

Riverdale e-Village Development Plan Executive Summary

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April, 2003

Riverdale e-Village

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Introduction

The Village of Riverdale received an Illinois Tomorrow Corridor Planning Grant in 2002 to create a transit oriented development (TOD) plan to enhance its commercial core-civic center. The TOD plan is centered on the Ivanhoe Stop on the Metra Electric Line which connects central Chicago to its Southern Suburbs. This grant was distinctive in that it was also used to design an *e-Village*, a 21st Century version of a transit village.

Transit oriented development is “the design and development of land around transit stations that encourage people to use mass transit within a neighborhood, between neighborhoods and throughout a region. TOD brings more people and more businesses to a station area, increasing the sense of community and promoting a thriving market place.” It can, therefore, “spur neighborhood revitalization in disinvested areas.” (*Building a Regional Framework*, Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission)

In other words, TOD is a bricks-and-mortar strategy for producing both economic and transportation benefits. TOD can revitalize transit villages and stimulate travel by walking and public transit instead of automobiles.

An e-Village is produced by adding an electronic overlay to a bricks and mortar village. The advantage of developing an e-Village is that it promises to accomplish the transportation goals and exceed the economic goals of TOD, all in a shorter time frame and at less cost than through bricks-and-mortar construction.

An e-Village introduces key elements of the future while preserving the best features of the past and present. It introduces a local community to the:

- economy of the future – e-commerce
- public telecommunications of the future – shared, professional-grade technology;
- automobile of the future – small, short-range, zero-emission vehicles
- services of the future – distance education, tele-medicine, e-government

At the same time, an e-Village reinforces traditional urban elements such as rail transit, Main Street, walking distances, and place-based community.

Village of Riverdale

Riverdale is a 110 year old village 35 miles south of the Chicago Loop, and contiguous with the southern-most border of the City of Chicago. Its population in 2000 was 15,055, which was 86% African-American with a relatively young median age of 27.5. It is one of 93 mostly small villages included in the South Suburban Region of the Chicago Metropolitan Area.

Riverdale, like many places in the East and Midwest United States, is a former industrial village attempting to make a transition to a post-industrial economic base. The Village leadership is aggressively pursuing a number of economic development initiatives, including street infrastructure improvements, brownfield cleanup, industrial attraction programs, and renewal of its commercial/civic core.

The commercial/civic core of the Village of Riverdale is a compact, pedestrian-oriented, charming area but in need of revitalization. While there has not been significant disinvestment, neither has there been much new private investment for decades. Revitalization of the Village core will improve the local economy and the community's quality of life. It will also contribute to the Chicago Metropolitan Area's long range strategy for congestion management and air quality improvement that involves developing or enhancing transit villages at stops along the Metra commuter rail system.

With a stop on the Metra Electric line, Riverdale has a potential competitive advantage over many other villages in the South Suburban Region. The Ivanhoe stop, on 144th Street in the heart of the village core, is currently one of the most popular Metra Electric line stops. Over 1,100 people catch the train there every day, and 11,000 pass through on the train.

However, the Village core lacks the functions to engage these commuters, to attract visitors from elsewhere in the Metra system, or to serve as a central market place for the 15,000 residents. This situation is self-reinforcing. There can be no commercial growth until some portion of the visitors stop and shop; no one will stop and shop until there are more functions available.

Without additional functions, the competitive advantage offered by rail is being squandered, both for the Village and the region as a whole. The Riverdale e-Village will help realize that potential by introducing a significant number of virtual functions, made feasible because they are not subject to the economics of a bricks-and-mortar presence.

144th Street Transit Oriented Development Plan

Farr Associates Architecture and Urban Design, with its subcontractors (Community Economic Redevelopment Corporation, Fish Transportation, and Gibbs Planning Group; referred to collectively as the Farr Team) created a state-of-the-art TOD plan. The plan (available from the Village of Riverdale or Farr Associates of Chicago) makes many detailed recommendations for changes to the physical environment. These include:

- Revising the existing zoning code in order to facilitate construction of mixed-use buildings and provide more flexibility for the marketplace to determine the uses.
- Significantly changing the physical form of the downtown. One of the commercially debilitating characteristics of the existing form is that Metra parking is located between the tracks and the eastern retail strip. The TOD plan relocates the Metra parking and adds mixed-use buildings to the former parking lots in order to strengthen the pedestrian linkage between the retail corridor and the Metra platform.
- Ensuring accessibility to the core by expanding parking capacity and alleviating existing levels of street congestion, already a problem in the morning and evening commute hours. The Plan also recommends signage to direct traffic from the main arterials to the Village core.
- Adding design elements to strengthen the *Main Street* identity and enhancing existing retro features that have become popular elsewhere in the nation.
- Advising corridor businesses to improve facades and create a joint-identity for marketing.

TODs are produced through a public-private joint venture. The private sector develops the property. The local government usually adopts policy changes (such as a new zoning ordinance), abates taxes (such as the façade rebate program), and makes collateral investments. In some cases the collateral investments can involve millions of dollars and reach 50% of the total cost of TOD implementation. In Riverdale, recommended collateral investments include signage, bulb-outs, landscaping, street furniture, street light fixtures, planters, curb restoration, parking facilities, and public art. Cost of these improvements were not estimated.

Riverdale e-Village

The Riverdale e-Village will have three distinguishing features:

- Rich mix of activities, especially for a place of its physical size.
- Congestion-relieving, smog-reducing, energy-efficient circulation system.
- Support for transition to a modern, digital economy.

Mix of Activities

According to leading research scientists Robert Cervero and Michael Bernick, one of the key to making a successful transit village is *diversity* – the range of activities offered (see *Transit Villages in the 21st Century*, McGraw Hill, 1997). The Riverdale Village core on 144th Street currently contains 38 businesses occupying about 50,000 square feet in addition to the Village Hall, the Public Library, and the administrative headquarters of School District 148. The retailers are all sole proprietors with a small market base. About one in four provides some form of personal service, such as hair care. Although residential neighborhoods are directly adjacent to the commercial core, there are only a handful of dwelling units mixed in with the commercial buildings. The area contains about 125 jobs, mostly in administration of the Village and School District 148.

Important functions missing entirely include education; other levels of government such as township, county, state and federal levels; medical (except for a single dentist); culture; and social services. Functions present but lacking in variety include food/beverage, business services, grocery, retail and jobs.

The TOD plan calls for adding space through bricks-and-mortar rehabilitation and new construction. The plan is to bring 15,000 square feet of vacant commercial space onto the market immediately, then build 15,000 square feet and 50 dwelling units within 3 years, and a final 15,000 square feet and 43 dwelling units 3 to 7 years after that.

This means that the bricks-and-mortar construction will add less than 15 new businesses and about 100 new residents over a 6 to 10 year period. In order to produce economic revitalization of the village core, the TOD plan relies more on improving design features than on adding activities.

The e-Village reverses the approach to revitalizing the core. Ten new functions, some with considerable variety, will be added within six months of project implementation. Education, training, federal government information and services, state government information and services, e-retailing, business assistance, cultural programs, business and government meetings, access to technology, and communications in the broadest sense

will add substantially to the activities available in the Riverdale core. For example, a *hot spot* for public, high speed Internet access will be created throughout the village core using Wide-Fidelity wireless technology. The *hot spot* should encourage visitors to eat, drink, shop, and generally linger in the commercial area. Other functions are discussed further below in the Network Station section.

Circulation System

The TOD plan recommends improvements to streets, intersections, and parking lots in order to accommodate more automobiles with fewer problems, improve the physical connection to the Metra rail system, and accommodate other modes of travel, especially walking and cycling. The e-Village will take this plan a step further by introducing a new travel mode that represents one version of the *automobile of the future*. This mode is the *neighborhood vehicle*.

Neighborhood vehicles fill a niche between high performance autos and walking and cycling. They are typically small, slow, and short range. They are, however, *appropriate* for taking short trips. Making more trips short and using appropriate transportation technology for those short trips can significantly reduce congestion, air quality, and oil-dependence problems. Examples of neighborhood vehicles include golf carts, neighborhood electric vehicles (NEV), personal transporters (e.g., the Segway), motor scooters, and others.

Parking is one obvious area of impact. Vehicles half the size of a full-sized auto will take-up half the space. This means that the same size parking lots can accommodate twice as many cars for the cost of re-striping. Neighborhood vehicles can also provide mobility for seniors. Driving a golf cart is easier and safer than driving a high performance automobile.

One way to introduce neighborhood vehicles is through a car-sharing program. Such arrangements are available elsewhere in Chicagoland and, because of proximity to the Metra system, should translate well to Riverdale.

Digital Economy

While the additional mix of functions should help revitalize the village core, modernizing business practices within the market area should improve the local economy. For research findings supporting the proposition that economic growth depends on enterprise modernization through digital technologies, across all industries not just technology industries, see “What the IT Revolution Means for Regional Economic Development,” Paul Sommers and Daniel Carlson, Brookings Institution, February, 2003.

Expressed simply, *using technological capabilities improves the capabilities of the user*. The e-Village will help corridor-businesses, government agencies, and participating organizations from throughout the Southland become more effective users of digital technology. This is analogous to helping businesses improve their facades and visual merchandising techniques, only potentially much more powerful. For example, a retailer will develop a web presence, add an electronic point of sale device, or adopt supply chain management techniques. The Village administration and public library will add e-government practices. Colleges and universities will become more proficient at distance education. And so forth.

As a result of the e-Village, Riverdale will attract more visitors, especially individuals and organizations with capabilities or aspirations to add value in the digital economy. Riverdale neighborhoods, villages throughout the Southland, and the entire region will be able to use digital networks to compete more effectively in the global economy.

Riverdale Network Station

A new type of facility, the *Network Station*, is the engine for transforming a bricks-and-mortar transit village into an e-Village. It provides access to communications just as a train station provides access to transportation.

A Network Station is an expertly staffed, non-profit, shared-use, mixed-function facility for digital communications. It is a *programmable* facility in that the activities it offers are programmed to satisfy the needs and interests of the adjacent community, and can be easily re-programmed to reflect changing needs.

Non-profit means it will price its services for community benefit, rather than for commercial gain. It will be owned and operated by a community-based non-profit corporation in order to provide the local community with a measure of control over its communications future.

Mixed function means that the facility will provide *access* to an array of digital technologies, and to the virtual presence of a variety of functions, such as education, health care, business meetings, small business counseling, vocational training, government services, etc. The *mix* of functions leads to *transportation* benefits.

Shared-use means that the facility will accommodate different communities of users. They include:

- Organizations which are service providers located outside the Village and capable of creating a virtual presence inside the Village. Hospitals, schools, and federal agencies can use the same space on different days.
- Local consumers of the services which are imported into the Network Station from organizations elsewhere in the region. Seniors obtaining

Social Security Administration counseling services can use the same space in the afternoon used for a class of small business owners receiving federal tax information in the morning.

- Local producers of services and other types of content which are consumed locally or exported to other villages or regions. Local specialists in data-base management services can share the computing equipment with digital photo editors applying Adobe Photoshop.

Shared-use also accommodates certain functions that are inherently best experienced as a group activity such as certain types of education, culture and entertainment.

Essentially, the initiative will create a place that puts technology applications into the hands of every motivated person, embeds every day services and experiences in the applications, and creates universal technology literacy and a culture of innovation.

Shared uses lead to *economic* benefits, in part by capitalizing and empowering small entities.

Riverdale Network Station Plan

The Riverdale Network Station has been planned for two phases. The first phase will consist of 5,000 square feet in one of the buildings being rehabilitated under the TOD plan, directly east of the Metra platform. The space will be divided into easy-to-reconfigure meeting space of 3,000 square feet, 1,000 square feet for a computer-based learning center, and 1,000 square feet for administration and storage. Implementation of phase 1 will begin as soon as funding has been realized. Its activities are described below.

The second phase is planned for 10,000 square feet in a location that has yet to be identified. Phase 2 implementation will be contingent on the success of phase 1 and, in any case, will not begin for at least 18 months after phase 1 begins. Phase 2 expansion is planned for a shared-work center and a technology exhibit area. This will attract business visitors and add the equivalent of jobs to the village core.

Phase 1 Activities

Phase 1 of the Riverdale Network Station will:

1. Function as a center for meetings and presentations.

The meeting center will offer groups the opportunity to meet electronically rather than always travelling for a face-to-face (F2F) experience, or to ride Metra to the meeting rather than always driving. Meeting options will include:

- Local face to face meetings (Riverdale Investment Club)
- Technology-assisted F2F presentations (new product introduction to sales staff)
- Audio conferences (Village staff and consultants)
- Live-interactive video conferences (Chicago Southland Chamber in Riverdale and the Metropolitan Chamber gathered at the Charles Hayes Family Investment Center in Chicago)
- Downstream video, upstream audio meetings (National League of Cities legislation briefing)
- Web meetings (business owners accessing the US Small Business Administration)

The meeting center will also have economic impacts as routine use of meeting and presentation technologies has the potential of making the meetings more effective. Electronic meetings also save valuable time wasted in transit to a central meeting site. In the long run, exposure to electronic meetings should result in more businesses and government agencies assembling their own conferencing infrastructure, and F2F meetings becoming a purely local phenomenon.

2. Provide access to the technologies that are essential to participating in a 21st Century economy.

The Network Station's high speed network access, multi-media computers with headphones, semi-private carrels, and catalogue of online resources will make it easy for motivated individuals to pursue their interests.

The Network Station will facilitate a region-wide program for businesses to develop multi-media marketing materials (in the form of CDs or DVDs for example) or for rich media Web pages. Web authoring tools will be available to do-it-yourself entrepreneurs, free lance designers, and individuals in training with South Suburban College or other institutions in the region that offer Web design programs. In this environment, development costs of a quality Web page should not be a barrier to any Southland business.

The Network Station will provide much of the same software that its primary collaborators use in their onsite training programs. For example, the Business and Career Institute at South Suburban College (discussed below) teaches courses that involve the Microsoft Office suite of programs, Adobe Photoshop, and AutoCAD. By offering the same software, the Network Station will allow advanced students to complete their class work or produce work freelance.

The Network Station will also provide access to entire technological systems. For example, the digital photography system could include introductory lectures by experts drawn from the Southland, loaner cameras with different capabilities, photo editing software, color printers of varying qualities, presentation software, computer projectors, and presentation space.

3. Provide access to virtual services that are not physically present.
Beyond kiosks, a variety of services can be made to virtually appear at the Network Station. The following types are feasible and have broad appeal. They are described in detail in the Vision Report.
 - Education
 - Social services
 - Business assistance
 - Workforce preparation
 - Entertainment
 - Retail shopping
 - Federal government service
 - Culture – virtual field trips
4. Create a center for post-disaster recovery and safety
It is increasingly apparent that reliable transportation may not always be available in the future. A number of events could dramatically disrupt the social order for periods of time, or shut down certain parts of the Metropolitan Area, certain roadways, or the Metra system. The Network Station will create an accessible center for public communications and information in case of a disaster or other emergency.

Initial Collaborators

The Network Station will collaborate initially with those organizations in the village, region, and metropolitan area with shelf-ready network applications, or at least a plan for one or more network applications that can appear in the facility. While the Network Station will help the most

prepared organizations realize their plans, it will also work with all others to develop those capabilities.

It will work primarily but not exclusively through umbrella and membership organizations that can demonstrate applications and facilitate marketing the program. The following organizations are those that have indicated interest in and capabilities of becoming phase 1 collaborators: Heritage Bank, Chicago Southland Chamber of Commerce, the Southland Mayors and Managers Association, South Suburban Community College, South Suburban Higher Education Consortium, Center Point at Governors State University, the South Suburban Council on Homelessness, and the federal Social Security Administration, Small Business Administration, and General Services Administration.

Funding Sources

The plan is to obtain start-up funds from a combination of sources. The initial funding will be sought from federal and state economic and transportation programs. The second source will be philanthropic foundations with grant programs for the Metropolitan Chicago area, or topic areas like technology, transit oriented development, or community development.

A target core amount from government and foundations would be 50% to 75% of the total cost of the project's first phase, or an initial grant amount of between \$400,000 and \$500,000.

The third source will be private corporations. Once core funding has been secured, private entities including those in the various digital industries, zero-emission vehicle manufacturers, and those with a significant Chicago or Southland presence will be approached. In-kind investments including expertise and equipment will be sought as well as capital. Donation, under-writing, and sponsorship are all options, although the community should ensure that it retains control of technology decisions.

Non-Profit Owner-Operator

The Village of Riverdale is expected to be the initial owner and operator of the Network Station. The Village and the Siembab Corporation will be co-applicants on funding applications, with the Village acting as fiscal agent for the start-up funds and the Siembab Corporation heading the development team.

The Village will appoint the project's Steering Committee based on structural recommendations from the development team. The Steering Committee will initially approve the programs and operating policies of the Network Station. As the project progresses, this group will take one of the following actions regarding the assets and the responsibilities for continuing the Network Station's operation:

- Recommend an existing non-profit corporation, or establish a new one.
- If establishing a new corporation, either act as corporate convenors and nominate a board of directors, or
- Become the board of directors, possibly with a few additions and deletions.

Cyber Southland

The Riverdale e-Village will be strengthened by additional e-Village developments in the Southland and throughout Chicagoland. As with any network, e-Villages will become more valuable and more effective as nodes are added.

A *Cyber Southland* could, before 2020, consist of a system of over 100 functionally integrated e-Villages developed from traditional village centers, retail malls, commercial strips, and brownfields. Larger villages would also have smaller Network Stations in their residential neighborhoods, possibly co-located with schools.

The Cyber Southland also would become an excellent market for a variety of digital technologies, and the leading market in the nation for alternative fuel neighborhood vehicles. Some of which would be manufactured or assembled within the region.

The transition to the Cyber Southland requires three steps.

1. The leading institutions and consortia in the Southland come to understand the Cyber Southland Initiative, discuss it, ultimately endorse it and make a commitment to participate in the pilot projects.
2. Southland leaders identify and develop a political consensus around the locations for two additional e-Village developments. They should be selected and positioned for funding by no later than spring, 2005 and should be considered as partners with Riverdale in the initial pilot project. In other words, the regional pilot should consist of three e-Villages. Then three additional sites (for a total of 5 beyond Riverdale) should also be selected for development beginning by 2007. At least four types of villages should be represented by 2007 in order to test the viability of an e-Village in different urban forms –a traditional village center with and without Metra service, and no traditional village center with and without Metra service.
3. Southland leaders should obtain funding to create a *digital centers plan* that comprehensively identifies the locations for Network Stations throughout the Southland so that by 2008 many e-Villages can be developed simultaneously. An achievable goal would be to have 45 e-Villages operating within 10 years (by 2013) and 100 by 2020.

Once funding for the Riverdale e-Village has been obtained, South Suburban leaders including elected officials and institutional executives need to ensure that the key public and private enterprises in the region take on the challenge of adopting new policies and practices. People and organizations tend to resist change. But in the end, new technology and behavioral change will be cheaper, easier, and much more effective for improving regional mobility and economics than just bricks and mortar and concrete and asphalt changes to the built environment.

