

# **NEW Old Chicago Redevelopment Plan**

**July 2006**

**City of Rock Island, IL**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Purpose of the Study

Over the summer of 2005, the City of Rock Island engaged the services of Planning and Design Institute (PDI) to study and recommend urban design and implementation strategies for the “New Old Chicago” area. This neighborhood west of downtown Rock Island has faced many challenges over the past decades.

While the neighborhood does have some locational advantages, including its proximity to the river and downtown, it is faced with the difficult task of reinventing itself and battling both perceived and real issues affecting its redevelopment. The City of Rock Island and PDI have worked together create an urban design and development plan that will provide a vision for redevelopment and reinvestment in Old Chicago.

## 1.2 Description of the Study Area

One of the oldest areas in Rock Island, the Old Chicago neighborhood lies west of downtown and is separated from the Mississippi River by the Centennial Expressway and railroad tracks. The once prominent area of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was strategically located between the commercial and industrial centers of the city. It was home to the City's first park and many of its most notable citizens.

The neighborhood changed abruptly throughout the 1960's and 1970's with the construction of the Centennial Expressway and the levee adjacent to the river. These projects transformed the neighborhood, severing it from the river while changing the neighborhood identity and urban fabric of the area. The construction of the Expressway, like many urban highway projects around the country, resulted in the destruction of several blocks of homes and businesses and more significantly, the deterioration of the neighborhood as a whole. On a positive note, the Sunset Business Park, located to the west and north of the Old Chicago area, has seen

recent industrial redevelopment. More investments and improvements are needed.

Other well-intentioned projects resulted in similar destructive action in the neighborhood. The Model Cities urban renewal efforts resulted in the destruction of a vibrant commercial core. While the program did not accomplish its overall goals, it did result in the construction of the King Center, a positive and wide-reaching facility offering a multitude of services to Old Chicago and surrounding neighborhoods.

The 189 acre neighborhood currently exhibits a mix of restored historic homes, well kept residences, vacant parcels, deteriorating homes, and a scattering of commercial uses spread over 55 blocks. It also includes several civic uses that provide social services and community functions to the area. Of particular concern are the large areas of vacant land that exist in several parts of the neighborhood. These areas are often visible from primary corridors and further contribute to the perception of blight and disinvestment in Old Chicago.

For the purpose of this study, the New Old Chicago redevelopment area is defined as 12<sup>th</sup> Street to the east, 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the south and the Expressway to the north and west (figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1: New Old Chicago Redevelopment Area: 1"=500'

### **1.3 Scope of Project**

The purpose of the study was to create a vision for redevelopment and reinvestment in the Old Chicago neighborhood by addressing the following issues:

- Housing design suggestions and options
- Income and racial mix
- Street and or/alley grid pattern
- Traffic flow
- Infrastructure design and age consideration
- Parks and open spaces
- Decorative streetscape elements
- Consideration of retail uses
- Access to employment
- Neighborhood organization
- Consideration on how development is coordinated with surrounding areas
- Funding and financing suggestions

### **1.4 Prior Studies**

Prior Studies

The study area was the subject of several previous studies including the Old Chicago (1993), Douglas Park (1994) and 11<sup>th</sup> Street Commercial Corridor (1999) plans.

## **Old Chicago Plan**

The plan dealt with a number of challenges within the neighborhood while trying to build on its historic assets. Recommendations/strategies included:

- Construct housing for a variety of incomes, rehabilitate existing homes
- Recognize historic features as a neighborhood asset
- Improve existing parks and play areas
- Improve communication of resource information
- Develop crime prevention programs
- Improve neighborhood perception
- Create strong neighborhood organizations
- Beautify the neighborhood
- Reduce nuisances
- Promote activities and jobs for youth
- Clarify zoning to promote investment
- Secure traditional financing for properties
- Develop more small business in the neighborhood

While progress has been made in some areas, including the reduction of some rates in crime, the promotion of the historic character of the area, and the construction of some new housing in the area by the City, many plan recommendations have not yet been met. In particular, the objectives to add more neighborhood-oriented businesses and construction of new owner-occupied housing have not been achieved to a great extent. The observation that very little loan activity or capital flows into the neighborhood is still an issue today. While the plan was conducted 13 years ago, many of the recommendations are still valid.

## **Douglas Park Plan**

Challenges at the Arsenal Courts housing project helped provide impetus for the plan. The top issues of concern in the plan are similar to those identified in the Old Chicago Plan:

- Eliminate drug and crime problem spots
- Establish a “watch and patrol” with police assistance
- Promote small business development
- Create a positive identity for Douglas Park
- Increase home ownership
- Improve service of City housing rehab programs to all
- Enhance access and use of the King Center
- Improve speed control and physical condition of alleys
- Promote pride of home ownership
- Maintain year-round activities for youth

Crime problems lessened in the neighborhood after changes to Arsenal Courts, although residents today still cite the development as a source of problems. The home ownership issue is still a problem as more and more homes are being converted from owner-occupied to rental properties as the population ages. There are still complaints that while City services are available, people are not taking advantage of them. As with the Old Chicago Plan, many of the recommendations from the Douglas Park Plan are still worth pursuing today.

## **11<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Plan**

The plan outlined strategies to enhance the character and business development of the 3.4 mile long corridor. Since conditions vary a great deal along the corridor, the plan set out to recognize Rock Island’s diverse character and how to make that diversity a tool for success on 11<sup>th</sup> Street. The plan pointed out that the northern portion of the corridor, which

runs through Old Chicago, contained substantial blight and that a 50% population loss in the area north of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue had occurred between 1970 and 1999. This is a critical problem today which makes it more difficult to establish neighborhood businesses. The corridor does contain a mix of businesses and services that Old Chicago residents rely on, but they are located distantly in the middle or southern portions of the corridor.

## **1.5 Public Process and Citizen Input**

A significant component of the project was the inclusion of public input throughout the duration of the planning process. The process included the creation of a steering committee comprised of local residents, conducting one-on-one stakeholder interviews with residents and community leaders, and holding several public meetings. The Following section provides a description of the various ways in which public input was solicited.

### **Steering Committee Meeting 1: Bus Tour**

The first Steering Committee meeting was held August 2, 2005. PDI presented its initial analysis of the redevelopment area utilizing photography and mapping provided by the City of Rock Island. The brief analysis primarily focused on potential locations of new development, identifying large or contiguous areas of vacant parcels and potential gateway and activity nodes. Major corridors were also called out and the edge along the Centennial Expressway was identified as a negative element. Members of PDI's staff were introduced to the area in greater detail via a bus tour through the neighborhood. The tour was comprised of visits to locations and sites key to the overall redevelopment of the area as well as those that describe the current character of Old Chicago.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

As the planning process began, PDI conducted a series of 15 interviews with local residents, business owners, and community leaders in order to learn important information on neighborhood perceptions, problems and opportunities. These interviews, lasting around 30 minutes each,

provided PDI with a list of issues of significance and are summarized in the appendix starting on page 61.

### **Meeting with Local Real Estate Professionals**

Prior to Steering Committee Meeting 2, PDI met with local real estate professionals to discuss the potential feasibility of various strategies for redevelopment. The group noted that the area faces many challenges, mostly due to negative perceptions of the neighborhood. The following observations were made:

- The neighborhood suffers from negative perceptions (real or perceived) which drag down redevelopment efforts. Even though some conditions including crime have improved, people's attitudes have not changed.
- The area is seen as one of the most challenged in the Quad Cities in terms of likelihood of private investment. Most developers/builders in the region would need incentives from the City to consider implementing a project in Old Chicago.
- While negative perceptions are a problem in the Quad Cities region, the area might hold some appeal to out-of-town developers and to homebuyers relocating to the Quad Cities area. The urban and historic character give the neighborhood an "authentic" feel that appeals to people coming from Chicago, St. Louis or other urban areas. The City should try to tap into this potential market.
- Some in the group thought that private investment could be attracted if there was an opportunity to make "a bigger splash" rather than small scale lot-by-lot incremental development. It was suggested that in order to get the attention of the development community, the City should consider assembling multiple properties into a larger redevelopment project and soliciting development firms through an RFP process. A major redevelopment project of this type was seen as one way to turn around negative perceptions of the area and help give it an enhanced identity.
- Proximity to the Downtown and to the Centennial Bridge are advantages. The area is easily accessible from throughout the Quad Cities.

### **Steering Committee Meeting 2:**

On September 7, 2005 PDI held a design preference survey for members of the steering committee and public officials. The survey was an interactive tool where respondents were asked to score 78 images based on their preferences. The answers revealed general design strategies regarding type, style, scale and character of development. Preferred images generally indicated the desire for moderate density residential development with mixed use commercial areas. The results of the design preference survey, including the preferred images are included in the appendix starting on page 65.

### **Steering Committee Meeting 3**

During the third steering committee meeting, held November 2, 2005, PDI presented the results of the design preference survey, showing the three highest and lowest ranked images of each category. In the following discussion, features that impacted the various images' ranking were identified. Also at this meeting, PDI presented the initial draft of the concept development plan. The draft concept plan identified 11 development nodes within three districts coined the Gateway North, the Center "Heart" and the Gateway West. Each development node was discussed and commented upon with revisions to be presented at the following public meeting. The concept plan is described in greater detail later in this document, starting on page 25.

### **Public Meeting: 11-16-05**

A public meeting was held November 16, 2005 at the King Center to unveil all the work that had been completed to date. Background information on the project was presented, including diagrams and development strategies, as well as the revised concept plan. Following the formal presentation, PDI staff discussed the plan by answering questions and allowing residents to comment and express any concerns they had.

### **Meetings with City Staff**

During the planning process, several meetings were held with City officials including department heads, planning staff, and local leaders to gather input and solicit reaction to planning concepts.

### **Meeting With Local Banks and Financial Organizations**

During the planning process the City convened a meeting with representatives of more than nine local financial organizations to solicit their interest in Old Chicago Redevelopment efforts. The participants indicated a strong interest in becoming partners in the renovation of the neighborhood. Several target programs have already been established by some of the institutions to provide financial assistance to projects in the Old Chicago area.

## **1.6 Project Goals**

As the planning process proceeded, a list of project goals was developed in response to input from the public, the stakeholders, and city officials and staff. This list, which is in no particular order served as a foundation as plan concepts and details were developed. It should be noted that these goals are similar to those developed in the 1993 Old Chicago Plan and the 1994 Douglas Park Plan both of whose goals are still relevant today.

- Preserve and enhance the established residential neighborhoods
- Encourage new private sector residential development (single or multi-family) and commercial development
- Improve the physical condition of public infrastructure (sidewalks, streets)
- When new development occurs, assure compatibility with adjacent uses and cluster redevelopment to make an impact
- Encourage linkages of neighborhood and downtown
- Assure public involvement and communication

## 2. NEIGHBORHOOD ANALYSIS: ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

### 2.1 Introduction & Background

A brief examination of census data for the area revealed several critical issues facing the neighborhood. The neighborhood roughly follows a census tract boundary (226) and this geography was used for the analysis. The 2000 census data was used since it was the most current at the time the report was written.

At the time of the census Old Chicago had 1888 people and a total of 1106 housing units. Of the 1106 housing units, only 812 or 73.4% were occupied; 294 units were vacant (21%). This vacancy rate is nearly three times the rate of the City as a whole. Additionally, only 28% of housing units (229) were owner-occupied, compared to the city-wide rate of 65%. The housing stock is quite old and over 50% of units were built before 1940. These statistics regarding the age, vacancy, and owner-occupancy rates indicate the need to improve the housing stock in this neighborhood.

The median household income in Old Chicago is approximately \$17,800, or about 50% of the citywide average, while the neighborhood had an aggregate income of just under \$20 million. A quick calculation to identify Old Chicago's income per acre reveals an overlooked asset of the neighborhood. Old Chicago has over 40% more purchasing power, measured as aggregate income per acre, than the City of Rock Island. This higher purchasing power could be used to entice retailers to participate in catalytic projects in the redevelopment area.

	Old Chicago		Rock Island	
	Num.	%	Num.	%
Population	1888	4.75%	39,684	100%
Housing Units	1106	6.3%	17,542	100%
Owner Occupied	229	20.7%	10,519	65.1%
Vacant	294	21.1%	1,394	7.9%
Year Built (median)	1940		1949	
Density (occupied)	4.3		1.6	
Median Income	\$17,789	49.2%	\$34,729	100%
Aggregate Income	\$19,677,900		741,655,600	
<b>Income Per Acre</b>	<b>\$104,115</b>		<b>\$72,882</b>	

Figure 2.1: Census 2000 Comparison

## 2.2 Social and Economic Activity: Existing Land Use

The most prevalent land use (fig. 2.2) in Old Chicago is residential, with the majority of structures being one- or two-family homes. As previously mentioned, most of the housing stock is old, with nearly 50% of units built before 1939 and only 24 new units constructed between 1980 and 2000. Habitat for Humanity has recently built multiple single family homes in the neighborhood and continues to pursue new opportunities for home ownership in the area, including an infill subdivision on 8<sup>th</sup> Street between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Avenues. In addition to single-family residential, the Rock Island Housing Authority owns and operates Lincoln Homes, a series of buildings on 8<sup>th</sup> Street between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues. These utilitarian looking structures provide residents a place to live, but no sense of identity or ownership. To many, they simply have the appearance of a housing

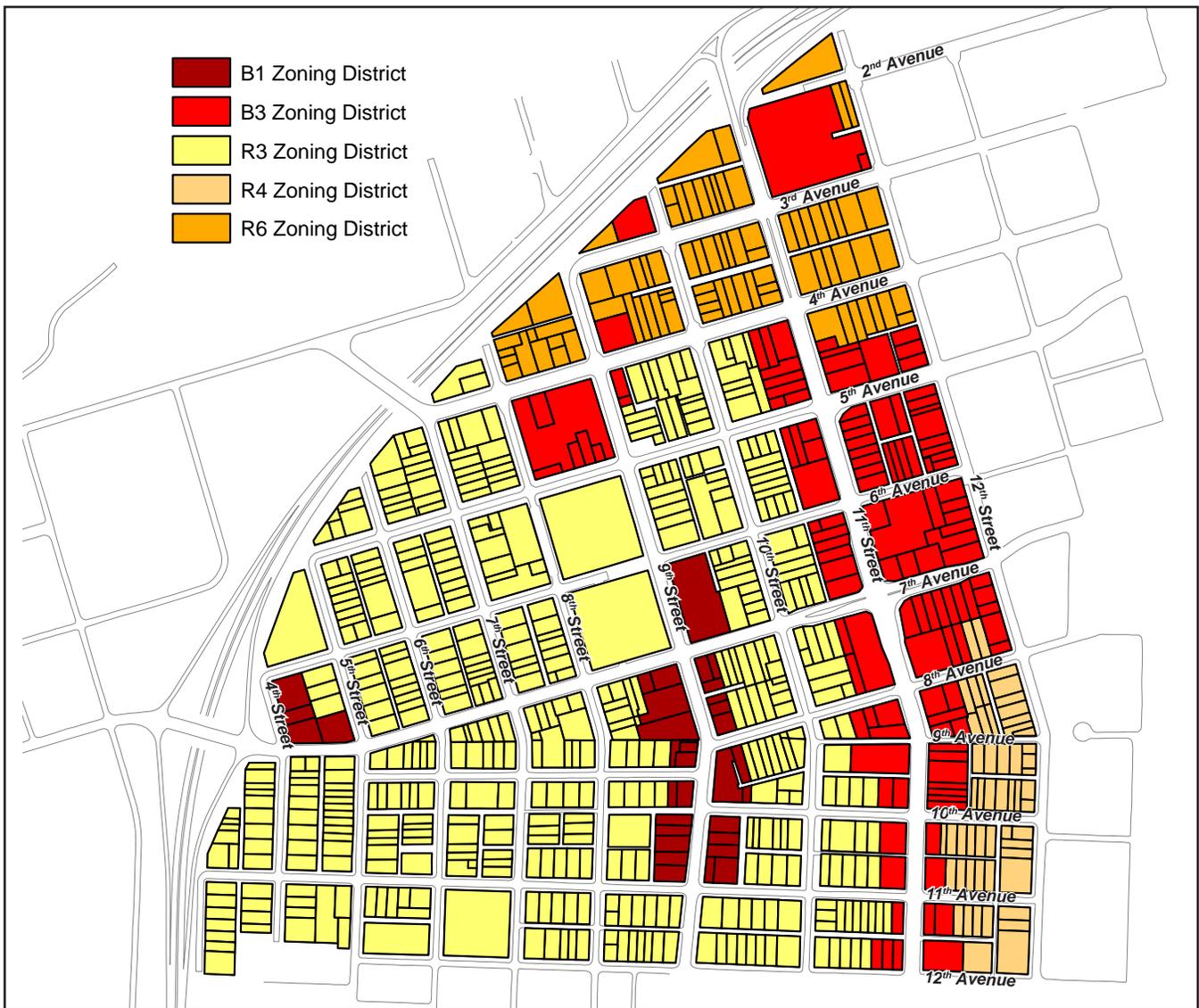


Figure 2.2: Current Zoning

“project” that has been inserted into the neighborhood. The Rock Island Housing Authority Asset Management Plan recommends maintaining the property in its current state until its viability is reevaluated in five to ten years.

Commercial activity in Old Chicago is generally limited to the 11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor and a few other nodes scattered throughout the area. There is little in terms of neighborhood retail or services in the area, which represents a significant need for the residents of the area. These neighborhood commercial uses may be difficult to attract to this area until the district’s population increases.

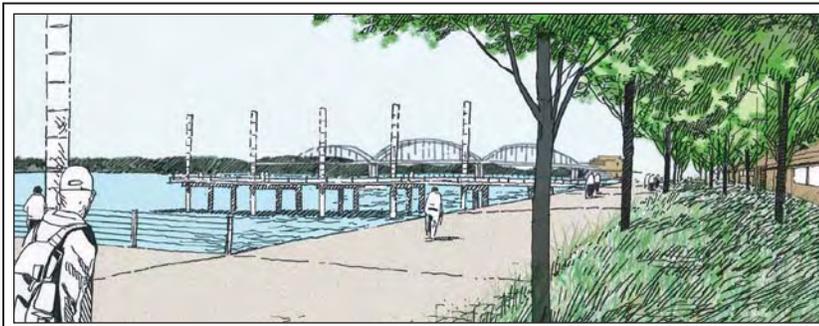


Figure 2.3: Riverfront promenade and housing from the RiverVision Plan

### 2.3 Social and Economic Activity: Long Term Adjacent Uses

Old Chicago has several distinct adjacent districts that have the potential to positively impact the future development of Old Chicago (fig. 2.4). To the east, Rock Island’s downtown is a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly district and its vibrant and active streets continue to fuel redevelopment in the area. As downtown development continues, the northeastern section of Old Chicago may see spill-over development which can help spur growth in the rest of Old Chicago.

Additionally, adjacent uses may have long-term impacts on the revitalization of Old Chicago. The Sunset Business Park, located west of the Expressway and accessible by 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues, is experiencing some redevelopment. Continuation of these recent efforts, including investment and improvements in the business park, could provide additional employment opportunities for area residents, as well as new opportunities for restaurants, commercial-oriented businesses and services in Old Chicago.

To the north of the Expressway, riverfront housing and public open space (fig. 2.3) could also assist in the redevelopment of Old Chicago. Proposed originally in the RiverVision plan, this housing could help attract additional retail and other business to the area while creating a residential “buzz”.



Figure 2.4 Adjacent districts that could positively impact the Old Chicago area.

## 2.4 Social and Economic Activity: Institutions and Services

Several civic, institutional, cultural and recreational uses exist within Old Chicago. The Martin Luther King Community Center, located on 9<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, provides programs and services to the Old Chicago's diverse population as well as other neighboring areas. The Metro Youth Center empowers children with leadership and self-discipline skills through their drill team. Second Baptist Church, another community anchor located on the 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets, has actively worked to improve Old Chicago and assist its residents. The former Grant School is also located in the redevelopment area, and is currently occupied by the Thurgood Marshall Learning Center, a Rock Island/Milan School District alternative high school.

Fig. 2.5: Martin Luther King Community Center



Fig. 2.6: Second Baptist Church



## 2.5 Social and Economic Activity: Non-Owner Occupied Property

Non-owner occupied housing in Old Chicago represents approximately three quarters of all housing units in the area and is indicated in red in Figure 2.7. It is critical to the future of the neighborhood that owner occupancy rates increase. Owner-occupants have a vested interest in the success of the neighborhood, whereas renters are typically more transient in nature and may not be as concerned about the long-term condition of the area. Owner-occupants have typically resided in their current home four times longer than renters in Old Chicago. Owner-occupant's properties are typically better maintained and homeowners are more likely to invest in an area than an absentee landlord.

Although in theory, it can be easier to acquire properties from a remote owner rather than an owner-occupant, having large numbers of absentee owned parcels, such as in the Old Chicago Neighborhood, makes negotiations difficult.



Figure 2.7: Non-owner occupied housing units

## 2.6 Social and Economic Activity: Land Publicly Owned

The City of Rock Island and other civic entities have become major property owners in the area (fig. 2.8), with more than 48 parcels in its ownership. Many of the City-owned parcels are vacant residential parcels, although there are a few vacant commercial lots on primary corridors. The City gained control of the properties by voluntary donation in exchange for the right of entry to demolish the structure or through the County's delinquent property tax program.

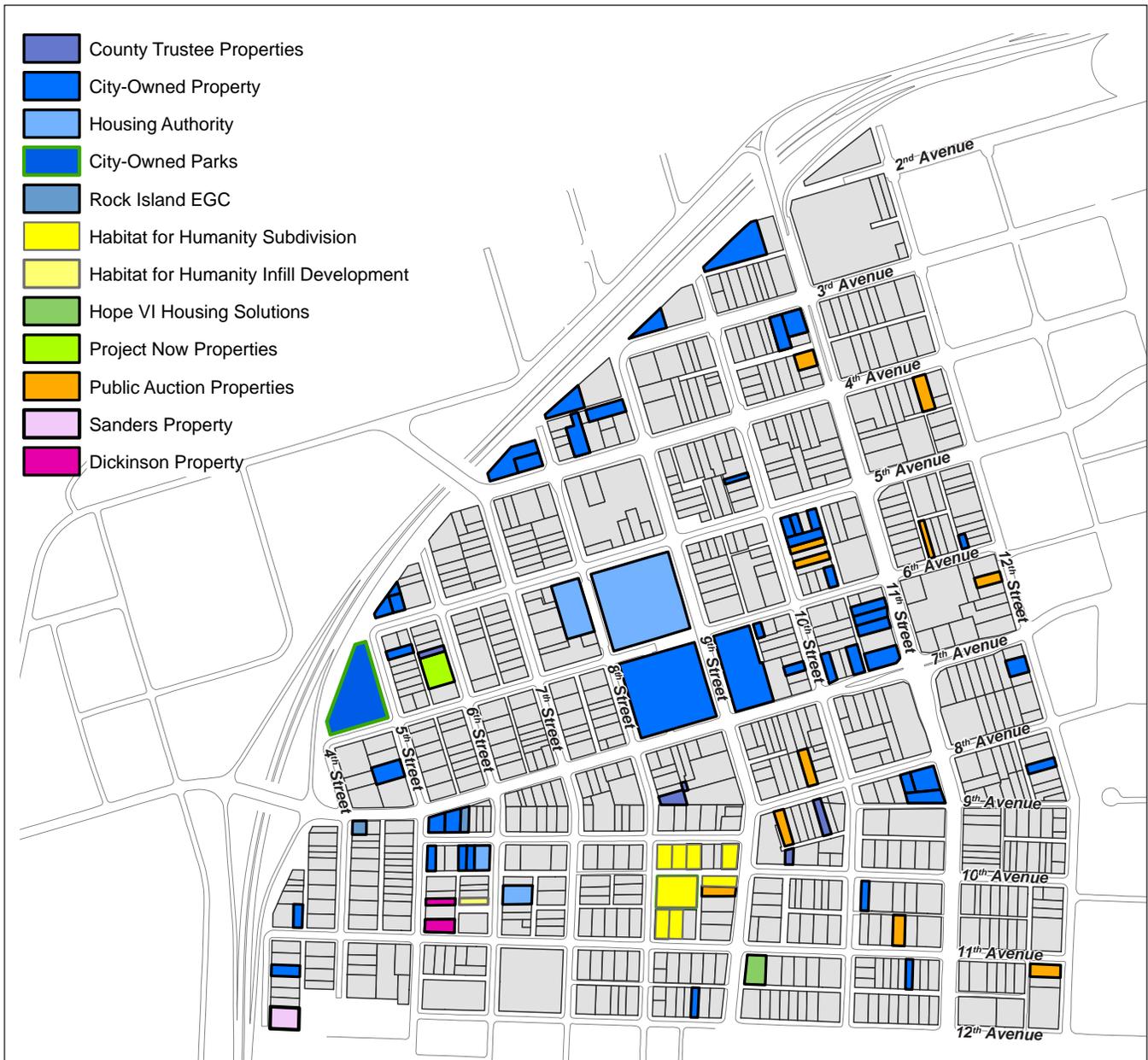


Figure 2.8: Publicly controlled property

## 2.7 Circulation

The Old Chicago circulation pattern consists of a series of major corridors that weave through a residential neighborhood. The study area has two primary corridors, several secondary corridors and many neighborhood streets. The primary corridors are 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street. The 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor connects Old Chicago to Rock Island's downtown and continues east to Moline. The 11<sup>th</sup> Street corridor is a major route to southern Rock Island and Milan. The intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street is the most notable in the area with a combined traffic count of approximately 12,200 cars per day. Both of these primary corridors have an expressway access point. Additional corridors include the 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue/9<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, which turns at the Centennial Expressway, as well as 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues. In addition to 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue is the only street in Old Chicago that crosses the expressway. This connection links Old Chicago and Downtown with the Sunset Business Park.



Figure 2.9: Major corridors, intersections, access points and gateways.



Figure 2.10: Triangular blocks created from streets terminating at the Centennial Expressway are difficult to develop and mostly vacant.

Figure 2.11: A street terminating at the Expressway surrounded by vacant parcels.



Old Chicago is served by two MetroLINK bus routes, which link the neighborhood to the rest of the Quad Cities. Bike lanes are also being developed in the neighborhood. In March of 2006, the City Council approved the provision of bike lanes, consisting of two curb lanes on each side of the street, along 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue from Mill Street to 21<sup>st</sup> Street.

The existence of the Centennial Expressway greatly impacts the circulation pattern within Old Chicago. Prior to its construction, the neighborhood grid extended into adjacent riverfront and industrial areas, creating multiple routes to employment and recreational opportunities. After construction, the neighborhood was effectively isolated from these areas, except for connections at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street. The development of the Expressway additionally left Old Chicago with a series of saw-tooth partial blocks adjacent to the Expressway corridor (figure 2.10). The resulting triangular shape of the seven partial blocks creates additional complications for development, and the majority of these are vacant.

The streets in Old Chicago greatly vary in their character. Local neighborhood streets are as narrow as 24 feet while primary streets are more than twice as wide, with as much as 52 feet of paving. Many of the primary streets, especially 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street, are excessively wide, creating the appearance of an asphalt-dominated neighborhood, hindering pedestrian traffic and encouraging high-speed traffic in the area. This excess width does create possibilities for significant streetscaping improvements on these corridors. Planted medians and boulevards, bike lanes and other features adjacent to the streets are examples of how this space could be better utilized while creating a neighborhood asset.

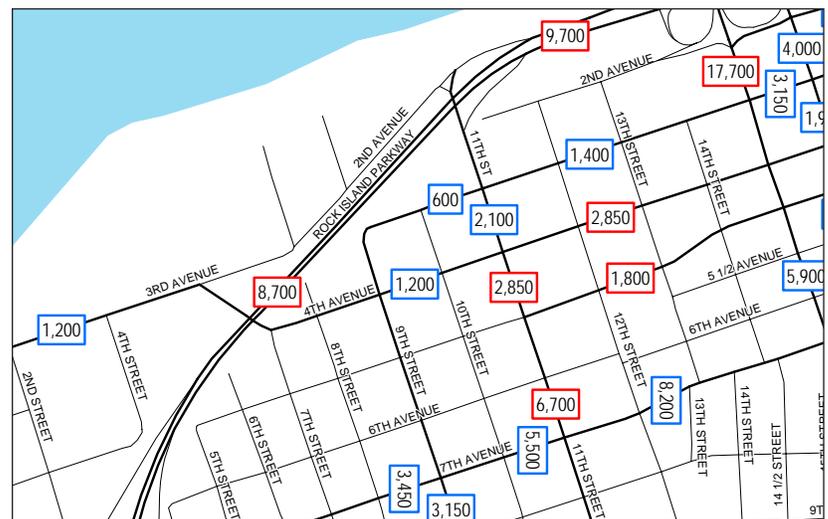


Figure 2.12: Average daily traffic counts in Old Chicago, measured in 2003 (red box) and 2001 (blue box).

## 2.8 Parks Open Space & Nature

Old Chicago has a relatively small amount of usable parks and open spaces (figure 2.13). Much of the open space is vacant parcels and is not utilized for active or passive recreation (figure 2.14). Large open areas in Old Chicago have no social ownership from the neighborhood and do not contribute positively to the community. Neighborhood access to the riverfront and the bike trail is limited.

Denkmann Park, located at 5<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, has recreational facilities including basketball courts and a small pavilion, but little in terms of passive recreational space or attractive landscape features. Additionally, there are basketball courts adjacent to Lincoln Homes on 9<sup>th</sup> Street (figure 2.15). These spaces in their current form fulfill only one aspect of what parks should do for neighborhoods. They only provide limited recreational opportunities and do little to increase the value of the surrounding area or act as neighborhood centers. The parks in this area should be redefined to serve a wider variety of needs.

While often overlooked and not considered formal open space, many neighborhood streets and lots are planted with magnificent mature trees which greatly contribute to neighborhood character and can possibly act as a selling point for neighborhood redevelopment.



Figure 2.13: Existing open spaces in Old Chicago.

Figure 2.14: Vacant lots account for a large portion of open space in Old Chicago.



Figure 2.15: A play area at Lincoln Homes



Figure 2.16: Well maintained housing



Figure 2.17: Historic house in Old Chicago



Figure 2.18: The Esquire Lodge



Figure 2.19: RIHA's Lincoln Holmes



Figure 2.20: Conditions near 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 10<sup>th</sup> Street.

## 2.9 Physical Form

The physical form of existing development within Old Chicago varies greatly, and no single term can describe it other than diverse. The overall character of the area is of a classic urban residential neighborhood with a mix of one- to two-story residential structures. Many have front porches and small front yards, with parking in the rear of the lot accessible via an alley. While some parts of the neighborhood are in states of disrepair or neglect, there are many pockets of well maintained properties (fig. 2.16). While certain structures may be in disrepair, the framework of the urban neighborhood is still intact. In many new housing projects called Traditional Neighborhood Developments, or TND's, developers are attempting to re-create many of the qualities of classic urban residential neighborhoods such as Old Chicago.

The largest obstacle facing Old Chicago is the abundance of vacant lots. Vacant lots break apart the neighborhood fabric, creating an image of disinvestment. They reduce the residential capacity of the area, limit the feeling of community and hurt neighboring business.

As one of the original settlement points of the City, the neighborhood contains some significant historic structures (figs 2.17 and 2.18). Some of these have been restored, some are currently undergoing restoration while others remain in various states of disrepair. Preservation and restoration of these structures is critical to the maintenance of the neighborhood character.

Multifamily residential units in the neighborhood vary in form and desirability. While the public housing facilities (fig 2.19) in the area are generally in good repair, the current form of public housing with its repetitive structures concentrates too much of this type of housing in a single area. The Asset Management Plan of the Housing Authority calls for evaluating the long-term viability of the Lincoln Homes development.

Some of the worst physical conditions in Old Chicago are located at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 10<sup>th</sup> Street (fig. 2.20). Here one finds a dilapidated mix of vacant lots and abandoned buildings that greatly contributes to the perception of blight. This highly visible location is only one block from the primary 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street corridors.





Figure 3.1: Development Concept Framework

### **3. DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: CONCEPT & PLANNING STRATEGIES**

The following four concepts underlie the development concept framework (fig. 3.1).

- ENCOURAGE CLUSTERS OF INFILL HOUSING AND REDEVELOPMENT. Clusters are more effective than scattered site development because they are more visible and create a feeling of momentum and that redevelopment efforts are working.
- REDEVELOPMENT ON VACANT LOTS MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY REHABILITATION OF EXISTING RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES. This strategy preserves neighborhood character while preventing displacement of existing residents.
- UTILIZE PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS TO INCREASE VALUE AND SPUR REDEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY. Public improvements could be as little as planting street trees in the terrace or include larger investments such as boulevard construction or park development. All public improvements should be visually appealing and create desirability in the area.
- PUBLIC EXPENDITURES ON INFRASTRUCTURE SHOULD BE PRIORITIZED AND TARGETED TO MAXIMIZE PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT IN REDEVELOPMENT.



Figure 4.1: Catalytic projects in the New Old Chicago Redevelopment area

## 4. Catalytic Projects/Recommendations

This concept utilizes many small but concentrated nodes of development in an effort to create a highly visible perception of improvement in the area (fig. 4.1). The plan does not identify a single starting point of development since many factors may impact the success of a single site. Instead, any identified node could act as a catalytic starting point. In Figure 4.1 potential redevelopment areas are indicated with a green background: the darker brown buildings on the sites indicate either new or renovated structures. Proposed locations for streetscape projects are indicated by the green rows of street trees that have been included in the drawing. The designated sites are a combination of publicly owned land and privately owned parcels suggesting that redevelopment and renewal of the area will be a combined effort of both the public and private sectors. If a site is indicated on this plan it does not mean that a property owner will be forced to participate in redevelopment efforts. The plan is meant to show places where redevelopment activity would most benefit the neighborhood in order to help set priorities and help target efforts.

The potential nodes mostly consist of vacant or under-utilized parcels which are located along highly visible primary corridors. The intent was to create active uses along the street that encourage spin-off development. Development nodes were grouped into three sub-areas: Community “Heart,” the Gateway West and the Gateway North. For each project a “timing” priority is listed in terms of short, medium or long term implementation horizons along with a listing of responsible parties. However, it is important to note that even though projects are given a priority level, catalytic redevelopment often occurs in an unpredictable, improvisational manner as opportunities arise. Therefore, flexibility is necessary so that resources can be redeployed to follow the “hot” areas once development momentum has begun.

## Strategies

Implementation of the plan will involve a concerted effort by the City to not only utilize public agencies and funds to stimulate redevelopment efforts but to encourage private investment from the development community. General strategies to help stimulate catalytic projects include:

- Define areas with the greatest potential for redevelopment and create incentives for developers to invest in those areas.
- Cluster new development to have the greatest positive impact on surrounding property values. Concentrations of higher values have a greater impact than the same higher values widely dispersed throughout the neighborhood.
- Couple new construction with rehab, renovation and preservation of surrounding properties to maximize benefit to the neighborhood.
- Couple new housing investment with infrastructure improvements that double as amenities (green space) and traffic calming measures. For example, a 68-foot traffic island centering an intersection may serve as a commons for residents and a traffic calming device. Use these capital improvements as a way of adding value and increasing the impact of housing reinvestment on the neighborhood.
- Put amenities in place (landscaping for example) for new housing developments to add value to those developments and spur additional investment in housing and rehab in the surrounding area.
- Increase owner occupancy throughout the neighborhood for all building types.
- The perception of housing has a significant impact on the identity and value of the neighborhood. It is important to improve the quality of housing and provide opportunities for home ownership. Incentives, such as creative financing and creative lending opportunities, should be offered by the City and local lenders. For example, reduced interest rates for specific areas could be offered as well as low-interest loans to homeowners or landlords for home improvements. Additionally, the City could operate as a master developer, and in some cases, provide initial subsidizing that is phased out as the market develops. Incentives should also target middle-income families.

- Emphasize the walkability of the neighborhood. In addition, many streets have wonderful mature trees which cannot be matched in suburban areas. Both of these factors add to the feeling of Old Chicago as a classic urban residential neighborhood

Given the historic trend of low investment in the neighborhood, it is important to recognize that the City will need to provide subsidies to private developers in order to get the initial project(s) underway. These subsidies will be necessary while initial redevelopment efforts become successful and expected sales prices rise. Thus the City might need to provide larger subsidies for the first projects, gradually reducing the amount for subsequent projects until they are not needed.

As an early action the City should convene a “summit” with local, regional, and other interested developers and real estate professionals. They should be briefed on the plan, and informed of the types of financial assistance they would need to do business in the neighborhood. The meeting might also include local banks and financial institutions, many of which have expressed in interest in participating in redevelopment efforts for Old Chicago.

## CENTER: COMMUNITY “HEART”

The community heart is roughly the area bound by 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues and 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets. It is what residents perceive to be the center of the neighborhood containing the existing community anchors of the King Center and Second Baptist Church. This district has several redevelopment and improvement projects, varying in scale and potential impact which are noted in figure 4.2 and discussed in the following pages.



Figure 4.2: Center: Community “Heart”

## C1. New Neighborhood Park

*Timing: short term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Parks Staff*

A new City park is proposed for the currently empty site on the half block bounded by 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This area could contain a mix of both active and passive green space along with a shelter and covered area for neighborhood gatherings, markets, or fairs. More active uses, including the shelter and covered area, are recommended along the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue street frontage while more passive uses are envisioned on the northern end of the park. The park should be enclosed by a row of trees along the perimeter of the block in order to help establish a strong definable edge for the park.

## C2. Douglas Park Place

*Timing: underway*

This multifamily residential development will revitalize the southwest corner of this important focal point. Current plans include the provision of a small green space on the northern tip of the site, bringing a pedestrian-friendly activity to the area.



Figure 4.3: A new community park at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Douglas Park residential development south of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue



Figure 4.4: Aerial view of new community park.



Figure 4.5: New streetscape and bicycle lanes along 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue



Figure 4.6: King Center Expansion

### **C3. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Streetscape**

*Timing: approved by Council, pending implementation*

The Council recently approved adding bike lanes, one in each direction, along 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue from Mill Street to 21<sup>st</sup> Street. The project will also include streetscape improvements.

### **C4: King Center Expansion**

*Timing: medium to long term*

*Responsible Party: King Center*

There is a potential expansion project for the King Center that has been discussed. The expected location of any future addition is toward the north of the existing building, fronting 9<sup>th</sup> Street. It is recommended that the addition have ample windows and pedestrian-friendly features such as entrances, canopies, and landscape provided along the 9<sup>th</sup> Street façade. The parking lot could also be expanded to the north, and it is recommended that an ornamental metal fence with landscape be included to provide additional screening.

### **C5: Lincoln Homes Renovation**

*Timing: medium-long term*

*Responsible Party: RIHA*

The RIHA Asset Management plan notes that the 45-unit Lincoln Homes development, while recently rehabilitated with new roofs, vinyl siding, and windows, is over 50 years old and will require replacement in the future. The Management Plan recommends that the development be re-evaluated in eight to ten years to determine its long-term value and sustainability as a viable property. If the development is to be replaced there is an opportunity to renovate the site to achieve a more neighborhood-friendly arrangement. Figure 4.7 depicts a recommended site concept that includes a series of smaller buildings fronting streets with parking provided in the rear of buildings in small lots broken up by areas of landscape. Units should have a sense of individual character, expressed through each having its own entrance or porch. Gables, dormers, projecting bays and other massing elements on the buildings should be utilized to make



Figure 4.7: Lincoln Homes redeveloped with neighborhood scale and character.

renovated Lincoln Homes relate to the character of the existing adjacent homes. A central open space or court/plaza space is recommended to provide an amenity for the residents. This space should be adjacent to the street and act both as a residential and neighborhood focal point.

## C6. 9th Street Streetscape

*Timing: 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue-short term; 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue-long term*

*Responsible party: Public Works, Planning Departments*

The streetscape project is envisioned in two phases. An initial phase would concentrate streetscape improvements from 8th Avenue to 5th Avenue to correspond with other short-term catalytic projects such as the new park, 7th Avenue streetscaping, and Douglas Park Place. A second phase would occur later, as streetscape elements are extended north and east to the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Improvements should include new pavement, curbs, sidewalks, street trees, and historic light fixtures similar to those used elsewhere in the neighborhood. Consideration should also be given for special pavement treatment to mark crosswalks at intersections such as colored asphalt or colored concrete.



Figure 4.8: New streetscape and bicycle lanes along 9th Street



Figure 4.9: New mixed-use development and streetscape on 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

### C7. 11<sup>th</sup> Street Mixed-Use Redevelopment

*Timing: long term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, private developers*

Old Chicago is in need of more neighborhood-oriented retail and services. Eleventh Street, between 7<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues, could become a site for retail redevelopment activity. A series of commercial (possibly including mixed-use) buildings is proposed in these areas. The buildings should be sited so that the buildings are close to the street edge, with parking located to the rear in order to create a pedestrian-friendly character along the street frontage. Since mixed-use development might be more of a long-term project an interim use of the vacant land along the corridor would help mitigate the appearance of blight that exists currently as the result of vacant lots and dilapidated structures. For example, community gardens should be considered as a short term use in this area to help provide a sense of renewal. However, policies should be enacted with any community garden program to ensure that gardens do not fall into neglect.

### C8. 11<sup>th</sup> Street Streetscape

*Timing: long term*

*Responsible party: Public Works, Planning Departments*

Eleventh Street currently has a concrete median down the center: consideration should be given to converting this to a landscaped median. If it is possible to reduce the width of the traffic lanes, the landscape median could be made even wider. Changes to 11<sup>th</sup> Street will need to be reviewed by IDOT, although the proposed modifications are likely compatible with “Context Sensitive Solutions” initiatives.



Figure 4.10: Perspective view of 11<sup>th</sup> Street mixed-use development and streetscape

## C9. 10<sup>th</sup> Street Residential Redevelopment

*Timing: short term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Private Developers*

Tenth Street, between 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, is one of the most challenged areas in Old Chicago. This area should be completely redeveloped into a new residential neighborhood, with the Second Baptist Church serving as a neighborhood anchor. Single-family or duplex homes with neighborhood-friendly architecture including front porches and garages located to the rear are recommended. It is important to concentrate efforts so that both sides of a street are completed at the same time in order to enhance the sense of a unified and finished environment.



Figure 4.11: Residential development on 10<sup>th</sup> Street



Figure 4.12: Parking Plaza in front of Second Baptist Church and improvements on 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

## C10. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue Improvements/Second Baptist Church

*Timing: medium term*

*Responsible party: Public Works and Planning Department, Second Baptist Church (parking lot landscape)*

Second Baptist Church is an important neighborhood institution which has a large parking lot in the front of the building. Decorative paving, fencing and landscaping added to the street edge of the lot could help screen it from residential areas. Additionally, 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue could be reconfigured with angle parking to provide additional church parking and streetscape elements added to decrease the visual impact of large parking lots. Additional streetscape improvements are proposed along 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 11<sup>th</sup> Street through 8<sup>th</sup> Street including a small landscaped traffic circle at intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> Street. This circle need not be large to accomplish the task of slowing traffic and adding a landscape feature to the neighborhood.

## Center District Redevelopment Strategy/Priorities

Redevelopment should be focused and phased to initially emphasize the primary corridors along 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street. A secondary corridor is proposed along 9<sup>th</sup> Street. The intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> Street is seen as a key focal point, around which initial redevelopment activity should be focused. While redevelopment activities and improvements are welcome in other parts of the district it is especially important to focus development efforts along the corridors to create a sense of momentum and progress. These areas represent the most visible and public “face” for the neighborhoods and successful redevelopment of these areas is crucial in changing the current negative impression of the neighborhood in the minds of many in the Quad Cities region.

Up until the late 1960’s the Old Chicago neighborhood was the scene of a vibrant business district that provided goods and services to the neighborhood and the City at large. Due to a variety of circumstances the business district deteriorated and was the target of demolition resulting in the current situation in which very few businesses are present in the area.

Further south of the study area, 11<sup>th</sup> Street contains numerous businesses, many oriented towards automobile traffic. As 11<sup>th</sup> Street passes through the Old Chicago Neighborhood one finds scattered businesses amid many vacant properties along the street.

The intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street marks a major focal point of the neighborhood featuring some of the higher traffic counts in the area and offers the opportunity to become the “epicenter” of any business redevelopment in the neighborhood. As such, this area is an important starting point for redevelopment activity that could eventually extend further northward along 11<sup>th</sup> Street and westward along 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Of particular importance is the area bounded between 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 11<sup>th</sup> Street, and 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Redevelopment of these two blocks could “jump start” the process and begin to turn around negative perceptions of the area through a high profile project, appropriate for the community. In an interview with local real estate professions, participants pointed out that it would be attractive to potential developers if the city were to assemble properties into larger redevelopment areas that could make a bigger impact and create a “buzz” in the development community. The City should consider acquiring all properties in these two blocks and packaging them into a single project to issue as a RFP (request for proposal) to developers. Along with the public improvements of streetscaping and the new community park, this redevelopment project could provide a new image for the community.

## GATEWAY WEST

The Gateway West district is comprised of three nodes of development, one located adjacent to Denkmann Park, the second at the western end of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the third located at the southern end of 9<sup>th</sup> Street (figure 4.13).



Figure 4.13: Gateway West

## W1. Neighborhood Green

*Timing: medium term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Public Works Department*

A small green space (fig. 5.15) is proposed on City-owned land at the intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street. This small space can act as a focus for a node of redevelopment in the immediate area and provide a gateway experience into the neighborhood.

## W2: New/Rehabilitated Housing

*Timing: medium term*

*Responsible Party: RIHA, Private Developer(s)*

The proposed park space will create a focal point around which residential redevelopment can occur. The park will create an amenity which can help attract investment to the area. Medium density housing in the form of rowhouses is proposed for the north side of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, facing the park. This project would involve land acquisition to assemble an appropriately sized parcel to accommodate the rowhouses. Other housing redevelopment is proposed for the block faces south and east of the proposed green space which could consist of new single family construction or rehabilitation of existing homes. The proposed housing projects could be a combined public and private sector effort involving both private developers and RIHA.



Figure 4.14: New park and surrounding residential south of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue.



Figure 4.15: Perspective view of new park and residential



Figure 4.16: Renovated Esquire Lodge.

### **W3: Esquire Lodge Renovation and Site Improvements**

*Timing: medium term*

*Responsible party: property owners*

The Esquire Lodge is an important landmark for the neighborhood and efforts should be made to ensure its preservation or adaptive re-use. In addition to the current use, the building appears to be a good candidate for other uses, including loft-style housing. Building capacity could be enhanced by an addition to the west, which is shown in the plan concept drawing. If there is no expansion landscape improvements to the existing parking lot to the north and west of the Lodge are encouraged.



Figure 4.17: Gateway and landscape features at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the Centennial Expressway

### **W4: Gateway Landscape Features**

*Timing: short term*

*Responsible party: Public Works Department, Planning Department*

The Rock Island Parkway Concept Design Plan recommends a number of landscape improvement strategies along the length of the Parkway. A landscape feature should be provided in the vicinity where the off-ramp meets 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This feature should contain signage that identifies the Old Chicago Neighborhood. Providing the landscaped gateway will complement the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue streetscape project which will add bike lanes as well as streetscape improvements along the street.

### **W5: Denkmann Park Expansion and Improvements**

*Timing: medium term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Parks Department, Public Works Department*

Denkmann Park, while providing neighborhood green space, is seen by many in the community as a troubled facility. Part of the problem is that the park is isolated in an almost forgotten corner along the Expressway. It is proposed that the park be renovated coupled with housing redevelopment on the block overlooking the park. Fifth Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street could be reconfigured to create a curving park lane, effectively expanding the park while offering a better arrangement of open space in this tight parcel adjacent to the Centennial Expressway. The larger park will allow for new

passive recreation spaces as well as expansion of its active recreation capacity. This project would involve property acquisition of several lots facing the park in order to facilitate the road reconfiguration.



Figure 4.18: Denkman Park expansion and surrounding residential development

## **W6. Housing Redevelopment**

*Timing medium to longer term*

*Responsible party: RIHA, private developers*

When Denkmann Park has been renovated, an opportunity will exist to provide new medium density housing that faces the park. The new housing will help add “eyes to the street” which will add to the security of the park and give the neighborhood a sense of ownership. Some property will need to be acquired to assemble a site of sufficient size to accommodate the new housing units. A Project NOW site is adjacent adding to the improvement of the area. A series of vacant lots across the street from the Project NOW site should be redeveloped into new single family housing to further enhance the neighborhood.



Figure 4.19: New pocket park on 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue with pathway leading to the Douglas Park residential development.

### W7: Neighborhood Pocket Park

Timing: medium term

Responsible party: Metro Youth, Planning Department, Public Works Department, Parks Department

An opportunity exists to create a small green space on the southwest corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue where three vacant lots currently exist. This neighborhood park could be overseen by Metro Youth which is located next door. A pathway could be provided to the north and east of the park through a triangular lot owned by the Rock Island EGC to connect with a small open space that is being provided as part of Douglas Park Place.

### W8. Habitat for Humanity Residential Development

Timing: underway

Responsible party: Habitat for Humanity

A series of single family homes will be constructed by Habitat for Humanity along 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Efforts should be made to encourage existing property owners across the street and adjacent to the site to take advantage of City programs that offer home renovation assistance.



Figure 4.20: Habitat for Humanity's subdivision on 8<sup>th</sup> Street.



Figure 4.21: Rendering of Habitat for Humanity's model home for 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

### W9: Former Hickman Center Renovation

Timing: underway

Responsible party: RIHA

The RIHA has recently acquired the former Hickman Center to be utilized by office and support functions. Renovation of this structure combined with site improvements which could include a small green space at one of the site corners along 11<sup>th</sup> street represents another potential catalytic project in this area.



Figure 4.22: Hickman Center Renovation

## **West District Redevelopment strategy/priorities**

Initial redevelopment efforts should focus on the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue corridor, which will receive streetscape improvements in the near term. In general, redevelopment in this area will most likely occur a bit later than the catalytic projects indicated further east along 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue as part of the “central” district. The landscape gateway at the foot of the Expressway could be an early project that helps create a welcoming image to the community. The small neighborhood green proposed at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street along with the adjacent redevelopment projects should be conducted as a coordinated and concerted effort to create a strong and visible node, further contributing to the visual presence of the gateway. The Denkmann Park Project is seen as a longer term project, due to its more remote location from the main redevelopment corridors.

## GATEWAY NORTH

Gateway North, roughly bounded by the Centennial Expressway, 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 15<sup>th</sup> Street, is comprised of several targeted developments. While some of these potential developments are technically outside the planning study area, the Old Chicago neighborhood will benefit from the improvement of these parcels.

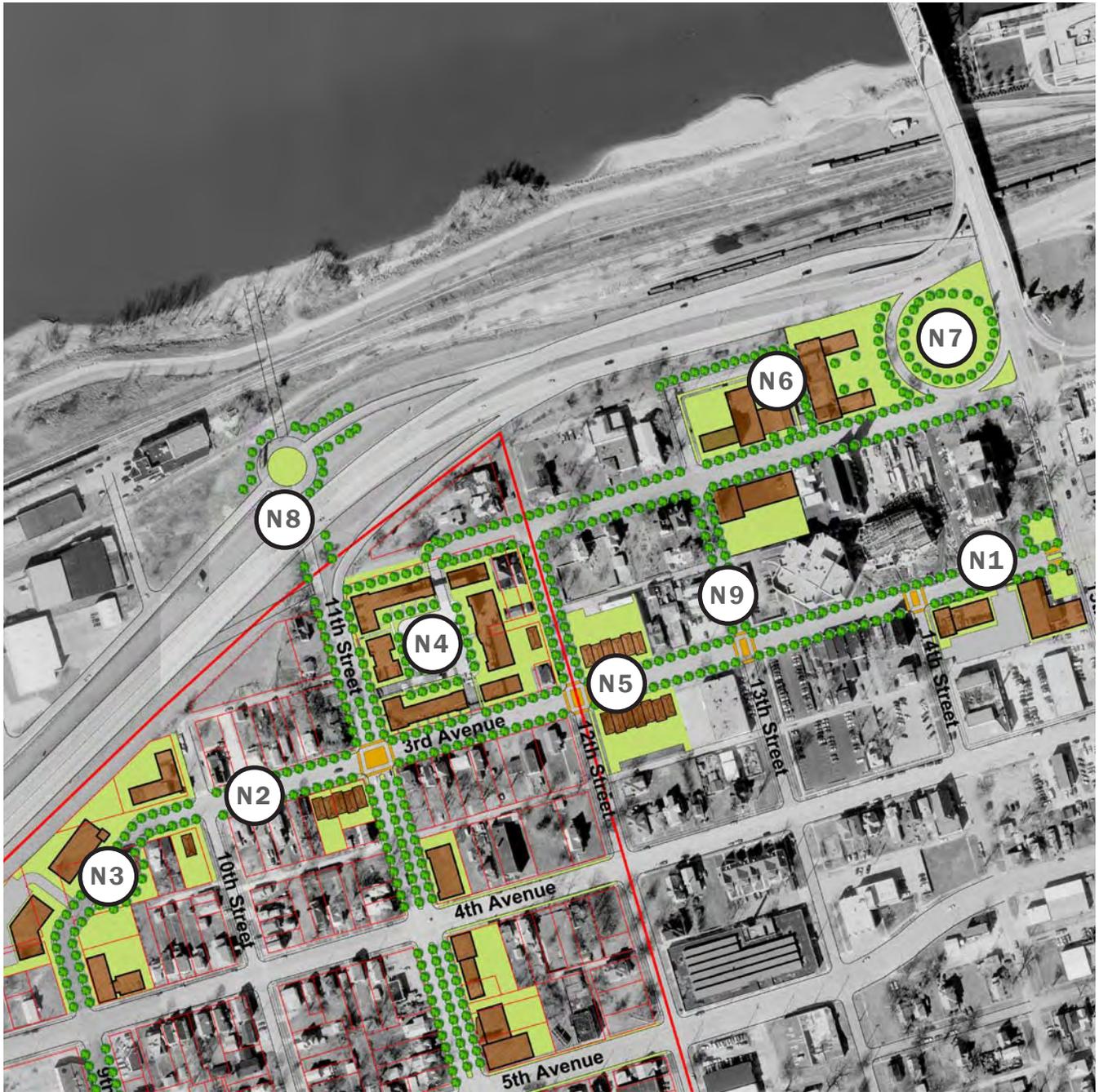


Figure 4.23: Gateway North

## **N1. Courthouse Square redevelopment**

*Timing: long term*

*Responsible party: private developers*

Third Avenue is an important gateway street from the Downtown into the Old Chicago Neighborhood. A key location that could be better utilized with a more intensive use than the current one is the southwest corner of the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Two commercial buildings are suggested for this location, capitalizing on healthy traffic counts and proximity to the downtown and the series of government buildings that are in the immediate vicinity. This could be a good location for a Walgreen's or other similar uses. In addition to the buildings, two plazas mark the gateway to the Old Chicago neighborhood from the east.

## **N2. 3rd Avenue Streetscape: Extension to 4th Avenue (see also related project C6)**

*Timing: long term, or when project N3 occurs)*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Public Works*

East of 11<sup>th</sup> Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue was provided with streetscape improvements by the City several years ago. It is proposed that streetscape treatments eventually be extended further west along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. Coupled with the streetscape project proposed for 9<sup>th</sup> Street (C6) this effort will lead to a fully improved street along this important link between the heart of Old Chicago and the Downtown. This project is a logical accompaniment to project N3, which calls for a major redevelopment project where 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue bends south to become 9<sup>th</sup> Street.

## **N3. Commercial Redevelopment**

*Timing: medium to long term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Public Works, Private Developers*

This potential redevelopment opportunity is located at the current termination of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue at the Centennial Expressway. By angling the road alignment as shown on the concept plan, 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> Street can be reconfigured to create contiguous, developable parcels that are larger than the previous remnants of land along the Expressway. These parcels would be attractive for commercial development because of their visibility



Figure 4.24: Courthouse Square improvement and commercial buildings.

from the Expressway. Because of their position at the endpoint of 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue they could also have a strong visual connection to the Downtown and provide a distinctive architectural landmark at this important “hinge point” between the Downtown and the center of Old Chicago. Three commercial office buildings are proposed for the newly created highly visible parcels, along with an additional commercial or multifamily building on a vacant parcel at the corner of 9<sup>th</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This project would likely be a combined public and private sector effort. City actions would include rezoning the parcel for commercial use, property assembly, and the reconfiguration of the road. The property is on the borderline of the 11<sup>th</sup> Street TIF district, and the boundary could be amended to provide TIF funds to these parcels. Once property acquisition has been completed, an open RFP process to attract a developer could be enacted. During the planning process, the planning consultant met with several real estate and development professionals from the Quad Cities area and many had a positive reaction to such a project. If an office building were to result portions could be leased out for government or community service functions, in effect, bringing some government office use a bit further west to the Old Chicago Neighborhood with the resultant benefits for the neighborhood of increased daytime populations necessary to support local business.



Figure 4.25: 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue reconfiguration with streetscaping and adjacent commercial development

#### **N4. Residential Redevelopment**

*Timing: long term*

*Responsible party: private developer*

If the current occupant of the property should choose to relocate their operations, the site could make for a major redevelopment opportunity. Its position at the western end of the historic district coupled with relative proximity to Downtown and the Expressway could give the property some locational advantages. The site would also allow for a significant sized residential development that could offer an internal amenity, such as a residential green courtyard, increasing the marketability of the project. The project should contain condominium units with a minimal number or no rental units, in order to build home ownership levels in the neighborhood. In a discussion between the planning consultants and local real estate and development professionals, it was noted that such a project was large enough to create a sense of a “neighborhood within a neighborhood.” It would be important that a project like this, while having an internal focus, not become a walled-off enclave: any amenity space should be open to the public and the property should be accessible via city streets or lanes. For example, in the concept shown on Figure 4.26, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue is turned south and brought through the site as an internal lane. A public green space is proposed for the center of the block to be maintained by the homeowners’ association.



Figure 4.26: Courtyard residential development on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> Street and adjacent new townhouses.

## **N5. Townhouse Residential Developments**

*Timing: medium term*

*Responsible party: private developers*

Continued infill redevelopment of either townhouse or single-family development is encouraged in the area. Care should be taken so that the architectural character of the buildings fits with the neighborhood and historic significance of the area.

## **N6. Renovation/Adaptive Re-use of Peerless Dairy and Duncheon Apartments**

*Timing: medium to long term*

*Responsible party: private developers*

These properties are National Register eligible and could be renovated utilizing historic tax credits to contribute to neighborhood renewal. The Peerless Dairy property has commanding views of the Mississippi River, Downtown, and the Centennial Bridge and would seem to be a great candidate for residential conversion at some point in the future.

## **N7. Centennial Bridge Interchange Landscape Improvements**

*Timing: medium term or simultaneously with project N6.*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Public Works*

Continuing efforts should be made to create a park-like landscaped spaces around the access ramps to the Centennial Bridge. This area has the potential to become an amenity for both the City and the Neighborhood rather than just a traffic junction.



Figure 4.27: Renovation of the Peerless Dairy and Duncheon Apartments with Centennial Bridge interchange landscape improvements to the east.

**N8. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue Extension to Riverfront and Future Waterfront Development**

*Timing: medium term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Public Works, IDOT*

Despite Old Chicago’s close proximity to the riverfront, there is no direct access to the waterfront or to the bike path. In addition, the RiverVision Plan recommended residential development along the waterfront, just north of Old Chicago and the Centennial Expressway (see fig. 2.3). If implemented, this area should be connected through public streets to Old Chicago, most likely at 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Improvements to this intersection would also help facilitate access between the neighborhood and the Sunset Business Park, which is currently undergoing redevelopment. However, formidable barriers including the levee, railroads and an awkward design of the off and on ramps to the Expressway at 11<sup>th</sup> Street complicate efforts for connection. Space is tight under the expressway bridge for the inclusion of sidewalks. Future studies should be made to examine alternatives for revising circulation to allow pedestrians and vehicles from 11<sup>th</sup> Street to reach the waterfront. A possible concept is shown in Figure 4.28 which proposes the extension of a two-way 11<sup>th</sup> Street under the bridge to a traffic-calming roundabout on the north side of the Expressway. To the north of the roundabout a small vehicular pull-off area and parking lot are

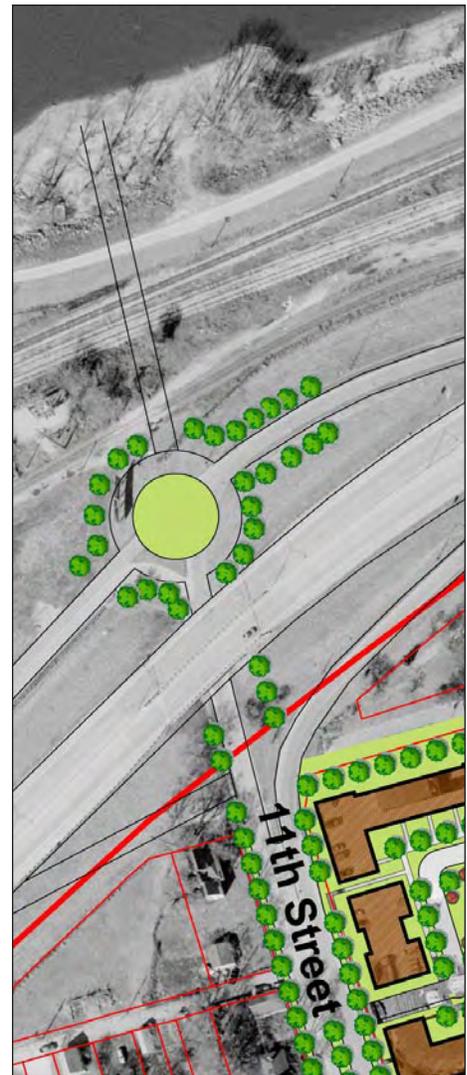


Figure 4.28: Extension of 11<sup>th</sup> Street, creating a new access point to the riverfront

proposed to allow access to the waterfront area. An overhead walkway or ramping system would be needed to reach the bike path, a feature requiring integration with the requirements of the railroad.

## **N9. 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Streetscape Improvements**

*Timing: medium term, or concurrent with project N4*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Public Works*

Many of the neighborhood's historic properties are located along this corridor. Streetscape improvements along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and along both 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> street, between 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, would help unify the area visually and provide a more cohesive sense of a historic district. Historic signage and possibly maps along a walking tour could help make the area more attractive to visitors and residents alike. These improvements could be leveraged by major redevelopment in the area such as project N4.



Figure 4.29: Streetscape improvements in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, 13<sup>th</sup> Street area

## **North District Redevelopment strategy/priorities**

While portions of this district are outside the planning area, it is an important transitional area between the Downtown and Old Chicago. The area also is the location of many of the key historic buildings which make Old Chicago noteworthy. The area is also Old Chicago's bridge to any future redevelopment of the waterfront as indicated in the RiverVision Plan. This area could also directly benefit from the redevelopment of the Sunset Business Park, since it lies strategically between the Business Park and the Downtown. A combination of new construction and adaptive re-use of existing buildings is recommended to help preserve the unique character of the area. While encouraging small-scale redevelopment efforts there

are also some larger projects proposed that would offer a more significant impact, although these projects need to be carefully conceived so that they complement the neighborhood.

## **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

G1. The School District of Rock Island is an important partner in crafting the revitalization of the neighborhood and its actions will have a significant impact on the success of this plan. Planning Staff should brief the School District on the components of this plan and continue to seek their involvement as the implementation process proceeds.

*Timing: short term, medium term, long term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Rock Island School District*

G2. A “marketing plan” should be developed for the neighborhood to overcome negative impressions. Over the past few years organizations like the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) have championed an innovative approach to business development in inner-city neighborhoods like Old Chicago by focusing upon neighborhoods assets rather than its liabilities. For attracting business one approach is to target the significant unmet retail market potential that exists in the neighborhood. The area might have market appeal to youth that could be reached by tapping into the Chamber of Commerce’s Young Professionals Network. The key to any marketing effort is to stress the “classic urbanism” of the neighborhood and build upon its proximity to downtown. Affordability is also a plus in marketing efforts. As mentioned elsewhere in the report the neighborhood might have appeal to those moving to Rock Island from other larger cities who look at the Old Chicago area and see opportunities and not just liabilities.

*Timing: short to medium term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Real estate community*

G3. Consider changing zoning and the future land use plan to reduce business zoning in the area and promote mixed use and residential use.

*Timing: short term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, City Council*

G4. Multi-department efforts should be made to enforce codes on a regular basis around the catalytic projects in order to support those who make a commitment to staying or investing in the area.

*Timing: short term*

*Responsible party: All City departments/agencies involved in code enforcement.*

G5. Keep the area green through a regular tree replacement program.

*Timing: short, medium, long term*

*Responsible party: Public Works*

G6. Utilizing methods such those outlined in Chapter 5, encourage home ownership for both new and existing residents. Utilize methods to ease the tax burden on existing residents as redevelopment efforts occur and property values rise.

*Timing: short term, medium, long term*

*Responsible party: Planning Department, Assessor, Taxing Agencies*

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION

The following pages discuss strategies for implementing the recommendations found within this plan. This section is divided into two parts: programs currently available in the City of Rock Island, and programs that could be created to assist redevelopment in Old Chicago. These new programs, which are based on successful examples in other cities, are intended to provide a menu of options to Rock Island; it is not intended that every listed program be implemented. Additionally, the City of Rock Island should ensure residents, property owners and developers are aware of the programs that are currently available, as well as any newly created program. The programs should also not be overly complicated or restrictive as to prevent potential usage.

### 5.1 Current Tools for Redevelopment

#### **Old Chicago/Downtown Property Tax Rebate Program**

The City of Rock Island offers a targeted property tax rebate program intended to spur new owner-occupied residential development in the Old Chicago and Downtown areas. This program is a 10 year graduated rebate of property taxes for newly constructed single family homes. Annual tax rebates start the first year at 100% and end the 10<sup>th</sup> year at 10%, with a annual maximum of \$1500.

This program makes Old Chicago more attractive to new home buyers by providing a longer window of tax rebates than the citywide version (currently three years). Any program that make an area more attractive to buyers, will also makes the area more attractive to potential developers. The program allows residents to ease into larger property tax bills while providing the City with some revenue beginning in the second year to help cover the cost of services.

## **Housing Repair Loans**

The City offers a variety of below-market rate loans that can assist owner-occupants and investor-owners in financing improvements on their properties. These loans are available to owners whose household income is at or below 80% of the median household income. Loans have a maximum value of \$5000 and a five year term with interest rates either at 0% or 3%. Depending on income and household size, portions or all of these loans may be forgivable if occupied for more than five years following the improvement.

To qualify for these loans, property owners must have a property with code violations, be current with property taxes, have proof of ownership and insurance, qualifying incomes and the ability to repay the loan.

It should be noted that federal regulations regarding lead content abatement for projects over \$5000 have had an impact on the incentives that can be offered by City agencies. The City has recently received a \$1.9 million grant to help address this issue and to supplement existing programs

## **Rental Property Improvement Program**

The Rental property program makes loans available to assist property owners eliminate code violations. The maximum loan amount is \$5000 at 3% interest rate for five years. Owners must present the City with a scope of work and receive two or more bids for all work before any repairs can begin.

To qualify for these loans, property owners must have a property with code violations, be current with property taxes, have proof of ownership and insurance, and the ability to repay the loan.

## **Facade Rebate Program**

The Facade Rebate Program is intended to provide commercial building owners an incentive to renovate their facades. The program provides rebates of up to \$15,000 to leverage investment in these areas while improving the appearance of neighborhoods.

Funds provided by the City will must be less than 25% or 50% (depending

on building location and use) of the total project budget. Funds provided by the City may only be used on exterior rehabilitation work but may be also be applied towards architectural and other project fees.

As was noted with the section describing Housing Repair Loans, the Facade Rebate Program is also affect by Federal lead regulations and will benefit from the recently received \$1.9 million grant.

### **North 11<sup>th</sup> Street Tax Increment District**

The City of Rock Island created this TIF district to spur redevelopment along the 11th Street corridor, however, the district encompasses most of the parcels in the Old Chicago Redevelopment area. TIF's use increases in assessed value to pay for improvement including:

- Construction of public improvements to support a private development
- Property assembly costs
- Demolition of buildings
- Rehabilitation of existing buildings
- Interest costs incurred by the developer in a redevelopment project
- Costs of job training

### **Rock Island Enterprise Zone**

A portion of the redevelopment areas is within the Rock Island Enterprise Zone. Business development within this area is eligible for various state and local tax credits including credits on new investment and jobs created. Additional, development within the enterprise zone may qualify for special financing and a sales tax deduction on building materials.

### **GROWTH Employer Assisted Housing Program**

This program assists employees of participating companies to purchase a home in the City of Rock Island. Purchasers need only \$500 down payment out of pocket; the remainder of the 5% down payment is covered by a grant. Purchasers also receive up to \$2,000 for closing costs and the first years insurance. Participants must have a household income of 120% or less of the area median income.

## **Project Now SFOOR**

The Single-Family, Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation (SFOOR) program provides grants to low-income homeowners for major home repairs that would otherwise not be affordable to them, including plumbing, electrical or heating systems, roofs and gutters, porches, insulation and improving accessibility. Participants must meet certain income requirements and occupy the dwelling receiving the rehabilitation, be current on their property taxes and mortgages and possess insurance on the property.

## **Low-Income and Historic Tax Credit Development**

In order to make development more attractive to developers, the City should encourage properties owners to utilize any tax credit options they may have. Both of these tax credit programs can positively impact the future of Old Chicago.

Historic Tax credits can assist developers to redevelop historic properties within the Old Chicago area, preserving the character in the neighborhood. Properties must be on the National Registry of Historic Places and be an income producing (rental) property to receive a federal tax credit of 20% of all renovation costs. There are also incentives administered by the State of Illinois for owner-occupied residential properties.

Low-Income tax credits are also available, and may be used in conjunction with historic tax credits. This federal tax credit is administered by IHDA, who distributes approximately \$14.5 million to the State of Illinois, excluding Chicago.

## **5.2 Potential Tools for Redevelopment**

### **Retail Grants**

Retail grants assist the development of new business in the area, or existing businesses looking to expand. They often are calculated based on the number of full time equivalent jobs created and from new improvements and are for retail-oriented expenditures, such as cash registers.

## **City as Developer**

Private developers are often reluctant to go into a new area that is perceived to be risky and heavy subsidies are often required to entice developers to take on the risk and proceed with the project. The City of Rock Island, the Housing Authority, another civic entity such as a non-profit development corporation (as recommended in the Housing Authority's Asset Management Plan), GROWTH, or IHDA could act as the first developer to build in the area, targeting specific sites within the redevelopment area. This proactive, catalytic approach allows the civic developer to calm developer fears about entering an area while giving the City ultimate control of the location, process and prospective homeowners/tenants.

Long-term residents are critical to an area's redevelopment and eventual success. Housing authorities have often focused on multifamily buildings and few have assisted capable residents to move on and purchase a home. Civic entities should develop a mix of housing types, including single family homes, apartments and duplexes, allowing the City to target a larger audience and capture residents who want to stay in the area but are not able to find adequate housing options. It also allows residents to graduate into a high level of housing while remaining in the neighborhood. The goal of this is to assist existing residents achieve homeownership in the New Old Chicago area while encouraging other residents to consider moving to the area.

Since the civic developer would be providing assistance or a subsidy, it has the ability to select residents most appropriate for the area and to require qualification of potential home buyers. Requirements often include homeowner training sessions and a minimum housing tenure to ensure residents will remain in the area. This selection process is currently required by Project Now and GROWTH.

Additionally, since a civic entity is developing the project and acting in the best interest of the City of Rock Island, the City has the ability to fast track the approval and permitting process. This expedited process has occurred in the past and should continue in the future.

## **Lease to Own Programs**

Based on Cleveland's Housing Network's Lease Purchase Program, these types of programs are intended to create long-term residents immediately by allowing renters to purchase homes at a below-market price after renting for several years. The process also allows residents to move-up to homeownership and have built-in equity at the end of the renting period.

The process is a public/private partnership that utilizes developers building single family homes that meet federal standards for affordable housing. The developer applies for federal low-income tax credits, which are received for a period of fifteen years; these funds are used to subsidize construction costs. After the fifteen year period, the developer sells the house to the resident at a price below the market rate; Cleveland's Housing Network is able to sell houses at 1/3 market value.

This approach is appealing to developers as the risk is significantly reduced. The process is appealing to residents who are looking to own but have not had previous opportunities, and the developer is able to have pre-screened buyers in hand prior to construction. Federal tax credits, a rental income stream for 15 years, and a predetermined sale of the asset combine to make an attractive prospect for the developer.

## **5.3 Tools for Retaining Residents**

The goal of all redevelopment activities is to increase the aesthetic quality, social activity, functionality, safety and desirability of a neighborhood. When a redevelopment effort is successful, there are financial implications for residents and property owners. The improvements to a neighborhood create a more desirable place and market forces respond by typically increasing the value of properties. As market value of a property increases, so does its tax burden to the owner. Many property owners are happy to pay the increased taxes in exchange for the neighborhood improvements; some sell their property capitalizing on the increased value; low-income residents wishing to stay in their property may struggle to afford these increases. While any increase in taxes is expected slowly and over many years, it still will result in an increase. The following strategies are options that may help reduce the burden on existing residents.

## **Tax Abatement**

Tax abatement programs are intended to allow residents to improve their properties or rental units without property tax consequences for a given period of time. The following concepts are possible methods of achieving this goal.

*It should be noted that the City of Rock Island only has the capability of abating its portion of a resident's property tax bill. The school district, county, and any other taxing entity's components of the property tax bill may reflect new development and subsequently increase. In addition, certain tax abatement scenarios may present obstacles and may not be possible if they are used in conjunction with a TIF district.*

### **Option Tax Abatement Program**

The concept of the Option Tax Abatement Program is to reduce property taxes of existing residents while assembling parcels for new development in specific locations. This program can work in the best interest of all involved parties, the City of Rock Island, the resident and the neighborhood as a whole.

In this concept, a parcel's property tax can be waived or subsidized in exchange for granting long term control of the property to the City. The resident and the City enter into an agreement where the City's portion or all of the property tax will be paid to the taxing authorities in exchange for the City having the right to purchase the property in the future. The agreement could be changed to allow for resident relocation to a new or newly renovated home in the New Old Chicago area instead of the City purchasing the house.

From the City's perspective, one of the most difficult tasks of encouraging and assisting development is assembling the land. A single owner refusing to sell, or constantly raising the price can halt development projects in their tracks. Property control is required before significant development progress can occur.

From the resident's perspective, the program is attractive as it allows the neighborhood to develop and improve around them, with no impact on their property taxes.

From the neighborhood's perspective, the program works because it allows the City to have control of properties without immediately removing residents. Residents would only change location immediately before a new project begins.

### **Development Incentive Tax Abatement**

This tax abatement program encourages development by abating new taxes incurred from the improvement or redevelopment of a property. This program rewards improvement of properties financially through reduction of the portion of taxes attributed to the improvement or redevelopment.

In this program, the assessed value of a newly developed/redeveloped/improved property is compared with its value prior to work commencing. The difference between the two values is the portion of the property taxes that is eligible for abatement. Several versions of abatement could be used

The amount of the abatement can be set at a specific percent (such as 50%), or vary depending on the amount of improvement that was undertaken on the property. For example, the following could be an abatement schedule for varying improvement amounts:

<i>Increase in Assessed Value</i>	<i>Abatement Amount (%)</i>
\$7,500-\$50,000	50%
\$50,000-\$100,000	60%
\$100,000-\$150,000	70%
\$150,000-\$200,000	80%
\$200,000-\$400,000	90%
\$400,000+	100%

Another version of this program could mirror the City's Tax Rebate program but apply to major renovations instead of new construction.

### **General Tax Abatement**

A general tax abatement strategy is intended to minimize the impact of adjacent development on owner-occupied properties. In this scenario, tax increases are minimized to prevent residents from being displaced due to increased tax burdens.

While this program may possess the potential to prevent displacement, it does little to encourage additional residential redevelopment and renovation within the New Old Chicago neighborhood. This type of abatement effectively makes it financially beneficial to residents to not improve their homes.

### **Alternative Grants: Targeted Improvements**

There may be alternative programs for distributing grants to low-income home-owners that offset increases in property taxes. This approach is not as direct and it may not always result in a one-to-one offset. For example, if a home-owner's tax bill increased by \$300, there may be some other home-owner expense (such as repairing a roof or a furnace) that could be paid for through a City sponsored program. The program would have to be carefully restricted to low-income home owners within the immediate improvement area. This program might be referred to as a Targeted Improvement Neighborhood. While more complicated, in the end this program may, in fact, create a higher neighborhood value by allowing taxes to increase and, at the same time, making needed improvements to properties immediately adjacent to new development.



## 6. APPENDIX

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

Date of Meetings: August 3, 2005

A series of meetings were held between representatives of PDI and numerous community and neighborhood stakeholders. The purpose of the meetings was to give PDI a better understanding of the important issues facing the area. Following below is a summary of some of the main points emphasized by the meeting participants. The comments are not listed in any particular priority order.

#### **Neighborhood's Positive Characteristics**

- Families and friends pulling together in tough times: sense of community
- Neighborhood's location within the region a plus: in center, near a bridge, near downtown. Parkway provides good auto access.
- Good police-resident relationships
- Better police protection than in the past
- Good people
- Church of Peace (12<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup>)
- Active community members
- Pockets of pride and maintenance
- Crime has decreased substantially – worst offenders off the streets

## **Neighborhood's Negative Characteristics**

- Empty lots
- Area near 10<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. particularly bad: tear down and redevelop
- Run-down housing
- One-way streets hurt business
- Loss of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue shopping center (used to be center of community – closed in 1960s): dept. store, pharmacy, theater, synagogue
- Neighborhood cannot support much business
- Erosion of neighborhood shopping areas
- Bad neighborhood image – many will not visit
- Drug use and sales – especially on 8th Ave between 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> St
- People afraid to call police to report crimes except in the most dire situations
- Tavern at 12<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup>
- Police not all that visible
- Lack of trees in some areas
- Cars parked in places for multiple years/abandoned
- Don't really know neighbors
- Vandalism

## **Future Development (Good)**

- Single family residential, multi-family (townhouse preferable). Should be affordable to the average RI resident.
- Apartments (small buildings, don't overwhelm area)
- Grocery
- Retail
- Service businesses: fast food ok
- An active recreation facility: like a YMCA
- Demand for storage businesses
- Assisted living so elderly can stay in neighborhood.
- Mixed income housing ok– screen tenants?
- Desirable commercial on 11<sup>th</sup> St won't happen until there is a pride of

ownership and maintenance in the area.

- Many existing businesses are isolated: need to cluster activity into business district(s) Create “Old Chicago Village” near 11<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Start with job creation
- More neighborhood green space needed

### **City Actions**

- City has no funds to make real changes
- Very deteriorated homes (beyond restoration) should be torn down
- City should leverage any funds they have – need joint partnerships
- City doesn’t enforce maintenance – neighbors have to report each other. City needs to be more aggressive in getting people to clean up property.
- Encourage residents to use programs that provide assistance for property renovation. Many people don’t know what’s available. Others resist because they would have to pay late taxes, fees, etc. to qualify.
- Get rid of one-way streets
- The income threshold for city loans is too low.
- City needs to fix up city streets and sidewalks.

### **Other Comments**

- Before the railroad there was residential along the water
- Rock Island, in general, has little shopping opportunity
- Sewer and bedrock problems in some areas – sewers back up and bedrock in some locations is cost-prohibitive for redevelopment (Habitat for Humanity)
- Need younger families with students, declining enrollment in schools since the 80s. Currently closing schools
- Neighborhood has many elderly residents who are property owners. Their homes are being bought up by landlords so the percentage of owner-occupied housing is decreasing.
- A new elementary school is being considered at Franklin Fields (ideal to be pushed out to 11<sup>th</sup> St (may mean closing another school elsewhere?) 2 to 5-year timeframe
- Battered women’s housing project may make things worse – located too close to available drugs; compiling potentially bad uses in one location
- Extend downtown to meet neighborhood – start strategically
- Connections to the river important
- Rents range from \$200 to \$450? Home top values at \$40k?



## **Design Preference Survey**

The Design Preference Survey was held September 7, 2005 in conjunction with the second New Old Chicago Steering Committee Meeting.

The participants rated 78 images in five categories and discussed why they scored the images as they did. The design preference results are a general indicator of respondents' preference of various architectural styles, site layouts, streets types, and public spaces. The results were tabulated immediately following the meeting and were used as an indicator of desired development types for New Old Chicago.

The images on the following pages represent the highest and lowest ranked for each category.

## Residential Character: Single Family

### Highest Rated Images



### Lowest Rated Images



Thirteen images of single family houses were shown to the respondents. The general preference was a more traditional urban model of housing; homes more closely spaced on small lots. Images dominated by driveways and garages were rated lower than others, while maintenance and landscape also factored in.

## Residential Character: Multifamily

### *Highest Rated Images*



### *Lowest Rated Images*



Several characteristics that positively impacted multifamily images are evident from the scores. Highly rated images had neighborhood scale, and typically exhibited a more traditional architectural style with elements such as pitched roofs, gables, porches and landscaping. Low ranked images typically featured larger building with little distinguishing features between differentiate between units.

# Commercial

*Highest Rated Images*



*Lowest Rated Images*



Highly ranked commercial images were generally buildings that responded to the street but were not dominated by the automobile. Pedestrian accessible retail was well received and mixed use buildings with office or residential above retail were also found to be desirable. Commercial environments dominated by cars and signage were not ranked highly.

# Parking

## Highest Rated Images



## Lowest Rated Images



Preferred parking was on street parking with street trees, decorative paving, pedestrian level lighting and other street equipment and bump-outs. Well-landscaped lots were also desired. Large paved parking areas in front of buildings with little or no landscaping were not preferred by the respondents.

## Streetscape/Landscape

### Highest Rated Images



### Lowest Rated Images



Preferred streetscape images included a mix of seating areas, landscaping relating to the surrounding areas and walkways sufficiently wide and planted along their path. Higher-rated images also featured elements that encourage people to inhabit and use the space.