

City of Warrenville, Illinois

For a Visit, Or a Lifetime...

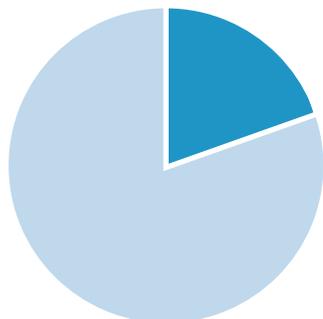
Strategic/Economic Development Plan



Cantera Office Development



Report 3



Economic Development Strategic Plan Input Report

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May 2012 Neighborhood Dialogues



Introduction

Preparation of the City of Warrenville Strategic / Economic Development Plan has been a very inclusive effort with broad community input. The process was initiated with detailed resident surveying and neighborhood dialogues. Subsequent tasks secured input from Warrenville governmental and community stakeholders. The areas of importance (themes) identified in those steps were:

- ▶ Economic Development
- ▶ Open Space and the Environment
- ▶ City Finances
- ▶ Flooding and Stormwater
- ▶ City Infrastructure and Utilities
- ▶ Public Safety

The findings of those input tasks have been summarized in the previously prepared reports: Resident Strategic Plan Input Report and the Specialized Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report. This report summarizes public input steps focusing on the theme of economic development.

TIMELINE

JANUARY 2014
Facilitation begins with a document review, staff and officials training, and analysis of resident input.

APRIL 2014
Consultant and designated City staff meet with the overlapping taxing bodies.

MAY 2014
City staff hosts two specialized stakeholder input meetings.

JUNE 2014
Consultant meets with key representatives of City departments.

JULY 2014
Consultant completes meetings with economic development focus groups.

Purpose

In order to delve deeper into the topic of economic development, a series of focus group meetings were conducted over the summer of 2014 with representatives of different facets of the business community in Warrentville including:

- ▶ Local Business Owners
- ▶ Business Owners in the Cantera Development
- ▶ Real Estate Brokers / Developers
- ▶ Hospitality Industry Representatives
- ▶ Choose DuPage (Countywide economic development organization)

The topic of economic development is highlighted as part of this process because of its importance in supporting the quality of life of Warrentville residents – both in terms of generating tax revenue and providing for the commercial needs of the community. In that regard, the businesses in Warrentville (or of any city) are a valuable parts of the community and highly vested in its future. Understanding the perspectives and needs of the business community, therefore, is important to strategic planning.

Input drawn from discussions with the businesses community can be expected in some ways to differ from those of residents and local governments – perhaps even be at odds with those views. Yet incorporating the business community’s perspective into planning for the City (long and short term) is essential. How it is coordinated with the overall needs and goals for Warrentville is to be addressed in preparing the Strategic / Economic Development Plan and subsequent City policy, regulatory, and implementation efforts.

Focus Group Participants

The various perspectives to be sought for participation in the economic development focus groups were developed by the consultant team and City staff. The intent was to gather those representing large and small companies, businesses located specifically in the Cantera development and throughout the City, and those that had been in the area for a long time and those that were newer to the region. The categories and types of organizations represented by the participants are:

Local Businesses

- Local Retailers (grocery, salon, auto repair, marine sales)
- West DuPage Chamber of Commerce
- Small commercial building owner
- Local financial institution
- Brewer / restaurant owner

Businesses in the Cantera Development

- Professional services firm
- Medical facility

Real estate brokers / developers

- Large property owners
- Real estate developers / brokers
- Property managers

Hospitality industry

- Local hotels
- DuPage Convention and Visitors Bureau

Choose DuPage (Countywide economic development organization)



Hyatt Place

Summary of Focus Group Input

As with previous public input discussions, the economic development focus groups identified a number of strengths that make Warrentville as a desirable place to live – noting also that this helps make it a desirable place to locate a business. Factors cited include the convenient location, attractive open space, and supportive municipal government.

A differentiation within the comments made by those participating in the economic development focus groups can be found in factors such as location and type of business. More specifically, the input highlights the different perspectives and needs of those businesses located in and around the Cantera development and those located elsewhere in the City. This is neither surprising nor unusual. Most communities have multiple business districts that have differing characters, strengths, weaknesses and needs, reflective of their age and location.

Former Navistar Building (left) and RR Donnelley Building (right)



Businesses located throughout Warrentville were developed in a variety of eras and mostly are found along arterial or collector roadways. Most businesses and commercial properties throughout the community are owned and operated by entrepreneurs – rather than national or regional chains. As noted in the detailed focus group input below, the challenges and opportunities for those businesses are not unusual for commercial development in comparable communities. Challenges noted regarding day-to-day operations included advertising, visibility, and access to their properties. Opportunities often reflect enhancements that would require support or direct action of the City or greater market place: increased traffic volumes, additional development nearby, property maintenance of neighboring sites, or navigating development regulations.

The perspectives and needs of business and property owners in Cantera reflect the form and location of that development, and certainly are made in a different context from those of local businesses. Cantera is relatively new, having been started in the early 1990's, and its development form reflects a distinctive market (a modern corporate office park with large lots that accommodate large businesses, company headquarters, restaurants, entertainment facilities, hotels, etc.). As such, operational issues and needs discussed in the focus group were at a larger scale and reflected concerns of corporations. For example, filling vacancies for commercial office spaces that are measured in tens or hundreds of thousands of square feet. Also, traffic in the Cantera area was raised as a concern related to excessive congestion discouraging customers (rather than a need for more traffic and potential customers). These factors highlight the different economic development needs of the Cantera area and local business districts, and are reflected in insights provided through the focus group discussions.



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Development in Cantera

Detailed Focus Group Input

BUSINESS CLIMATE

The overall economic climate in DuPage County was described as sound; yet there is little doubt that just as in the rest of the country, recovery from the Great Recession is gradual. However, a number of economic strengths in DuPage County were noted by participants and include:

- Good quality of life
- Low unemployment rate
- Highly educated, high quality work force
- Excellent transportation access to the region
- Low cost of doing business
- Diverse economy
- Close proximity to Chicago

Similarly, Warrenville was described as having a number of strengths:

- Very good municipal services
- Good schools
- Engaged community
- Location along I-88
- Safe area for people to meet (both a reality and perception)
- Generally economical area (parking, food, hotel rooms, taxes, etc.)
- Being close to Naperville, but being a different type of community
- Being in / near a natural environment
- Easy access to Downtown Chicago by train

ECONOMIC STRENGTHS

1 HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

2 LOW UNEMPLOYMENT

3 EDUCATED WORK FORCE

4 EXCELLENT TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

5 LOW COST OF DOING BUSINESS

6 DIVERSE ECONOMY

7 CLOSE PROXIMITY TO CHICAGO

PERSPECTIVES ON THE REGIONAL MARKET

- The Cantera development was noted by company and owners association representatives to be doing well in terms of occupancy and level of business activity. As with other areas, Cantera was impacted by the economic downturn, but is recovering. Due to the size of businesses in the development, the loss of a single user (such as Navistar which moved out in 2012) can create a large “hole” in the market. Conversely, a new business can consume significant vacant space (such as the recent arrival of EN Engineering).
- Discussions confirmed the perspective that Cantera is a high profile, high quality development in the region. From an economic development perspective Cantera puts Warrenville on the radar of numerous large corporations due to the visibility, access, nearby business services (hotels), and location of the development.
- The City of Naperville looms large as an economic activity area in the west central part of DuPage County. Its downtown, retail districts, hotels, etc. create a gravity that draws business, retailing, and activity. Those interviewed felt shoppers go to Naperville because there are desirable clusters of businesses including many places to eat.
- In concert with observations about Naperville, focus group participants commonly noted that Warrenville has a distinctive and positive reputation for business and benefits from being a different community than Naperville. Warrenville strengths commonly noted include: open space, small town character, less traffic, and responsible local government.
- Interstate 88 was identified as a significant economic strength for Warrenville and surrounding areas, specifically areas around the Winfield and Route 59 interchanges. Once improvements are completed, the Route 59 interchange area is expected to see significant new development and be a benefit for the area.
- Hospitality industry representatives of hotels in and around the Cantera development note they are performing solidly and have a goal of continued growth. They note that the number of hotels in the area creates a synergistic effect between them (being able to refer potential customers to another property if they are filled) and the nearby corporate properties. Available nearby hotel rooms were cited as helpful in drawing new commerce to the area. Likewise, hotels look to increase their booked room nights by attracting more activity from existing businesses, and capturing new activity from businesses that will come to the area.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE LOCAL MARKET

Local businesses noted a range of challenges and concern. As noted below, some reflect the general economy while others are particular to the area:

- ▶ Relatively low traffic volumes in certain areas that have been identified for future commercial development.
- ▶ Sales performance being down or not meeting expectations.
- ▶ Limited amount of available land for development.
- ▶ Limited visibility by passing vehicles (particularly for those businesses located along Route 59).
- ▶ Appearance of older strip malls as poor and detracting from community image and desirability.
- ▶ Lack of housing growth and the need for more residential rooftops / density and potential customers.
- ▶ Existing Diehl Road retail/restaurant business area effectively satisfy a significant portion of the Warrenville market demand for these types of uses.
- ▶ Forest Preserves exclude growth opportunities. While an attractive amenity they create a one-sided commercial market area.
- ▶ The most active local area of development (for residential uses) is further east. One participant described Glen Ellyn as the current “hot town” for housing. However, local housing markets were identified as performing well in Warrenville for homes in the \$400,000 range.
- ▶ Traffic was noted as a challenge in the Cantera area (as opposed to concerns of low traffic volumes in other business areas), particularly efficient access to and from restaurants in the area south of Interstate – 88 at lunch within one hour is difficult. In addition, high traffic volumes there were noted as potentially discouraging for many customers who may patronize retailers in the area.
- ▶ Businesses away from I-88 noted that much of their successful advertising is done by word of mouth because visibility and access are limited.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE LOCAL MARKET (CONTINUED)

Participants representing smaller, local businesses identified several opportunities they felt would support existing businesses and attract new ones:

- ▶ There was a general sense that Warrenville would benefit from successful clusters of businesses – either new ones or improvement to existing areas currently with a “run down” appearance.
- ▶ A destination retailer, perhaps a higher-end grocery store, was noted as desirable for attracting shoppers.
- ▶ Additional population in the community was described as needed to make the community more appealing for new commercial/retail/restaurant tenants.
- ▶ The desire to replace City well water with Lake Michigan water was discussed (as was the significant costs involved in such a switch).
- ▶ Having a place in the community for people to gather was noted frequently in the discussions. While this may not be seen as creating a direct economic benefit, the sense of the group was that encouraging people to attend community activities in Warrenville would help residents and visitors focus on the City and increase visibility of businesses.
- ▶ In addition to increased business from corporate customers, those in the hospitality industry see room for growth in other sectors. Stays from new non-corporate customers attending local events (weekend and weekday) may include: personal family events like weddings, regional events such as sports tournaments, and local attractions such as recreational or cultural areas (a trailhead on the Prairie Path was specifically noted).
- ▶ Needs for supporting business identified by representatives of the hospitality industry included increased number of local or regional events – understanding that some are outside the control of local industry or government. The group also indicated that additional food / restaurant options would be beneficial. They noted that most of the nearby options are in the “fast casual” category of dining. Interest from their customers indicated a need for more family oriented or white tablecloth restaurants.
- ▶ More diverse and higher density housing stock than currently exists was noted as a way to increase the customer base and provide additional housing options for those who work in the City.

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WARRENVILLE AS A PLACE TO DO BUSINESS

Warrenville and its municipal officials (elected, appointed, and staff) consistently were rated well overall as supportive of businesses by focus group participants.

- The City's development approval process was specifically noted as predictable and well managed. This was particularly the case for larger businesses. Those having challenges with the process were more likely to be smaller business operators, which is common in communities. For example, signage regulations were identified by a number of participants as restrictive regarding electronic changeable copy signs and permitted sign size, which is consistent with concerns raised regarding visibility to customers.
- City services were highly rated (particularly snow plowing, which was topical given the amount of snow seen during the most recent winter).
- Representatives of business and property owners in the Cantera development noted having a good, but not active working relationship with the City; they would support and expect to find benefit from more regular communication with City officials.

Warrenville City Hall (left) and Warrenville Public Library (right)



- Warrenville is broadly seen as a safe place. In particular, participants in the hospitality industry focus group noted that their customers in the Cantera area feel safe. However, the perception of safety is diminished by those developments and businesses in the City where the appearance of older strip malls is poor. They detract from community image, desirability and perceptions of safety.
- The small town feel of the City is strong in the community, and helps to make Warrenville's name a good one in the region. Having many of the locational advantages of the I-88 corridor and being the community that is "not Naperville" was described as a worthwhile niche.

Refined Goal Statements

Input summarized in this interim report suggests a further refining of some goal statements originally presented in the Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report. As noted in that report, these goal statements were to evolve as outreach activities took place with specialized stakeholder, business community groups, and City Council members. What follows is a list of goal statements as presented in the Specialized Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report. In some cases suggestions are provided on how those statements might be refined in the City of Warrenville Strategic / Economic Development Strategic Plan based on economic development focus group input.

GOAL 1



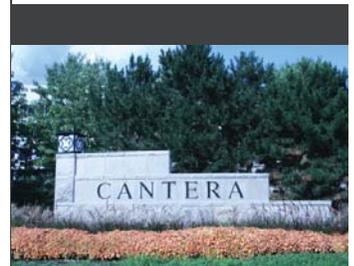
Economic Development

Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report

“Enhance the City’s tax base, increase local shopping and dining opportunities, expand the City’s labor market, and create attractive gathering places by:

- actively planning for and aggressively encouraging well designed and environmentally responsible commercial development in the Route 59 corridor;
- mixed use redevelopment in the Old Town/Civic Center; and
- the rehabilitation, improvement, and occupancy of older vacant commercial properties throughout the community.”

- ▶ Input from the economic development focus groups was consistent with the above goal statement, and highlighted the challenges to achieving the goal. One such challenge is focusing on new commercial development along Route 59. Obstacles noted to reaching this goal include multiple property ownerships, environmental conditions (wetlands), character of nearby commercial centers, and overall lack of strength in the retail market. These barriers to attracting new commercial development are not insignificant and suggest that accomplishing this goal will be difficult and long term.



REFINED GOAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 1

Economic Development (continued)

Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report

- ▶ An element of the goal highlighted through the focus groups was rehabbing and enhancing older commercial properties (vacant and occupied) throughout the community. Commercial centers in the City that were built in a different era and reflect deferred maintenance are counter to the goals of having attractive gathering places. Further, they diminish the overall character of the City's commercial corridors and its perceived quality. The third bullet point in this goal statement could be edited so that it is not limited to just "vacant" commercial properties.
- ▶ The goal, as stated, provides no reference to the Cantera development at the south end of the City. Discussions with focus groups highlight that this area is a significant economic engine for Warrenville. Consideration should be given to adding a fourth bullet point to this goal statement that recognizes the need to support existing retail, restaurant, and entertainment businesses and encourage additional complimentary development in this area where appropriate.



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*Walgreens at Route 59 and
Batavia Road.*

REFINED GOAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 2

City Finances

Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report

“Uphold the City’s record of fiscal conservatism by adopting a balanced budget overall and at the fund level, ensuring a relatively low cost of living for Warrenville residents, incurring little to no debt, and maintaining a diversified revenue stream.”

- ▶ Comments from the focus group meetings support (and applaud) the City’s sound fiscal practices and relatively low cost of living. However, the input also suggests a more active economic development program be in order for the City to support its tax base and attract desired development. As that program is yet undefined, a goal locking into specific financial practices, such as maintaining current fund levels or a set amount of debt may not be appropriate. Consideration should be given to expanding this goal statement to document the City’s commitment to the development and implementation of a more formal economic development program as a way of achieving the desired outcomes identified in draft goal statement.

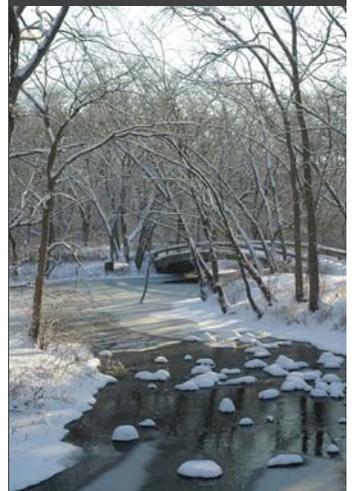
GOAL 3

Open Space and Environment

Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report

“Preserve and protect the natural features, open space, and wooded areas that contribute significantly to the City’s overall character, setting, and uniqueness, and seek opportunities to showcase, access, and promote these components as important and valuable community assets.”

- ▶ Since the natural features in and around Warrenville were repeatedly highlighted as assets to the community during economic development focus group discussions it is recommended that that this goal statement remain the same.



*West Branch of the DuPage River.
Photo credit: Maurice Weiser*

REFINED GOAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 4



Flooding and Storm Water

Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report

“Improve flood protection and reduce residential and business flooding in the West Branch of the DuPage River Watershed, require environmentally responsible development that effectively controls the volume and improves the quality of stormwater runoff, and address neighborhood drainage issues.”

- ▶ Input from the economic development focus groups did not address this issue.

GOAL 5



City Infrastructure and Utilities

Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report

“Repair, maintain, replace, and strategically upgrade the City’s physical infrastructure assets in a well-planned, coordinated, and timely manner that is fiscally responsible, enhances public safety and supports increased private property values.”

- ▶ Infrastructure related comments raised in the economic development focus group discussions highlighted an interest in securing Lake Michigan water for Warrenville. However, the discussion also acknowledged the high cost of securing that service. While those expressing this desire were not aware of the detailed analysis the City previously performed on the costs associated with securing Lake Michigan water for Warrenville, they did acknowledge that the cost would be extremely high when compared to existing municipal well water costs. Unless the City Council chooses to reevaluate these costs, the goal statement should not be modified based on this input.



Williams Road Bridge (top) and Towne Tap (bottom).

REFINED GOAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 6

P Public Safety

Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report

“Provide excellent, proactive, public safety service throughout the community, focusing on addressing the perception of gang activity and drug use.”

- ▶ As with the specialized stakeholders, economic development focus group participants highlighted that Warrentville was a safe community and that made it a good place to live and do business. The issue raised was one of perceived lack of safety related to outmoded and poorly maintained commercial centers in the community. Some centers include land use that are considered not conducive to attracting shoppers. This suggests augmenting the goal to include land use and physical conditions of business areas to the safety related concerns.





Conclusion

This Economic Development Strategic Plan Input Report is step three in assessing the community's perspectives and needs regarding Warrentville's future. The interim report highlights the area of economic development and identifies relevant observations from those in the community with firsthand knowledge of the business climate in Warrentville. How input from the focus groups may change draft goal statements has been noted. Ultimately, these findings will be combined with those from other input reports to support drafting of the goals, priorities, and specific outcomes that will be included in the final City of Warrentville Strategic/Economic Development Plan.



Concerts in the Commons.

Appendix: Focus Group Participants

ATTENDEES AT JUNE 26, 2014 BUSINESS OUTREACH MEETING

LOCAL BUSINESSES (OUTSIDE CANTERA)

BUSINESS NAME	REPRESENTATIVE(S)
Two Brothers Brewery and Tap House	Jason Ebel, Owner
Water Works II	Walt Matan and Anthony Kosi, Owners
Mr. Jim's Service Center	Jim Mehling, Owner
Family Foods	Phil Salerno, Owner
Heidi's Hair Salon	Darcy Pinedo, Employee
Family Dental Care	Sue Tripp, Owner
Northstar Credit Union	Lloyd Fredendall, President
Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce	Patricia Haskins, President

ATTENDEES AT JUNE 26, 2014 BUSINESS OUTREACH MEETING

IN CANTERA

BUSINESS NAME	REPRESENTATIVE(S)
Cadence Cancer Treatment Facility Cantera	Larry Bell
EN Engineering	Thomas Ziegenfus, President

ATTENDEES AT JUNE 26, 2014 BUSINESS OUTREACH MEETING

REAL ESTATE DEVELOPERS/BROKERS

BUSINESS NAME	REPRESENTATIVE(S)
Daniel and Associates	Dan Czuba
Cantera Owners Association	Christopher Wilimitis
MaeCliff Project	Tim Brugh, Developer
JR Walker Development	Jeff Walker, Owner/CEO
Duke Realty & Development	Susanne Bergdoll
Commercial Group R.E. Inc.	Mike Phillips
Jones Lang LaSalle	Jeff Shay
Remax	Fred Nelson

Appendix: Focus Group Participants

ATTENDEES AT APRIL 25, 2014 WARRENVILLE HOSPITALITY MEETING

BUSINESS NAME	REPRESENTATIVE(S)
Springhill Suites	Richard Mazur/Katya Posega
Hilton Garden Inn/Residence Inn	Tricia Meyer
Residence Inn	Christina Swanson
Hilton Garden Inn	Lou DeMarchi
Hyatt	Shannon Schurr
Warrenville Historical Society	Sara Phalen
Warrenville Park District	Karey Ross

ATTENDEES AT JULY 1, 2014 BUSINESS OUTREACH MEETING – CHOOSE DUPAGE

ORGANIZATION NAME	REPRESENTATIVE(S)
Choose DuPage	Greg Bedalov, President & CEO
Choose DuPage	Bryan Gay, Economic Development Director