# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Elevate West Chicago's competitive position as one of the prominent commercial centers and major employment hubs within DuPage County and the suburban Chicago region.

### **Economic Development**

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Invest in and launch a robust, proactive economic development program, led by the City, that partners with the business and real estate development community to promote West Chicago as a place to invest in a range of commercial and industrial uses, and build an entrepreneurial spirit.

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Establish targeted investment and economic development strategies for each area of the City's five defined business districts, tailored to corridor and site-specific conditions.



### Introduction

West Chicago has a diverse, complex local economy matched by a diversity of business districts. The City features a traditional Downtown, three commercial corridors along major highways, and a series of office and industrial parks. West Chicago has historically been a hub of employment anchored by its historic Main Street and it remains competitive today. However, despite featuring a number of retail nodes and corridors, the City has struggled to support this type of development in recent years. The City is at a crossroads where a high-level economic development strategy is needed, but which should be deployed through a series of corridor and site-specific investment strategies.

West Chicago is a unique community because although it is centrally located and adjacent to a lot of suburban population density (and some of the highest disposable incomes in the Chicago region), its local development pattern has inhibited some economic stability. The community's trade area is limited because West Chicago is largely surrounded by forest preserves, Fermilab, and the DuPage County Airport. Although this "greenbelt" of open space presents the community with benefits, West Chicago lacks the population density within this sphere to exclusively support its own businesses; and unfortunately West Chicago residents ultimately fall within the trade areas of adjacent and neighboring business districts, such as Randall Road, that siphons economic activity away from the heart of West Chicago. Although challenging, this dynamic is not insurmountable.

The City of West Chicago is at a point in its history where a focused, 5-year economic development strategy will effectively reposition its real estate to be the most economically competitive it can be over the next generation. This strategy needs to contain a series of programs that address both how the City of West Chicago adds resources to its economic development efforts, as well as targeted physical improvements and infrastructure investments. The strategy is both policy-oriented and site-specific. And both components should be implemented in partnership with the business community.



Invest in and launch a robust, proactive economic development program, led by the City of West Chicago, which partners with the business and real estate development community to promote West Chicago as a place to invest in a range of commercial and industrial uses, and build an entrepreneurial spirit.

### **The Approach**

The City of West Chicago should position itself as more proactive in terms of business recruitment, retention, and expansion as part of regular operations. This approach will require clear roles and responsibilities for City staff, elected and appointed officials, business association groups, and appropriate chamber of commerce. This new model will function, in effect, as a "West Chicago sales force," and will be most effective through iterative collaborations that leverage the strengths each sector brings to the table.

The most effective foundational approach to establishing municipal economic development activities is creating and managing an ongoing business recruitment, retention, and expansion program. Recruitment activities can vary based on a variety of factors, but retention and expansion programs (B|R+E) tend to be more consistent.

#### **B**|R+E Programs

Business retention and expansion programs begin with the recognition that as high as 86% of new jobs and capital investment is generated from existing employers, and likewise in many cases, new retail and restaurant activity directly stems from local business expansion. The importance of ongoing, institutionalized retention and expansion programs cannot be understated, and in many cases they are staffed and led by municipalities in their respective communities.

Business retention and expansion programs generally aim to manage seven core goals:

- Build strong relationships between public officials and business leaders.
- Demonstrate the support and commitment of public agencies towards the local business community and establish active collaboration.
- Identify problems impacting the business community.
- Identify specific problems impacting an individual business or commercial/industrial property.
- Identify business sectors and specific companies at risk of downsizing or closing entirely.
- Identify business sectors and specific companies with the need or potential to grow and expand in the existing municipality.
- Help facilitate ongoing land use, development, and growth management planning.

## What is an Economic Development Task Force?

An Economic Development Task Force is an advisory body that contains not only City of West Chicago staff and officials, but also a purposeful mix of private sector actors, including developers, property owners, business owners, realtors, listing agents, banks, university employees, various association representatives, and others. They are sometimes also called the Mayor's Council of Economic Advisors.

This group meets regularly to act, in effect, as local economists who are experts on West Chicago's development trends and potential. Further, the group can assist in identifying priorities and advising on what course of action the City should take, if any at all. These entities can be an important part of monitoring and managing a municipal-led economic development program by regularly tapping into the experience, expertise, and real-time knowledge of the community's business and development leaders.

### Who (or what) Are The IEDC/ICSC?

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) is a membership-based non-profit organization that helps developers promote economic well-being and quality of life for their communities. They aim to create retail and expand jobs to facilitate growth and provide a stable tax base in communities across the world.

The International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) is a trade organization for the international shopping center industry. The organization aims to advance the shopping center industry by providing educational programs and publications in all aspects of shopping center development, conducting meetings, collecting and disseminating information, developing and maintaining professional certification programs, advocating the interests of the shopping center industry, and publicizing to the general public.

These goals are achieved through what is known as a "data-to-action" approach, anchored by three key functions; these functions must be institutionalized, resourced, and managed as part of regular, ongoing municipal operations. Those functions are (1) regular business site visitation meetings, (2) the collection and examination of standardized survey-generated data that is fed into a business monitoring and tracking system, and (3) the use of these efforts to make strategic decisions, overseen by an Economic Development Task Force and executed by municipal staff.

Retention and expansion efforts can also directly inform business recruitment activities as well as City policy, land use planning, and capital infrastructure programming more broadly as part of general municipal strategic planning. These efforts represent the "heart and soul" of municipal-led economic development programming.

West Chicago has a vibrant local economy and has been a center of employment for decades. These local jobs help support the City's housing market, its retail and restaurant businesses, and lessens the tax burden on homeowners. A critical strategic priority for West Chicago is continually modernizing its competitive position in the regional economy. Entrepreneurship and small business startups are an important economic development goal for the community.

There is often a lot of focus on attracting a big company to the community, but most job growth actually occurs through the expansion of local, existing businesses. West Chicago has long featured major industrial employers, particularly in manufacturing, but it needs to diversify its local economy to remain competitive. Growth industries and sectors can initially be captured by small companies and new startups. West Chicago needs to identify ways to attract and support these entrepreneurs.

- The City should consider drafting and adopting a formal 5-year economic development strategy, including evaluating policy statements on the use of a variety of public incentives and development tools.
- The City should continue to actively participate in the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and the City could consider encouraging at least one member of municipal staff to become a Certified Economic Developer (CECD).
- The City should establish a
  formal business retention
  and expansion program that
  provides adequate municipal
  resources and staffed by City
  personnel, in partnership with
  elected and appointed officials
  and business leaders through
  an Economic Development Task
  Force.
- The City's business retention and expansion program should directly include the Economic Development Task Force, which should be responsible for coordinating with staff on tracking, monitoring, and evaluating the information collected as part of activities. Teams of community representatives, including staff, elected and appointed officials, and business customers, should develop a routinely structured series of business visitation meetings that utilize a standardized survey tool.
- The City should consider working with the business community to create a dedicated business and development website.
- 6. The City should continue to partner with existing property and shopping center owners, as well as interested developers, to promote the community through the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) to recruit new retail and restaurant users to the community.

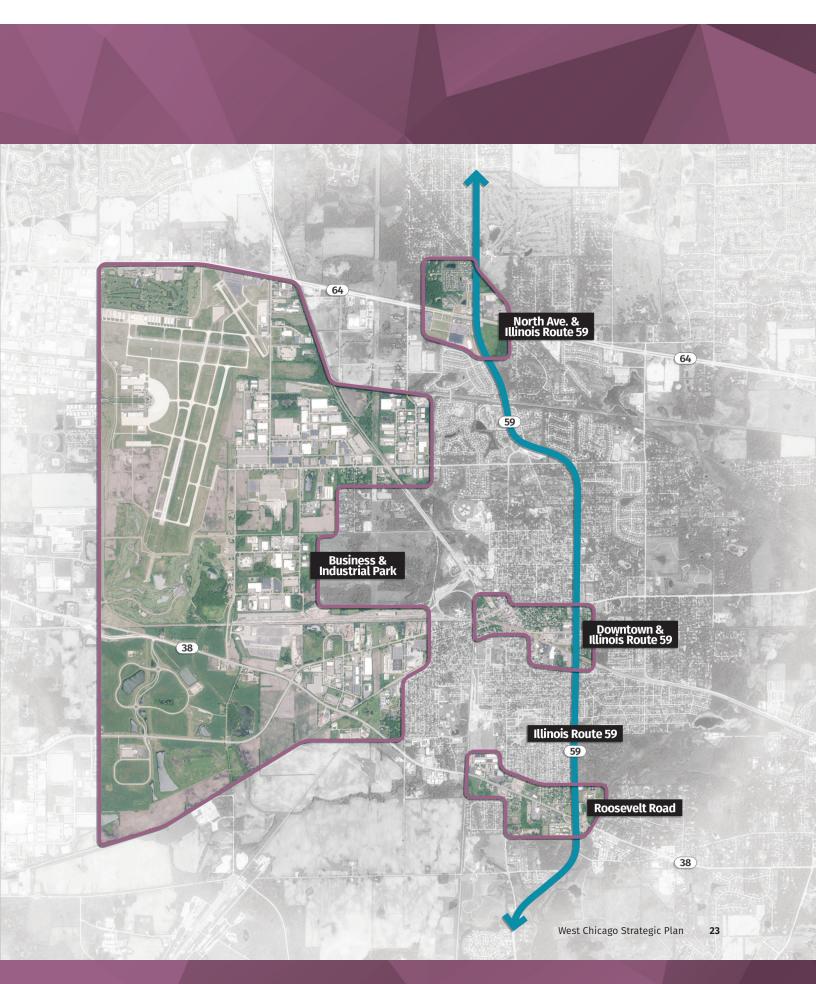
- 7. The City should continue to directly partner with the DuPage Business Center developer to assist in marketing the development and recruiting users to the employment park.
- 8. The City should continue to engage with existing local and regional organizations, such as the Small Business Development Center, to formalize and refine entrepreneurship and new business support programs as a component of the City's economic development programming.
- 9. As part of a long-term employment and development strategy, the City should partner with local and regional organizations, including the College of DuPage Small Business Development Center and Center for Entrepreneurship, Rev3 Innovation Center, along with major economic development entities like Choose DuPage and the DuPage County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to support businesses in emerging employment sectors.

Establish targeted investment and economic development strategies for each area of the City's five defined business districts, tailored to corridor and site-specific conditions.

### **The Approach**

The City of West Chicago's business community is defined by five distinct areas. These business districts shape the City's built-form and West Chicago largely functions as a series of five commercial neighborhoods. Each commercial area features its own set of conditions, ranging from urban design elements to real estate economics to business mix.

The City should develop detailed implementation strategies to competitively position each of these five areas for development, redevelopment, and new investment. Through those efforts each commercial area should be reinforced as a distinctive business district that aligns land use planning, zoning, infrastructure investment, corridor branding, and urban design character in a manner that differentiates the district from other parts of West Chicago, as well as other parts of suburban Chicago.

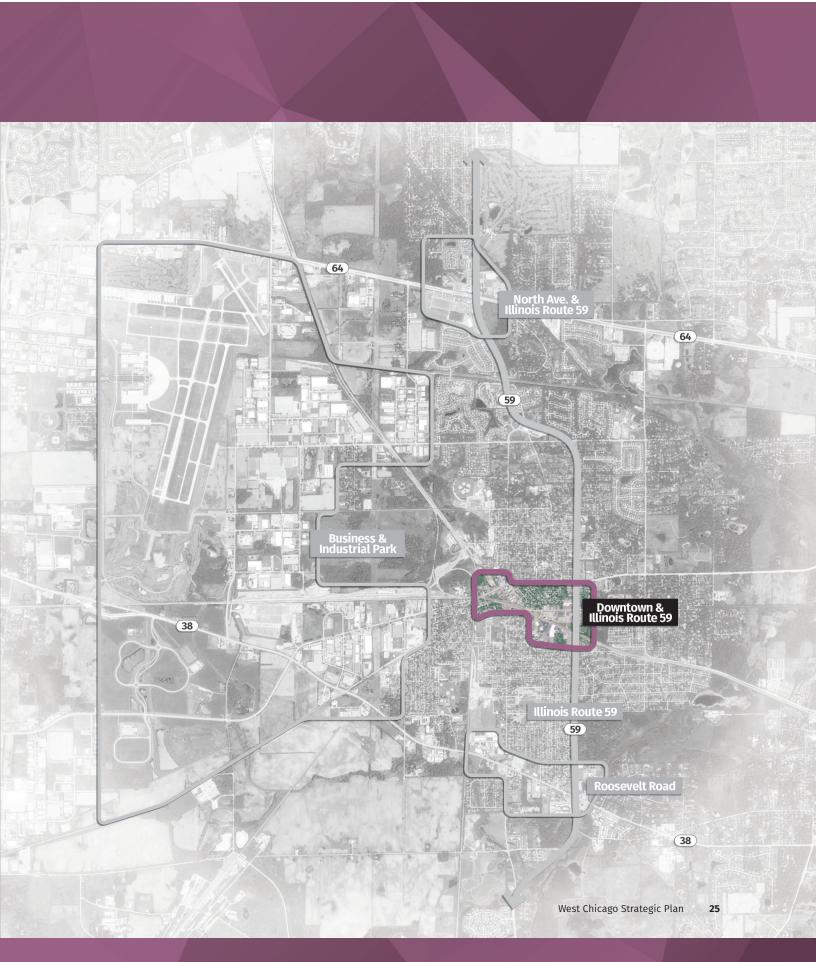


#### **Downtown**

West Chicago is not just another suburb – it is a city and a hometown. As a result, its historic central business district - Downtown - is the traditional heart and soul of the community. However, in the 21st Century the community is fragmented, and Downtown no longer serves a role in the lives of West Chicago residents; in fact, some residents prefer to travel to St. Charles, Geneva, Wheaton, and even Naperville when they want to visit a historic, walkable, mixed-use dining and entertainment district. West Chicago's downtown has been characterized as overwhelmingly Hispanic in character, and furthermore, others only see it as a local neighborhood business district - not the central gathering place for the community as a whole. That must change.

Downtown West Chicago is unique because its Main Street is not a U.S. or Illinois highway – this means the City has far greater control over its urban design than most suburban communities. The potential exists to add iconic signage and other streetscaping elements that would really differentiate the area, add a unique sense of place, and create a memorable destination – but would never be approved by IDOT. Further, in contrast with the ubiquitous nature of riverfront downtown districts in the western suburbs, West Chicago is unique because of its terrain, grade change, and railroad heritage. Furthermore, the community's Latino culture adds another unique, differentiating characteristic that makes it clear a visitor is in a distinct place. West Chicago needs to capitalize on these attributes.

Downtown West Chicago also features a Metra station and some initial. suburban-style transit-oriented development (TOD). However, the potential exists to push this style of infill development even further. There is an increasing interest in the suburban Chicago housing market in traditional, walkable neighborhoods in close proximity to the corner business district, the local park, and community landmarks, while still featuring attractive but affordable housing and West Chicago clearly has that to offer. The potential exists to invest in a few signature projects over the next 5 to 7 years to serve as catalyst for a generation of downtown investment in West Chicago.



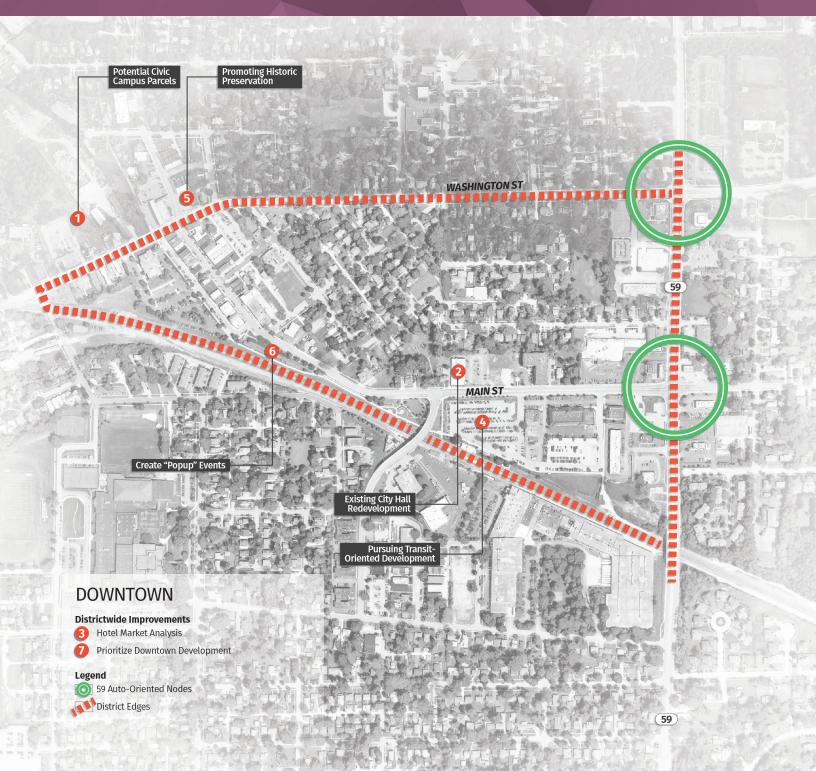
### What are popup events and tactical urbanism?

Tactical urbanism is a term used to describe low-cost, temporary changes to the built environment intended to improve local neighborhoods and gathering places. They can activate a space and bring together the community around a one-time event. Examples of types of interventions include: better block initiatives, guerilla gardening, PARK(ing) Day, Depaving, food carts/trucks, open streets, and many more.

The City of Chicago, for example, provides its community with the "Make Way for Play Guide" that was developed in 2013 to help give Chicagoans the tools to maximize the use of the public way and promote active living.

- The City should make a final determination on the real estate it owns in Downtown West Chicago; the City could consider selling a portion to a private developer, and/or it build a new, civic campus as a foot traffic anchor for the district. Such a facility should act as more than a traditional 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. government offices building and offer dynamic, flexible public facility space that helps activate downtown 7 days a week during both business hours and at night.
- Should the City vacate the current City Hall, the site should be prioritized and incentivized for infill redevelopment, across from the Metra station, to add greater density to the Downtown neighborhood.
- The City should study the market potential for a small, business-oriented hotel that caters to local employers and the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory located within an infill redevelopment project.

- The City should continue supporting the downtown as a TOD hub by partnering with Metra and other property owners to maximize the available real estate, including parking lots. The City should also consider implementing a bikeshare program and density bonuses to promote West Chicago as one of the most competitive communities on a Metra line in the Chicago suburbs for new infill construction.
- The City should continue to enforce the adopted design guidelines and work to integrate the role of the Preservation Commission with future public improvements.
- The City should work with private local entities to coordinate the creation of a series of tactical urbanism or "popup" events to activate Downtown West Chicago and demonstrate its market viability and character to a wider population.
- 7 The City should target-market Downtown to comparable business districts in its business recruitment and economic development efforts.



#### **Roosevelt Road**

Roosevelt Road is Illinois Route 38 and acts as a major arterial highway that connects Glen Ellyn and Wheaton to Geneva and the Fox River Valley. As a result, the corridor is designed to move traffic safely and efficiently throughout the Chicago region; within West Chicago, the business district is largely defined by a substantial interchange and viaduct structure at Illinois Route 59. The Roosevelt Road corridor transitions into a midcentury-style strip retail district before it transitions into a more modern office park at approximately Town Road.

The district still features prominent anchors, such as Jewel-Osco and Haggerty Ford, but it has also experienced disinvestment in recent years and shows signs of aging and obsolescence. Ultimately the Roosevelt Road corridor business district competes for many of the same consumers as Downtown. Although Roosevelt Road features high traffic counts, traveling east and west features limited population density. Roosevelt Road's primary market in the future will likely be motorists as well as business park users to the west, as far as Kirk Road.

The City needs to thoroughly evaluate redevelopment strategies for Roosevelt Road and proactively incentivize infill reinvestment in the corridor. The recently completed roadway improvements on multiple streets in the area provide an opportunity to stimulate new investment, but an economic development vision and strategy for this corridor needs to be determined and established. If West Chicago features a surplus of commercial and retail square footage, it may be more competitive to concentrate such uses at the 59 and Joliet Street intersection, while transitioning mid-block properties to mixed-use, office, and residential uses. Further, many of the existing buildings are set far back from the right-of-way and feature large parking lots; the potential to add outlot buildings and/or increase development density in the corridor may be beneficial.



### The Benefits of Flexible Parking

Flexible parking improves traditional, "mandatory-minimum" parking requirements based on access to transit, the presence of nearby complementary destinations within walking/biking distance, the potential for shared parking, auto ownership rates of the community, and implementation programs to reduce demand for parking, such as car sharing. Conventional parking requirements have often produced an over-supply of parking, which tends to be dedicated to one individual parcel.

The advantage to setting out these criteria specifically, and allowing these reductions, is that developers will know up front how many spaces they will be expected to provide.

- Create and adopt a formal Roosevelt Road corridor Development Plan that details the community's vision for the area, addresses public infrastructure improvements, and provides subarea and site-specific detail on infill redevelopment strategies.
- Identify certain mid-block parcels and existing buildings that could potentially be targeted for infill redevelopment to transition part of the corridor to a mixed-use, office, and residential land use.
- Examine parking mandatory-minimums and existing businesses in the corridor and identify opportunities to allow for the construction of new outlots on existing sites.

- Examine the potential use of development incentives and special revenue districts to stimulate private investment in the Roosevelt Road corridor.
- 5 Consider establishing a Roosevelt Road corridor overlay district that permits flexible parking and density bonuses in exchange for achieving other redevelopment goals in the corridor.
- 6 Consider working with I-DOT to explore the possibility of investing in a district-branding strategy based on streetscaping that differentiates the established Roosevelt Road business district from the industrial and business park properties that begin west of the BNSF railroad tracks.



#### **North Avenue**

North Avenue travels from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River and locally connects suburbs like Elmhurst and Carol Stream to St. Charles and the Fox River Valley. The roadway is designed as a major, arterial state highway intended to move a high volume of traffic at high speeds. The corridor cuts through the very northern portion of West Chicago, acting as a critical business district for the City, while also somewhat separating the residential areas to its north from the historic core of the community. North Avenue's intersection with Route 59 anchors a major retail node, which is east of the former Charlestowne Mall site and Pheasant Run Golf Course.

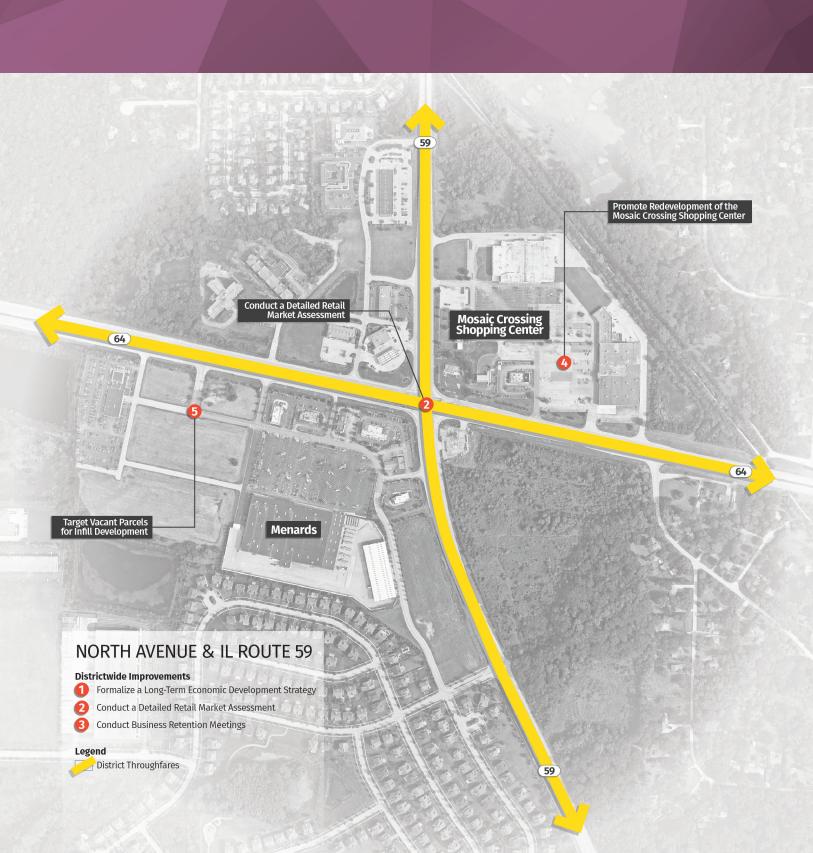
North Avenue has somewhat struggled as a business district within West Chicago and features vacancy and less-than-A-quality retail lease tenants. The recent losses of Hobby Lobby and Fox Valley Volkswagen add to existing vacancy. This commercial area is fragmented and generally developed piecemeal around a major signalized intersection; typical for its era, these properties must be redeveloped, repositioned, and reinvested to be competitive in the future.

These types of shopping centers face challenges in reinventing themselves and competing over time in virtually any community, but the intersection of North Avenue and Route 59 is further emphasized because, despite high traffic volumes, it does not anchor a major node of population density. To the east, the corridor is primarily industrial uses and designed around very low-density businesses.

The Mosaic Crossing Shopping Center is the clear catalyst opportunity. The site is very large, the existing buildings are set very far back from right-of-way, and the visibility into the development from the roadways is poor. Further, there are some site access and circulation issues. In general, this is a challenging development that features certain signs of obsolesce. This real estate represents one of the most critical opportunities for West Chicago's economic development efforts, particularly in terms of maximizing retail sales tax potential.



- Formalize a long-term economic strategy for this business district, in partnership with existing property and shopping center owners.
- 2 Consider the potential of conducting a detailed retail and restaurant market assessment that captures the maximum potential of this commercial area node; balance that market potential against concept scenarios that may introduce mixeduse, office, medical, hotel, and housing uses to the district.
- 3 Conduct a rapid-succession series of business retention meetings, involving shopping center managers and property owners, to determine the stability of the business district over the next two years.
- Continue to engage the current property owners of the Mosaic Crossing Shopping Center to discuss the potential for a public-private partnership to redevelop this site, including adding density and mixed-use components as part of a longterm master plan. A redesign of this site could potentially include a mix of residential, office, medical, and hotel uses, alongside retail and restaurant businesses. By adding a mix of uses and greater density in the area it would increase daytime populations and generate more local demand. Such a project will likely require public incentives.
- Examine the remaining vacant parcels for potential outlot development and/or beautification projects.



## The Benefits of Illinois 59 to West Chicago

Throughout the strategic planning process, outreach participants and community stakeholders have repeatedly cited the positive impact Illinois 59 has on West Chicago. It is true that IL-59 is a net benefit to the community. However, from an economic development standpoint it is important to understand its competitive advantage clearly. There are limited opportunities for additional development on IL-59; most of the highway frontage is residential or open space, and the existing commercial nodes are the best positioned real estate for retail, restaurant. and office development. In general, the commercial nodes on IL-59, located at Roosevelt Road, Main and Washington Streets, Tower Station, and at North Avenue, are stable and feature relatively low vacancy. The economic development strategy here should be on reinvestment and repositioning these nodes to continue to be competitive.

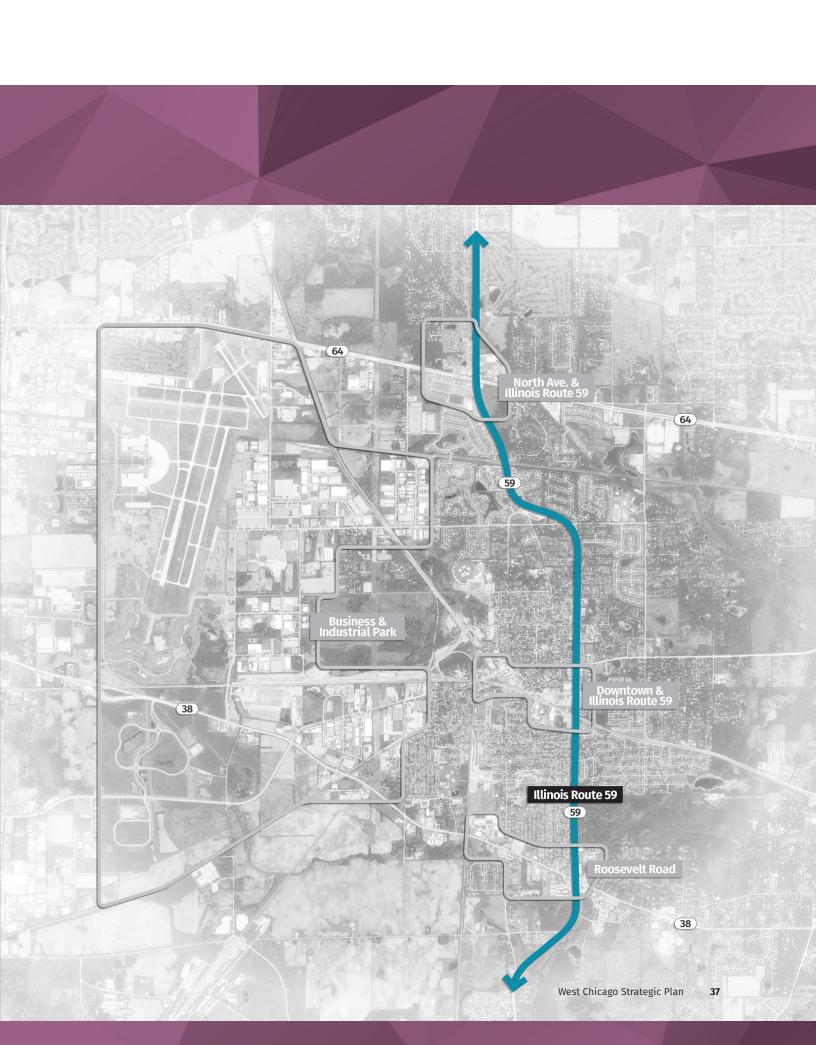
Beyond these four commercial nodes, the primary benefits of Illinois 59 are as a regional highway that efficiently moves motorists throughout the metro area. The highway corridor connects West Chicago to both I-90 and I-88, as well as to communities throughout DuPage County. Depsite quick access to the heart of suburban Chicago, West Chicago still provides a quiet, smalltown character surrounded by open space.

### **Illinois Route 59**

Illinois Route 59 is similar to other commercial corridors in West Chicago in that its role as a major, regional Illinois state highway means it is designed to move high volumes of traffic great distances in the Chicago region. Route 59 serves western DuPage County, but it also largely functions to connect I-90 to I-88, generally Hoffman Estates to Naperville. There are dozens of municipalities and unincorporated areas along this stretch of highway, and none of them are differentiated from each other in any substantially memorable way. West Chicago does feature prominent and attractive gateway signs on 59, but otherwise the character of development has been consistent with the national chain and highway-oriented retail and fast food users seen in most other communities located on IL-59. Although close in relative proximity, Downtown West Chicago is just west of IL-59, and therefore many motorists traverse the community without ever knowing where they were.

Illinois Route 59 represents a tremendous economic development opportunity for West Chicago, primarily because the quality of existing development has been successful, but still leaves the capacity for potential improvement through redevelopment. There is a prominent retail district located at the intersection of IL-59 and North Avenue. which is addressed in the North Avenue section of this chapter. Further, Tower Station and Aldi serve as a neighborhood retail center in the middle of a primarily residential area. This shopping center features low vacancy and appears competitive, serving this established residential neighborhood.

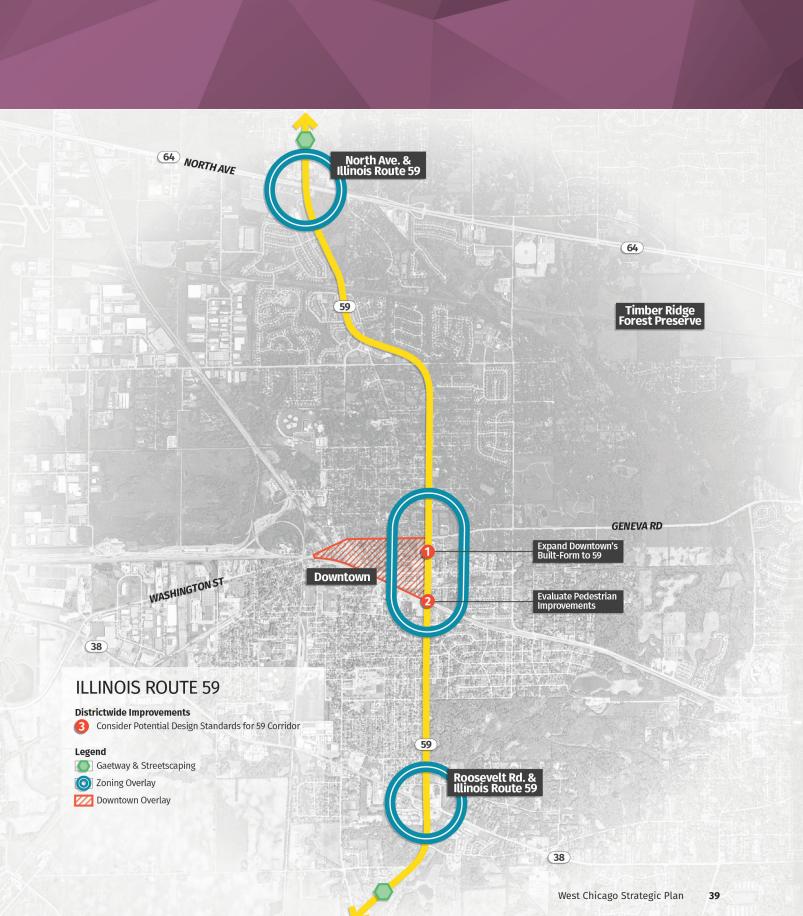
The two critical nodes are the clusters of businesses oriented to Route 59 at Main Street and East Washington Street; ultimately these nodes are extensions of Downtown West Chicago and should be redeveloped as such. These areas should be denser, more mixed-use in nature, stitch into West Chicago's pedestrian and transit-oriented downtown district, and slow traffic on Route 59 enough to the extent the community character is apparent that a motorist is in the City – a distinctive and memorable place.



#### The Benefits of Suburban Infill and Mixed-Use Development

Infill development promotes the better use of sites through reuse and repositioning of obsolete or underutilized buildings. Additionally, infill uses vacant land to contribute to community revitalization. This is often true in suburban communities, that originally developed at a lower density and in a manner that served the initial needs of residents. As suburban communities are changing and evolving today, the opportunity to redevelop and reposition real estate is timely. The benefits of mixed use infill development include environmental benefits of using land efficiently, confining growth into existing urbanized areas, and increasing walkability.

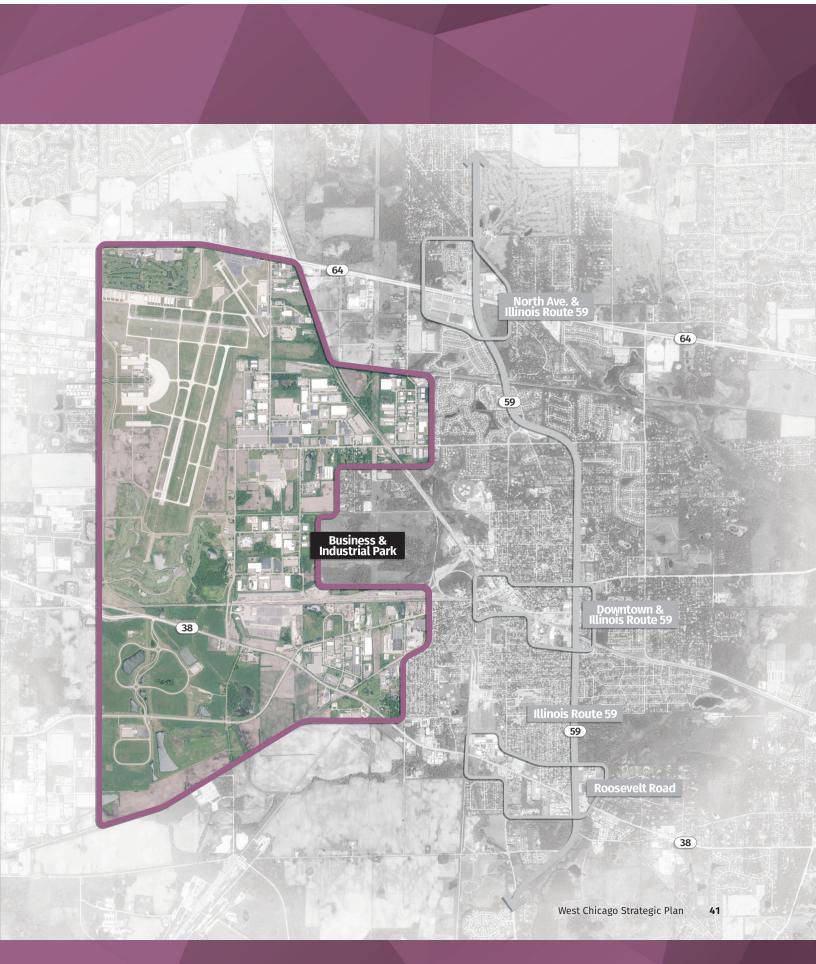
- Evaluate expanding Downtown West Chicago's larger neighborhood to extend to Route 59 and carry the district's multi-story, mixed-use, and pedestrian-oriented character to infill developments at those intersections.
- Working with IDOT, evaluate opportunities to install pedestrian safety and traffic calming techniques at the West Washington and Main Street intersections over the long-term, and based on crash data and level of service.
- 3 Consider adopting urban design standards for the Route 59 corridor that are incorporated through overlay zoning districts to promote high-quality developments.



### **Business & Industrial Parks**

West Chicago is unique within the suburban Chicago region because it features a major airport as well as hundreds of acres of undeveloped office, industrial, and employment park real estate. Sometimes called "business parks" because of their flexibility, the former DuPage National Technology Park has transitioned into a more dynamic, mixed-use development that carries considerable opportunity for West Chicago. These "greenfield" sites are in close proximity to West Chicago's existing industrial, manufacturing, and traditional employment centers, to the east.

One of the defining questions for West Chicago over the next generation is whether or not it can stimulate employment growth in these areas. Some businesses and employers that are in West Chicago today will leave. The long-term indicator for the City will be whether or not it replaces those businesses with new, growing employers. Although the location may lack certain advantages, such as immediate interstate access, it provides others like a local, qualified workforce. West Chicago needs to understand these industries, what factors matter to them when making an investment decision, and where the City fits in the regional Chicago marketplace.



## What is an incubator? an accelerator? co-work space?

An incubator begins with companies that are in the early processes of starting a business. Some incubators have an application process while others work with companies and ideas they come in contact with. In most cases, startups accepted into an incubator program relate to a specific location to work with other companies in the incubator. Examples of regional incubators with networks already in the Chicago area are: Ideaslab, TechNexus, and Catapult Chicago.

An accelerator program usually has a set timeframe for an individual company. Many times, these companies spend time working with a group of mentors to build out their business and avoid problems along the way. Accelerators always have an application process, and top programs are typically very selective. Examples of existing accelerator programs in the Chicago area are: Y Combinator, Techstars, and Brandery.

Co-work spaces are typically more affordable and flexible working spaces for start-up businesses that might not have the capital to lock into an office lease. Typically, these spaces require a small monthly fee to cover the expenses of running an office, and include office furniture, open or flexible working spaces, high-speed internet access, break rooms, printers, etc. Some co-work spaces that are geared towards crafting have tools, scrap wood, laser-printers, welders, and circular saws, etc.

- Onsider the use of development incentives and public financing tools to create a 5-year plan for roadway improvements and other needed infrastructure to stimulate new growth.
- 2 The City could host regular meetings with the DuPage Airport Authority and develop a formal investment strategy that identifies practices that leverage the benefits associated with the airport. As part of this endeavor, evaluate the North Avenue frontage for redevelopment.
- The City should develop a long-range master plan to reposition the former General Mills site and proactively attract new investors and employers to the community. If necessary, this site could be segmented into smaller developable "pads" and marketed to smaller users.

- The City could consider partnering with Choose DuPage, or other regional and local organizations, to elevate these industrial and office park development sites as a critical priority for the County's economic development programs more broadly.
- The City could consider developing small business incubator and accelerator space within these industrial areas; these facilities may be developed in partnership with colleges and universities located in the western suburbs, as well as in partnership with Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. Such projects could be developed using a mixture of public, private, nonprofit, and university resources.

