

Executive Summary

Berwyn Transit-Oriented Development Study

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Transit-Oriented Development

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Vision Statement

The City of Berwyn has the desire and ambition to continue to nurture and deepen its roots that were planted 100 years ago. In 20 years, the City of Berwyn's Stanley and Windsor Corridor will have: three attractive and pedestrian-friendly train station areas; a Depot District with an active and vibrant entertainment, retail, restaurant, and residential atmosphere; a Harlem Avenue Station area with safe, accessible, and pleasant features, complete with a grade-separated railroad crossing; a LaVergne Station area with a family-, young professional-, and empty-nester-friendly residential neighborhood; a boulevard-like promenade along the entire corridor where pedestrians, bicycles, trains, and buses take priority over the personal automobile; a variety of new residential living opportunities to choose from in each station area; an institution that serves the community's health, fitness, and medical needs; well-preserved and maintained historic structures; a streetscape that enhances the ambiance for pedestrians and bicyclists; landscaping that gives back to the environment; signage, building, and landscape features that guide both the first-time and the long-time visitors to the corridor; a landmark civic feature that fosters community pride and allows visitors to gather, socialize, and experience nature, the visual arts, and the performing arts; and an ample and unobtrusive supply of parking for shoppers, employees, commuters, residents, and visitors.

The *Berwyn Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Study* will be the reference for community leaders to achieve the vision of its residents, property owners, business owners, and friends of the Metra/BNSF Railway Corridor over the next 20 years. The result will be a destination for the residents of Berwyn, Downtown Chicago, and the western suburbs.

Berwyn Transit-Oriented Development Elements

The Promenade

The TOD district of Berwyn will become the heart of the community, centered on the development of the Promenade. As the residents of Berwyn stroll, visit, and gather, a more connected and social environment will evolve. The primary land uses along the 1.0-mile-wide Promenade will be residential, with a mix of retail, restaurant, entertainment, and office, within the three station areas.



Promenade: "a stroll or walk, esp. in a public place, as for pleasure or display." Source: Dictionary.com

Harlem Avenue Station Area

The Harlem Avenue Station Area is located at the west end of the rail corridor. Elements in this district will include: new greenspace surrounding the existing station, new parks flanking both sides of the railroad corridor, a new "kiss-n-ride" for commuters to be dropped off by friends and family, new mixed-use and residential

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developments, a new commuter parking lot to accommodate additional commuter parking spaces and commuter spaces displaced by the proposed streetscaping in the BNSF right-of-way (to be approved by the BNSF Railway and Metra), a western gateway to the City, and a grade separation to allow the trains to pass over the Harlem Avenue with vehicular traffic below.

Berwyn Station (“Depot District”) Area

The Berwyn Station (“Depot District”) Area is located at the midpoint of the rail corridor, centered on the historic train depot. The Depot District is the center of the Promenade, on the axis of Oak Park Avenue, and is the heart of the entire City of Berwyn. The TOD plan calls for significant transformation of this district into a vibrant, dense, and bustling downtown. Entertainment, restaurants, conveniences and downtown living experiences will abound. This transformation will be accomplished by identifying opportunities for dense, mixed-use developments. A public-private partnership should be established between the City of Berwyn and MacNeal Hospital to create a uniquely urban medical campus that is interwoven into the downtown on the both sides of Oak Park Avenue. The transformation the Depot District will be accomplished through the efforts of constructing parks, building a town green, creating streetscapes, and installing quality infrastructure. Improvements in the immediate vicinity of the Berwyn Station will include station renovations, a new kiss-n-ride drop-off area, and “plaza streets” with decorative pavement that are occasionally closed-off to vehicular traffic during special events. The Depot District will become the location for current and new restaurateurs and shops. If and when the Harlem Grade separation displaces existing businesses, then the Depot District would welcome such establishments as The James Joyce, Quan’s Oasis, and Connie’s Restaurant, to name a few. New businesses such as a prominent produce market, unique restaurants, live entertainment venues, and destination shopping will be incorporated into the Depot District as well.

The Grove Avenue Parking Garage will provide commuter and public parking stalls within the Depot District. Eighty (80) commuter stalls within the BNSF right-of-way will be reassigned to public parking use when the parking garage is complete. Fifty-nine (59) commuter spaces within the BNSF right-of-way already have been reassigned for public parking use. In addition, any commuter parking spaces displaced by the proposed streetscaping in the BNSF right-of-way will need to be approved by the BNSF Railway and Metra for each phase of the redevelopment process, resulting in no net loss of commuter parking.

LaVergne Station Area

The LaVergne Station Area is located at the east end of the rail corridor. Elements in this district will include: new greenspace surrounding the existing station, new landscape buffers along streets and rail corridors, a small park at the northwest corner of Stanley Avenue and Ridgeland Avenue, new residential development, safe corners, and an eastern gateway to the City and the Promenade. A recommended feature near this area is senior apartment development just inside the border of Cicero. In addition, any commuter parking spaces displaced by the proposed streetscaping in the BNSF right-of-way will need to be approved by the BNSF Railway and Metra for each phase of the redevelopment process, resulting in no net loss of commuter parking.

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Design Guidelines

The Berwyn TOD Design Guidelines are intended to advise property owners, business owners, design professionals, developers, and City of Berwyn representatives on what elements to incorporate into future remodeling, redevelopment, or business planning efforts within the rail corridor and station areas. The guidelines contain principles of a desired physical environment and are supplementary to the zoning code and the City's development review and approval process. Desirable elements identified in the guidelines include utilizing brick, stone, metal, and glass building materials; ensuring harmonious building proportions; establishing a base, middle, and top for all buildings; embracing sustainable practices with solar and wind power, green roofs, and pervious pavement; constructing mixed-use buildings with retail, office, and residential uses; engineering a landmark-quality bridge at the intersection of Harlem Avenue and the BNSF rights-of-way; designing beautiful gateway features that welcome visitors to Berwyn; and selecting coordinated street furnishings and wayfinding signage that blends traditional and modern elements.



Implementation

The implementation phase is the critical chapter that articulates the strategy to finance and construct the *Berwyn TOD's* vision. The vision for the scale of Berwyn's TOD Study is that of a "master development" plan. The strategy needs to address the sources and uses of funds to finance and phase the master development over time. Unlike an individual project, the implementation strategy for an overall planning area requires a balance of detailed cost estimates for the projects that are tangible, yet balanced with general cost-benefit calculations for the larger redevelopment. Unfortunately, due to the cost of land and construction, it is nearly impossible to develop a new project in Berwyn profitably by relying on the financial return created from the project itself.

There are several levels of involvement in the redevelopment process the City should consider:

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- High Level of Participation – Under the most proactive approach, the City or its designated development agency would acquire development sites through negotiated purchases, condemnation, or a combination of methods.
- Medium Level of Participation – Under a mid-level effort scenario, the City assists a developer/land-owner to undertake a project. The City does not take title to the land, resulting in less control over developer selection.
- Low Level of Participation – The City can take a reactive position and use its regulatory and zoning authority to attempt to guide development. The *Berwyn TOD Study* can be used as a guide to approve or reject development proposals that the private market brings forth. The City still has some control over potential development in the form of veto power, but has very limited ability to have positive or proactive influence over the implementation process.

Many projects and initiatives are broken down into “early success” projects, short-term projects, and long-term projects for the overall Promenade and the three station areas.

The strategy articulated in this report responds to the bold vision of the *Berwyn TOD Study*, which was requested by Berwyn’s constituents during the public involvement activities of the planning process. The definition of a “bold” plan in the context of implementation equates to cost. The Promenade, the various parks, and the quality of the construction called for in the design guidelines are very expensive to develop in the current Berwyn market. The alternative to the preferred plan would have been a modest face-lift or retrofit of the current building stock and infrastructure, including minor renovations, leaving Berwyn essentially in its current configuration. This is not the stated goal for Berwyn’s rail corridor. Instead, the City prefers to grow and prosper by creating a splendid railroad corridor that is memorable and serving as a regional destination. This goal creates higher land values and an improved real estate market, and the implementation strategy needs to articulate a method for initiating this master development that will ultimately drive-up the sales and tax revenues. The implementation strategy announces to the marketplace that Berwyn is prepared to lead this master development, sending a signal to the investment community that there is a new and profitable environment forthcoming.

Strategies to be utilized during the Berwyn TOD Study’s implementation process include adopting zoning code amendments; ensuring a high level, proactive redevelopment approach by the City of Berwyn through a Community Development Corporation or a Third-Party Master Developer; utilizing “early success”, short-term, and long-term projects to realize the plan over a 20-year timeline; and identifying potential sources of redevelopment funding such as tax incremental financing, special service areas, business improvement districts, and grant programs.