



HOMER GLEN TOWN CENTER VISIONING

March 2024

Acknowledgements

A special thank you goes to everyone who participated in the visioning process for the Homer Glen Town Center. The resulting framework concepts for a new town center were made possible by the contributions and insights of the residents, business persons, property owners, representatives from various groups and organizations, the Mayor and Board of Trustees, Plan Commission, Village Committees, the Community & Economic Development Committee, Village Manager, and the Village of Homer Glen Professional Staff.

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Introduction

This summary represents the culmination of a year-long exploration of envisioning a town center – a village center – in Homer Glen.

This work has a long history, which began with Homer Glen's 2005 Comprehensive Plan, where a town center was a central idea. Since then, informal discussions have continued from time to time among the Village Board, commissions, and residents. On a couple of occasions, developers have brought forward plans for mixed-use centers, though none were built.

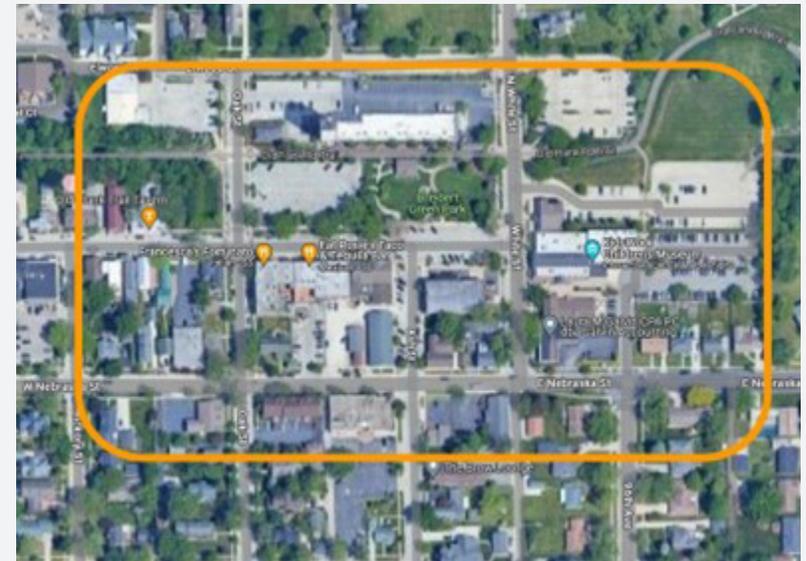
In embarking on this project to imagine what the Village of Homer Glen would want in a town center – if it started with a blank page – the Village embraced a different approach: Rather than waiting for a developer to propose his or her vision, could the Village coalesce around a community-driven vision?

The Village engaged The Lakota Group as its planning consultant after issuing a public request for proposals. Beginning in March 2023, The Lakota Group began working with the Village Board, Village staff, and a project Steering Committee on an intentional exploration. This included:

- 1. Community Engagement.** Through focus groups, interviews, a community survey, a community workshop, and pop-up events, the planning team sought to understand what people wanted in a town center. The Summary of Community Engagement is included in the Appendix.
- 2. Market Assessment.** An analysis of consumer demand and the real estate development climate provided a realistic analysis of what scale and form of town center might be feasible. The Market Assessment also evaluated eight potential locations for the town center which had been previously identified by the Village. The Market Assessment is included in the Appendix.
- 3. Concept Development.** Working from information gleaned through Community Engagement and the Market Assessment, Lakota developed four site development framework concepts. These four frameworks are presented in this summary report. They were shared initially with Village staff and the project Steering Committee during the design process, and then with the Homer Glen community through a public workshop and community survey in January-February, 2024.

FRANKFORT, ILLINOIS

Downtown Frankfort was mentioned by the Homer Glen residents as one of their most-preferred downtowns. The core of downtown Frankfort encompasses approximately 23 acres, organized around a town green, and includes approximately 137,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space. It also includes about 30 housing units (both upper-story and single-family) in the core and about 558 housing units within a one-quarter mile radius of the center.



The town center concepts developed through this exploration are just that – concepts. If the Village chooses to move forward, these concepts can be a vision and starting point for guiding more detailed community design and proposals sought from the private sector.

WHAT MAKES A TOWN CENTER?

Historically, town centers evolved organically over time. They included a variety of uses from the outset and they grew as the community grew around them.

New town centers typically adopt some of the planning principles of historic town centers: they are compact and walkable, and they contain a mix of uses in and around their core, including retail and other commercial activities, housing, civic spaces, and institutional and religious buildings.

The traditional town center form differs somewhat from the town center imagined by some Homer Glen residents. The input received from residents during the Engagement phase indicated many people want a small-scale town center with gathering spaces and light retail. While they expressed resistance to mixed-use buildings, denser development forms, and multi-family housing, it was also clear that the actual town centers they liked most (what we called “reference communities” in the Engagement summary) all contain a mix of uses in a compact form.

We know from conversations with developers and our market assessment that housing would need to be a foundational use for a town center in Homer Glen to be viable. It would be critical to the development's economic feasibility, but it would also be essential in creating vibrancy and walkability, and bringing people into close proximity with the center's retail and civic offerings.

Among the factors mentioned frequently in interviews with residents, and also evident in the demographic analysis, is the need for a variety of housing products that can accommodate young families, smaller families, empty-nesters, and seniors. The town center's housing options should include alternatives for people who raised their families in Homer Glen and want to age in place (but with fewer maintenance responsibilities), and options where the next generation can find a suitable home to start a family.

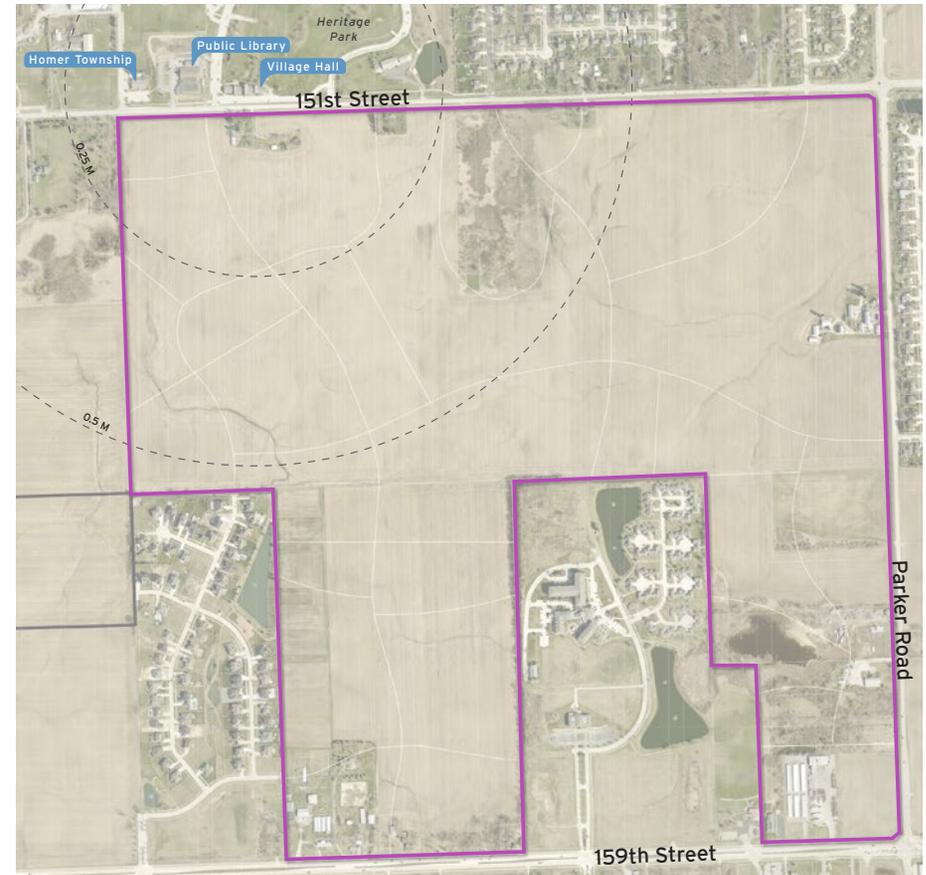
LOCATION

The planning team evaluated eight potential locations during the Market Assessment phase. Each location had advantages and disadvantages across a range of parameters, such as visibility, traffic counts, proximity to infrastructure, etc. Other factors, such as centrality and adjacency to Village assets, were also considered.

The Steering Committee and the Village Board preferred by consensus the location across 151st Street from Village Hall. While some of the other sites have higher traffic visibility,

this location is adjacent to Village Hall and Heritage Park, two important anchors of the Homer Glen community. At around 480 acres, the site is also large enough for a town center to start small and grow in meaningful phases.

TOWN CENTER: Study Area



2

Town Center Framework Concepts

The planning team sought to design an “achievable reality” – one that considered residents’ preferences and the current development environment. The market assessment provided a clear guide that any town center concept would have to lean on residential development first, with retail as a phased-in amenity. While this differs from most residents’ initial vision, it is the model that would create a village center that is full of life and community, and that would include civic gathering spaces that residents expressed as important elements.

Consensus on a single location allowed the planning team to develop four town center framework concepts for the site. Each framework considered market strengths and needs, site geography, topography, connectivity, phasing, and other factors. These concepts remain flexible: the final acreage of each component may be adjusted, based on preference and market needs, and certain components that appear in one concept (such as recreational or gathering spaces) could be inserted into another concept in a “mix-and-match” approach.

The four drawings for each framework illustrate the progression of concept development and the refinement of each plan. In each framework set, the first two drawings are land-use diagrams: they show the types of proposed uses, their relationships and adjacencies, and the relative land area for each use.



The first drawing shows a “Phase 1” development and the second drawing shows a potential future full buildout. (Full buildout of the town center might take 10 or 15 years, depending on absorption rates and economic conditions.) Each of the concepts shows greater intensity of uses at the south end of the site (159th Street), where a wider street with higher traffic counts is well-suited for national chains and other retailers. This area is also more suitable for multi-family buildings. Overall, the site is very deep, spanning about a mile from north to south; this allows for a mix of land uses, housing products, and building typologies most appropriate to existing adjacent uses. The primary road structure is critical for setting up planned future growth. The Engagement Summary (see Appendix) includes images of different types of land uses.

The third drawing in each set illustrates Phase 1 in greater detail, showing the scale of the town center buildings, residential lot sizes, and more detailed recreation and green spaces. This illustrative rendering represents a refinement of the land-use diagrams and reflects more detailed measurements.

The fourth drawing – a three-dimensional rendering – illustrates the massing of the buildings in Phase 1 and gives a sense of what the town center and surrounding neighborhood might look and feel like.

Summary tables of “Concept Statistics” show total acreages for each land use category and the total number of dwelling units by housing type. These are provided for illustrative purposes for each of the four frameworks. The four framework concepts and designs are described on the following pages.



CHARACTER EXAMPLES OF LAND USES

The following character images represent the land uses identified in the four concept frameworks.

TOWN CENTER



TRADITIONAL SINGLE FAMILY



TOWN CENTER SINGLE FAMILY



TOWNHOME SINGLE FAMILY



RETAIL MIXED-USE



CIVIC & OPEN SPACE



RECREATION



FRAMEWORK A | Civic Anchor Front Door

In Framework A, the town center is pulled up tight to the northwest corner of the site, directly across 151st Street from Village Hall. The mixed-use core is organized around a central green space or public square. Rear-loaded rowhomes are shown immediately south of the town center, and Town Center Single Family (detached homes on smaller lots) surround a large active recreation area, directly across from Heritage Park. A pedestrian connection between the town center itself and Heritage Park is shown between the library and Village Hall. Alleyways behind single-family homes allow for rear access and parking, and create more people-oriented streetscapes. Playing fields are shown in the open space directly across from Heritage Park.

FRAMEWORK A: Phase I Land Use Strategy



FRAMEWORK A: Full Build-Out Land Use Strategy



FRAMEWORK A: Design Concept



FRAMEWORK A: Design Concept Massing Diagram



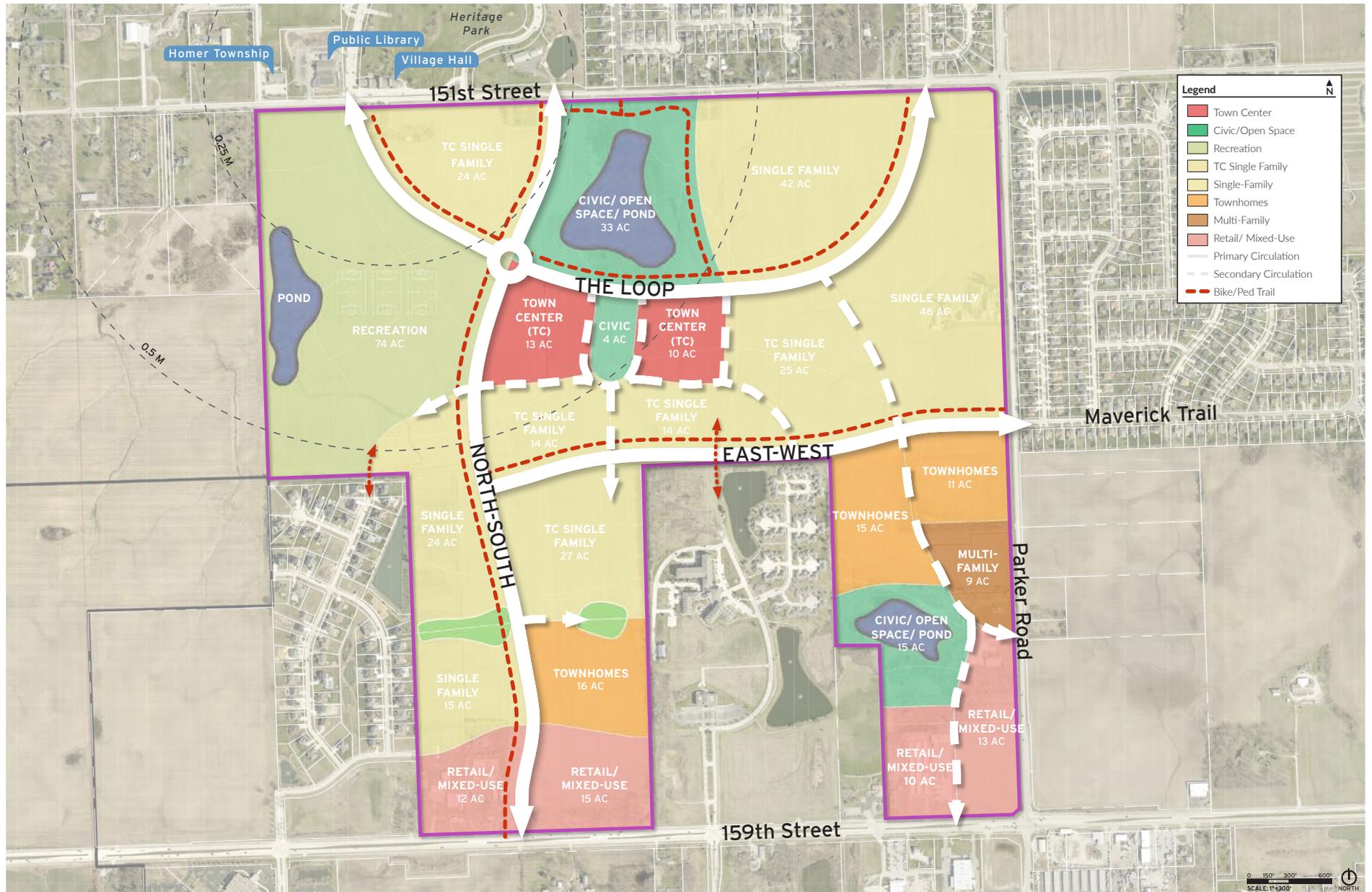
FRAMEWORK B | The Loop Town Center

In Framework B, the town center is set back from 151st Street, across from a “Great Park” and pond, while still visible from the road. Framework B shows a loop road which connects to Heritage Park at Village Hall and at South Arboretum Drive, with a pedestrian connection to Heritage Park west of Eagle Ridge Drive. As illustrated in the Phase 1 rendering, the town center itself fronts on a green civic space with street parking in front and lot parking behind the mixed-use retail buildings. Rowhomes are shown close to the core, with compact single-family development south and east. The large open space on the west side of Phase 1 is shown with soccer fields for scale, though the area could be programmed differently. Walking trails are shown around the Great Park and the recreation fields. As in Framework A, alleyways provide access for rear-loaded parking for single-family homes.

FRAMEWORK B: Phase I Land Use Strategy



FRAMEWORK B: Full Build-Out Land Use Strategy



FRAMEWORK B: Design Concept



DESIGN CONCEPT STATISTICS	
Housing Type	Residential Dwelling Units
TC Single Family	127 DU
TC Rowhomes	71 DU
TC Mixed-Use	110,680 SF Retail 110-220 DU



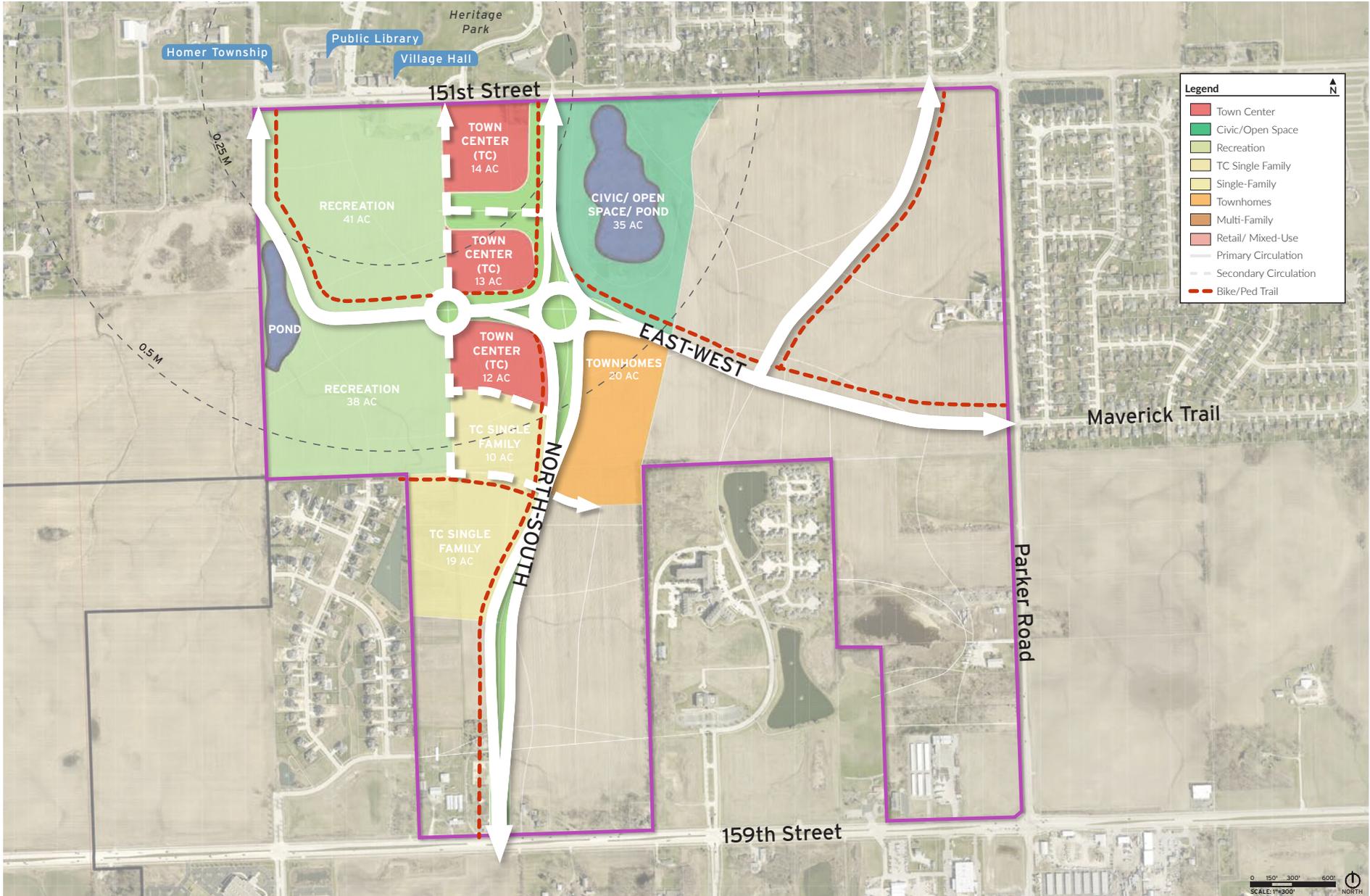
FRAMEWORK B: Design Concept Massing Diagram



FRAMEWORK C | Main Street Boulevard

In Framework C, a north-south boulevard runs from 151st Street to 159th Street and serves as an organizing spine, with an east-west road connected by a traffic circle. The north end of the mixed-use retail core abuts 151st Street for visibility and also faces the Great Park and pond to the west. Walking trails are shown throughout the Great Park; rowhomes are shown closest to the commercial core, as in Frameworks A and B. A pedestrian connection to Heritage Park is shown at the location of the commercial core, west of Village Hall. This plan includes an indoor recreation center in the northwest quadrant of the site. If deemed a priority, this facility could be developed publicly or privately and could be added to any of the other framework concepts.

FRAMEWORK C: Phase I Land Use Strategy



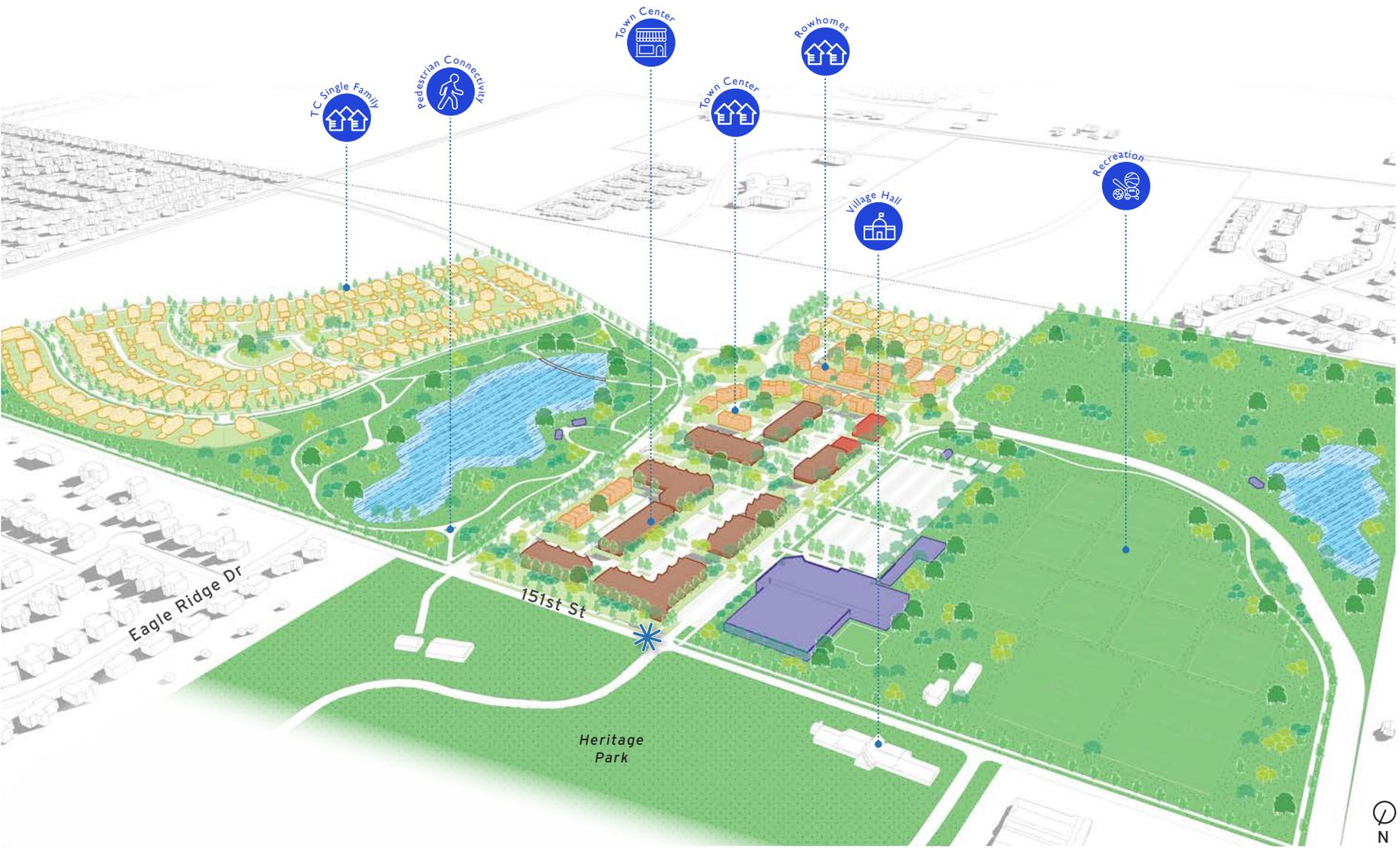
FRAMEWORK C: Full Build-Out Land Use Strategy



FRAMEWORK C: Design Concept



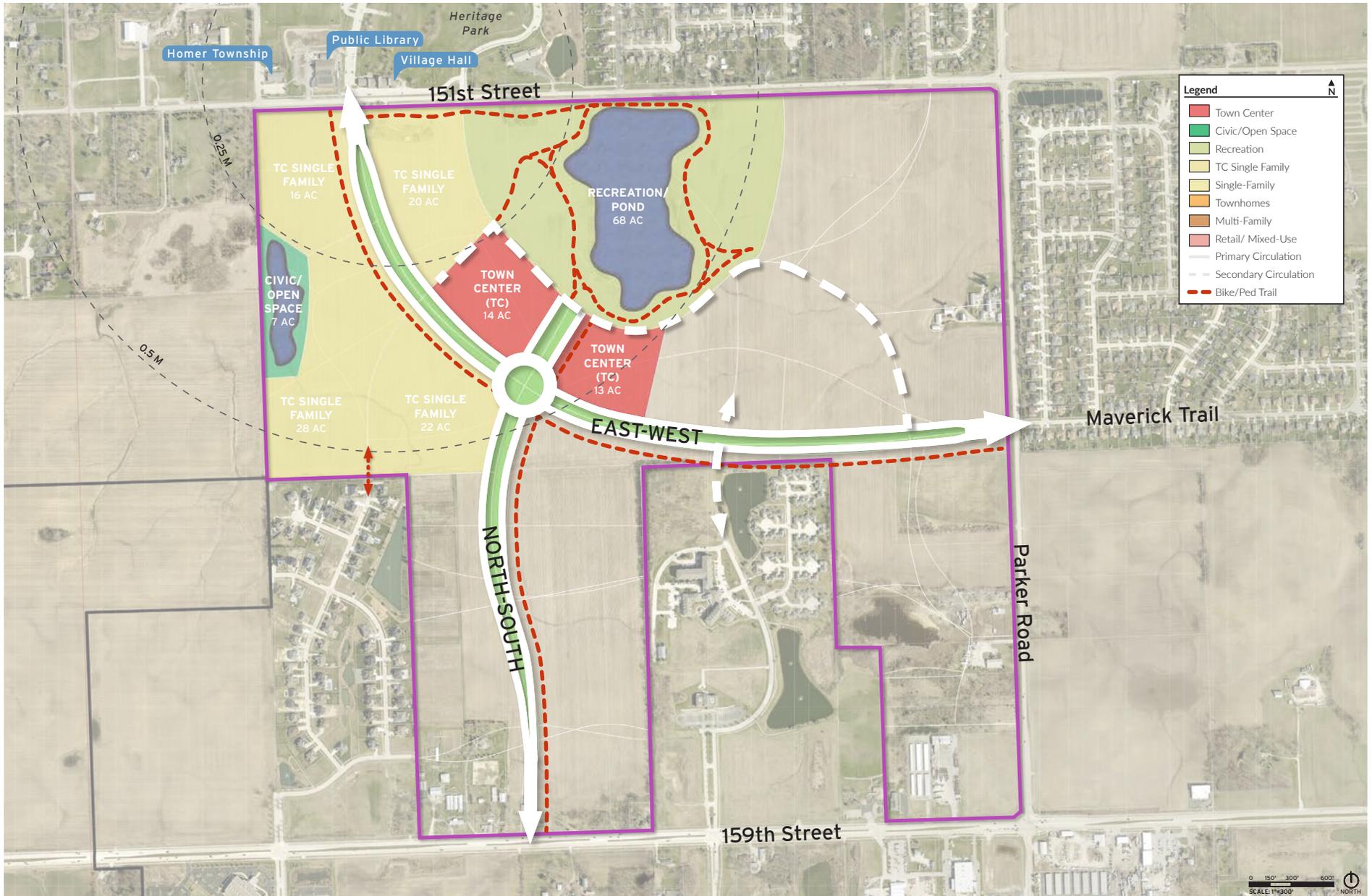
FRAMEWORK C: Design Concept Massing Diagram



FRAMEWORK D | Great Park Town Center

Framework D combines certain elements of Framework B (the commercial core is set back from 151st Street, faces the great park and pond, is organized around a green civic space, and is connected by a loop road), but this concept enlarges the central park by bringing the playing fields in and around it. Rowhomes are more fully integrated into the residential areas of Phase 1. A pedestrian connection to Heritage Park is shown just east of Village Hall.

FRAMEWORK D: Phase I Land Use Strategy



FRAMEWORK D: Full Build-Out Land Use Strategy



FRAMEWORK D: Design Concept



DESIGN CONCEPT STATISTICS	
Housing Type	Residential Dwelling Units
TC Single Family	101 DU
TC Rowhomes	143 DU
TC Mixed-Use	111,000 SF Retail 110-220 DU



FRAMEWORK D: Design Concept Massing Diagram



WHAT WE HEARD | Community Feedback

The planning team presented the four framework concepts to the Homer Glen community through a public workshop at Village Hall on January 30, 2024. The workshop was advertised through broadcast emails and social media and attended by approximately 65 people. The workshop exhibits were also posted to a survey website (also promoted through broadcast emails and social media posts) and received 127 responses over a three-week period.

The public response to framework plans presented at the in-person workshop differed significantly from the public response to the same framework plans when viewed in the online survey. This is likely because those who attended the workshop benefitted from a half-hour introductory slide show and “planning seminar” on town centers and real estate development. Those who took the online survey had the opportunity to watch a 10-minute introductory video but did not have the benefit of live interaction. Feedback at the workshop was markedly more positive than feedback received through the survey.

Participants at the workshop had the opportunity to fill out a comment card for each framework concept. The comment cards asked three questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you like Framework [X]?
2. What do you like BEST about Framework [X]?
3. What do you like LEAST about Framework [X]?

The scores, below, illustrate the relative preference for each framework plan and the differences between scores received at the live workshop versus the online workshop.

Framework D was the clear favorite among those who came to the workshop. For the online version of the workshop, all concepts scored below five, with Framework C edging out the other three concepts.

Comments were dramatically more positive among live workshop participants than online survey participants. For example, in response to “What do you like BEST” about a framework, everyone who filled out a card at the workshop wrote a positive comment, while about 27% of participants in the online workshop responded to the same question by writing some version of “nothing” or “I don’t like anything about it”. (It is possible that, with some technical know-how, a respondent to the online workshop could have taken the survey more than once, however this does not appear to have happened in large numbers.) Actual comments can be read in the appendices.

Comments ranged widely, touching on the layout of roads, the size and scale of the town center itself, parking, concerns about housing density, and the importance of maintaining lower traffic on 151st Street with more traffic intensity on 159th Street. There were also concerns about how new residential development would impact the school district’s capacity and the quality of education. Many comments related to the importance of green/open space, both active (e.g., recreation) and passive (e.g., the pond).

Framework A



Framework B



Framework C



Framework D



B

Development Strategies

Market factors – both macro and microeconomic – will influence the development of a town center in Homer Glen. Macroeconomic factors include the high cost of borrowing, land valuations, and inflationary impacts on the costs of labor and construction materials. Microeconomic factors include the desirability of the Homer Glen market and location. Homer Glen is a bucolic community with excellent schools, attractive to many who choose to raise their families there.

These positive attributes notwithstanding, developers take a more circumspect view of Chicago's southwest suburbs. This area has not shown the same level of value generation as some other suburban locations and is therefore less attractive to real estate investment. For Homer Glen in particular, past resistance to higher-density development proposals will also factor into prospective submittals. Based on our assessment of land and home values, commercial lease rates, and interviews with brokers and developers, Homer Glen will likely need to offer significant incentives and a streamlined onramp to approval in order to attract a high-quality town center proposal from a qualified developer. While we cannot predict the level of interest that a developer RFP may raise, we believe a town center of the type Homer Glen residents want will require Village participation.

VILLAGE STRATEGIES

Potential developer and Village strategies for incentivizing a town center of high-quality design and construction include the following:

- » **Pro forma analysis.** The Village may commission a pro forma analysis of the framework concepts in order to get a deeper understanding of a prospective developer's profit opportunities and financial constraints. A pro forma analysis can identify components where public investment will provide greatest leverage and it will put the Village in a better negotiating position when selecting a developer.
- » **Cost-benefit analysis.** The Village may commission a cost-benefit analysis to gain a clearer understanding of how the development will raise residential and commercial real estate tax revenues, how new families will impact the school district, and how anticipated revenues may justify potential Village investment in infrastructure, parks, and other aspects of the center.

- » **Tax Increment Finance feasibility.** The Village could use the future tax increment based on increased values to support the town center’s land assemblage, land development, infrastructure buildout, and community public space. In considering a TIF strategy, the Village may commission a TIF feasibility study. It should be noted as a caveat that the site identified for the town center is currently zoned agricultural and may not qualify for TIF.
- » **Developer RFP.** In order to generate town center development proposals, the Village may issue a developer request for proposals. In issuing the RFP, the Village would include the framework concepts (or the most-preferred concept) and require that developers’ proposals align with the concept(s).
- » **Public-sector commitments.** The Village will almost certainly have to commit to certain kinds of infrastructure and public improvements to incentivize a town center development. These improvements may include water and sewer, roads, parks, sports facility, or other elements. They could also include Village purchase of certain elements of the town center, such as parks and civic spaces.
- » **Streamlined approval.** Developers place a high value on regulatory predictability. They want to move quickly through approval and entitlement because these administrative steps consume resources and slow the process. A developer will consider it a significant incentive to know that a proposal they put forward, if it closely aligns with community-informed town center concepts and expectations, will be quickly approved.
- » **Purchasing an option.** It may be advantageous for the Village to negotiate a temporary purchase option from the owner(s) of the preferred town center location. An option would give the Village time to enter a proposal solicitation process in a deliberative manner and with predictability.
- » **Density allowances.** Rowhomes and multi-family housing are less expensive per unit to build than single-family homes because these formats consume less land and provide construction efficiencies. The greater the allowance for these types of dwelling units in the framework concepts and the development RFP, the easier it will be to elicit a quality development proposal.
- » **Establish a “Town Center” zoning district or overlay.** In order to provide a regulatory pathway to development, the Village will need to establish a zoning ordinance that aligns with the Framework concepts and allows for a mixed-use town center. This will need to be established in advance of issuing a developer RFP.
- » **Reduced permitting fees.** Based on the findings of the pro forma and cost-benefit analyses, the Village may consider reducing its Residential Development Impact Fees and/or its Building Permit Fees as developer incentives.

DEVELOPER STRATEGIES

A prospective developer may choose to employ an array of strategies to manage costs, cash flow, leasing, and sales. Examples include:

- » **Pre-sales.** A developer may consider pre-selling homes or condos as a means of generating cash up front, reducing the amount they need to borrow and thereby reducing the development's carrying costs. Whether pre-sales are an option for the town center project depends on the strength of the market and the desirability of the product.
- » **Ground lease.** A developer can reduce their up-front costs by taking a long-term ground lease from the landowner rather than purchasing the land outright.
- » **Joint ventures or public-private partnerships.** A developer could enter an agreement with the Village or, even, establish a foundation to raise money for public-benefit aspects of the town center.
- » **Sell or hold.** Different developers have different business models and strategies in terms of holding long-term or selling the final product. This strategy is also influenced by the cost of borrowing and market demands. For a developer, holding onto apartments has the advantage of increased cash flow over time, as rents escalate three to five percent per year. Homes and condos allow the developer to recoup their investment quickly, assuming sales are strong.

CONCLUSION

"Town Center" means different things to different people and it is hard to envision from the words alone. The goal of this work was to listen to residents, design concepts sensitive to the input, allow the community to react to them, and refine the concepts through an iterative process. It was also important to align town center concepts with market realities and how developers might or might not respond to an opportunity in Homer Glen.

The Homer Glen community comes to this exploration of a new town center with a mix of attitudes that range from excitement to resistance. A town center would be a big change for the village. Based on feedback received over the course of this process, some residents embrace the possibility while others take a more anti-development stance. Many are on the fence or still considering what such a development would mean for the village and for them. For most, the vision communicated was for a walkable, appropriately-scaled center where they can experience a sense of community.

It's worth considering – as with all towns and cities, small and large – that what is here now wasn't always here. At different points over the course of time, people built things – houses, stores, schools, roads, parks, and institutions. Towns evolve and each generation leaves an imprint.

The exploration of a possible town center has helped Homer Glen think about its future: What do Homer Glen residents want for their families today? What will they want as they age? What will the next generation of residents want from their community? Planning for change does not mean abandoning the past or abandoning the present character of Homer Glen. Rather, planning is the work of crafting scenarios that reflect the values, quality, and scale of the Homer Glen community for years to come.



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