

# Commercial Corridor Plan for Howard Street and Morse Avenue

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September, 2004, DevCorp North, the business, community and economic development organization of Rogers Park, engaged the University of Illinois' City Design Center to collaboratively develop commercial district plans for Howard Street and Morse Avenue. Despite recent growth in the neighborhood's residential real estate market, two of the community's primary shopping districts remain underdeveloped and suffer from a deteriorated appearance. Both streets had suffered from decades of commercial disinvestment and clear strategies were needed to revitalize and renew them. Before the planning process began, DevCorp North reviewed and analyzed approximately 14 previous studies conducted in Rogers Park by various outside and local entities in the past 18 years and assessed their findings and shortcomings. From this review, DevCorp North committed to a course of action that addressed the plans' shortcomings by creating a planning process that was broad and inclusive with specific measurable outcomes and implementable recommendations.

A twenty-member community steering committee composed of non-DevCorp North directors and members helped lead and develop the planning process. Facilitation and meeting design assistance was provided by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, one of the project funders through the Full Circle grant. Three community meetings were held in a nine month period. Customer intercept surveys, business owner surveys and land use maps were used to determine a baseline of customer interest in new retail and service opportunities, gauge the level of sophistication and profitability of existing businesses and understand current land use patterns.

The process reflected the philosophy advocated by Northwestern University's Asset Based Community Development Institute, in which communities reflect on assets, including physical, social and institutional assets. To that end, this planning process was intended to build on assets rather than focus on deficits.

Based on surveys, community meetings, steering committee work and community mapping of assets and areas of opportunity, final plan recommendations are grouped in five categories with accompanying vision statements intended to direct activities:

1. Shopping Mix - Celebrate the diversity of Rogers Park through a broad mix of businesses and services, varying in size and type and catering to a range of incomes, races and ethnicities.
2. Public Safety - Enhance the safety of the streets for everyone at all hours of the day and night through preventative and responsive measures that reduce the opportunity for criminal activity in order to create a welcoming feel in the area.
3. Design and Appearance - Improve the appearance of the streets and buildings to cultivate a distinct district identity and encourage more pedestrian activity through better signs, greater cleanliness and physical improvements.
4. Community Development - Foster a healthy foundation of commerce, culture, education and community service that focuses on organizing and mobilizing all parts of the community to improve the Morse Avenue and Howard Street commercial districts.
5. Transportation - Capitalize on Rogers Park's transportation and parking to promote stronger connections to adjacent districts and enhance the accessibility of neighborhood destinations to attract shoppers from the larger region.

Specific detailed recommendations were developed for each category and can be found in the Revitalization Strategies section of this plan.

It is hoped that this plan will function as a blueprint for revitalization that is balanced in approach, serving residents from various income levels, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations and other groups that make Rogers Park the wonderfully diverse community that it is. As with all plans, changes and modifications will need to be made as time goes on and the landscape of Rogers Park and potential for development changes. This plan and the associated Revitalization Strategies should be reviewed on a regular basis and updated as needed. DevCorp North holds an annual organizational strategic planning retreat; it is expected that this plan will guide the work of DevCorp North and impact future workplans for the Morse Avenue and Howard Street Special Service Areas. This plan is not intended to address issues outside of the 5 recommendation areas; it is not a comprehensive plan for Rogers Park and does not address other important issues such as affordable housing, residential development, development in commercial districts such as Sheridan Road and Jarvis Square, nor does it address issues such as quality of education, recreation facilities and programs, social service agencies, health needs, etc. While important, those issues are outside the purview of DevCorp North as the Rogers Park business, community and economic development organization. Other organizations and entities that serve or address those areas are welcome to develop plans that address concerns outside of this plan.