

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEMORANDUM

DATE OF MEETING: April 11, 2024

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: Case 24-04 –Downtown Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan

APPLICATION INFORMATION

APPLICANT	Village of Homewood
ACTION REQUESTED	Recommendation of approval for Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan
ADDRESS	N/A
PIN	N/A

LEGAL NOTICE

Legal notice was published in *Daily Southtown* on March 26, 2024.

DOCUMENTS FOR REVIEW

Title	Pages	Prepared by	Date
Homewood Transit-Oriented Development Plan	73	Muse Community Design + Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)	03/27/2024
Homewood Existing Conditions Report	12	Muse Community Design	09/01/2023
Description of Changes – Final Transit Agency Review	1	Muse Community Design	03/27/2024

BACKGROUND

The Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan is a comprehensive planning document providing a large-scale development strategy for the Village’s downtown area, anchored by Homewood’s new multimodal transportation center currently under reconstruction. The plan provides strategies for improving infrastructure and open spaces, constructing new transportation options and performing economic development to support the continued development of Homewood’s downtown as a transit-oriented development.

The plan encompasses the area roughly within a 15-minute walk from the central transit hub (Metra rail station) of Homewood, and is generally bounded by 183rd Street, Dixie Highway, and Park Avenue, with additional area included along Ridge Road.

The TOD Plan was developed in partnership with the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the regional body for Chicago’s major transit agencies (Metra, CTA, Pace). The RTA’s Local Planning team provides support to implement transit-focused plans to leverage investments in transit services for the benefit of local municipalities. The TOD Plan is a product of RTA’s Local Planning team, Muse Community Design as a primary consultant, and Latent Design and CivilTech Engineering as sub consultants.

DISCUSSION

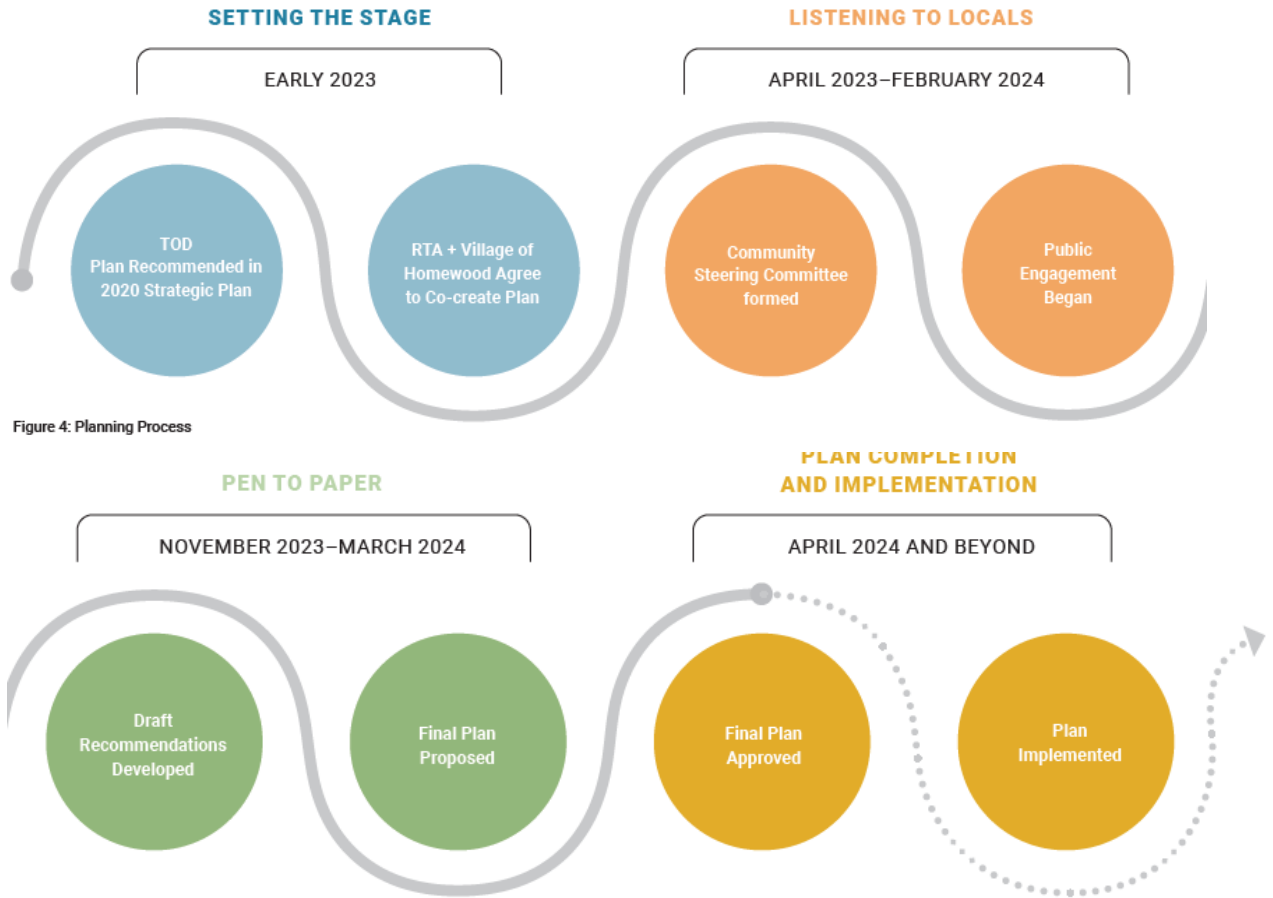


Figure 4: Planning Process

Figure 1: Planning Process for the Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan, as presented in the final plan document. (Source: Muse Community Design)

The TOD Plan has been in development since April 2023. Since then, the planning team has worked closely with Village staff and various Homewood residents and leaders to craft the recommendations and action steps set forth in the final plan document. A brief summary of the process of plan development and public engagement is provided below.

1. TOD Plan Recommended in the 2020 Strategic Plan.

The 2020 Strategic Plan prepared for the Homewood Village Manager’s Office identified two key goals related to the development of the Downtown (TOD) Plan:

Short Term Complex Goals:

"...Complete three transit-oriented developments in the Village."

Long-Term Complex Goals:

"...review and update the Village's current downtown master plan to attract a variety of housing and business uses and options (i.e. mixed-use buildings and enhanced parking)."

This agenda item is the formalization of the downtown as a "transit-oriented development" area with a greater mix of uses to complement the investments made in the transit station in the downtown. Given that this plan functions as a partial update and addendum to the 1999 Comprehensive Plan, this plan represents a fulfillment of multiple Strategic Plan goals and serves to further implement the Village goals and vision set forth in the Strategic Plan document.

2. RTA + Village of Homewood Agree to Co-Create Plan

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) was authorized by the Village Board of Trustees via resolution on April 12, 2022 to co-create the TOD Plan alongside Village staff. The Regional RTA was authorized to study public transportation and land development topics in cooperation with other public and private agencies.

3. Community Steering Committee

The first planning team selected a Steering Committee through self-nomination via public outreach. The Steering Committee is a diverse mix of Homewood residents and local leaders with an interest in planning and development in downtown Homewood.

The Steering Committee met several times throughout the development of the plan:

- **April 18, 2023:** The first meeting of the Steering Committee included a walk audit and tour of the downtown to identify areas of concern and opportunities for new development or improvements in the downtown area. This was led by the Village consultants, RTA and Village staff.
- **June 20, 2023:** The Steering Committee met to further detail potential challenges in the downtown area and talk about the existing experience of being a transit commuter or user coming to or from Homewood.
- **August 29, 2023:** The Steering Committee met to review the Existing Conditions Memo as a deliverable of the planning process. This memo details the current state of transit ridership, land use, transportation choice, and other variables which affect planning decisions for Homewood's downtown. Consultants engaged with Steering Committee members to brainstorm and create ideas for tackling some of the challenges identified in the Memo, including vehicle and pedestrian crashes, bus ridership, parking challenges, and redevelopment sites.
- **November 7, 2023:** The Steering Committee met to refine development concepts for vacant or underutilized sites in the downtown, developed user-friendly strategies for managing parking

accessibility, and assessed opportunities for improving streetscape and ped/bike infrastructure in the downtown. The Committee provided ideas for improving the business climate in the downtown, and reviewed initial recommendations by the planning team.

- **March 5, 2024:** The Steering Committee met a final time to discuss the draft plan. Steering Committee members provided feedback on recommendations and workshopped additional solutions in the plan.

4. Public Engagement

The planning team working provided additional opportunities for community engagement. These opportunities included participation at public events, specialized workshops, focus groups, and various other opportunities to have dialogue with the planners working to develop the plan. Some of these opportunities included:

- **Focus Group Gathering #1 (June 6, 2023):** Focus group members discussed transit usage habits, barriers to transit, optimizing the transit experience, and improving commuting for Homewood.
- **Gotts-Chalk the Walk 2023 (July 23, 2023):** Planning teams were at Homewood's chalk the walk festival on Martin Avenue, using chalk art to spark conversation about how Downtown Homewood can invest in placemaking and new uses for a vibrant village center. Residents provided answers to prompts with creative chalk drawings of their own.
- **Fall Fest 2023 (September 23, 2023):** Village staff and planning consultants set up a booth at the Fall Fest to provide opportunities to comment on various development sites in Downtown Homewood. The event allowed for continuous direct conversation with residents of Homewood about ideas and concerns about the downtown, including pedestrian safety, missing uses, and vehicle and bicycle parking opportunities.
- **Focus Group Gathering #2 (October 17, 2023):** Focus groups participated in breakout sessions hosted by planning team members to discuss site redevelopment, pedestrian/bicycle improvements, and building new downtown destinations. Focus group members prioritized recommendations for each topic to develop a set of clear priorities for the final plan document.
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Workshop @ Goodspeed Cycles (February 3, 2024):** Members of Muse Community Design and CivilTech Engineering set up a workshop at Goodspeed Cycles on 183rd Street in Homewood to allow the public to comment on the proposed bicycle and pedestrian improvements in the draft plan, and provide additional insight about their experience of bicycling and walking in Homewood. Over 60 attendees participated.
- **Homewood Business Association Workshop (February 6, 2024):** Members of the planning consulting team attended the February meeting of the Homewood Business Association (HBA), and engaged with HBA members about improvements needed to support business development and retention in the downtown area. The planning team received insights about downtown parking, opportunities for new uses in the downtown, and additional services and infrastructure to support small businesses around the transit station in the downtown.

5. Draft Recommendations

Draft recommendations were developed over a six month period from September 2023 to February 2024. During that time, draft recommendations were reviewed by Steering Committee members, focus groups, and workshop participants. Village staff from assisted in reviewing and finalizing recommendations based on public feedback and feasibility. The recommendations were also vetted by the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), Metra, and Pace as stakeholders and key implementation partners of the plan.

6. Final Plan

The final version of the Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan was released by Muse on March 20, 2024. The plan was refined and re-released on March 27, 2024 with small adjustments related to Metra and private railroad infrastructure based on feedback from transit agencies involved in the planning process.

The plan was made publicly available for review on the Village website, and copies were available for pickup at Village Hall. A comment form was created on the website for members of the public and local officials to provide long form comments. The Planning and Zoning Commission members had the opportunity to have 1:1 meetings with Village staff to ask questions and provide feedback.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

As of the time of publication of this agenda item, one public comment has been received discussing the plan. The resident affirmed portions of the plan and cited a need to provide a greater consideration of the disabled in the infrastructure recommendations of the plan. The member of the public cited that since the disabled generally must drive to access downtown Homewood, greater consideration should be given to ADA-compliant on-street parking, especially near the intersection of Dixie and Ridge Road.

STAFF COMMENTS

A copy of the TOD Plan was provided to the Planning and Zoning Commission on March 20, 2024. Copies were made available in digital and paper formats. Minor revisions related to infrastructure, particularly infrastructure owned by Metra and Canadian National Railroad, have been made after review of the final draft plan by transit agencies. These revisions are reflected in the "Description of Changes – Final Transit Agency Review" attachment. A revised version of the final plan document was released to the public in digital and paper formats on March 27, 2024.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Staff has prepared the draft findings of fact. The findings of fact, as proposed or as amended, may be entered into the record:

1. The applicant, the Village of Homewood, requests an amendment to the 1999 Comprehensive Plan with the adoption of the Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan.

2. The proposed plan was created as the product of a partnership between the Village of Homewood and the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) and approved consultants as authorized by Resolution R-3104, approved by the Village Board of Trustees on April 12, 2022.
2. The Village undertook efforts to engage the community in the creation of the proposed plan, in partnership with the approved consultants, subconsultants and partnering public agencies.
3. The Village held eleven workshops and events throughout this process.

RECOMMENDED PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION ACTION

The Planning and Zoning Commission may consider the following motion:

Recommend approval of the proposed amendment to the Comprehensive Plan as the Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan; and
Incorporate the findings of fact into the record.