

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL  
JUNE 28 AND 29, 2006



CAMPAIGN  
FOR SENSIBLE  
GROWTH



# REMAKING AN HISTORIC CORRIDOR

ARCHER AVENUE/BRIDGEPORT  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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## ULI Chicago

ULI Chicago, a District Council of the Urban Land Institute, has more than 1,300 members in the Chicagoland area who come together to find solutions and build consensus around land-use and development challenges. The Urban Land Institute's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

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## Campaign for Sensible Growth

The Campaign for Sensible Growth is a coalition of government, civic and business organizations promoting strategies to enhance the economic vitality of the greater Chicago region while preserving open space, minimizing the need for costly new infrastructure, and improving the livability of communities.

More than 200 organizations and 1,000 individuals are members of the Campaign, including ULI Chicago. The Campaign is co-chaired by the Metropolitan Planning Council and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

### **The Campaign thanks the following supporters of its technical assistance work:**

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## The Backdrop

For generations Archer Avenue provided a primary route from the Loop to Chicago's southwest side and beyond. The stretch of Archer Avenue between Canal Street and Ashland Avenue, in the Bridgeport neighborhood, enjoyed a retail and commercial heyday and served as a gathering place for the neighborhood.

That changed drastically with the construction of the Stevenson in 1964, which severed the northern section of the neighborhood along the Chicago River, displacing many businesses and homes, and creating a physical and psychological barrier that still predominates. The affects of the Stevenson and years of economic disinvestment along Archer eventually destroyed the neighborhood's pedestrian-friendly environment. Today, the four-lane arterial serves as an alternative to the Stevenson, with few traffic lights and a widely flouted speed limit, presenting an imposing barrier for the community — particularly seniors and children. The mostly commercial district suffers from a patchwork of uses ranging from warehouses to auto repair facilities.



The northeastern section of Archer between Canal and Halsted streets consists of a series of industrial buildings, with the headquarters of Connie's Pizza wedged among them, and a smattering of residential buildings. Southwest of Halsted, there is a mix of Italianate buildings containing older residential and either marginal or vacant commercial spaces.

The bridge carrying traffic along Archer over Ashland Avenue was recently demolished, providing the opportunity for an attractive western gateway into the district and spurring new retail and residential uses at this notorious intersection, once branded by the *Chicago Reader* as the city's "ugliest," before the bridge was demolished.

The construction of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Orange Line in the 1990s greatly improved transit access from Bridgeport to downtown and out toward Midway Airport, but is still an underutilized service that could be a much greater asset for the community.

The 2006 construction of a 27-acre park on a former quarry and landfill also adds to the potential for community improvement and residential development. When complete, Stearns Quarry Park will include a fishing pond and pier, interpretive wetlands, preserved quarry walls with scenic overlooks, more than 1.7 miles of trails, an athletic field and running track, sledding hill, and decorative fountain.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of the area around the Archer Avenue corridor in Bridgeport rose 11 percent, to 33,694, from 1990 to 2000, including a 30



*A once-bustling Archer Avenue corridor — Bridgeport's "Main Street" — is today a shadow of its former self, with the adjacent and parallel Stevenson Expressway (top left) severing the neighborhood to the north and creating a psychological barrier to commerce and pedestrian activity. The corridor has an unwelcoming western gateway (bottom left) and remnants of Main Street appeal (bottom right).*



*Landscaping efforts (left) attempt to soften the harshness of the infrastructure for the Stevenson Expressway. Not obsolete; just underutilized. Viable buildings along Archer Avenue await a market and rezoning (right).*



percent increase (to 10,165) in Latinos and 80 percent increase (to 8,851) in Asian residents. The current demographics are 41 percent non-Hispanic white, 30.2 percent Hispanic and 26.9 percent Asian. Bridgeport also saw a 42 percent increase (to 952) in residents with bachelor's degrees and a 52 percent increase (to 719) in those with graduate degrees; the median family income went up 9 percent (to \$43,335) during the 1990s, while the median housing value spiked 36 percent (to \$138,731). Since 2000, new construction in the area has dramatically increased housing prices.

Redevelopment and infill projects are underway in many adjacent sections of Bridgeport. Residential developments are either completed or underway at Archer Avenue and Canal Street (50 condos over first-floor retail), 2801 S. Halsted (45 units with 7,000 square feet of first-floor retail), 2821 S. Halsted Street (senior suites), 2609 S. Halsted Street (60 units with 10,000 square feet of first-floor retail), 25th and Senour Avenue (64 single-family homes), and 2830 S. Lock Street (40 single-family or town-homes along the Chicago River).

## The Panel's Charge

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) are two-day sessions jointly sponsored by the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Chicago District Council and Campaign for Sensible Growth (Campaign) that recruit experts in such fields as real estate development, urban planning, law, engineering, and environmental issues to provide thoughtful recommendations on a set of questions related to land use and development.

The selected community creates a problem statement that lays out its key questions. Panel members learn the con-

text and study background information prior to the meeting, including a history of the community, current issues, demographic and economic statistics, maps, plans and zoning regulations, and any prior or ongoing analyses. Next, panel members interview key stakeholders in the study area, including municipal and elected officials, business owners, and residents. Once sufficiently informed, the panel commences two days of discussion and analysis, devising a strategy for revitalizing the study area. At the end of the second day, panel recommendations are presented at a public meeting. TAPs provide progress toward both the Campaign's sensible growth goals and ULI Chicago members' desire for community involvement by providing planning and development expertise. On average, the Campaign and ULI Chicago conduct three TAPs each year. The Archer Avenue panel, on June 28 and 29 of 2006, was the 15th undertaken since 2001.

The Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development and 11th Ward Ald. James Balcer invited ULI Chicago and the Campaign to organize a TAP to recommend ways to



*The panel strongly encouraged retaining the neighborhood's rich architectural heritage along Archer Avenue, particularly Bridgeport's characteristic Dutch-style architecture (above).*



address the barriers preventing the revitalization of a specified section of Bridgeport, including parcels on and around Archer between Halsted and Ashland.

### QUESTIONS ADDRESSED BY THE PANEL:

**TRANSPORTATION.** Panel members considered how to surmount the fact that the Stevenson Expressway currently acts as a physical and psychological barrier between nearby residential areas and public transportation. They thought about how to improve pedestrian safety without disrupting the current high volume of traffic along the street, as well as how the city might incorporate pedestrian connections between Archer and the nearby Stearns Quarry Park.

**RETAIL.** The panel examined existing land-use regulations, which dissuade the type of retail necessary to draw customers to Archer. Panel members also considered zoning changes, density enhancements, and transit-oriented development ideas that could complement the area and help spur revitalization.

**MARKETING/IDENTITY.** The group considered how the city should engage existing property owners in marketing the area. The panel looked at how best to preserve or recreate the historic architecture of Archer; creating context-sensitive design guidelines would help capitalize on the area's historical significance.

## Sponsor Presentations

Ald. Balcer, a lifelong resident of Bridgeport, began the two-day proceedings by recalling the days when Archer teemed with shops and pedestrian activity. "The Stevenson took care of that," he said. The alderman also spoke of having achieved some success in improving the appearance of the street with city funds for trees and landscaping, the Ashland Avenue bridge construction project, and scattered private redevelopment along sections of Archer. But such successes are just the beginning, according to Balcer, who would like to replace substandard properties along Archer with more attractive, economically viable uses. A full streetscape plan for Archer, including a boulevard, is also on his agenda.

"I'd like to see development, but we're limited in what we can do," Ald. Balcer said, adding that buildings with retail on the first floor and residential above appeal to him. The Orange Line provides quick access into Bridgeport from



*The panel had to address the physical and psychological barriers of the adjacent and parallel CTA Orange Line (top) and Stevenson Expressway (middle), as well as capturing and accommodating a growing residential market while retaining the character and scale of the corridor (bottom).*

downtown and elsewhere, he said: While he welcomes new residents and visitors, "I have to think about the people who have lived here. I'm open to suggestions." Balcer promised to look for more parking opportunities near the Halsted and Ashland Orange Line station and also to consider transit-oriented development. "It's desolate down there under the expressway," he said.

The alderman acknowledged that Bridgeport residents are proud of their community, and he believes the neighborhood is widely misrepresented in the media. He sees proximity to downtown, the adjacent Chicago River, and Quarry Park as significant assets for this part of his ward. Balcer would like to see restaurants and retail along the river and looks forward to the park's opening, which will also have a nature center. Bob Foster, of the Chicago Park District, said the site will feature downtown views, fossils of single-celled organisms dating back 400 million years, all-native plantings, wetlands, and "a strong educational component." He said the park district does not anticipate emissions from the capped landfill of building materials. The only worry is that the park could be a gathering place for gang members.

John Molloy, project manager for the West Region of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development, believes creating a pedestrian-friendly environment is crucial to attracting businesses and wonders if a tax-increment financing (TIF) district or other financing device might be needed to spur improvements. He said he would never think of walking along Archer in its current state, and he added the street is particularly forbidding for seniors. "Once we [attract pedestrians], a lot of [retail] starts coming in," he said.

Beautification and banners would help accent "unique and attractive" older buildings that line the street, Molloy said, and an organized business district would help the retail and commercial bases jointly market themselves. But although the swelling fan base for the neighborhood's World Series champion Chicago White Sox is patronizing area businesses more frequently, Molloy believes, "Bridgeport does not want to be a regional draw like Wrigleyville."

## Bus Tour

The panel took a bus tour that wound through the larger community before focusing specifically on the Archer district. A trip down 35th Street about a mile west of U.S. Cellular Field showed new construction and rehabilitated condominium buildings that Molloy noted will compete with Archer. After traveling northbound along a commercially healthy stretch of Halsted Street, the bus turned east toward the intersection of Archer and Canal, the site of a five-story loft conversion with first-floor retail. "It still feels a little like no man's land here," one panel member com-



*New, diverse residential development in other parts of Bridgeport provide stiff competition for the Archer Avenue corridor.*

mented as the bus started westward through the mostly industrial stretch between Canal and Halsted, interrupted only by Connie's Pizza.

The stretch near the Halsted El station looks "barren" except for median plantings and embankment landscaping, Molloy said. He added that the station is cut off from the rest of Bridgeport by the expressway viaduct, and the existing retail is limited to a Dunkin' Donuts and a storefront advertising "oily massages." Better pedestrian access from the Halsted station to Quarry Park would be a dramatic public improvement for this portion of the study area.

North of the Stevenson, along Halsted Street, the bus passed a new development of 65 homes wedged between the expressway and the city's designated Planned Manufacturing District. Price points for the homes range



*Panel member and transportation expert Tom Samuels surveys the wide expanses of pavement that surround the Halsted Street El stop.*



*The Archer Avenue corridor is blessed with multiple transit options. Unfortunately, the poor appearance of both stations is made worse by design deficiencies and physical limitations. A young mother navigates the staircase with her baby in a stroller (left). The Ashland station is “buried” under the Stevenson Expressway viaduct (right).*



from \$320,000 to \$450,000. Although the area is largely industrial with a smattering of residential streets, park district plans call for the development of a five-acre neighborhood park (named “Eleanor Park”) along the Chicago River for this largely underserved area. “It’s a massive environment remediation site right now,” Foster said. Once the site is cleaned up, the park district will assume ownership but has “no definite plans” for how the park will look, he said. “We’re waiting for the community to tell us what they want.” The park district looks to acquire river-front property wherever possible, Foster said. “People are drawn to water; they want to be near the water,” he said.

The development at 2830 S. Lock Street, a mix of townhouses and single-family homes, includes 60-foot setbacks from the river and a public easement that allows access for other neighborhood residents, Molloy said. The townhouses will face the river and the single-family homes will front Lock Street. Additionally, single-family homes are expected for the site of a former People’s Gas facility immediately east of Riverside Square mall on the southeast corner of Ashland and Archer — the western “gateway” to the study area. The site is currently under remediation, Molloy said.

As the bus pulled into the Ashland El station, panel members commented that the station is more isolated than

the Halsted station, with industry to the north and inaccessible retail (mainly Riverside Square) to the south. The station is sited near — practically beneath — an imposing Stevenson expressway overpass. Next, panel members toured Origins Park along the I & M Canal. The park, which opened in 2003, offers panoramic downtown views and native, low-maintenance plantings, Foster said. Informative placards on the history of the site traverse the park.

The bus tour concluded along the central stretch of Archer between Ashland and Halsted — the epicenter of the study area. The corridor features a scattershot mix of uses, including a Mexican steakhouse, tavern, sign store, and auto parts establishment. Few establishments were open at 10:30 a.m. on the Wednesday of the tour. Traffic roared past at speeds well above the limit of 25 miles per hour. The streetwall along both sides of the corridor is interrupted and inconsistent, with empty lots, boarded-up storefronts, and deteriorated frame housing. On the north side of Loomis, the parcels are occupied by the berm of the expressway. In short, the neighborhood feel of the greater Archer Avenue corridor in Bridgeport is sorely lacking.



*This building, in the heart of the Archer Avenue corridor, is out of place. The building “turns its back” on the street, creating inconsistency in the streetwall and unpleasantness for the passerby. The Stevenson Expressway is in the background.*

## Community Interviews

Organized panels of interviews and brief conversations with neighborhood passers-by helped the panel understand the breadth of views on Archer’s past, present and future.

A local developer commented that Bridgeport is greatly undervalued, given the neighborhood’s diversity, location, relatively low crime rate, and added cache from the White Sox championship. Homes that sell for \$1 million near



*The buildings along both sides of Archer Avenue are inconsistent in height and scale, creating irregularity in the streetwall. Though the pattern reduces the corridor's attractiveness, its vacant parcels and obsolete buildings provide opportunities for developers looking for burgeoning commercial and residential markets.*

Roosevelt Road to the north are priced at around \$600,000 in Bridgeport. He said people from the upscale areas of the South and West Loop are moving into Bridgeport townhouses because many of Bridgeport's properties include small yards.

According to the developer, land assembly is needed for larger developments because most parcels are individually owned. "I could put together land all day on Archer," he said, adding that he knows most of the owners. "They're all going to sell." Greater density would encourage developers, he added, in part because it would help keep units affordable, and "everyone is sensitive [to Bridgeport residents] being able to afford [homes in their own neighborhood]."

An artist who moved to the neighborhood nine years ago from Rogers Park characterized retail along Archer as "spotty, at best." He shops predominately on Roosevelt Road or in the Loop. He sees the underpasses near the CTA station as an "extraordinary" opportunity for public art, and the multistory buildings on the west side of Archer parallel to the Stevenson as a potential sound buffer that could help create relatively quiet places for people to congregate. "I walk a fair amount, but I don't walk on Archer much," he said, adding that he would love to see new restaurants and service uses as gathering spots. Artists who have moved south from Wicker Park have found such places, he added, "but they've had to create them."

A local tavern owner, who also works at a settlement house, said some established businesses along Archer

have operated successfully with relatively small amounts of on-street parking, but an insufficient number of parking spaces causes problems for other businesses. According to her, those who own and operate businesses along the corridor are "pretty isolated" and feel little or no sense of community although many live in Bridgeport. On the upside, she feels the prevailing stereotypes of Bridgeport are melting away and long-standing residents are "adapting to the change."

A resident and neighborhood council member from the nearby Back of the Yards neighborhood believes Archer currently attracts only local residents for shopping, and that significant land assemblage and a parking lot would attract outsiders. "Archer is scrunched; it's been scrunched for years, and it's getting more scrunched," he said, referring to the narrowness of the sidewalks. "There's no room for trees to make pedestrians feel safe and welcome."

"Archer Avenue is asleep. It's been asleep for 35 years," he said. "People are not [driving through] looking for goods and services. The buildings were constructed under circumstances unique to an era. It just doesn't work [today]," he said. "The facades [look] miserable. But if you ask the people here, they're going to tell you that's what they like."

He predicts Bridgeport residents will reject "cutesy," trendier businesses such as bookstores and coffee shops. The tavern owner disagreed, pointing to a coffee shop at nearby 31st and Morgan that appears to be succeeding, in part because of young people moving into the neighborhood. "Why not at Archer and Halsted?" she asked.





*According to Chicago's Dept. of Planning & Development, "Retail follows beautification," so the city landscapes expressway embankments along the Stevenson (top left). Vacant storefronts (bottom left) along Archer Avenue await the commercial prosperity experienced by other parts of Bridgeport, such as the coffee shop (right) at Morgan and 31st.*

## Final Presentation

The panel began its presentation by stating the central dilemma: redeveloping an aging commercial thoroughfare in a storied Chicago neighborhood that fell into disrepair but is beginning to revive. "Bridgeport is Chicago," said panel chair John Mays, partner at the Chicago law firm of Gould & Ratner. "How do you preserve the best of the past and take advantage of the vitality?"

The panel reiterated key points made during stakeholder interviews with Ald. Balcer, the city, and community members. The alderman's priorities included streetscaping improvements for Archer, capitalizing on the corridor's history as a former Indian trail from Joliet, rehabilitating Archer's architecturally significant buildings; protecting family-owned businesses, relocating businesses that detract from the attractiveness of the corridor (including a used car lot and auto repair shop), improving the Orange Line stations, encouraging the use of the area's two new parks, bolstering the retail sector of Archer, and increasing discussions about riverside improvements, including docks, restaurants and other amenities.

The city planning department suggested improving access and attractiveness near the El stations to make the areas pedestrian-friendly, "softening" the imposing expressway overpass (the idea being that retail follows beautification), encouraging transit-oriented development near the el sta-

tions; providing economic incentives such as tax-increment financing to jump-start projects, creating a gateway to Quarry Park for both wayfinding and sense of place, adding signage and banners near Archer and Halsted (for similar reasons), preserving unique older buildings; and adding context-sensitive parking where needed.

The community told the panel that gentrification is pushing property values higher, but that Bridgeport remains relatively affordable. They said draws to the neighborhood include the White Sox, a tight-knit dynamic among neighbors, and an accessible, extensive transportation network. Drawbacks to the Archer Avenue corridor include the lack of viable retail and service uses (including restaurants). The community wants "eyesore" properties to be rehabilitated, to consider denser zoning on Archer that will allow for residential development and viable commercial spaces, to celebrate and capitalize on the district's historic features and heritage, to encourage artists, and to use the public realm to bolster social interaction befitting a prosperous, viable urban neighborhood.

"They wanted people to stay, to stick around. There isn't a place to do that right now," said panel member Julie Workman, vice president and real estate counsel for Ryland Homes North Central Region. Other ideas included assembling smaller parcels into larger pieces for significant developments, reducing, slowing, or eliminating negative traffic impacts from trucks, pass-through commuters,



*The market potential of the Archer Avenue corridor is realized by this new upscale residential development near the Orange Line El stop on the east end of the corridor.*

and drag racing, trying to attract “anchor” stores, including a pet store or coffeehouse, celebrating existing neighborhood successes such as the steak house, bakery and Connie’s Pizza, and encouraging use of the Orange Line. “We didn’t get the sense people benefit from it as much as is possible,” Workman said.

Ald. Balcer interjected with comments about traffic problems on Archer, including that the Archer corridor is too wide and it serves mostly as an alternative to the Stevenson expressway. He presented the option of installing planters in the middle of the street as a traffic calming measure. “There’s plenty of room,” he said. “It would slow down the traffic.”

The panel observed that current uses along Archer run the gamut, with residential, manufacturing, retail, and restaurants peppered throughout but with little cohesiveness. “You have everything,” Workman said. “You have all sorts of offerings in a relatively confined location.” That variety extends to the area’s housing stock, which ranges from 1870s-era single-family homes to new multi-story senior housing. Workman said Bridgeport needs to “respect history” while welcoming new residents. “Integrate those two concepts,” she said. The community also needs to better integrate residential and commercial market segments, she said.

## **RECOMMENDATION 1: ASSESS THE MARKET POTENTIAL**

The panel saw the viability of rebirth for Archer. “You’re still trying to address what happened when the expressway was constructed,” said panel member James Matanky, president of Matanky Realty Group, Inc. “Archer was damaged. You need to recreate the community feel.” To do so, build upon the appreciating but still affordable residential property values which make the area popular with both newcomers and existing residents who love it so much. They don’t want to walk away,” Matanky said. The panel also mentioned revitalizing underused structures.

Panel member Peter Tortorello, vice president of Newcastle Limited, expanded upon those thoughts by encouraging local leaders to think about sub-markets such as students at University of Illinois-Chicago, local artists who need live-work spaces, and the next generation of Bridgeport residents who want to raise families in the neighborhood of their youth. In doing so, he said, look for opportunities to build new homes for “move-up” couples priced between \$225 and \$275 per salable square foot, multifamily buildings for younger and older residents, and mixed-use developments along the river to leverage that asset.

The area will continue to attract people in search of new, relatively affordable homes in a convenient location close to the Loop, expressways, and public transit, the panel said. Tortorello told an anecdote about a softball teammate and White Sox fan from outside the area who purchased a three-bedroom property for \$265,000. “He wanted to be here,” he said. “You need different housing types for people who want to remain here, plus the new folks.” Ald. Balcer agreed: “More people than you think are moving here from outside the community.”

New condominiums and other residential development types will establish “the sheer density needed to support the pedestrian environment,” said panel member Gregory Kirsch, principal at Baum Realty Group. Potential retail tenants “need to see bodies,” he said. “They need to see people on the street.” Once that begins to happen, community leaders can more easily attract a service-oriented retail mix to Archer, Matanky said, including a dry cleaner; diner; coffeehouse; laundromat; day care; healthcare; and a barbershop or beauty salon. “It’s a traditional city street,” he said. “Some of these uses have begun coming back into the neighborhood. There’s potential here.”



Before and after images of infrastructure upgrades to create a “complete street” and sense of place, including signage, street lights, crosswalks, public art, and a new slogan for the corridor — “Old Bridgeport” or “Chicago’s Hometown.”

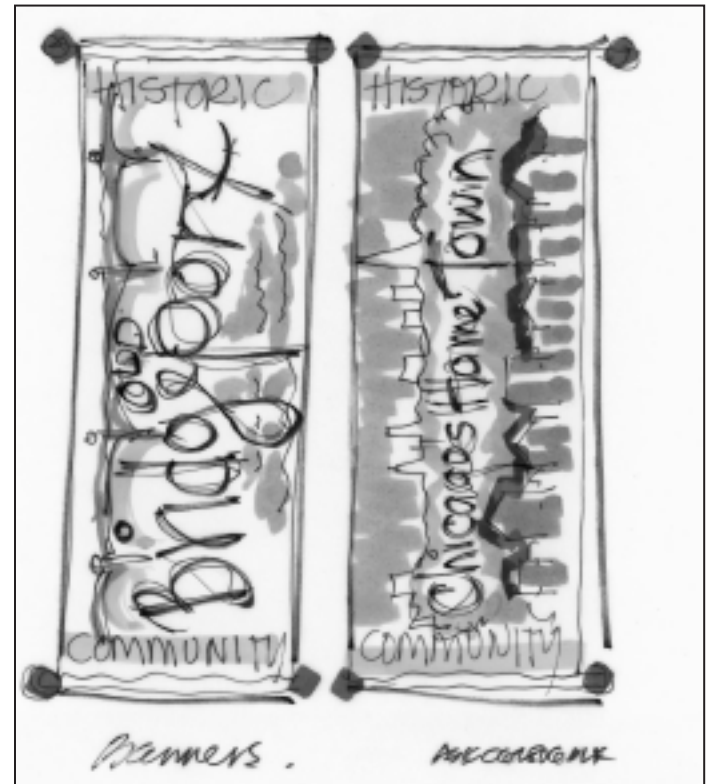


**RECOMMENDATION 2:  
UPGRADE STREET INFRASTRUCTURE**

The panel recommended a “complete street”— a vibrant, safe, enjoyable mixed-use corridor. “Archer Avenue doesn’t feel like a complete street,” Matanky said. “It’s neglected. It’s got these massive viaducts. The sidewalks are too narrow. There’s nowhere for people to hang out.”

To preserve and enhance the underlying beauty and heritage of the street, he suggested identifying buildings or landmarks that add historical significance by using the city’s Historical Reference Survey as a guide and working with property owners on façade renovations using programs offered through the city, state and federal governments. He also recommended improving the expressway viaducts and other high visibility spaces along Archer with lighting, fencing, public artwork, and landscaping, while also considering lowering the grade under certain viaducts, based on further study and community input. Similar improvements should be made to both CTA stations to improve appearance and accessibility.

“Some of this you’ve been working on,” Matanky said. “There’s a lot of potential along this section of Archer Avenue.” It also would help to widen the sidewalks and add trees, street furniture, pedestrian-scale lighting, and identity elements such as banner signs with slogans that read “Old Bridgeport” or “Chicago’s Hometown.” Matanky



said, “Build an identity. This is an old section of town. That could be played up.” Ald. Balcer was pleased at the prospect of using elements to re-connect the neighborhood with its past. “I like, ‘Old Bridgeport,’” he said. He also said the city could pour new, wider sidewalks and curbs, and make the panel’s recommended street improvements, but would need help from key neighborhood stakeholders such as railroad companies.



The existing CTA Orange Line station (left) at Halsted Street is difficult for pedestrians to navigate and access. Redesigning the station (right) would include improved and safer access, services for busy commuters from many of the corridor's new residential developments, and features such as brick pavers and trees.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:  
FOCUS ON TRANSIT-ORIENTED  
DEVELOPMENT**

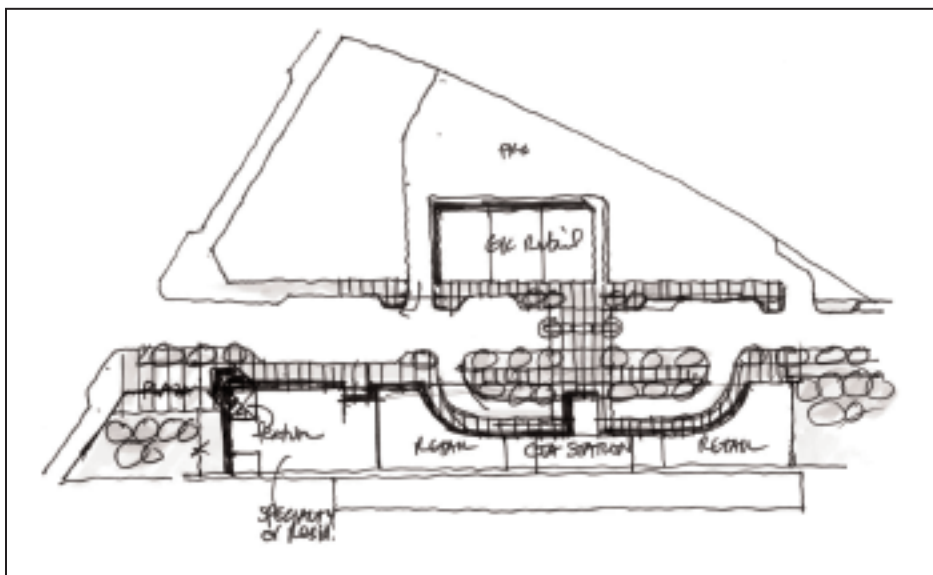
The panel emphasized strengthening the link between Archer and the Orange Line and overcoming the psychological barrier between them, by pursuing transit-oriented development on key parcels and at key intersections along the corridor. "It's a misperception that these barriers cannot be changed," said panel member Michael Davidson, manager of the Campaign for Sensible Growth. "The creation of a viable commercial and retail corridor near transit will change the dynamic between the transit line and the neighborhood," he said.

The Ashland El station is underused by residents and workers due to lack of signage and visibility, poor access,

and a hostile, unattractive environment under the expressway viaduct, Davidson said. "It's extremely isolated," he said. "The area is overwhelmed by concrete, litter and weeds." To improve pedestrian access both physically and psychologically, Davidson suggested improving the signage, visibility and staircase access; adding a ramp for the physically disabled and a walking path along Bubbly Creek connecting to Archer; reconfiguring bus access and circulation; and adding parking and a kiss-and-ride feature under the viaduct.

The Halsted station is also underused for some of the same reasons, and it's devoid of any complementary service uses for transit riders. "These are opportunity losses for such a dense neighborhood in a major city," Davidson said. Though Davidson acknowledged the retail options

further south on Halsted, he stated that commuters benefit from uses closer to transit stations. "You want something within arm's reach because you're in a hurry." The panel recommended adding retail opportunities such as a dry cleaner or coffeehouse adjacent to the transit stop and across Archer, siting residential spaces nearby to add to the ridership base, improving walkability and public access for safety, usability and a sense of place, and adding parking on site, across from the station and under the viaduct.



This rendering of the Halsted Street Orange Line station illustrates design features for attractiveness and walkability, as well as ample amounts of retail befitting a bustling urban setting.



**RECOMMENDATION 4:  
ESTABLISH GATEWAYS AND THE  
MIDPOINT**

Marking gateways and key nodes is important to establish a sense of place, the panel said. An eastern gateway at Halsted and a western gateway at Bubbly Creek near Ashland Avenue would “bookend” the corridor, capitalizing on the new bridge and viaduct structure at Ashland by adding architectural elements and better lighting, said

panel member Diane Legge Kemp, principal with DLK Civic Design. “I know there are budget constraints, but this is the entrance to your community,” and such features build identity and community pride, she said. The streetscape could then be expanded with banners and historical monuments to Bridgeport throughout the Archer Avenue corridor, she added. Legge Kemp stressed the importance of doing this in a comprehensive way to reposition the corridor to attract more vitality, retail, housing, pedestrians, and better access to the Orange Line stations.



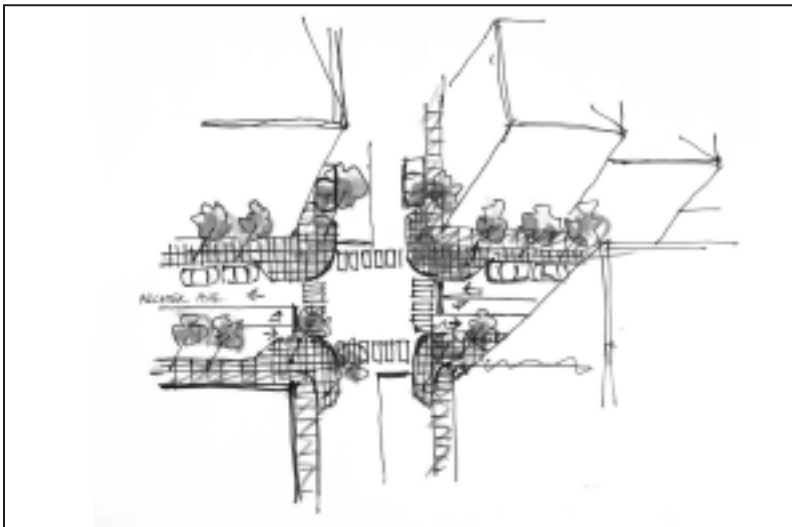
*The Ashland Avenue gateway on the western end of the corridor was once dubbed the “ugliest intersection in Chicago.” Major infrastructure upgrades and improvements are currently underway (bottom). The panel recommended marking gateways on both ends of the corridor to establish community pride and sense of place. Gateway features would include architectural elements, signage, and improved lighting.*



The panel recommended the intersection of Archer and Loomis — midway between Halsted and Ashland — serve as the district’s primary gathering place — the unofficial “corner of State and Main.” To mark it as such, the panel recommended preserving existing building stock on each corner, creating bump-outs at the corners to slow traffic and create parking, and commissioning and installing an historical marker celebrating the corridor’s heritage. “It’s helpful to have a node or point that’s more important than the others,” Legge Kemp said. “You’ve got enough room to bring cafes out onto the street,” but the sidewalk “is just too narrow now,” and boarded up storefronts “create a sense of abandonment. Get those back in use.”



The nearby intersection with Fuller could add to the neighborhood square atmosphere with parking, green space, a mix of annual and seasonal plantings chosen by the community, and pedestrian and bike access to Eleanor Park, which would serve as a secondary gateway for the residential neighborhood north of the Stevenson. Access to Quarry Park to the south is also critical for returning the community to the pedestrian, Legge Kemp said. Other boulevards around Chicago are known for being “beads on the green necklace that connects parks,” she said, and “Archer can become one of those streets.”



North-south streets emerge from beneath the Stevenson Expressway to intersect with Archer Avenue (top) for the length of the corridor, providing opportunities for the creation of key nodes (middle) to facilitate outdoor commerce, community interaction, and artistic display. The corner of Archer and Loomis (above), the corridor’s midpoint, is especially appropriate to be its “corner of State and Main Streets.”



The panel recommended architectural design guidelines that respect the corridor's historic and contextually significant structures. This is a rendering of Archer Avenue as a "complete street" (left), devoid of vacant parcels that disrupt the cohesiveness of the streetwall. The height and bulk of the new development adheres to the consistent streetwall principle (right).

**RECOMMENDATION 5:  
FILL IN THE STREETWALL**

To protect the remaining streetwall along Archer, the panel recommended preserving existing historical buildings and those with architectural significance. Where there are gaps in the streetwall or redevelopment opportunities for derelict or insignificant buildings, the panel recommended adopting B-1-3 zoning along both sides of Archer adopting to spur three to five-story infill development. The new zoning designation would allow for developments that buffer the street from the sights and sounds of the Stevenson



and railway, Kirsch said. "People want verticality in an urban context to feel like they're in a place," he said. "Archer Avenue lacks that today. This corridor can cater to the next generation with three to five-story buildings; this is where young people will live." Where possible, he added, use existing building stock to create that density, with housing at various price points and the opportunity for ground-floor retail.

**Design**

The panel recommended establishing architectural and design guidelines that respect historic and contextually significant structures such as those at Archer and Loomis, modeling efforts from other neighborhoods. Panel member and architect Federico Vidargas suggested a classic design theme, but one that also allows for creativity. "Don't necessarily go for cute," he said. Other design



The Archer Avenue streetwall needs infill development that is in context with the corridor's rich architectural past.



*The corridor's urban appeal, transit options, proximity to downtown, and relatively abundant supply of larger buildings make for viable high-density living, but also considerable rezoning to meet the changing market.*

ideas included a horticultural display along the expressway embankment.

### **Parking**

The panel recommended adding additional parking for businesses under the viaducts, behind buildings, and in the first block of connecting streets; and preserving parking on both sides of the street while using three lanes of traffic to maintain flow and capacity.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6: REVIEW ZONING AND FINANCING**

Zoning along Archer is currently a hodgepodge of R-M-5.5, B-3-1, B-4-2, C-1-2 and M-2-3. The panel recommended local leaders consider the long-term social and economic implications of the current zoning classifications and take steps toward allowing greater height, which would encourage both new development and the sale of underutilized space. "What zoning fits your vision?" asked panel member Adam Burck, executive director of Edgewater Development Corp. The B-1-3 and B-3-3 classifications

would allow new mixed-use buildings of up to six stories and would not require parking if retail space is less than 10,000 square feet.

The resulting height increases would encourage redevelopment and allow market conditions to prevail; in other words, property owners may be more motivated to sell if zoning changes make prices for underused space more competitive. "People who live there will likely use the Orange Line rather than drive," Burck said. Doing so is not "reinventing" Archer so much as "bringing it back to what it was," with residential space above businesses, he said.

The panel recommended a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district for Archer and its vicinity with city funding for an eligibility study and redevelopment plan. "We thought one of the most effective tools would be a TIF," Tortorello said. The measure would provide an economic development tool to encourage preservation and redevelopment, he added. Funds would finance infrastructure improvements at the CTA stations and streetscape upgrades along Archer and intersecting roadways.



There is a strong market for residential development in Bridgeport, which could enable the conversion of industrial parcels and buildings into habitable space. Neighborhood leaders should seize residential market opportunities, but they must first determine if the parcels are no longer viable for industrial development. Regarding the Pilsen Planned Manufacturing District (PMD), if sometime in the future there were to be a shift in the PMD boundaries, rezoning of property along the northern boundaries of the study area for residential purposes would be appropriate.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:  
HONOR THE PAST**

Lastly, the panel recommended coming full circle by establishing a Bridgeport Historical Society in the 1870s house on Archer that is currently for sale. The city could take it by eminent domain and restore its façade. “It’s a wonderful piece of Archer Avenue history,” Matanky said.



*At nearly 130-years-old, this is the oldest structure in Bridgeport, a community with a rich and colorful history, worthy of celebration and preservation. The panel even recommended establishing a Bridgeport Historical Society.*

## Reactions and Questions

Ald. Balcer said he liked the ideas to slow traffic which included bump-outs at Archer and Loomis, widened sidewalks, planter boxes, and streetscaping features. Kathleen Nelson, from the Chicago Dept. of Planning and Development city planning department, said she and her colleagues had thought about some of the same ideas as the panel, but that was still “great to have them confirmed.” She noted a TIF as probably DPD’s first priority, although she foresaw challenges related to how boundaries would be drawn and whether the building sizes would generate enough of an increment. Nelson figured the city could implement bridge lighting and “other short-term stuff,” and then look toward the longer term. “Once people see changes, hopefully the private market takes over,” she said.

In response to audience questions, Burck said the panel’s design team had taken cues from significant buildings already on Archer in thinking about what to add next. “How can we give a face to this street so you’re not looking at the viaducts or the Stevenson?” he asked. Added Davidson, “Some of this has to happen organically. People in the community need to determine their fate.” Tortorello stressed the importance of zoning changes. “Rezoning will encourage redevelopment,” he said. “Property owners can’t get enough for their land” with current zoning. “Based on all of our conversations with people, a market is there.”

Panel member and transportation expert Tom Samuels, who works for 48th Ward Ald. Mary Ann Smith and is a board member of America Walks, said changing the street has a greater impact than decorative elements. “It’s curbs and gutters that matter; face-of-curb to face-of-curb,” he said. “Decrease the number of lanes on the street from four to two, plus a center lane. You can add seven feet of sidewalk, which is enough for trees and other streetscape amenities. Bump-outs give you 10 parking spaces per intersection — that’s four free parking garages. Save the architectural money for later.” Vidargas agreed: “Bump-outs are the physical solution to create pedestrian-friendliness.” And Kirsch concluded: “Slowing traffic is the way to create this environment.”

# Panel Recommendations

## Assess the Market Potential

- Build upon appreciating but still affordable residential property values.
- Accommodate sub-markets such as the next generation of residents whose families are from Bridgeport, students from the University of Illinois-Chicago and South Loop campuses, and local artists who need live-work spaces.
- Build homes that allow young Bridgeport couples to remain in the neighborhood, multifamily buildings for younger and older residents, and mixed-use development along the corridor.
- Support new developments that create density, which generates foot traffic and attracts retail.
- Create a service-oriented retail mix that includes a wide array of uses, including dry cleaners, eating establishments (i.e., diner), a laundromat, and hair salons and spas.

## Upgrade Street Infrastructure

- Create a “complete street” along Archer with safe, enjoyable public spaces for friends and neighbors to gather.
- Embark upon an ambitious streetscape program, including widening sidewalks and adding trees, street furniture, pedestrian-scale lighting, and minor identity elements such as banner signs.
- Preserve and restore historic buildings and landmarks through improvement programs for facades and the like.
- Improve the look and safety of open spaces along the corridor with lighting, fencing, public artwork and landscaping, and consider lowering the grade under key viaducts.

## Focus on Transit-Oriented Development

- Harness the power and convenience of the Orange Line to create a positive association with Archer, making a viable, mixed-use corridor synonymous with the ease of transit access.
- Improve the signage, visibility, and pedestrian accessibility near the Ashland El station, reconfigure bus access and circulation, and add parking and a kiss-and-ride feature under the viaduct.
- Near the Halsted El station, provide retail opportunities adjacent to the transit stop and across Archer, develop residential units, improve walkability and public access, and add parking.

## Establish Gateways and the Midpoint

- Create an eastern gateway to the Archer Avenue corridor at Halsted and a western gateway at Bubbly Creek. The western gateway should capitalize on the new bridge by adding elements for safety (lighting) and community identity.
- Establish the intersection of Archer and Loomis as the primary gathering place in the neighborhood, preserving the attractive building stock, adding identity elements on key rights-of-way, and creating corner “bump-outs” to slow traffic and create additional parking spaces.
- At Fuller and Loomis, add parking, green space, a mix of annual and seasonal plantings, and pedestrian and bike access to Eleanor Park and the residential neighborhood to the north.

## Fill In the Streetwall

- Retain existing historic buildings and allow for 3 to 5-story infill development to establish a sense of place along the corridor.
- Establish architectural and design guidelines that respect historic and contextually significant structures.
- Bolster identity with a consistent signage program.

## Review Zoning and Financing

- Review zoning with an eye toward allowing greater height, taking a close look at B-1-3 zoning to allow new buildings with ground-floor retail and residential up to six stories, creating a sound barrier to the Stevenson.
- Establish a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to encourage preservation and redevelopment, and to finance streetscape and infrastructure improvements on Archer and at the El stations.
- Seize residential market opportunities by converting underused space in and around the corridor to a residential or business zoning classification based on a list of priority redevelopment sites.

## Honor the Past

- Establish a Bridgeport Historical Society in the “1870s House” on Archer, which is currently for sale, and restore the façade.

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