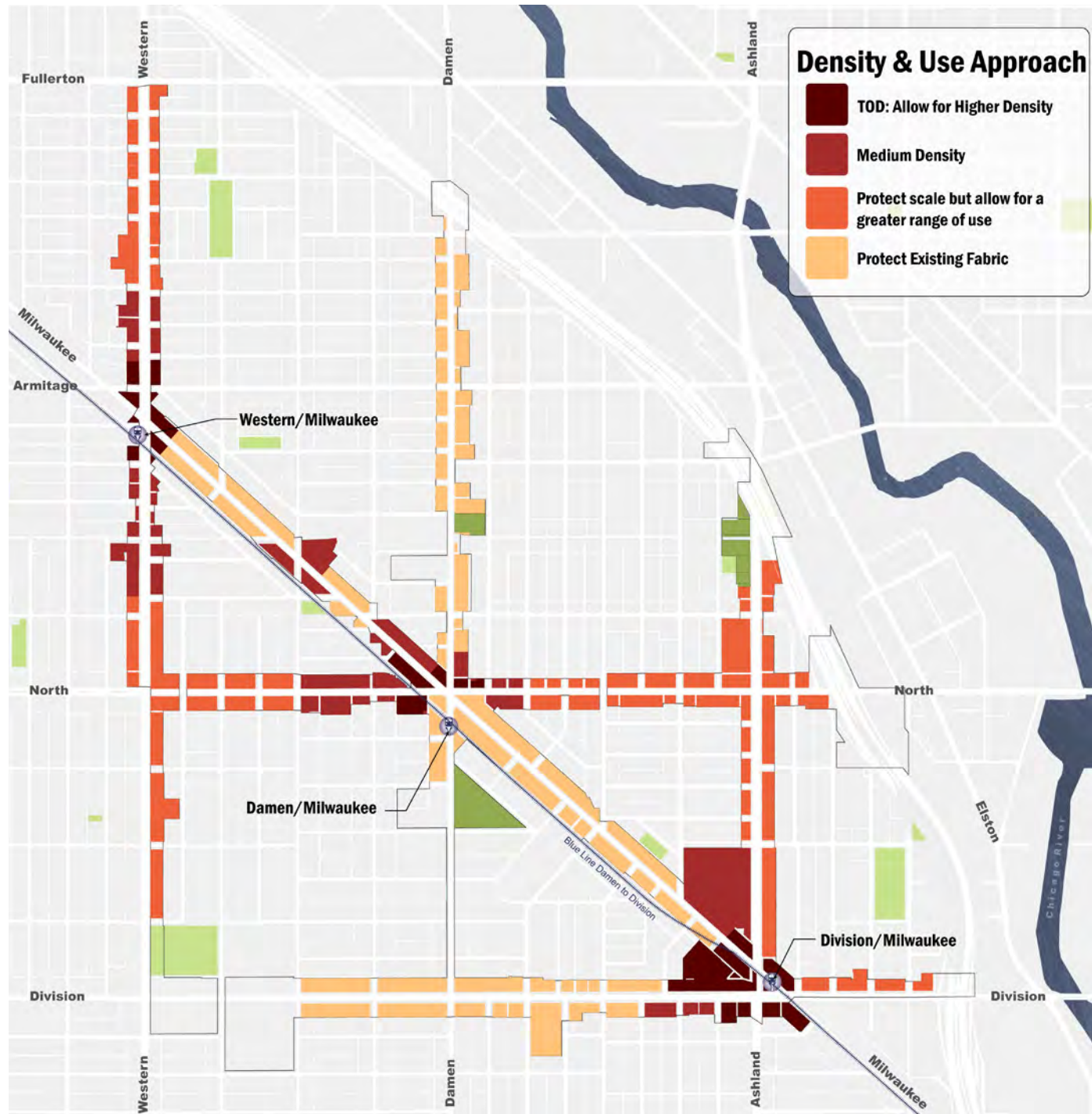


Figure 83. Density and Use Approach Map

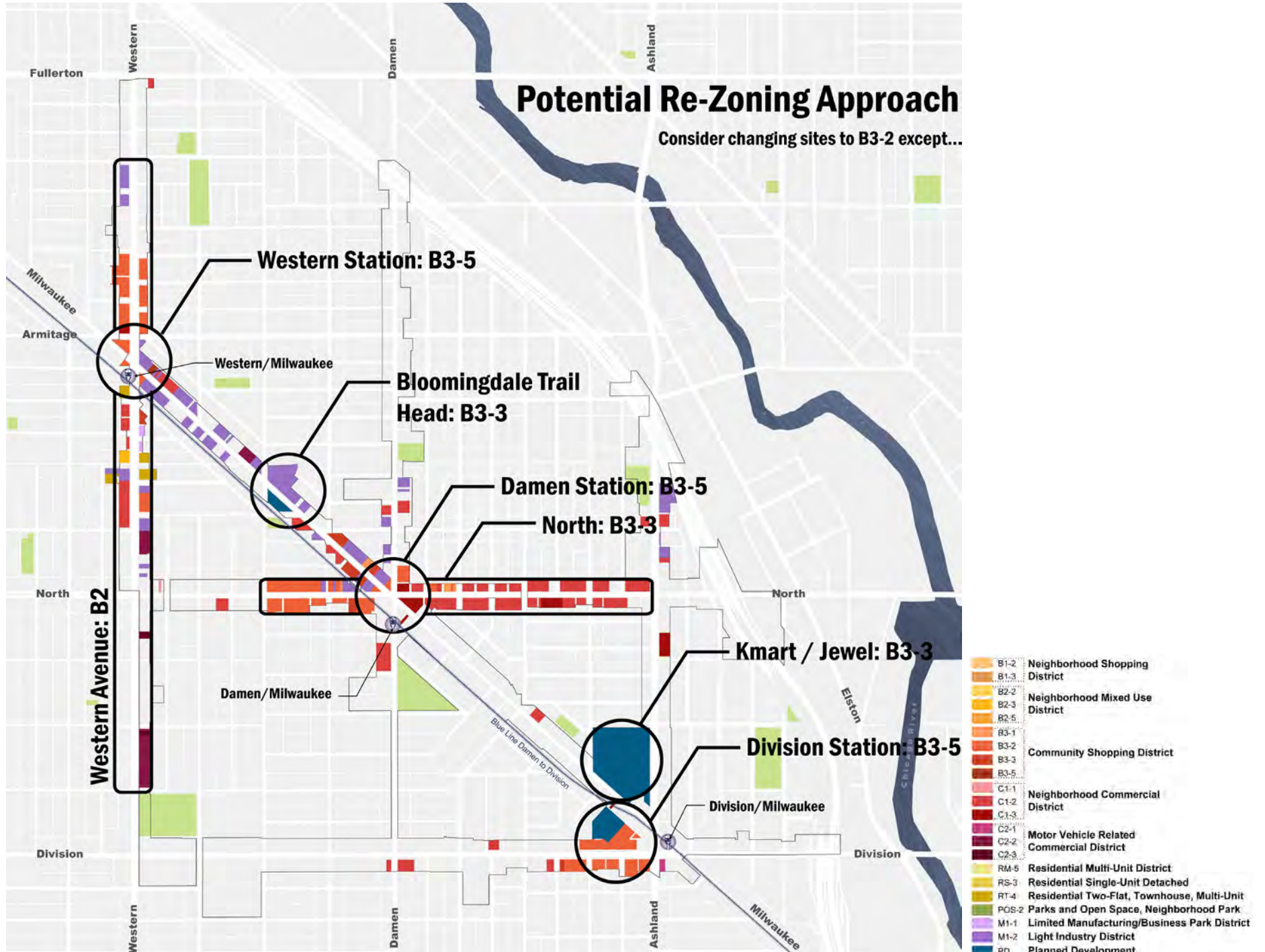


Figure 84. Proposed Re-Zoning Approach Map

5. **Expand pedestrian retail streets designation** – The only street in WPB that has the pedestrian retail street designation is Milwaukee Avenue from Division to North. This should be expanded to include Division Street from Marshfield to Leavitt (which is currently a pedestrian street), Damen Avenue from Pierce to St. Paul, and North Avenue from Hoyne to Elk Grove. This designation would enhance the pedestrian experience as well as shield these areas from the proliferation of banks since only pedestrian retail streets are protected by the City's banking ordinance.

6. **Protect against proliferation of national retailers** – In order to encourage the local retailers who have helped make WPB the thriving retail destination that it is, we recommend considering the introduction of a new zoning overlay, similar to the pedestrian retail street designation, to be applied to its main retail corridors, requiring any new retailer proposing a store of more than 7,500 square feet to obtain a special use permit. This overlay could be part of a citywide effort to protect certain areas from having large retailers enter the market and harm the existing retail experience by occupying large store fronts, while also affording community groups like the SSA a voice in project review and some flexibility should a larger project fit the area's general development goals. A 7,500 square foot maximum store allows for retailers to occupy 2 storefronts side by side (50 feet of store frontage) with a lot depth of up to 150 feet (with average lots in WPB being 100-150 feet deep).

It is recommended that this overlay correspond to the same streets that carry the recommendation of being changed to pedestrian retail streets as described above. This will apply to sections of streets on Division, North, Damen, and Milwaukee.

It is likely that increasing density around the stations will stir opposition. It should be noted, however, that increasing density at each station will actually improve the surrounding neighborhoods. With increased density at each station, more people will move to WPB inclined to take the train to work and other destinations instead of drive. The intent is to clearly target the station areas for density while protecting existing residential blocks from over-development.

Business Zoning Cheat Sheet

B2 – Neighborhood Mixed Use District

B2 districts serve the same purposes as B1 districts, but where the commercial market is not as strong, they can accommodate a greater range of land uses including ground floor residential units by-right. The B2 designation is intended to stimulate development along under-developed streets. This zoning designation accommodates artist live/work space in ground floor units as of right.

- Gross floor area of commercial establishments = 25,000 square feet.
- **B2-2** has a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 2.2 and a maximum building height of 45 feet if there is no ground floor commercial space, or 47 – 50 feet if there is ground floor commercial space depending on the width of the lot frontage.
- **B2-3** has an FAR of 3.0 and a maximum building height of 50 – 60 feet if there is no ground floor commercial space, or 50-65 feet if there is ground floor commercial space depending on the width of the lot frontage.
- **B2-5** has an FAR of 5.0 and a maximum building height of 50 – 75 feet (or higher if reviewed and approved as a Planned Developments (PD)) depending on the lot frontage if there is no ground floor commercial, or 50 – 80 feet (or higher if reviewed and approved as a Planned Developments (PD)) depending on the lot frontage if there is ground floor commercial.

B3 – Community Shopping District

B3 districts accommodate a broad range of retail and service uses. It allows for dense, mixed use projects, but because commercial developments are not subject to size limits under B3, B3 developments sometimes take the form of shopping centers. As many customers arrive by car at these destination-style shopping centers, the supply of off-street parking tends to be higher in B3 districts than in B1 or B2 districts.

- *Commercial establishments are not subject to size limits*, which can lead to the development of big-box or national chain retail.
- **B3-1** has an FAR of 1.2 and a maximum building height of 38 feet.
- **B3-2** has an FAR of 2.2 and a maximum building height of 47 – 50 feet depending on the width of the lot frontage.
- **B3-3** has an FAR of 3.0 and a maximum building height of 50 – 65 feet depending on the width of the lot frontage.
- **B3-5** has an FAR of 5.0 and a maximum building height of 50 – 80 feet (or higher if reviewed and approved as a Planned Developments (PD)) depending on the lot frontage.

See the Appendix for more information on FAR and the zoning designations that apply to WPB properties.

5.2 Promote Low Impact Development (LID) and green building technologies in all new construction and rehabilitation projects.

ACTION > Advocate

Work with the Aldermen, the City, the Chamber, and community groups to review developments with an eye toward green building and managing stormwater.

In 2004, the City of Chicago, a leading pioneer of green development practices nationwide, adopted The Chicago Standard, a new set of green guidelines for public building design, construction, and renovation to “reduce operating costs and conserve energy and resources.”³⁴ With the 2007 Chicago Green Homes program, the City has taken important steps to incentivize and encourage green development in the private sector as well, offering density bonuses and fast-track permitting to smaller scale projects that adopt an eco-friendly approach. The WPB SSA, together with the Aldermen, the Chamber, and local community groups, should take an active role to ensure that new development in WPB goes above and beyond in support of the City’s initiatives, embodying the area’s identity as not only green, but progressively so.

The design for all new and rehabilitated structures in WPB should respect and contribute to the neighborhood’s desire for a greener, more sustainable future, incorporating environmentally sensitive design and building techniques. Proposed developments should, accordingly, be held to stringent standards during their community review process. All residential and mixed use projects should be required to fill out the checklist for the City’s Green Homes program so that the neighborhood can evaluate the project’s baseline eco-efforts. Special attention in all project reviews (for residential projects, mixed use projects, or otherwise) should be paid to:

- **Stormwater Management** - all projects should employ Low Impact Development (LID) techniques that aim to preserve or restore predevelopment hydrology systems and water quality by introducing a series of interventions that provide hydrologic and pollution control for small, frequently occurring storms. Stormwater management techniques, detailed in Recommendation 6.3, should minimize stormwater runoff by maximizing the water volume that infiltrates (sinks into the soil or green roof on site) and evaporates (from the ground or plant matter).
- **Green Building** - all projects should adopt green building techniques resulting in projects that use energy and water efficiently; use renewable sources of energy, like solar and wind; use building materials that are energy efficient, have high recycled content, low toxicity, and good durability; and reduce the waste from construction, renovation, and demolition when possible.
- **Site Design** - all projects should promote walkability in WPB, contributing to an environment that prioritizes the pedestrian and makes walking (and walking to transit) easier and more comfortable than driving. Because parking lots and parking structures inherently cater to the automobile, these types of developments (see Recommendation 7.36 for potential new locations) should be required to meet higher standards with regard to stormwater management and green building. Parking lots should be designed with light colored, permeable paving materials to lessen the urban heat island effect and allow for stormwater absorption and filtration. Parking structures should have green roofs. All new parking facilities should have lushly planted edges, limited curb cuts, and be embedded mid-block to minimize their impact on the pedestrian and aesthetic environment.

Beyond its advocacy role in development review, the SSA should promote education and awareness about Low Impact Development by linking prospective developers with information about City programs and resources for building green homes, green roofs, and mitigating the urban heat island effect, etc.³⁵

³⁴ http://egov.cityofchicago.org/webportal/COCWebPortal/COC_ATTACH/ChicagoStandard.pdf

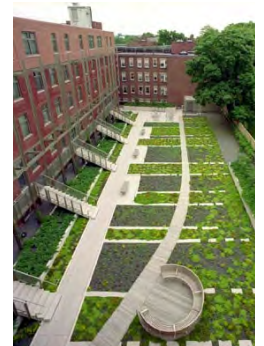
³⁵ See the City of Chicago’s Department of Environment’s home page’s link to Initiatives and Programs



Green roof above City Hall.
Source: www.inhabit.com



Source: Department of Environment



Green roof over parking garage at Harvard University.
Source: <http://blog.design-public.com>

5.3 Work to redevelop strategic sites.

ACTION > Advocate

Work with property owners, the Aldermen, and the City to push for the transformation of key sites as dense, mixed-use, and urban developments.

The majority of WPB's commercial streets are built-out with a dense, walkable fabric that makes the area so attractive to locals and visitors alike. Within this fabric though there remains a handful of properties that are either underutilized or that were built at a time when the market in the community was soft, often resulting in a built form tailored more to the automobile than the pedestrian or bicyclist.

While the SSA is not a developer, it should help to raise the bar for what is built in the community and actively rally the property owners, Aldermen, and other community groups around a redevelopment approach for these sites that supports density, a mix of uses, and walkability. Regarding existing land use and design, participants in this study overwhelmingly identified three key sites of concern:

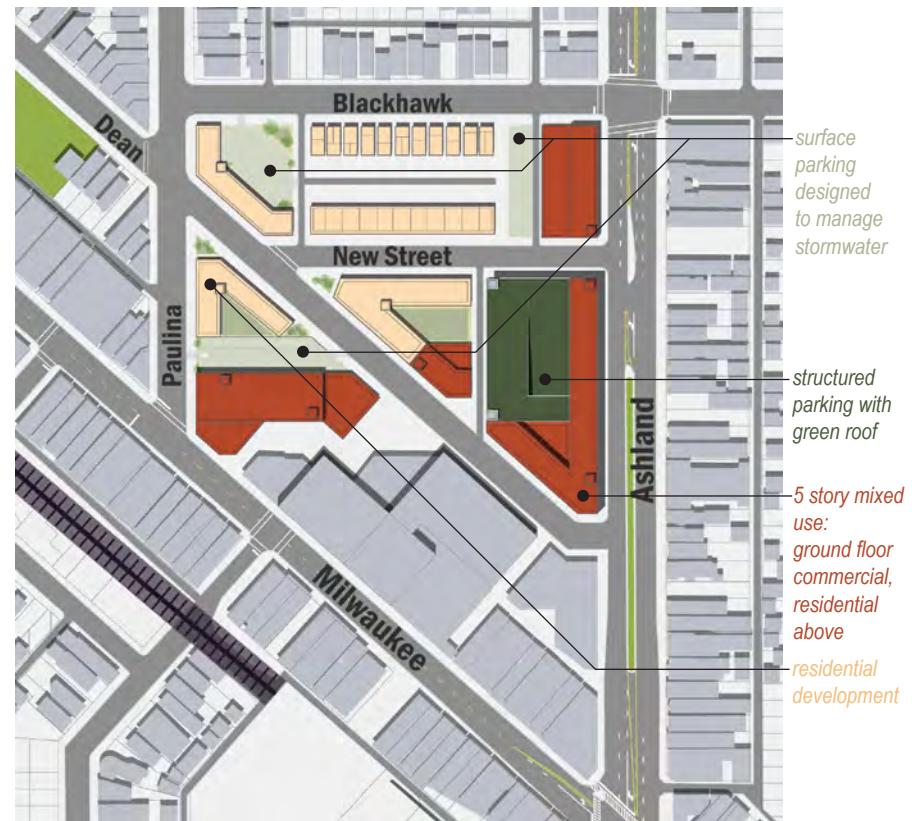
Kmart and Jewel – The Kmart and Jewel provide necessary services to the community but were developed within a suburban model. The stores have long-term leases on the property, but redevelopment should be considered when the leases expire in approximately 10 years.

Given the site's proximity to the Division Blue Line stop (less than a ¼ of a mile), and its frontage along both Milwaukee Avenue and Ashland Avenue, redevelopment of the Kmart and Jewel is a significant opportunity to enhance the southeastern section of the SSA as a gateway for the community while supporting transit-oriented development. This site has the potential for many uses, and while a national tenant may anchor the site, space should be reserved for locally-owned businesses as well that will further connect this parcel to the rest of the SSA. The conceptual site plan illustrates:

- Breaking the current super block into smaller blocks by extending N. Dean Street through to Ashland Avenue;
- Designating properties facing Milwaukee and Ashland for commercial use on the ground floor with housing above;
- Concentrating new townhomes along Paulina and Blackhawk Streets;
- Integrating a new parking garage that is not visible from surrounding streets thus protecting sidewalk activity;
- Creating a new supermarket on the ground floor facing Ashland Avenue;
- Increasing density closer to the Division Blue Line stop; and
- Providing pedestrian access from Milwaukee Avenue across to the supermarket and Ashland Avenue.



Figures 85a. and b. Existing and Proposed Conceptual Site Plan for Kmart and Jewel site. Residential development in peach; mixed use residential/commercial in red.

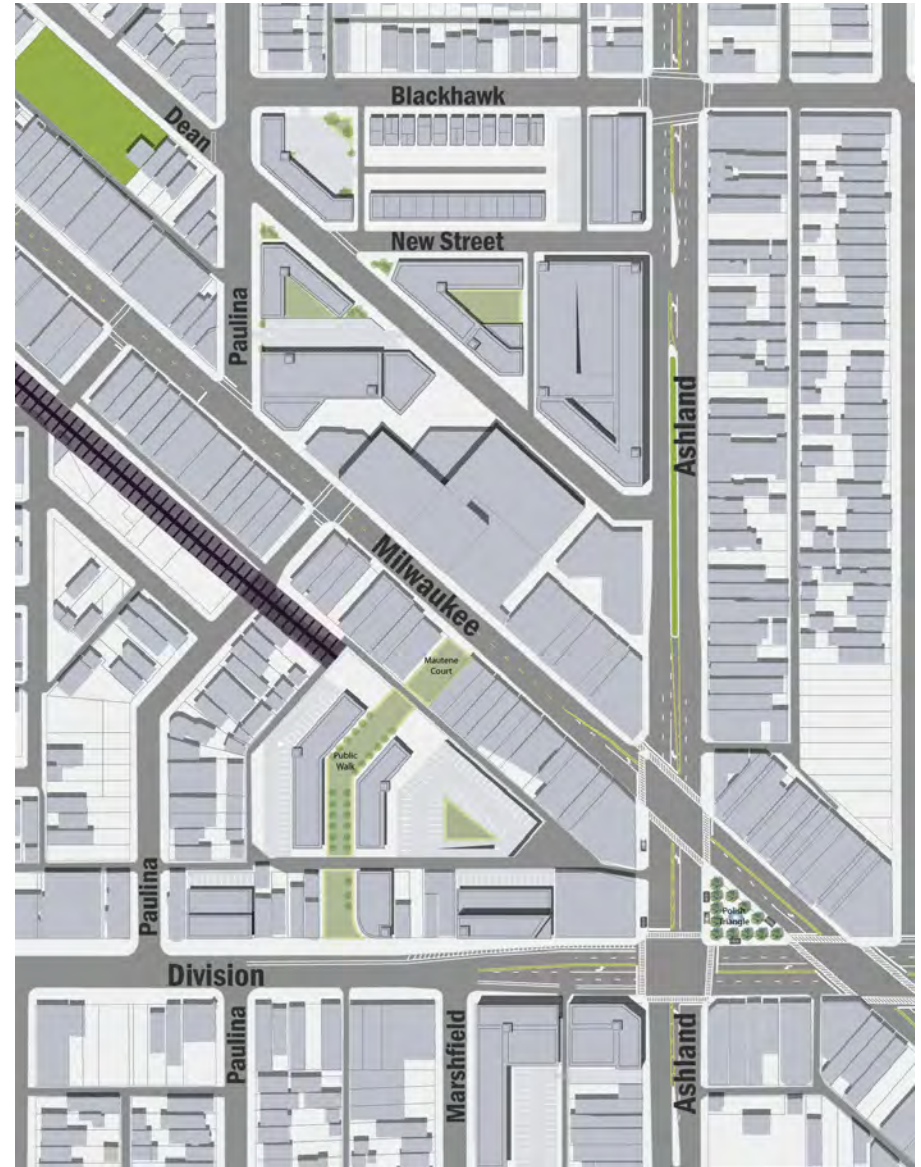


Division between Paulina and Ashland – The area is currently used primarily for parking despite the fact that it is within eyeshot of the Polish Triangle and the Division Blue Line stop. Recent interest in improving Mautene Court as a new plaza along Milwaukee makes this area an important and potential connection between Milwaukee Avenue and Division Street. The conceptual design approach for the site includes:

- New mixed-use development facing Division Street providing a street wall of activity near the Polish Triangle;
- Parking concentrated in the rear of the property hidden from the main streets; and
- An extended pedestrian link extending Mautene Court through to Division Street lined with new mixed-use development. This could be a unique, pedestrian-only, intimate plaza or a covered arcade line by cafes.



Figures 86a. and b. Existing and Proposed Conceptual Site Plan for Division between Paulina and Ashland.



Figures 87a. and b. Existing and Proposed Conceptual Site Plan for Kmart and Jewel site and Division between Paulina and Ashland showing a denser, finer-grained form of development.

Milwaukee and Leavitt – The intersection of Milwaukee Avenue and Leavitt Street presents a gap in what could be a continuously active, urban, and vibrant Milwaukee Avenue in WPB. Vacant land exists both north and south of the old Bloomingdale rail line, and a suburban style Aldi occupies a major site on Milwaukee, with surface parking meeting the street. The lack of continuous retail activity in this area is often cited as major factor impacting the viability of retail further north on Milwaukee Avenue.

However, this area has much to build on including the public library only one block to the south and a new City park completed at Wabansia and Leavitt. Most significantly, the Bloomingdale corridor is proposed as a new linear park, and this intersection has been slated as a major gateway to the proposed park.

The redevelopment approach should include all of the vacant sites near the intersection but also consider the Aldi as an opportunity for redevelopment. Although the Aldi is active, the demographics around the store are changing, which indicates that it might sell and move on or transition to a Trader Joe's, which has the same parent company as Aldi. In either case, the site should be discussed as an opportunity for increasing density, providing new uses that will activate this stretch of Milwaukee Avenue, and connecting to the Bloomingdale Trail. The conceptual design approach includes:

- A new six screen movie theater akin to the Alamo Drafthouse in Austin with parking and a green roof above to serve the development of the entire site;
- New housing with direct access to the Bloomingdale Trail;
- New retail facing Milwaukee Avenue including a small plaza suitable for outdoor food markets;
- An playful, visible connection to the Bloomingdale Trail along Leavitt just north of the trail in the form of a new grass hill (perfect for sitting in the summer and sledding in the winter);
- New mixed-use development on the south side of Milwaukee Avenue with parking located along the "L" line; and
- A new café tailored to bicyclists marking the intersection of Milwaukee Avenue and the Bloomingdale Trail as the bicycle center of the City.

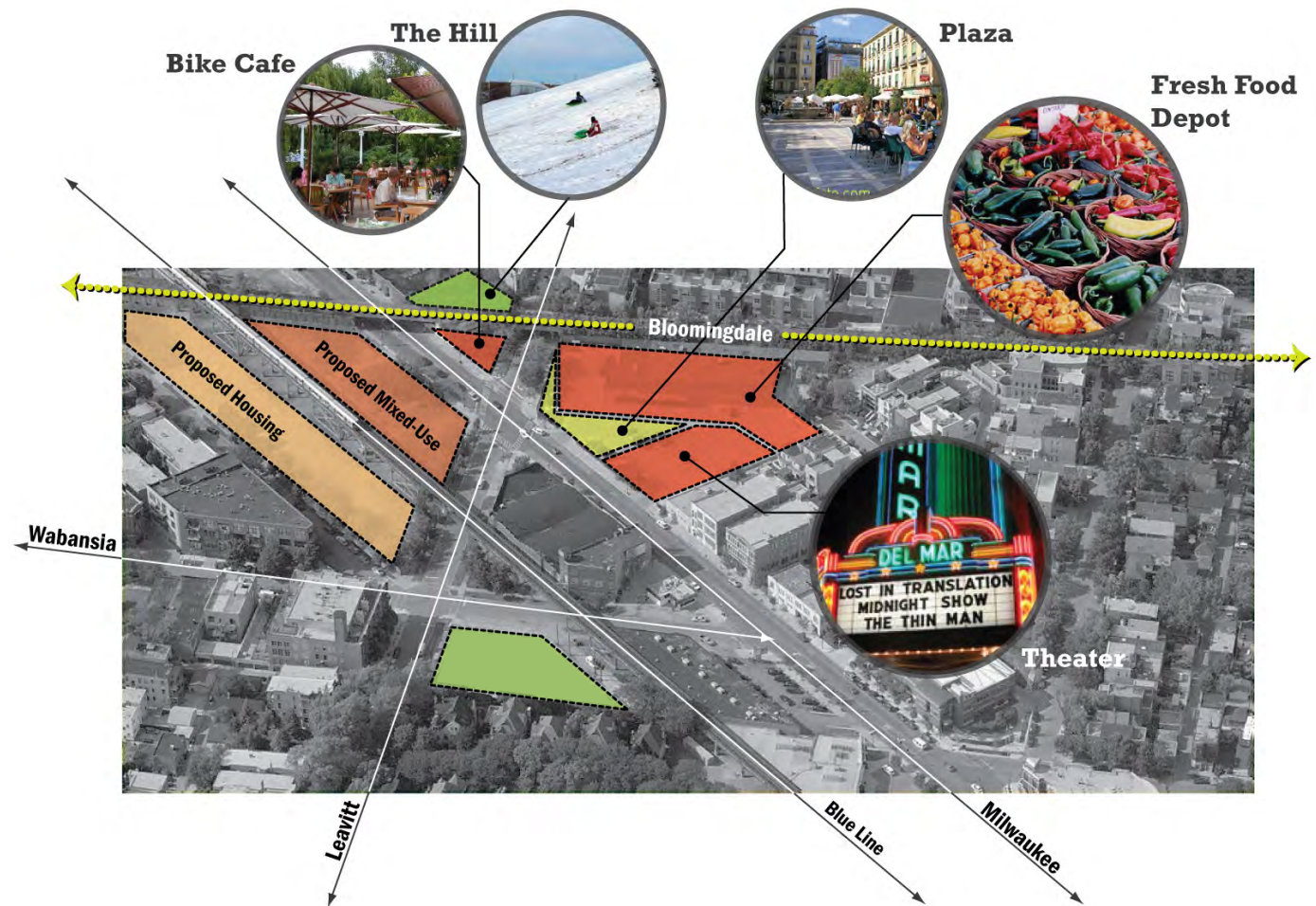


Figure 88. Proposed Land Use Diagram for Aldi Site



Figures 89a. and b. Existing and Proposed Conceptual Site Plan for Aldi Site



5.4 Actively recruit retail to fill niches.

ACTION > Advocate

Work with the Chamber of Commerce to actively match available retail spaces within the SSA with tenants that fill the below listed retail niches.

Wicker Park Bucktown is largely meeting its retail needs, but there is still room for well run businesses in the SSA. While the SSA is largely free of national chains, businesses must compete with any number of big box stores that surround the SSA to the north and east. The proximity of chain stores shields the SSA from having many of these stores attempt to locate in their district, but it does have an economic effect, as residents use the chains that are only a short drive away.

The SSA should follow a plan of recruiting local businesses that fit with its ideals of a healthy retail environment. The following steps are recommended in following a recruiting path:

- 1) **Have Patience** – This will not be achieved overnight. It must be an ongoing process that is followed actively if it is to be successful.
- 2) **Contact individual firms listed below** – These are firms that are thought to be the leading candidates for a successful recruitment process. Reaching out to these firms will create ideal contacts for recruiting successful businesses in these retail niches.
- 3) **Contact other locally owned stores within Chicago that fit these niches** – They may be looking to expand their locations and would be interested in hearing how Wicker Park Bucktown could fit in their future plans.
- 4) **Contact the trade associations for each niche as listed below** – Some of the niches have an independent branch which will focus solely on the independently owned businesses that the SSA is interested in recruiting.
- 5) **Advertise in trade journals** – This process can be costly but there may be some opportunities to leverage the costs in creative ways.
- 6) **Network** – By keeping in contact with these various sources there may be opportunities for some low cost opportunities to put Wicker Park Bucktown in front of some prospective businesses. For example, a national trade show could come through Chicago which would present an opportunity to attend.

Below is a list of some niches that the SSA could support in the neighborhood based on the retail supply and demand of the neighborhoods, followed by some contacts that can be used for recruiting:

Grocery Stores: The one common desire and commercial market need in the neighborhood that came up in both the focus groups and the market analysis was the demand for a high-end supermarket in the immediate area. While this is partly created by the greater segmentation of the grocery industry as a whole, the fact is that a more upscale supermarket would fit the needs of the Wicker Park Bucktown SSA residents, and the demand does exist to support such an establishment. Consumers are used to buying groceries at a wide variety of stores to fit specific needs such as a Whole Foods for produce, Trader Joe's for relatively inexpensive prepared meals, Costco for bulk purchases, and Jewel or Dominick's for everyday needs. The corridor along Western Avenue has the ideal lots and infrastructure to support one of these types of grocery stores.



Photo Booth suggestion from WPB Open House.

However, the Jewel located at the corner of Milwaukee and Ashland Avenues seems to have recognized the community's changing demographics, and appears to be in the process of modernizing the store and food selection to keep more local residents from leaving the neighborhood to grocery shop as often as is currently the case. Recently, Roundy's, a supermarket chain from Milwaukee, declared it would open a dozen stores in the Chicago region in mostly urban areas; Wicker Park Bucktown would qualify as such. These stores are set to open on smaller lots, which could open up the entire SSA for the possibility of gaining such a store which would fit in the neighborhood rather than having to locate in a larger lot on Western Avenue.

Immediate Contact:

Roundy's
875 East Milwaukee Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202
414-231-5000

Trade Associations:

Food Marketing Institute
2345 Crystal Drive, Suite 800
Arlington, VA 22202
202-452-8444

Organic Trade Association
PO Box 547
Greenfield, MA 01301
413-774-7511

Publications:

Progressive Grocer
770 Broadway
New York, NY 10003
646-654-7561

The Gourmet Retailer
3301 Ponce de Leon Blvd.
Suite 300
Coral Gables, FL 33134
646-654-4539

Bookstores: The lack of a traditional bookseller is surprising due to the demographics of the SSA. A full service locally-owned bookstore would seem to have a perfect fit based on the market analysis. However, the new book market is in nationwide decline with more stores closing than opening annually. So, while a bookstore should be encouraged if such a prospect exists, it should not be considered likely in the short term but possibly in the longer term as contraction by national booksellers Barnes and Noble and Borders is a strong possibility.

Trade Associations:

Great Lakes Booksellers Association (GLBA)

P. O. Box 901
208 Franklin Street
Grand Haven, MI 49417
Toll-Free: 800-745-2460
Phone: 616-847-2460
Fax: 616-842-0051
Executive Director: Jim Dana, jimd@books-glba.org
Trade Shows: October 2008, Dearborn, MI and October 2009, Cleveland, OH

American Booksellers Association
200 White Plains Road, Suite 600
Tarrytown, NY 10591
Phone: 800-637-0037
Fax: 914-591-2720
E-mail: info@bookweb.org
COO: Oren Teicher, oren@bookweb.org
Trade Show: BookExpo, Annually in May

Toy Stores: With the changing demographics of the SSA showing more babies and young children being added every year, a toy store seems like a natural fit and the market analysis confirms this belief. While this market segment is dominated by national chains and even more so by national general merchants such as Target, there are some local toy sellers who have found a neighborhood niche and have found ways to remain competitive. One of these stores is Toys et Cetera which has three outlets in Chicago including one at Armitage and Clybourn. This local toy store could represent a possibility for the SSA if a truly local option cannot be found.

Immediate Contact:

Toys et Cetera
1502 E 55th Street
Chicago, IL 60615
800-546-0900
justforfun@toysetcetera.com

Trade Associations:

American Specialty Toy
Retailing Association
116 W Illinois St
Chicago, IL 60654
312-222-0984
info@astratoy.org

Publications:

EdPlay
171 Reed Street
Geneva, NY 14456
315-789-0458

Playthings Magazine
Betsy.komes@reedbusiness.com

Small Movie Theater: This market segment has been dominated by large megaplexes locating on large lots for the past decade or so. So, while a movie theater would seem to fit in the SSA, it is not a market segment that has seen much growth in theaters that have a small number of screens and are located in urban neighborhoods. One possibility may be to attract a theater that acts as both a restaurant and movie theater which can expand profits. Any number of examples exist nationally but one great example is the Alamo Drafthouse chain which started in Austin, Texas and has a franchise program in place. This type of establishment can provide entertainment options for the immediate neighborhood and also act as a magnet for other businesses in the SSA by drawing residents of other neighborhoods.

Immediate Contacts:

Hollywood Blvd.: A Cinema, Bar & Eatery
phone: 630-427-1880
fax: 630-427-1883
1001 West 75th Street
Woodridge, Illinois 60517
ChicagoBest@atriptothemovies.com

Alamo Drafthouse Cinemas, Ltd.
Franchise Department
13809 Research Blvd., Suite 735
Austin, TX 78750
Franchise Inquiries: franchise@drafthouse.com
Real Estate Referrals: owner@drafthouse.com

Trade Associations:

National Association of
Theatre Owners (NATO)
750 First Street, NE
Suite 1130
Washington, DC 20002
Tel. 202.962-0054
Fax: 202.962-0370
nato@natodc.com



Photo Booth
suggestions from
WPB Open House.



Basic and less expensive needs: While it is recognized that some basic needs are not met in the SSA's retail districts and some are not provided at an affordable price, it is hard for local businesses to provide these types of goods in the current economic environment that exists locally. Within the SSA, Kmart, Jewel, and Aldi provide a number of options and just outside the SSA any number of national chains provide these types of options. Locally-owned businesses cannot compete with the national chains head to head for low cost goods because the chains will almost always have a better price, so local businesses have turned to niches in order to survive and thrive. So, while any businesses that meet these needs should be encouraged to locate within the SSA, it is unlikely that they will do so due to the intense competition and real estate costs associated with business in Wicker Park Bucktown.

5.5 Reinforce retail districts.

ACTION > Review

Adopt an active voice in the future redevelopment discussions concerning key commercial sites to ensure that new retail development is in keeping with local values, needs, and design expectations.

The Wicker Park Bucktown SSA contains four separate and developed retail districts that should be preserved to retain their distinct identity not only within the boundaries of the SSA but within Chicago.

North Damen: This district is signified by the many locally-owned boutiques that have agglomerated recently and have formed one of the most unique stretches of businesses in Chicago. While this district prices out many local residents and does not appeal to a wide variety of City residents, its niche is strong enough to draw customers from all corners of the Chicago region as well as national and international attention. This niche works to help the entire SSA as people are drawn by the high end boutiques but may spend the day visiting various other stores, restaurants, and bars. While a small number of national chains have moved into this district recently without damaging the retail fabric, care must be taken to ensure this district retains its unique stature of locally-owned boutiques or else it risks becoming just another retail outlet with no regional or national draw.

Division Street: The stretch of Division Street that borders the south side of the SSA is one of the most unique business districts in the City and is dominated by locally-owned businesses. The extra wide sidewalks foster an atmosphere that creates a distinct feel and separates it from other retail districts in the SSA. The locally-owned businesses have created a citywide draw and bring in money from around the Chicago region. This unique atmosphere should be preserved and national chains should be encouraged to locate in other areas of the SSA where their presence would not be as disruptive as it would be on Division Street. There is also a healthy mixture of daytime and nighttime uses in this district. However, care must be given to ensure this is the case in the future as the temptation may be to add more nighttime uses in the form of bars and restaurants. Adding too many more nighttime uses may endanger this balance and place the traditional retailers in peril as the district loses its balance.

Milwaukee and Ashland: This district represents the most potential for future retail use in the SSA. It is anchored by a CTA subway stop as well as three major bus lines, which provide the visibility that any retail district needs. This district would benefit greatly from a retail anchor that enhances business activity by forming a hub connecting the existing districts along Milwaukee at Damen and Division Street. The Jewel/K-Mart site will be vital to this district moving forward. This is the largest parcel of land in the district, and its current design, dominated by surface parking, does little to enhance the areas around it. By following the principles set forth in this plan, future redevelopment could help transform this district to reach its full potential as the southeastern anchor of the SSA.

Ashland Avenue: While less defined than the other three WPB retail districts, Ashland Avenue enjoys a cluster of viable businesses, some of which are Latino-owned, offering a link to the neighborhood's recent past and a character distinct to this area of WPB. These businesses should be preserved, and new businesses, particularly restaurants, should be encouraged in addition to new live/work spaces for artists.

5.6 Take some retail precautions.

ACTION > Advocate

Discourage national chains from locating in key locations throughout the SSA such as along the Division Street corridor.

Encourage a zoning overlay that will limit new retail developments to 7,500 square feet along the newly recommended pedestrian retail streets in WPB. (See Recommendation 5.1)

ACTION > Review

Ensure that the banking ordinance is enforced throughout the SSA.

Although the SSA is home to a vital retail business community there are some precautions that should be understood and adopted to ensure that this continues in the future.

National Chains: As it has been stressed elsewhere, an eye must be kept on the proliferation of national chains in the SSA. While each individual outlet does little harm to the independent businesses in Wicker Park Bucktown, large groups of them can cause damage to the business district as a whole in two main ways: 1) They damage the unique vibe because they look and feel like every suburban mall and hurt the power of these unique districts to draw consumers from around the City, and 2) The national chains pay a premium in rent, causing the prices for all retailers to rise. If too many national chains find a presence in the SSA's retail market, many of the local retailers that were fundamental in the creation of these retail districts will no longer be able to afford to do business with such high overhead and will be forced to relocate to other, more affordable places in the City.

The zoning discussion in Recommendation 5.1 details important strategies that could help slow the growth of national chains in WPB, especially the larger national retailers. By advocating for a maximum size for retailers along major retail corridors in WPB of 7,500 square feet unless the retailer obtains a special use permit for a bigger floor plate, the SSA could be a vocal advocate of maintaining a strong mix of locally-owned businesses in order to preserve the retail districts that exist for all of its members.

Enforce the Banking Ordinance: The proliferation of banks in the Wicker Park Bucktown SSA is a major concern and is one that has been recognized in neighborhoods citywide. For this reason, the City has drafted an ordinance meant to curb the further growth of bank branches which are stifling retail growth and driving up the costs of rent. Zoning ordinance 17-3-05040-I requires special use permits for bank branches that are within 660 feet of one another in areas designated as pedestrian retail streets (most of the SSA enjoys such designation). Currently the only pedestrian retail street in WPB runs along Milwaukee Avenue from Division to North. In Recommendation 5.1's zoning discussion, we recommend adding to the list of streets that have the pedestrian retail designation. Adding this designation to more streets in WPB can curb the number of new bank branches that will locate in the area. We recommend that no such special use permits be granted in the near future and until such time as the number of bank branches is reduced to a reasonable level.

Daytime versus Nighttime Uses: The retail corridors of the SSA currently have a healthy mix of retail and commercial activity during the day and restaurant and bar activity in the evenings. These uses complement one another, allowing all of these establishments to thrive. However, as the destination quality of nightlife along selected corridors grows, this balance may be upset, with daytime uses yielding to bars and entertainment venues that remain shuttered until evening hours. The SSA must keep an eye on evolving nightlife districts and gently encourage or discourage the trends through marketing, recruiting, and enforcement efforts.



Photo Booth suggestions from WPB Open House.

5.7 Enhance local businesses.

ACTION > *Advocate*

Encourage locally owned businesses to become members of Local First Chicago and become active in the group ensuring the needs of Wicker Park Bucktown are met by the organization.

ACTION > *Spend the Budget*

Set up a grant system for new, locally owned businesses that locate within the boundaries of the SSA.

ACTION > *Review*

Encourage national chains to locate outside key locations throughout the SSA, avoiding the Division Street corridor, in particular.

The Wicker Park Bucktown SSA is home to many locally-owned businesses and has become a shopping and dining destination for neighbors, Chicago residents, and tourists alike. However, this character has been weakened in recent years through the incursion of a number of prominent chain retailers at the core of the SSA near the Milwaukee-North-Damen intersection. The arrival of each new chain outlet represents a reasonable and carefully considered business decision by both the firm and the building owner, but the sum of these decisions has begun to alter the character and economics of the area. With the recent sale of the prominently situated Midwest Bank building and the new owner's stated desire to lease to national tenants, the SSA is confronted with an acceleration of this trend.

We propose that the SSA take a direct and ongoing role in business recruitment, seeking out and delivering prospective tenants to the building owners that help fund the organization. Without a strong effort in this regard, the busiest hubs of the neighborhood can become clogged with national tenants, diluting the very appeal and foot traffic that brought them there. American Apparel, Urban Outfitters, Levi's and the like can be a valuable part of the retail mix in a diverse business district; in a district comprising mostly chains, though, they are simply anchor tenants at the mall.

The SSA and Chamber of Commerce should go further in promoting the notion that they are open to locally-owned businesses.

- The SSA should more actively promote Local First Chicago. This group is headquartered within the SSA boundary and can assist greatly in marketing the vast amount of local businesses in Wicker Park Bucktown. Many businesses located in the SSA are already members of this group and as more join, Wicker Park Bucktown's local business community

will be even more highlighted. Local First Chicago is a member of BALLE (Business Alliance of Local Living Economies) which plugs them into a nationwide network of local business organizations that share information on best practices and other information that can help all businesses in the SSA. Local First Chicago currently has a "sticker" membership program and has established such programs as Independents' Week in early July and a similar program around the holiday season.



Source: www.localfirstchicago.org

- Beyond local businesses, the SSA should link Local First Chicago with WPB building owners in an effort to raise awareness among property owners about commercial rental rates. As vacancy is bad for the bottom line and for local businesses, building owners should be encouraged to rent their spaces at more reasonable rates so as to fill the space, generate more street activity, and eventually strengthen the market to fetch the current asking prices.
- A grant program should be set up to give a small but significant amount to locally-owned, independent businesses that are opening in the SSA. An amount of \$5,000 could go to four or five qualified businesses each year to help them with space improvements and other opening costs and signaling that Wicker Park and Bucktown are open to these types of businesses, thus ensuring business diversity continues into the future. This grant can be awarded to specific types of businesses, as determined by the SSA that add value to the retail district for all members of the SSA. For example the grants could apply only to businesses that fit one of the retail niches described in Recommendation 5.4, who primarily serve residents of the SSA, or any other parameters that the SSA feel enhance the retail character of the district.
- The stretch of businesses along Division which has been grown organically through the hard work of local business owners should be declared a "locals only" zone, with the SSA and respective Chambers of Commerce strongly recommending that national chains are steered to other parts of their service areas. While current City codes prevent any hard barriers being placed to limit national chains, the power of the SSA could be used to steer this type of development to areas that can more readily absorb these developments without altering the character of existing development.
- Small spaces that would be unattractive to national tenants should be tracked (see Recommendation 5.8) and marketed, in partnership with the Chamber, specifically towards locally-owned independents that can benefit from the foot traffic and cache of a Wicker Park Bucktown location.

- Another area in which the SSA can assist its contributing members is to provide financial and in-kind assistance in the promotion and advertising of the various associations that exist within the borders of the SSA. With the size and diversity of the SSA, marketing the SSA as a whole is of limited utility; such an effort may try to please all but in the end will not help anyone. There are already existing merchants associations such as the Division Street Committee that have a structure but lack the financial resources to launch a meaningful marketing campaign. With some backing by the SSA this would be possible for a variety of groups. This marketing budget would not be limited to only business associations but could include resident or artist associations that are located within the SSA boundaries. Any funding by the SSA should require matching contributions to ensure these groups have internal backing and are not relying upon the SSA for their very existence. Details on the amount of marketing money that would be available or the number of groups that would be eligible could be determined after an overall marketing budget has been outlined.

5.8 Market small spaces to prospective businesses.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Dedicate a member of SSA or WPB Chamber of Commerce staff to creating and maintaining a database of available vacant space within the SSA.

The SSA should work with the WPB Chamber of Commerce to form a central clearinghouse to catalog and market vacant space within its borders to prospective tenants. This database should be kept online to allow the widest access possible and assist building owners in recruiting businesses to the neighborhood. There are two keys to making this effort successful:

- 1) The database must be maintained and updated on a weekly or biweekly basis to keep the information as current as possible. This should be a regular job function for a member of the SSA or Chamber of Commerce staff. This type of information needs to be kept as up to date for both tenants and building owners or it does not hold as much value. The website should clearly label the last time it was updated so that it can be used with confidence that its contents reflect reality. Information to be collected from property owners and displayed on the website includes: contact information, square footage, zoning designation, floor plans, prices, and pictures of the property both inside and out.
- 2) This database should be marketed through the appropriate channels, such as the local Chambers of Commerce, the SSA and Chamber websites, real estate firms, business organizations, and any small business assistance groups so that it is being used by as many people as possible. The more use this database gets, the more value it will provide to the SSA and its respective building owners. The Downtown Boulder BID markets available office and retail space in such a way.³⁶ Visit Pittsburgh's www.coolspacelocator.com to see another example.

The database should be used to link available space to businesses that reinforce the marketing opportunities in the community. For instance, locally owned businesses should continue to be encouraged along Division Street. In addition, new potential districts should be proactively marketed with this database. These opportunities include Ashland Avenue which is already home to a few excellent restaurants that could form the basis of a restaurant district that could help to revive Ashland's retail base.

³⁶ See http://www.boulderdowntown.com/guide/real_estate

COOL SPACE LOCATOR

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Cool Space Locator is a non-profit commercial real estate organization focused on bringing vibrant businesses to urban and walkable neighborhoods. Our mission is to promote sustainable economic development by influencing policies and activities that impact commercial urban real estate markets. We offer direct business services including real estate brokerage and consulting, and perform community outreach through research, education and advocacy.

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Newsflash!
Kyra moves on to URA, CSL reorganizing
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 CSA 07

Cool Space Awards
Cool Deals Report
CSA07 T-Shirts
Click for details.

Source: www.coolspacelocator.com

5.9 Reuse the Northwest Tower building as a green hotel.

ACTION > *Advocate*

Work with the property owner, the Alderman, and City representatives to encourage reuse of the Tower as a world-class green hotel.

The Northwest Tower has long served as a visual marker for the larger Wicker Park and Bucktown communities. The Tower's location and unique identity make it an important asset for WPB. Currently, the Tower contains what is commonly referred to as Class "C" office space. In other cities, these buildings have often found new life with a different use. WPB's growing tourism industry combined with the fact that there are few places to stay in the area makes the Tower an excellent candidate to become a new hotel. To ensure that the hotel truly represents WPB's values, push for it to cater to a design-aware audience and for it to be converted and operated as a "green" hotel. Boutique operators have opened hotels recently across the country and WPB provides the necessary vibe to make the concept work in Chicago. The SSA can play an important role by assisting to develop the concept, providing local research, and marketing the concept as a part of the area's broader objective to grow greener.

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Photo Booth suggestion from WPB Open House.

