

OrlandParkPatch

Regardless How We Got Here, 9750 Is The Best Option Going Forward

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Clearly, one of the hottest issues in Orland Park right now is the Main Street Triangle project; specifically the 9750 apartment project. I can't remember any other issue that has generated so much debate as this one. Blogs and websites, like this one have presented a variety of opinions on this topic. We have recently have seen an open house, which led to a public hearing on this. Last week Tuesday, a number of citizens attended the public hearing to present their opinions on this to the mayor and village board. While most of the speakers came out against this, intelligent arguments were made on both sides.

Disclosure time: I was one of the speakers who attended last week's hearing and I spoke out in favor of this. I am also a member of the village Plan Commission and I voted in favor of this proposal. While there are many facets to this debate, the Plan Commission is charged with considering whether or not the proposal inconsistent with the village plan. We do not look at financials or the marketing plans of any petitioner.

There are really two separate aspects of this issue. First, should the village be involved in

creating a development at 143rd and LaGrange in the first place? Second, if it does, what should that development be?

The first part of this has been around for quite a while. The mayor and board have long envisioned a mixed use downtown area centered around the Metra station similar to what Tinley Park did along Oak Park Avenue. To do this, the village had to use eminent domain to access the properties needed to make this downtown possible.

Eminent domain is never easy. It upsets people to see businesses that they've been loyal to forced out in the name of "progress." It's fair to say that there are a lot of folks who would prefer to shop at Orland Plaza than a new downtown. I understand. Personally, I think eminent domain is overused to undercut market forces. My opinions aside, there is plenty of legal precedent for the village to use eminent domain for this kind of project.

Politically, this has been an issue for some time. Gerald Maher used it as his primary issue when he ran against Mayor McLaughlin in 2009. McLaughlin won by a two to one margin. In the 2011 trustee race, this was also the primary issue and McLaughlin's slate won, although not with a majority.

The second part of this is the question of what to do now. The debate about whether or not to create a downtown has been decided, so has the debate about eminent domain.

Since the idea of a downtown was conceived, there have been varying proposals for it. Originally, the downtown would consist of condos and townhouses along with some nice retailers and restaurants. Unfortunately, the economy had something to say about this. The condo and townhouse market has dried up along with most other residential markets. It's pretty difficult to attract retailers to a new location when they are downsizing.

A bad economy, downsizing business and a depressed real estate market; this is the hand we're dealt. The question is where do we go from here?

I support this project because, given the current situation, apartments make the most sense. There is a market for high end apartments. The uncertain real estate market has kept people on the sidelines. No longer is there the promise of building equity as there was when most of us bought a home.

An uncertain job market has also kept people on the sidelines. Folks don't want to commit to a home when they don't know where they will end up working. As the economy improves, jobs may open up in a particular field but they may require people to relocate.

Dissenters question why a renter would want to rent in Orland Park instead of trendier places like Lakeview or Lincoln Park. If those places were so great, how come we all moved here?

Orland Park is a safer quieter community. Not every renter lives for the night life. Orland Park residents don't spend thousands of dollars on parking (or parking tickets and tows).

Remember, we don't need thousands of yuppies to flock to Orland Park for this to work. We only need around 300 or so.

The other part of this equation is the village's financial stake in this. I suspect that this is the main point of concern for most opponents of this project and I certainly understand why.

The main advantage of the village putting up the funding is that they will have a lot more control over this project than if the developer did this alone. This is important if you're concerned about the owners going Section 8.

The bottom line is that there is going to be a downtown Orland Park. The 9750 project makes the most sense right now. There is a demand for this, according to the marketing report. Again, you don't need to empty out Bucktown for this to work. All you need are about 300 or so people that want to live in an upscale apartment in a nice safe community.

As the economy improves, retailers and restaurants will have an additional reason to locate in the triangle. If and when the housing market improves and renters want to become buyers, the apartments can be sold as condos. Sold at a profit to the village and the developer.

There have been legitimate arguments made by reasonable people all along the way on this topic. Decisions have been made along the way and now we are at the point where we stand. If we are to go forward on a downtown, the 9750 project is the best way to start this.