

MEMORANDUM

To: Village Board of Trustees
From: Village Manager Cara Pavlicek
Date: 2024-11-12
Subject: A presentation on the history, status and next steps of the Village of Northbrook Economic Strategy for downtown.

Overview

The Village established an Economic Strategy Commission in 2022. The ESC is a group of business leaders who have met and developed a set of recommendations for the development and redevelopment of downtown Northbrook. The ESC met jointly with the Board of Trustees in May of 2024 to share and discuss their recommendations. This presentation is to share with the Board and community the steps that have occurred to date as well as next steps.

Fiscal Impact

This agenda item shares with the Board potential next steps for economic development in downtown Northbrook. The recommendations would require staff time and funding. Implementation would be subject to the approval of future budget requests.

Recommendation

Presentation and referral to the Committee of the Whole.

Background

A vital and active downtown is an important part of the Northbrook Community. In the post pandemic world, people and places of business have changed. To build and maintain a vibrant business district downtown Northbrook will need to rethink and retool to attract new business investment in the downtown. Below is an outline of business strategies for the Village to consider.

Partnering on business resiliency and enhancement: Based on research of neighboring communities the major categories of municipal engagement in business growth are public capital improvements, business investment programs, business engagement, collaboration,

joint marketing and events.

Public capital improvements: The purpose of public capital improvements is to recognize that some enhancements benefit most or all businesses within a district or zone. Examples include streets, parks and open spaces, parking, streetscape including sidewalks and pathways, benches, planter, and uniform permanent vegetation/street trees. The village has invested \$X in the CBD infrastructure through the capital improvements plan.

Business investment programs: The purpose of business investment programs is to foster and encourage new and existing businesses to invest and continue investing in their facilities. The programs fall into a few main categories based on the size of the investment and the life expectancy of the improvement. See attachment for additional details.

- Small façade enhancements or fixed asset: Sign, banner, paint, new equipment, furniture
- Small business sales tax generating expansion: website sales, joint marketing
- Mid-range facade: exterior improvements like windows, doors, & detailing
- Mid-range fixed asset: partial kitchen renovation; outdoor space improvement (concrete, pavers, fireplace)
- Significant: Major full facility renovation; major addition or new facility

Business/community engagement and collaboration: The purpose of business/community engagement is to engage the broader community as stewards of the visual character and unique experience of downtown Northbrook. The goal is to include a broad array of community partners in developing and implementing business enhancing strategies. This is focused on downtown and special districts and is in part accomplished through the creation of a nonprofit entity that collects dues, charitable contributions and volunteers who focus on marketing, communication, events and programming that has a shared benefit for businesses within the district. Examples include: Enjoy Highland Park, Celebrate Highwood, Mainstreet Libertyville,

Events: The purpose of events downtown is to create connections and a sense of community by drawing larger numbers of persons to visit the event hosted in the downtown; and by so doing they are encouraged to shop, eat, and enjoy this as a unique community shared space. The reality is that events are expensive, time consuming, require significant planning and many volunteers. Many villages have formed business associations to focus specifically on marketing and event planning in the downtown. Many of Northbrook's comparable communities have 30-50 events in the downtown each year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & TRANSPARENCY:** The Village is transparent in its CBD planning, design and development process and fully engages the community to receive feedback regarding the desired outcomes in the CBD and other significant retail corridors.
2. **DESIGN EXPERTS:** The Village engages a nationally-recognized urban planning and design firm with expertise in creating new development in existing downtown districts to guide the design and development process for the CBD and other significant retail corridors.
1. **GUIDELINES:** The Village should develop a set of specific CBD Design Guidelines and ensure that every new development in the CBD and adjacent to CBD area is compatible with and takes design cues from existing shared character and architecture. Design Guidelines would assist developers in creating appropriate compatible designs of new buildings and specify elements such as site plan, building placement, streetscape, pedestrian amenities, landscaping, and building design options. The guidelines would include such elements as height, proportion, rhythm, exterior materials, roof shapes, and scale.
1. **MASTER PLAN:** The Village upon completion of the zoning code, and guided by an Urban Design consultant as noted above, should develop a Master Plan for the CBD and other important business corridors. This document would include a blueprint at full buildout, a collaborative public design charette process, and the above-mentioned recommendations of CBD-specific Design Guidelines and revised zoning. The Master Plan would provide site-specific design considerations and serve as a format to guide the future of Northbrook's CBD.
1. **ZONING:** The Village is in the process of reviewing the Zoning Code currently and further consideration should be given to Form Based Codes to reflect the recommendations above and ensure that the desired compatibility of new buildings is specified in our zoning code, including for example: building bulk requirements; setbacks; building maximum height; "build to" lines; facade articulation, first floor transparency; and materials.
3. **PARTNER ON BUSINESS RESILIENCE AND ENHANCEMENT:** The Village should engage business partners including the Chamber, Convention and Visitor Bureau, individual businesses, and community members to consider and make recommendations on future programs and activities designed to strengthen the CBD.

ACCOUNTABILITY: On April 2023, the ESC sent a memo to the Village Board of Trustees highlighting 10 recommendations which kicked off a discussion on additional opportunities to enhance the vitality of CBD. The recommendations listed above begin a process to address each of the ten recommendations. The starting point is hiring a design professional to lead a process to engage the community and develop plans for CBD and other significant retail corridors. The plan is important because it collects feedback from the community, informs the prioritization of many individual goals, and consistently communicates with the development community the plans and expectations for the downtown district. This process will consider and make recommendations for design, quality, density and diversity of retail, restaurants, housing, streetscape improvements, infrastructure, parking, vistas, community gathering spaces and more.

ACTION: Accept and place on file the recommendations of the Economic Strategy Committee and refer it to the Committee of the Whole for further discussion.

[Supplemental downtown presentation 11-07-2024.pptx](#)

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