

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEMORANDUM

DATE OF MEETING: April 23, 2026

To: Planning and Zoning Commission

From: Noah Schumerth, Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development

Through: Angela Mesaros, Director of Economic and Community Development

Topic: Cases 26-13, 26-15, and 26-16: Metra/ComEd Traction Power Substation and Transformer Facility

APPLICATION INFORMATION

APPLICANT	Puppala Phanindra (Hatch Consultants Ltd.)
ACTION REQUESTED	Zoning Map Amendment, Special Use Permit, and Site Plan Review
ADDRESS	18277 Park Avenue, Homewood, IL 60430
PIN	29-31-306-024; 29-31-306-019

ZONING & LAND USE

SUBJECT PROPERTY	ZONING	LAND USE
CURRENT	B-2 Downtown Transition and PL-2 Public Land and Open Space	Vacant/Public Parking Lot
PROPOSED	PL-2 Public Land and Open Space	Utility Use (TPSS Facility)
SURROUNDING	N: PL-2 Public Land and Open Space	Public Parking Lot (Park Ave. Commuter Lot)
	E: B-2 Downtown Transition	Railroad ROW (Metra/Canadian National)
	S: R-4 Multiple-Family Residential	Multi-Family Residential complex (Flossmoor Condominiums)
	W: PL-2 Public Land and Open Space	Golf Course (Ravisloe CC)

LEGAL NOTICE

Legal notice was published in *Daily Southtown* on April 9, 2026. Mailed notice was sent to property owners and residents within 250'.

DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

Title	Pages	Prepared by	Date
Application	2	Puppala Phanindra, Applicant	03/20/2026
Narrative	1	Puppala Phanindra, Applicant	03/18/2026
Plat of Survey	1	Hatch Consultants, Ltd.	06/16/2025
Existing Utility Plans	2	Hatch Consultants, Ltd.	06/16/2025

Site Plans	2	Hatch Consultants, Ltd./GFT Inc.	Various
Special Use Standards	3	Puppala Phanindra, Applicant	03/18/2026
Elevations	1	GFT Inc.	03/20/2026
Renderings	6	GFT Inc.	03/20/2026
Landscape Plan	1	GFT Inc.	03/20/2026
Photometric Plan	1	GFT Inc.	03/20/2026
Staff Exhibits	2	Noah Schumerth, Asst. Dir. ECD	04/17/2026

BACKGROUND

The applicant, Puppala Phanindra of Hatch Consultants Ltd., has submitted planning and zoning applications on behalf of Metra and ComEd to allow for the construction of a traction power substation (TPSS) and utility campus at 18277 Park Avenue. The use will include the construction of a new building containing the new traction power substation (controlled by Metra) and a new outdoor transformer facility (controlled by ComEd). These facilities will be located on vacant land located to the south of the Park Avenue Commuter Lot (18210 Park Avenue), and will include a small portion of the existing parking lot.

This facility requires the following planning and zoning reviews to receive approval from the Planning and Zoning Commission:

- **Zoning Map Amendment:** Rezone both parcels within the project area from B-2 Downtown Transition and PL-2 Public Land and Open Space to PL-2 Public Land and Open Space alone.
- **Special Use Permit:** Receive a special use permit to allow for the operation of a utility use, designated as a special use in all zoning districts.
- **Site Plan Review:** Receive approval of site plan drawings for all improvements associated with the new utility use.

The applicant submitted planning and zoning applications on March 20, 2026. The Village’s Public Works Department has been coordinating review of engineering drawings for the project since August 2025.

REZONING

The proposed project will be located across two existing parcels:

- **29-31-306-019:** The Village’s Park Avenue Commuter Lot, a parking lot acquired from the South Suburban Transit Authority District in 2022 – **zoned PL-2 Public Land and Open Space**
- **29-31-306-024:** Large parcel encompassing area a CN control tower, vacant area near Park Avenue and 183rd Street, Metra railroad area, and public parking lots along Park Avenue near the Village’s Amtrak station – **zoned B-2 Downtown Transition**

The larger parcel (5.27 acres) is proposed to be rezoned into the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district, to reflect the use of this facility to support a public railroad service (Metra) and a public utility (ComEd) and to align with the other railroad-oriented improvements within this parcel. A portion of the Village parking lot (0.07 acres) will be consolidated into the larger parcel and be used as part of the proposed utility facility.

The purpose of the PL-2 zoning district is as follows:

“...to protect and maintain public properties owned by the village, the park district, school districts, non-profit organizations, and non-commercial places of assembly.”

Metra is a non-profit public agency operated by the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). ComEd is a privately-owned company but operates public utilities which are in alignment with the use of a special district for public lands. Numerous other utility facilities exist within the Village’s PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district, including other Village water and electrical facilities.

The Planning and Zoning Commission and Village Board will be required to approve the final lot line consolidation. The applicant plans to submit the lot line consolidation application for this project no later than June 2026. Final approval of this rezoning is conditioned on approval and recording of the lot line consolidation, in conformance with the details of the applications described in this memo.

Zoning Map Amendment Standards

Any application for a zoning map amendment must be reviewed against the Map Amendment Standards found in Section 44-07-10 of the Village Zoning Ordinance. No one standard is binding. Staff has reviewed the application in reference to the Map Amendment Standards and provided information related to relevant standards below.

- a. Does the current zoning or the proposed zoning more closely conform to the stated goals in the comprehensive plan?* The project area, including area in both parcels, is not included in any land use category in the Future Land Use Map of the 1999 Comprehensive Plan. The project area to be included as part of this utility facility is included as a portion of the railroad right-of-way for Canadian National and Metra crossing through the Village. The PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning is more in alignment with this lack of use classification and inclusion within railroad facilities, as the proposed improvements will support a public utility and transit service and support the railroad use. Neither the project area, nor area within the larger parcel proposed to be rezoned from the B-2 to the PL-2 district, is likely to be used to support commercial or residential uses permitted in the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district.
- b. Have major land uses, conditions or circumstances changed since the original zoning was established?* The parcel including the proposed project was established as a part of the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district in 2022. The area has been a vacant grass and gravel area since the zoning of the lot within the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district.
- c. Do sites exist for the proposed use in existing districts permitting such use?* Properties located within the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district are generally reserved for a mixture of commercial and residential uses which support a higher-density downtown development environment. A utility use is allowed as a special use in any zoning district. However, many larger utility uses (such as water towers and tanks and transformer facilities) are located within the PL-2 Public Use and Open Space zoning district, including the Village’s water tank at 1657 Maple Avenue.

- d. Is the requested change compatible with the existing uses, development patterns and zoning of nearby properties?* The proposed zoning change brings the entire proposed facility into a single zoning district. This will ensure that the new parcel for this utility use is within a single zoning parcel, which promotes orderly development patterns.
- f. Does the existing zoning impose an unreasonable hardship or can a reasonable economic benefit be realized from uses permitted by the existing zoning?* The property in within property used to support the adjacent railroad and is unlikely to be used for commercial or residential uses permitted and in alignment with the purpose and intent of the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district. The proposed utility use is allowed as a special use in any zoning district. While the current zoning does not bar economic benefit from the property, all new properties and developments are required to be incorporated into a single zoning district wherever it is feasible. This facility will support a public agency (Metra) and is more suitable to be located within the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district, which is a special district designed to protect and support facilities used for non-profits and public agencies such as Metra.
- h. How long has the property been vacant as compared to development occurring in the vicinity?* This property has been vacant for an extended period of time. There is a former control tower owned by Canadian National Railroad located on the property which is currently abandoned and has been vacant for many years.
- i. Is the property physically suitable for the zoned uses or for the proposed use?* This lot is vacant and is suitable for the utility uses. The land is adjacent to the railroad with limited developable area between Park Avenue and railroad right-of-way, and it is unlikely that the land will be physically suitable for uses in the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district. The location of the property adjacent to Metra-owned railroad right-of-way and ComEd transmission lines is suitable for the proposed substation use, which must be located adjacent to the railroad in proximity to existing high-voltage transmission lines.
- j. Does the proposed use satisfy a public need?* This use supports efforts to improve reliability and expand operations for Metra commuter services, which provide essential transit and regional transportation services for Homewood residents.
- k. Will the proposed change conflict with existing or planned public improvements or adversely impact schools, parks or other public facilities?* The proposed facility will not disrupt existing ComEd electrical facilities which are located near the property. The proposed facility is not anticipated to disrupt any other public facilities.
- l. In the vicinity, will the environment or traffic patterns be adversely affected?* This facility will not impact any traffic patterns on Park Avenue or 183rd Street adjacent to the facility. The facility will not generate daily traffic and will only be accessed intermittently by ComEd or Metra service vehicles. The facility will not produce any air pollution, water pollution, excess vibration or other environmental impacts.
- n. Will the proposed change deter the use of properties in the area or contribute to redevelopment?* The proposed use will eliminate 4-6 parking spaces in the Village-owned Park Avenue Commuter Lot. The proposed use constitutes a significant redevelopment of a vacant

parcel along Park Avenue, which is unlikely to be included in any other tax-producing redevelopment project.

o. Will the proposed change be detrimental to the health, safety and welfare of the neighborhood or of the village as a whole? The use is designed in a manner which minimizes impact on the neighborhood and the Village as a whole. The location of the traction power substation will mitigate any noise impacts on the surrounding area. The facility is not anticipated to produce any air pollution, water pollution, excess vibration or other environmental impacts which could harm Village residents.

SPECIAL USE

The Village Zoning Ordinance defines utility uses as a *special use* in the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district. Any application for a special use permit must be reviewed against the Special Use Standards found in Section 44-07-11 of the Village Zoning Ordinance.

Utility uses are considered as a *special use* in all Village zoning districts due to their unique potential impacts on surrounding property and the Village as a whole. Staff has reviewed the Special Use Standards in the application, and included information relevant to specific standards below. The full responses to the Special Use Standards as completed by the applicant are attached.

- 1) *Is the special use deemed necessary for the public convenience at that location?* This utility use is designed to support improved reliability and expanded services for the Metra Electric (ME) regional rail service which services Homewood. This facility must be located adjacent to existing railroad facilities with a vacant lot large enough to support a substation facility and an additional transformer facility.
- 3) *Will the special use be consistent with the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan and other adopted plans of the village?* This area is not included in any land use category in the Future Land Use Map of the 1999 Comprehensive Plan. The area to be included as part of this utility facility is included as a portion of the railroad right-of-way for Canadian National and Metra crossing through the Village.
- 4) *Is the special use at the subject property so designed, located, and proposed to be operated, that the public health, safety, and welfare will be protected?* The traction power substation has been proposed within a building to screen any visual impact and reduce any impact of noise, vibration, or other external effect from the function of the substation. Additional landscaping has been proposed to screen outdoor equipment from public view. Security measures, including security fencing and gates and security lighting, have been proposed to ensure the protection of public safety once the facility is under operation.
- 5) *Is the special use a suitable use of the property and, without the special use, could the property be substantially diminished in value?* This property is immediately adjacent to railroad right-of-way, and the subject property is bisected by an easement containing a Canadian National control tower which is currently out of service. The area is currently used for access to railroad property. This use is suitable for this property and will ensure continued support of railroad operations.

- 6) Will the special use cause substantial injury to the value of other property in the neighborhood in which it is located? The facilities for this use have been designed to mitigate any impact on surrounding property. The use is mostly adjacent to a golf course (PL-2 zoned) and a public parking lot (also PL-2 zoned). There is a multi-family residential complex located across 183rd Street from the proposed facility, and the proposed facility is screened with landscaping to mitigate any impact of the facility on this property.
- 7) Will the special use be consistent with the uses and community character of the neighborhood surrounding the subject property? The area between Park Avenue and railroad right-of-way is largely used to support railroad services, including parking areas, electrical facilities, and station infrastructure. This use is consistent with the other uses and overall character of this area.
- 9) Will the special use impede the normal and orderly development and improvement of surrounding properties for uses permitted in the zoning district? This facility is unlikely to impede use of surrounding properties. The use will occupy a portion of the Village parking lot; the applicant will be responsible for replacement of existing curb, sidewalk, and the exit driveway to the Village parking lot upon completion of the project to avoid negative impacts on the continued use of the Village's parking lot, which has been expanded and is planned to be further renovated in future years.
- 10) Does the proposed special use at the subject property provides adequate measures of ingress and egress in a manner that minimizes traffic congestion in the public streets? The property has two points of ingress and egress – a gravel driveway where a driveway is already located in the southern portion of the site, and a driveway to a fenced yard in the northern portion of the facility. These access points are sufficient to serve workers visiting the site and service vehicles requiring access to the site.
- 11) Is the subject property adequately served by utilities, drainage, road access, public safety and other necessary facilities to support the special use? New water and sanitary sewer services are proposed to ensure the adequate function of the facility. The Village has requested additional security lighting to ensure public safety and vandalism deterrence on the transformer yard facility. The existing storm sewer, electric service, and other utility services in the vicinity are sufficient to support the site. All improvements have been reviewed and approved with conditions by the Village Engineer.

SITE PLAN REVIEW

The proposed development will be developed with two major facilities – a traction power substation (TPSS) operated by Metra and an outdoor transformer yard operated by Commonwealth Edison (ComEd).

The traction power substation will convert electricity into an appropriate voltage and current type to be used by the Metra Electric (ME) rail service. The substation will be a transformer unit located within a 2,940 square-foot building. A parking area and outdoor fenced yard with an area of approximately 3,000 square feet will be located adjacent to the substation facility. The fenced yard will have secured gates for pedestrians or vehicles entering and exiting the facility. The fenced yard will provide three parking

spaces and temporary storage for Metra vehicles. This fenced yard will be accessed by a new driveway installed on Park Avenue. A portion of this facility will be located within property currently used for public parking within the Park Avenue Commuter Lot.

The outdoor transformer yard will include a large electrical transformer box surrounded by a 1,500 square foot outdoor fenced yard area. The yard will be a gravel yard with room sufficient to temporarily provide parking for service vehicles. The yard area will be accessible to vehicles with a vehicle gate. A gravel driveway will be constructed to connect to the yard to the existing gravel service driveway on the site. The yard will be heavily landscaped to screen the yard from 183rd Street and Park Avenue.

The existing gravel driveway will be improved and connect to two additional parking spaces to support the facility. New retaining walls will be installed on portions of the western property boundary along Park Avenue to minimize erosion and support the new structures proposed on the site.

The existing abandoned control tower owned by the Canadian National Railroad will not be removed. There are no current plans for renovating or improving the tower by Canadian National. The area between the existing gravel access driveway and the Canadian National control tower is controlled by Canadian National and is not included in plans for this proposed facility.

Landscaping

The facility is proposed to have landscaping surrounding the outdoor transformer yard on the south side of the facility. Per Section 44-05-08 of the Village Zoning Ordinance, all ground-mounted equipment (including transformers) must be fully screened from view from public right-of-way. The facility will be bordered by *chipkaensis* ("skip laurel") evergreen bushes around the yard to screen the view of the transformer and yard from both Park Avenue and 183rd Street. The facility will have large serviceberry trees on the south side of the property to further screen the view of the transformer yard from view from 183rd Street.

The remainder of the site south of the outdoor transformer yard will be covered in mulch and groundcover. The applicant has proposed to use juniper bushes planted in mulch to provide this groundcover, which will improve the aesthetics of the site and provide additional absorption of groundwater. The Village Arborist has recommended an alternative species to replace the juniper bushes, and this replacement has been provided as a recommended condition with this approval (see *Recommended Planning and Zoning Commission Action*)

No landscaping is proposed near the traction power substation on the north side of the facility. The area between the existing gravel access driveway and the Canadian National control tower will not be landscaped due to the area remaining controlled by Canadian National.

Engineering

A 6" sanitary sewer line is proposed to be constructed from the new traction power substation building (near the restroom on the northwest corner of the building) through the Village parking lot. A new 2" water service line is also proposed to connect to the substation building from an existing main on Park Avenue.

The vast majority of the site will be covered in grass or gravel which will provide permeable surface for drainage. The new retaining wall in the rear of the outdoor transformer yard on the south side of the property will include a perforated drain pipe, which will drain water through two outlets facing the existing gravel access drive and the grass area near the corner of 183rd Street and Park Avenue. Site drainage, including roof drains, will be routed to the existing 36" storm sewer main on the east side of Park Avenue. Drainage plans have been reviewed and approved by the Village Engineer.

New electrical poles will be constructed to connect the outdoor transformer facility and the traction power substation to existing railroad facilities. No other utilities in the vicinity, including water and storm sewer mains along Park Avenue and gas mains intersecting with the property, will be affected by the new construction.

The Village Engineer has reviewed all details of the proposed plans, including a 100% submittal for engineering drawings. These drawings have been approved with conditions by the Village Engineer. While a 10' easement for the proposed sanitary sewer line is proposed, the Village Engineer requires the recording and execution of a 15' sanitary sewer easement, with 7.5' minimum distance on each side of the proposed sanitary main. This easement must be included on any submittal for a lot line consolidation to incorporate a portion of the Village parking lot. A condition of approval to provide this easement on a resubdivision plat has been provided for this application (see *Recommended Planning and Zoning Commission Action*).

The Village Engineer has also required the installation of curb and gutter structures along both sides of the existing gravel access drive (leading to new paved parking spaces on the south side of the new traction power substation building), to ensure drainage is properly controlled and routed to the existing storm sewer on the east side of Park Avenue (see *Recommended Planning and Zoning Commission Action*).

Elevations

The new traction power substation will be fully enclosed within a building. Each elevation of the building will be clad in two types of brick: a smooth-faced brick on the lower half of each wall face, and a textured brick on the upper half of each wall face. All brick will be laid with a "Flemish bond," alternating between bricks laid lengthwise and widthwise. On the textured upper half of each wall face, the widthwise bricks will be raised to create visual interest. The two halves of each wall face will be separated by a small metal band with LED lighting installed within the band as accent lighting for the building. The north and west elevations will also include panels of cast stone near the building's entrance to further enhance the appearance of the structure.

The elevations are designed with proportion and shape to match the existing Village Metra station constructed in 2023, including similar building height, similar roof parapet structure, and matching entry and lighting design on the northwest corner of the building. The cast stone panels on the north and west elevations of the building are similar to the stone panels which are used as cladding across much of the Village's Metra station. A "summer yellow" aluminum panel on the west and north elevations will also match the panel used on the front entry of the Village's Metra Station.

The building will have also use a brick material which is similar in color and texture to the existing Canadian National control tower located near the facility. Similar types of brick are used in numerous

locations throughout the Village, including on several office and commercial buildings in the Village's downtown area.

The building must meet the design standards set forth in Section 44-05-11 of the Village Zoning Ordinance. The building meets material quality standards by providing extensive "Tier I" materials (>50%) across all four elevations of the building. The building will also meet façade articulation requirements by providing the textured brick on the upper portion of each elevation and providing cast stone panels as an additional architectural feature on the west elevation where façade articulation is required. The building does not include any windows due to security and operational constraints of the substation facility, and the director of economic and community development may waive requirements for building transparency. A condition of approval to provide a written waiver of transparency requirements has been provided with the recommendation for this development (see *Recommended Planning and Zoning Commission Action*).

Lighting

Security lighting fixtures are proposed to be installed on the northeast corner of the traction power substation building to provide lighting for the fenced yard adjacent to the building. The LED light bands on all four elevations of the building will also provide additional lighting around the perimeter of the substation building, including on the public sidewalk along Park Avenue.

No lighting plans have been submitted for the outdoor transformer yard on the south side of the facility. Staff have provided a recommended condition of approval to include security lighting around the outdoor transformer yard for protection from vandalism and other security concerns (see *Recommended Planning and Zoning Commission Action*).

STAFF COMMENTS

This proposed facility will require Appearance Review. The applicant has applied for an Appearance Review. This review will occur on Thursday, May 7, 2026.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The staff has prepared the draft findings of fact following the standards outlined in Section 44-07-10 and 44-07-11 of the Village Zoning Ordinance for zoning map amendment and special use permit applications. The findings of fact, as proposed or as amended, may be entered into the record:

1. The subject property is located at 18277 Park Avenue, and is currently located within the B-2 Downtown Transition and PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning districts, with land currently located within parcels with Cook County PINs #29-31-306-024 and 29-31-306-019;
2. The subject property is currently owned by the Village of Homewood and Metra;
3. This proposed project requires a lot line adjustment to transfer 0.07 (3,055 square feet) acres from PIN #29-31-306-019 to PIN #29-31-306-024, and rezoning of parcel #29-31-306-024 from the B-2 Downtown Transition zoning district to the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district. This rezoning will remove approximately 5.27 acres of property from the B-2 Downtown Transition and move the entire property into the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district.

4. The proposed utility use is a special use within the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district;
5. The subject site meets use-specific standards set forth in Section 44-04-10 of the Village Zoning Ordinance;
6. The subject site meets applicable development standards in Section 44-05 of the Village Zoning Ordinance;
7. The proposed use and subject site are consistent with the applicable standards for zoning map amendment approval as set forth in Section 44-07-10 of the Village Zoning Ordinance;
8. The proposed use is consistent with the applicable standards for special use permit approval as set forth in Section 44-07-11.

RECOMMENDED PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION ACTION

The Planning and Zoning Commission may wish to consider the following motion:

Recommend approval of Case 26-13, a zoning map amendment to rezone a proposed parcel of approximately 5.32 acres from the B-2 Downtown Transition and PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning districts to the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district, to the Village Board of Trustees, subject to the following conditions:

1. The applicant shall apply for a lot line adjustment with the Village of Homewood and receive approval of final plat from the Planning and Zoning Commission and Village Board, and have a revised plat recorded with the Cook County Clerk’s Office, to incorporate a 3,055 square foot (0.07 acre) portion of the parcel with PIN #29-31-306-019 (owned by the Village of Homewood) into the parcel with PIN #29-31-306-024.

AND

Recommend approval of Case 25-15, a special use permit to allow the operation of a utility use within the PL-2 Public Land and Open Space zoning district, to the Village Board of Trustees;

AND

Approve Case 25-16, a site plan review of proposed improvements to support a traction power substation and outdoor transformer yard for use by Metra and Commonwealth Edison, as proposed in the documents submitted by Puppala Phanindra of Hatch Consultants Ltd., Metra, and GFT Inc., subject to the following conditions:

1. Submit a revised landscape plan with building permit submittals providing an alternative groundcover species selection for the proposed juniper bushes located in the southern portion of the property;
2. Submit a photometric plan with building permit submittals demonstrating the location and lighting impact of security lighting fixtures installed at the transformer yard on the southern half of the property;
3. Provide a copy of a permit determination letter from the Thorn Creek Basin Sanitary District to the Village Engineer prior to building permit submittals;

4. Submit a revised utility plan with building permit submittal indicating the replacement of a 10 foot sanitary sewer easement with a 15 foot sanitary sewer easement pursuant to Village engineering requirements. This revised easement shall be reflected on revised final site plan drawings and included on the final plat of the required lot line consolidation;
5. Submit a revised site plan with building permit submittals indicating the interior location of a water meter within the substation building and a 2-inch water service line servicing the building no closer than 10 feet from any proposed roof drain line;
6. Submit a revised site plan with building permit submittals replacing proposed aggregate shoulders on gravel access driveways with curb and gutter pursuant to Village engineering requirements;
7. Any installation of outdoor transformer equipment as specified in engineering plans shall include a containment pit suitable for 1,000 gallon transformers;
8. Approval of special use permit and rezoning of the property by the Village Board of Trustees shall be completed prior to issuance of any building permit.