

## **Section 2:**

# **Community Outreach**

Round Lake's Downtown Plan provided an ideal opportunity to introduce the entire Village to the Downtown planning process. Community outreach and citizen participation is the foundation upon which the planning process is built. Community input helps to guide the Plan and create support for its objectives and ultimate recommendations.

This section describes the results of the community outreach activities designed to involve property owners, business persons, and residents in the planning program. This section provides a highlight of the outreach activities and presents a summary of the most common responses from participants. A detailed summary of all comments from all outreach activities is on file with the Village.

Community Outreach activities have included:

- a) Community Workshop;
- b) Key Person Interviews;
- c) Downtown Business Survey

### **Community Workshop:**

A *Community Workshop* for the Downtown Round Lake area was conducted with the residents of Round Lake on March 6, 2004. Approximately 65 people attended and participated in the workshop. The workshop was designed to encourage residents to communicate their concerns and feelings about their community and the downtown area during the early stages of the Downtown planning process.

This section provides a summary of the results of the *Community Workshop*. The summary reflects the opinions and comments stated during workshop dialogue and includes a summary of participants' responses to the workshop questionnaire. Below, each workshop question is presented, along with the most popular responses.

1. **Identify five (5) issues or concerns confronting the Downtown Area that the Village should consider as it begins**

### ***developing the Round Lake Downtown Plan.***

The most commonly cited issues and concerns, in order of frequency of response, include:

- ❑ Traffic related issues
- ❑ Need better commercial/retail
- ❑ Lack of parking
- ❑ Need better urban design features
- ❑ Need to update existing buildings
- ❑ Need more/new civic uses
- ❑ Improve Metra station and service
- ❑ Need roadway improvements
- ❑ Need a variety of restaurants
- ❑ Businesses recruitment and retention
- ❑ Establish better bicycle/pedestrian access

2. ***List, in order of importance, the three (3) most important issues discussed thus far.***

The top three issues, in order, were:

- ❑ Traffic
- ❑ Parking
- ❑ Variety of retail/business

Other frequently mentioned issues included:

- ❑ Metra station improvements
- ❑ Stormwater issues
- ❑ Appropriate architecture
- ❑ Pedestrian environment
- ❑ Cultural/Civic Center
- ❑ Infrastructure
- ❑ Walking/Bicycle paths
- ❑ Streetscape
- ❑ Cedar Lake Road

3. ***Identify three (3) specific projects or actions that you would like to see undertaken within the Downtown Round Lake Area.***

The most frequent responses were:

- ❑ Restaurants
- ❑ Cultural/Civic Center
- ❑ Cedar Lake Road Improvements

Other frequently mentioned issues included:

- ❑ Train station improvements
- ❑ Retail
- ❑ Unique/specialty retail shops
- ❑ Variety of retail
- ❑ Traffic Improvements
- ❑ Upgrade appearance of existing business/residences
- ❑ Infrastructure
- ❑ Streetscape
- ❑ Town Square

4. ***What are the primary strengths and assets of the Village of Round Lake and the Downtown Area?***

The most common responses were:

- ❑ Train station
- ❑ Lots of available space to create downtown area
- ❑ Diverse mix of ethnic groups
- ❑ Forest preserve
- ❑ Foresight of current Village administration
- ❑ Park District
- ❑ Growing community
- ❑ Leadership and vision of Mayor/Board of Trustees
- ❑ Location
- ❑ Small town feel
- ❑ Growth of residential
- ❑ Lakes
- ❑ Park District & library close to downtown area

***Key Person Interviews:***

As a part of the *Community Outreach* phase of the Downtown Round Lake Planning program, confidential interviews were conducted with individuals to discuss conditions and potential within the downtown area. Thirteen individuals who possess various interests and insights into the community were selected. Persons interviewed included residents, representatives from the business community,

and representatives of local institutions, such as schools and social service organizations.

Interviews were conducted on during April and May 2004. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each. Each interviewee was asked a series of questions regarding the community. Additional interviews were conducted via the telephone for those individuals unable to attend one of the two scheduled interview dates.

Overall responses are summarized below.

1. ***What kind of community is Round Lake?***

Interviewees described Round Lake as a typical, middle-class small town. Round Lake is not as affluent as other nearby communities. Most people noted that Round Lake is changing quite a bit. Now, home values are increasing and the population composition is changing with it. The population is shifting from blue collar to more white-collar workers who commute to Chicago. The growth is generally seen as positive, but interviewees suggest that the Village plan for its population growth and consider issues such as traffic.

Round Lake is improving its image, but there is nothing to distinguish Round Lake from nearby communities (such as Round Lake Beach, Round Lake Park, etc). Round Lake needs to develop a strong identity.

2. ***What do you believe are the primary assets and advantages of Downtown Round Lake?***

Most people mentioned the Metra station, which is becoming even more highly used and is an asset that should be maximized. The area's proximity to Chicago was another asset mentioned by interviewees.

According to many of the interviewees, the number of Spanish-speaking establishments (such as the restaurant and bakery) and the increasing Hispanic population are assets that should be built upon.

The people of Round Lake were often mentioned as an asset. Many noted the

increase and change in population. The population is becoming more diverse and white collar.

The fact that Round Lake has a Downtown was mentioned as an advantage. Downtown was described as “Normal Rockwell-esque”. One interviewee noted the recent facelift and pointed out that the Downtown has improved.

**3. *What do you believe are the primary disadvantages of Downtown Round Lake?***

Interviewees pointed out that there is no big draw in Downtown. The competition with nearby malls, outlets, etc makes it difficult to run a retail business. Many people thought that the Downtown needs upscale restaurants. Another commonly-mentioned weakness was the lack of parking and traffic flow, specifically, the rerouting of Cedar Lake Road and the number of railroad crossings. Maintenance was a concern to several interviewees. Some properties are poorly maintained. The lack of roads and access to transportation makes Round Lake difficult to get in and out of, and limits the community from becoming more than a residential community.

Other noted issues include Downtown not being family friendly, too many bars, and stormwater and flooding is a concern.

**4. *Do you consider Downtown Round Lake to be aesthetically pleasing and physically attractive?***

Most of the interviewees commented on the improvements that were done by the Village a few years ago. They felt the area has improved over the last 5-10 years. Most liked the new bricks and lighting, the clock, the new curbs and gutters, the trees and greenery. Other positive comments were that the Downtown is clean and the police do a good job of patrolling the area.

A few interviewees were concerned with property maintenance. Also, several interviewees suggested that the Village

adopt unified design guidelines and assist businesses with façade improvements.

**5. *How would you describe the overall climate for new investment and development in Downtown Round Lake?***

Downtown is not currently a big retail draw. Some consider the local government to be business friendly. The municipal services are good. Currently, people do the minimum to make buildings attractive and functional and don't see much money being put towards capital improvements. The Village is growing very fast and needs to keep up with managing new development.

However, the general sense is that Round Lake is becoming more attractive for investment and development. Lake County is growing overall. The past ten years have been slow, but over the last five years the amount new investment and development has been huge. Property was cheap, but values have exponentially increased. In addition, the growing population base makes it more attractive for retail investment.

**6. *What do you consider to be the single most important issue facing Downtown Round Lake today?***

The most common response to this question was the lack of an anchor downtown. Since not many people work downtown, the challenge is how to get more foot traffic Downtown. Also, the Village should be patient and wait for high quality business.

Parking and traffic flow were commonly-mentioned concerns. Interviewees think that there is a lack of parking in the Downtown area. More Metra parking will be needed eventually. Cedar Lake Road traffic and the number of trains often make traffic get clogged up.

Also mentioned by more than one interviewee was the need for planning in the Downtown area. Planning and future land use goals should be put in place and those plans implemented. Businesses want

to know what will happen in the future before they will invest much money.

**7. *What kind of new development or uses do you want to see take place in Downtown?***

The number one type of development interviewees would like to see is more restaurants (specifically, sit-down, white tablecloth type); followed by several requests for franchises and/or national chains (i.e. Starbucks, Dunkin Donuts, Walgreens).

Other suggestions include: a grocery store; a local bank; a video store; movie theater; clothing stores; small, mom and pop type businesses; a convenience store; a bookstore; an ice cream parlor; some service uses, such as shoe repair, hair salons, dry cleaners; a 3-4 story condominium building with ground floor retail and/or a restaurant; good industry that will provide lots of jobs; a community gathering place (for example, a cultural center, meeting space); more recreational opportunities, such as a picnic area, a bar and grill, sports and recreation facility, etc.

**8. *What kind of new development or uses do you NOT want to see take place in Downtown?***

The most commonly mentioned use was bars/taverns. Several interviewees said that Downtown doesn't need any more bars. Unless an upscale restaurant applies for a liquor license, no more licenses should be handed out. Adult uses were the next-most commonly mentioned use interviewees would not like to see in Downtown, followed by heavy automobile uses (such as a towing company, etc.).

Others included: anything that attracts loitering; more dollar stores, no more restaurants; arcades, gas stations; anything that threatens the walkability of the area; and a thrift store.

**1. *If you had the power to undertake one project or improvement, what would it be?***

Responses to this question varied quite a bit, but the most commonly-mentioned

responses were: a nice community park with a swimming pool, exercise facility, etc.; some sort of public space (tot lot, Memorial Park, Village green, etc); improve facades and adopt and enforce design guidelines; and encourage more mixed-use development (like Downtown Highland Park: build a parking garage, encourage a variety of shops, a theater, etc.). A few interviewees commented on the schools. Improve the schools so much that they become the reason that people move to Round Lake.

Other ideas included: add landscaping around the Metra parking lot and in the medians, add more trees; examine zoning code; develop a pedestrian environment; make the Downtown area into a restaurant district; move some of the auto-oriented businesses out of the Downtown area to another location; improve community pride (make Round Lake different than surrounding communities); make it more family friendly; attract a big grocery store; buy up all of the property on Goodnow Street and expand the Downtown; improve the traffic flow by putting Cedar Lake Round under the railroad tracks, which would open up the property to the west and eliminate the train delays; and finally, amalgamate the five Villages. Round Lake would have to take the lead.

***Downtown Business Survey:***

In April of 2004, a survey was given to all businesses located within the Downtown area. The survey consisted of thirty questions addressing a range of Downtown redevelopment issues. Approximately 33 surveys were returned and tabulated by URS•TPAP, the results of which are summarized below. Significant trends and findings are apparent and can be considered useful in determining overall community interests, desires, and impressions. While it is important to show, whenever possible, results for individual questions in the survey, a quick overview of results helps to identify the emerging trends and issues early on in the

planning process. Generalized responses from all surveys are summarized below.

- ❑ A good number of respondents felt that their store requires improvements to attract customers.
- ❑ New facades and exterior paint were the two most common types of improvements.
- ❑ Central location/good visibility and traffic volume were cited as the primary advantages to having a business located in the Downtown area.
- ❑ Not enough parking was the primary disadvantage to having a business located in the Downtown area.
- ❑ Over half of the respondents said that give the opportunity to move out of the Downtown area, they would not chose to do so.
- ❑ Most respondents didn't see another shopping area as competition, but of those who did, Round Lake Beach/Rollins Road/Route 83 was the area with the most responses.
- ❑ Almost half of the respondents said that they do not need more parking spaces near their store or business.
- ❑ Almost all of the public facilities and services were highly ranked (either good or fair), except for Downtown promotion, parking and other public transportation.
- ❑ Responses to the question "What kind of new developments or uses would you most like to see added to the Downtown area in the future?" varied, but there was some consensus around what types of developments and uses are not wanted (bars/taverns).
- ❑ Traffic/parking was the most commonly cited issue currently facing Downtown.
- ❑ Most respondents feel informed about what is going on in the Village.
- ❑ Most respondents think the Downtown area has improved over the last ten years.