

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL

SEPT. 29 AND 30, 2004



  
CAMPAIGN  
FOR SENSIBLE  
GROWTH



# ELBURN, ILLINOIS

THINKING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE BOX

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# Executive Summary

## The Backdrop

The transitional farming community of Elburn, Ill., located in western Kane County about nine miles west of the urban/suburban corridor along the Fox River. On a clear day at the town's highest point, about 900 feet above sea level, one can see the Sears Tower. In recent years, Elburn has experienced rising development pressure.

Until recently, Elburn managed to retain its small town charm even as land speculation increased development activity. The region's growth pressures will arrive at the village's front door when Metra expands its commuter rail service from Geneva to Elburn by late 2005. Elburn's leaders and longtime residents would like to hold onto the Mayberry-like atmosphere by managing growth and retaining such assets as a low-crime rate, a volunteer spirit illustrated by the second-largest Lions Club in the U.S., and an agrarian heritage reflected by the aggressive preservation of open space around and within the village.

Population in Elburn rose from 1,275 in 1990 to 2,756 in 2000, according to the U.S. Census; it is projected to hit 3,126 by 2005 and balloon to 20,000 by 2030. The village has a median household income of \$67,426. Most homes are owner-occupied (86.6 percent) and single-family (92.4

percent), with lot densities traditionally kept at two homes per acre; nearly three-quarters (73.7 percent) of the homes are valued between \$100,000 and \$199,999.

Elburn has relied upon its informal "box" of wetlands and creeks – a square-shaped area created by the Virgil Ditch and Welch and Blackberry creeks – to determine where to allow development. But Elburn wants to better master its own destiny by creating a permanent "emerald necklace" of green space around its outskirts to strengthen this more informal "box." Village leaders want to wind bike paths and other green space through the middle of town, bolster its tapped-out water and sewer systems, and upgrade its aging infrastructure, all of which will require new financial resources.

Growth pressures encircle Elburn: Sugar Grove to the south along Interstate 88 has annexed land aggressively and approved large-scale developments, while LaFox to the immediate east recently has adopted a concept plan that shows mixed-use sectors and attached single-family homes. Further east and northeast, the booming Fox River towns of Aurora, St. Charles, Geneva and Elgin have staked out their presence, particularly along the traffic-choked, big-box retail strip on Randall Road. Pressure could eventually come from the west if the proposed Prairie Parkway (between Interstate 80 and Interstate 90) is built.



**Figure 1** The Blackberry Creek subdivision is pedestrian friendly and environmentally sensitive.



**Figure 2** *Prairie Park is designed to demonstrate environmentally friendly landscaping.*

Based on a belief in “better, not just bigger,” Elburn intends to continue to critically evaluate new development proposals. But the town does not wish to stop growth. It has issued 76 permits in the Williams Ridge subdivision north of town and 300 in the Blackberry Creek area to the southeast. More new developments are anticipated, following the patterns of the past years: 149 permits were approved in 2003, up from 53 in 2002, and “for more information” realty signs are sprouting in numerous area cornfields. (See Table 1).

Growth will also come near the center of town once the Metra station opens in late 2005. The village envisions a transit-oriented development of new housing and retail near the train station, about a quarter mile from the center of downtown. The 264-acre site, parts of which are unin-

corporated, is currently farmland between the existing downtown and the Blackberry Creek development.

Due to population increases and burgeoning rail freight traffic on the track that crosses the center of town, Elburn’s main north-south arterial of Route 47 has become a major traffic headache. Officials foresee a bypass using Anderson Road east of Route 47 as an alternative route for trucks and other traffic that must cross the tracks. Local schools face increased enrollment pressures as well, while longtime residents already feel over-taxed and have turned down several referenda for both the schools and the public library. This has fueled hesitation about creating a park district or parks department, which the town lacks.

**Table 1: Village of Elburn, Building Permit Information**

		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
<b>Single Family (detached)</b>	Units	50	52	30	156	143
	Buildings	11	3	1	4	3

**The Panel’s Charge**

To gain a fresh set of eyes on how to proceed with its vision and goals, village officials asked the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Chicago and the Campaign for Sensible Growth to organize a panel of experts that would make recommendations. The resulting Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) on Sept. 29 and 30, 2004, convened pre-eminent developers, financiers, architects, lawyers, planners, and consult-

ants. The panel reviewed detailed briefing books, met with village officials and residents, toured the village by bus, and deliberated about the issues before developing a presentation for officials and residents given at the end of the two days.

While the recommendations provide guidance for Elburn, they also could help create a model for development in other suburban or exurban locations. In its policy paper, “Greenfield Development Without Sprawl: The Role of Planned Communities,” ULI recommends combining planned open space, regional transportation planning, and mixed-use developments with diverse housing choices. The panel utilized those principles in making its specific recommendations for Elburn, with the hope that they will be implemented here and at other greenfield locations around the Chicago area and beyond.

## Summary of Major Recommendations

The panel emphasized that Elburn needs to proactively execute its vision in the face of rapidly accelerating development on all sides. Panel members agreed strongly with village leaders’ expressed desire to provide a wide variety of housing types, which would ensure that Elburn retains the multigenerational character that many suburbs have lost: providing options for young adults and the elderly who are unable to afford or unwilling to live in large, single-family homes on half-acre lots. Bigger-box retail such as a grocery store could work inside the town and would be a valuable contributor to the tax base, but competition from Randall Road is stiff – and Elburn should be cautious about negative impact on existing retail in its downtown while pursuing new, transit-oriented retail development.

Continuing to maintain open space around and within the town is not only central to the town’s vision, but adds value to all development. Panel members thought the village could do more to permanently protect the land. This was the central warning the panel wanted to deliver, said

*A listing of the panel’s major recommendations can be found at the end of the full report.*

Panel Chair Gregory W. Hummel, of Chicago-based Bell, Boyd & Lloyd, LLC. The panel urged village leaders to articulate the vision behind the community’s broad comprehensive plan, inserting greater detail by showing where future parks, roadways, and other public facilities would be located, and providing a framework that shows what uses should occur in each sector of the community.

“You tell the landowners what you want,” advised panel member Steven Friedman, of the Chicago-based S.B. Friedman & Co. “It will shape how your community feels, how walkable it is, and how interconnected it is.” In addition, the panel emphasized the need for tying a comprehensive plan to a financial plan and a natural resources inventory.

Routing truck traffic around the new transit-oriented development and providing amenities within the development, such as convenience shopping, will help cut down on traffic through the center of downtown. A boulevard-like design for the new Anderson Road bypass would be more pedestrian friendly and, if routed farther east than currently proposed, less likely to divide the community in half (Fig. 9, Pg. 9 and Fig. 10, Pg. 9). Retail should be sited near the train station, with parking pushed toward the



**Figure 3** The new library reflects high quality design that Elburn is aspiring to encourage.

edges of the station area so people walk by retail shops on their way to and from the station.

A key issue is the financial planning that must be done before development overwhelms the village's vision. Tools to protect the streams include land purchases and bonds, as well as conservation easements. Other tools the community should utilize prior to approving development include annexation agreements with neighboring communities, and incentives of density bonuses or transferable development rights to developers whose projects will fulfill the priorities of the village. Financing sources to be investigated include federal, state and local grants, and partnerships with nonprofit organizations.

To employ all of these, the village needs a complete financial plan and capital budget, which will include the use of general obligation bonding, alternative revenue bonds, developer exactions, and special service areas. The panel recommended a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district for the downtown and transit-oriented development area, and listed more than a dozen sources of grants, loans, and project financing sources.

Despite the daunting to-do list, Hummel was enthusiastic. "You have an absolutely wonderful opportunity. We're excited," he said. "We think you're on the verge of greatness."

## Problem Statement

**T**echnical Assistance Panels (TAPs) are two-day sessions jointly sponsored by ULI Chicago and the Campaign for Sensible Growth during which ULI members, chosen for their expertise in such fields as real estate development, urban planning, law, engineering and environmental advocacy, convene to provide advice on land-use and development issues. The selected community creates a problem statement that lays out a set of questions. Panelists examine the issues and make recommendations at a public meeting at the end of the two days. The TAPs provide progress toward both the Campaign's sensible growth goals and ULI Chicago members' desire to give back to a local community by providing planning and development expertise. On average, the Campaign and ULI Chicago do three TAPs each year.



*Figure 4* Stores in the downtown offer personal service to the community.

The Village of Elburn asked the TAP to explore how the historic town can continue to develop both on its outer fringes and around the Metra station that will open in 2005 near downtown, without losing its rural character. The town would like to "master its destiny" in spite of the growth pressures on all sides, remaining "quaint, yet viable," in the words of one village leader. The panel examined three broad areas: how to firmly establish the greenway around the town; how to most effectively develop the area around the new train station to encourage a mix of residential and retail uses in a walkable layout that will reduce traffic; and how to create the necessary vision to plan for the future and finance needed infrastructure, whether new or upgrades.

The panel addressed the following questions:

- (1) What guidelines are reasonable for developments within the "box" created by the waterways that surround the incorporated village? Should the village find ways to prevent leapfrog development outside the box, and what legal methods are there for doing so? How does the community balance residential, commercial and industrial development?
- (2) How should major infrastructure upgrades, particularly for water, sewer and roadways, be financed?
- (3) What guidelines are reasonable for development, whether residential, retail or mixed-use, around the train station and in the traditional downtown?

- (4) What guidelines are reasonable for pedestrian and bicycle friendly mobility in and around the new train station and the rest of the community? How does the village utilize the bike trails network and other infrastructure for travel and recreation?
- (5) What is the role of the community in relation to Kane County? Can the county be expected to secure agricultural land through zoning or play a role in aiding appropriate development, for example through water resource protection?

Prior to the two-day meeting, TAP participants received a large briefing binder about Elburn that contained a wealth of information, including a community profile with demographic information, a narrative on the town's development over the years, an analysis of the future of the Blackberry Creek watershed and proposed development templates to encourage conservation design, an environmental assessment of the impact of the train station, and a report from ULI's national office on "greenfield" development that minimizes sprawl – principles Elburn hopes to put into practice.

## Village Presentations

The panel heard a presentation from Mayor James L. Willey during the first morning and met with Village Administrator David B. Morrison over lunch. Panel Chair Greg Hummel opened the proceedings by framing the panel's mission: answering "a set of questions on how you manage growth." While development has been targeted to the eastern and central parts of Kane County until now, available land is mostly to the west, he noted. Given the aggressive annexation behavior of nearby towns and uncertain politics of the county board following recent elections, Hummel said, Elburn needs to figure out, "How do you master your own destiny?"

Mayor Willey, a local dentist who opened his practice in 1979, said the village hoped to gain "a fresh set of eyes" from the panel's work. He opened his presentation with a bit of scene-setting, delivering a humorous "You Might Be From Elburn If ..." presentation that included such answers as, "You have the number of Gliddon's Drug Store on your speed dial," "You refer to anyone with a house newer than the 1980s as 'the rich people,'" and "The town next to you is considered 'trashy' or 'snooty' – but actually Sugar Grove is just like Elburn." Willey quickly

added that the two neighboring towns might share a friendly rivalry, but have "very different philosophies on growth." He added, "We talk a lot about community in Elburn. Community is not buildings. Community is the people."

Willey told the panel of shared concerns among Elburn residents:

- Growth that's too rapid or too dense.
- Loss of our small town charm and values.
- Traffic congestion that becomes unbearable.
- Overcrowding of schools.
- Being taxed out of our homes. (Referenda from the schools, library and township have been turned down.)

Elburn residents also share a number of values they want to preserve:

- Volunteer-spirited and honest citizenry.
- Hometown "Mayberry" atmosphere.
- Friendly and quiet neighborhoods, despite the whistles of the Union Pacific trains.
- Low crime rate and secure homes.
- Open space and agrarian heritage. (Elburn still has grain elevators and encourages Prairie-style architecture and incorporation of public land into new developments.)

As Elburn leadership looks to the future, they wonder "how will we be judged?" by succeeding generations. Willey fore-

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*"Community is not buildings.  
Community is the people."*

Mayor James L. Willey  
Elburn, Ill.

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sees several critical questions: Did we create public spaces and places? Did we foster community interconnections? Did we provide equal access to social resources? In other words, are there still coffee shops in which one can sit and feel part of a community? And, did we encourage cross-aged relationships?

On a more conceptual level, Willey presented several “growth planning clichés” the Village Board is trying to live up to in the community:

- The first is “better, not just bigger.” Leaders are trying to promote the mindset that, “We’re not just growing for the sake of growth,” Willey said.
- The second, “Here’s your hat, what’s your hurry,” means leaders are trying to make sure that development proposals fit the town’s goals, rather than rubber-stamping proposals that do not.
- “Sweet home, Elburn.” In other words, don’t be afraid of uniqueness.
- “Connect the dots.” The town is not hung up on a square grid, Willey said, but “we don’t think cul-de-sacs are a very good investment.”
- “The University of Elburn.” The notion is to create a green, campus-like feel with sidewalks “everywhere you want to go” and bike paths not far away.
- “Divide and conquer.” The best way to shop Randall Road is to not get onto Randall Road, he said, but to take back entrances.
- “Make lemonade.” The barreling Union Pacific trains are the big lemon in town, he said, but Elburn is “trying to make lemonade by inviting Metra” rather than having trains barrel through town with no way to board them.
- And, finally: Is this heaven? No, it’s open space,” recalling the spirit of the movie “Field of Dreams.”

Willey named three major challenges the community faces: how to expand the town’s water and sewer system to meet the demands of new development while continuing to filter radium out of its deep wells; how best to build an access road to the new Metra station in time for its opening, since the entire development probably will not be finished by then; and how to fund and acquire right-of-way for an Anderson Road overpass through the proposed transit-oriented development.

In response to other questions, Willey said the proposed overpass will include a bike lane, and “one of our macro goals has been to make (bike) trail connections.” Elburn has about two-and-a-half square miles of development now, and the “box” could accommodate up to six square miles of development. The main limitation to development, however, is the wastewater treatment plant. It could

expand to serve a population of 12,000 to 15,000 because it was originally built to serve a now-defunct meatpacking plant, but needs major upgrades, Willey said.

Elburn has not negotiated any boundary agreements with surrounding towns yet, he said, but leaders are particularly concerned about development encroaching from LaFox to the east, and see Harley Road as a “line in the sand.”

Elected and appointed officials of the town dialogue with major landowners “all the time,” said Administrator Morrison. The surrounding area is comprised of a few major holdings and many family farms.

Within the development area, 10,000-square-foot lots are now the average size, Willey said, with officials “trying to be cognizant of building life-cycle housing within Elburn. That’s a challenge if you’re going to say, two units per acre,” he said. The village would like to see apartments, condominiums, starter-homes, four-bedroom family homes, and assisted living facilities for seniors, or perhaps duplexes with “mom-in-law situations.”

While the village struck an annexation agreement that limited major developers A&B and Kennedy Homes to a density of two units per acre at Blackberry Creek, officials have not flatly rejected another proposal that would see construction of 800 units at 2.3 to 2.4 units per acre. Panel

*(text continued on p. 11)*



**Figure 5** Children walk home from the new school in the Williams Ridge subdivision.



Figure 6 Green Framework Proposed for Elburn

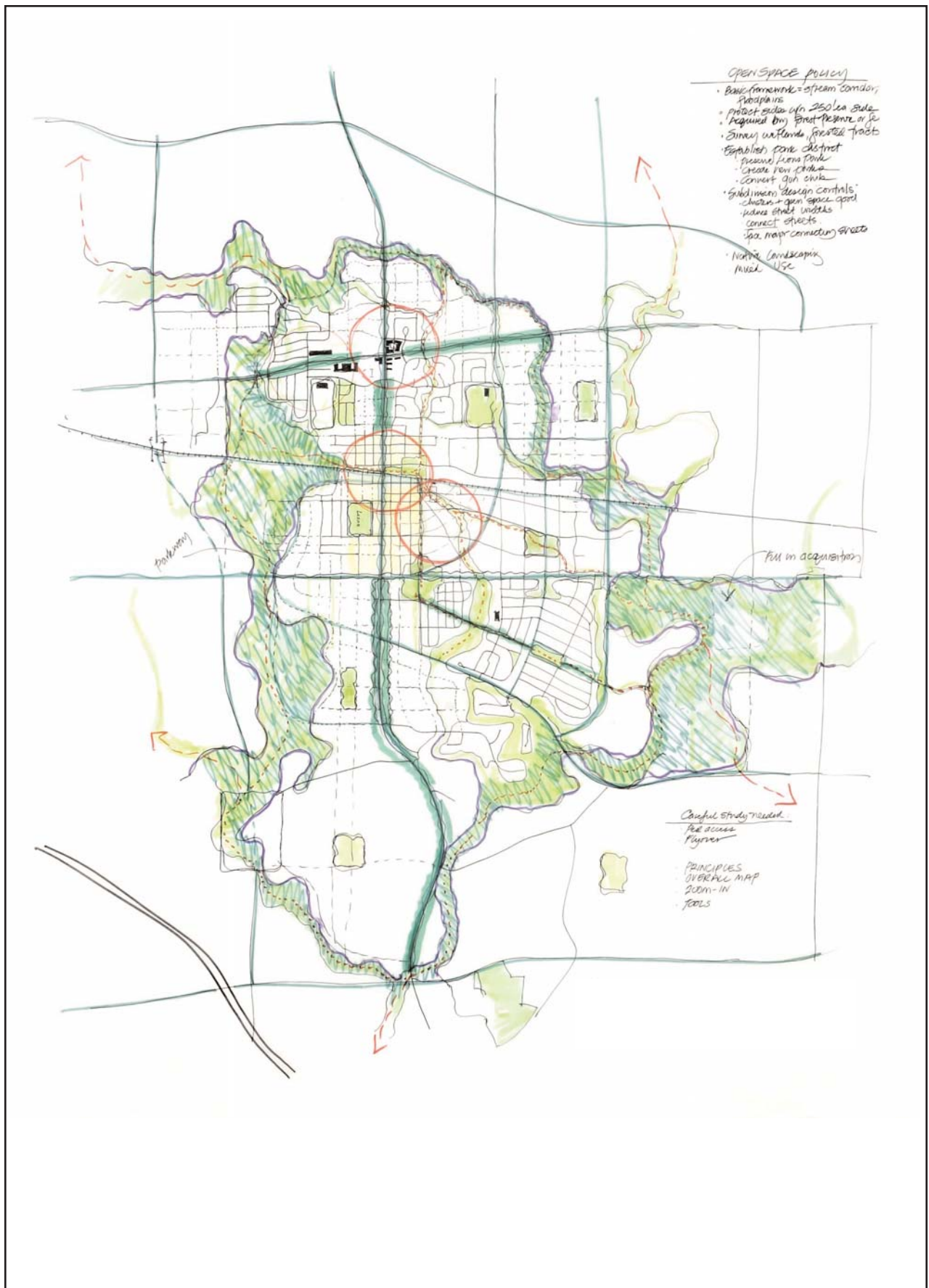


Figure 7 Transit-Oriented Development in Center of Village and Emerald Necklace



Figure 8 Weaving Green Spaces Through New Development

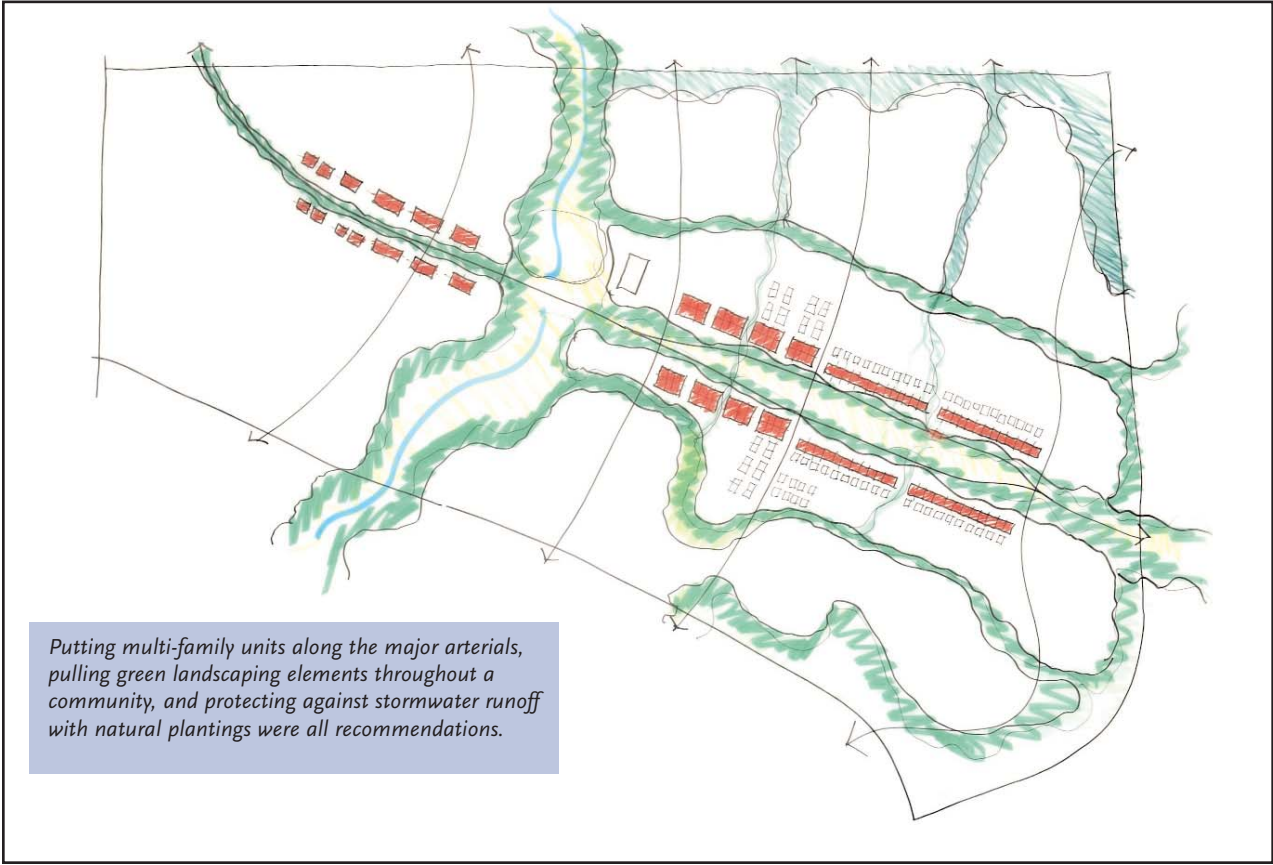


Figure 9 Transit-Oriented Development, Scheme A

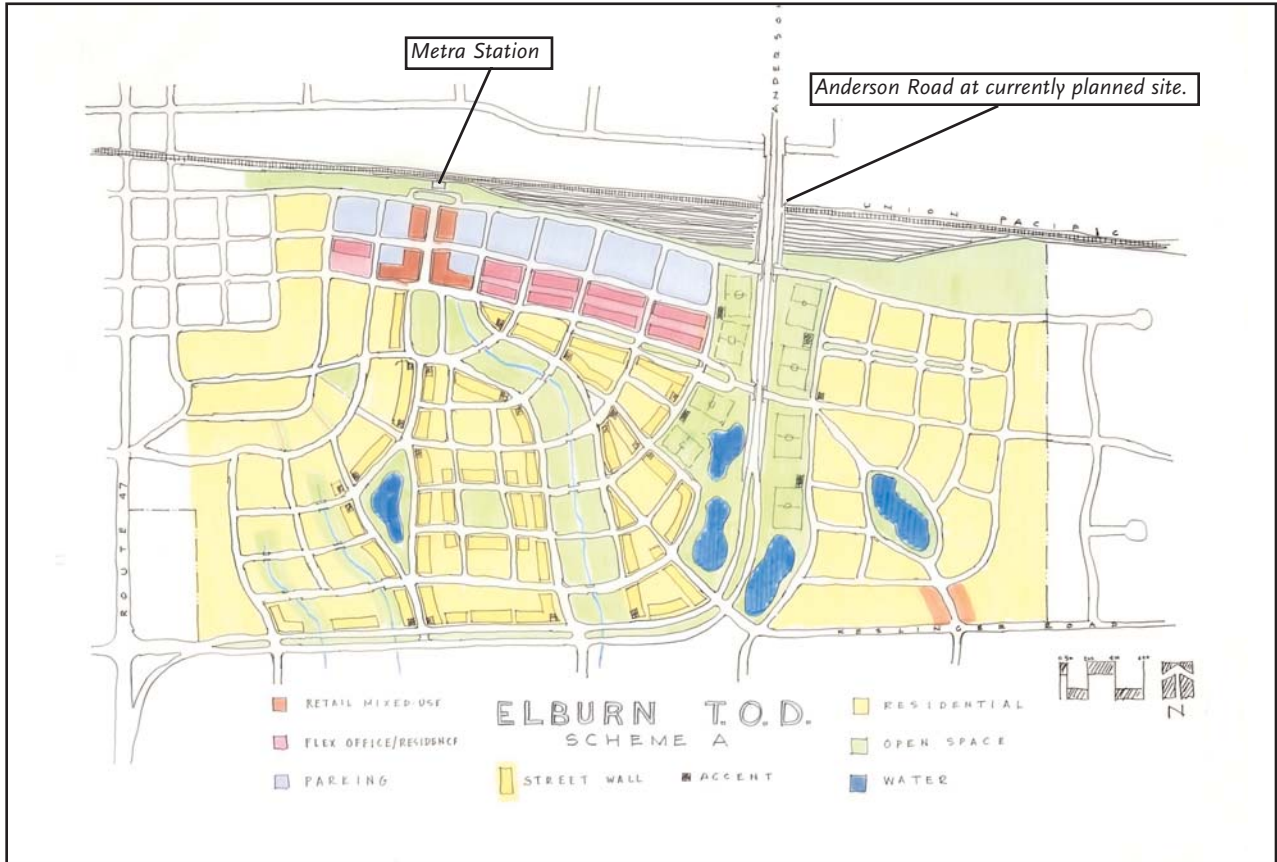


Figure 10 Transit-Oriented Development, Scheme B

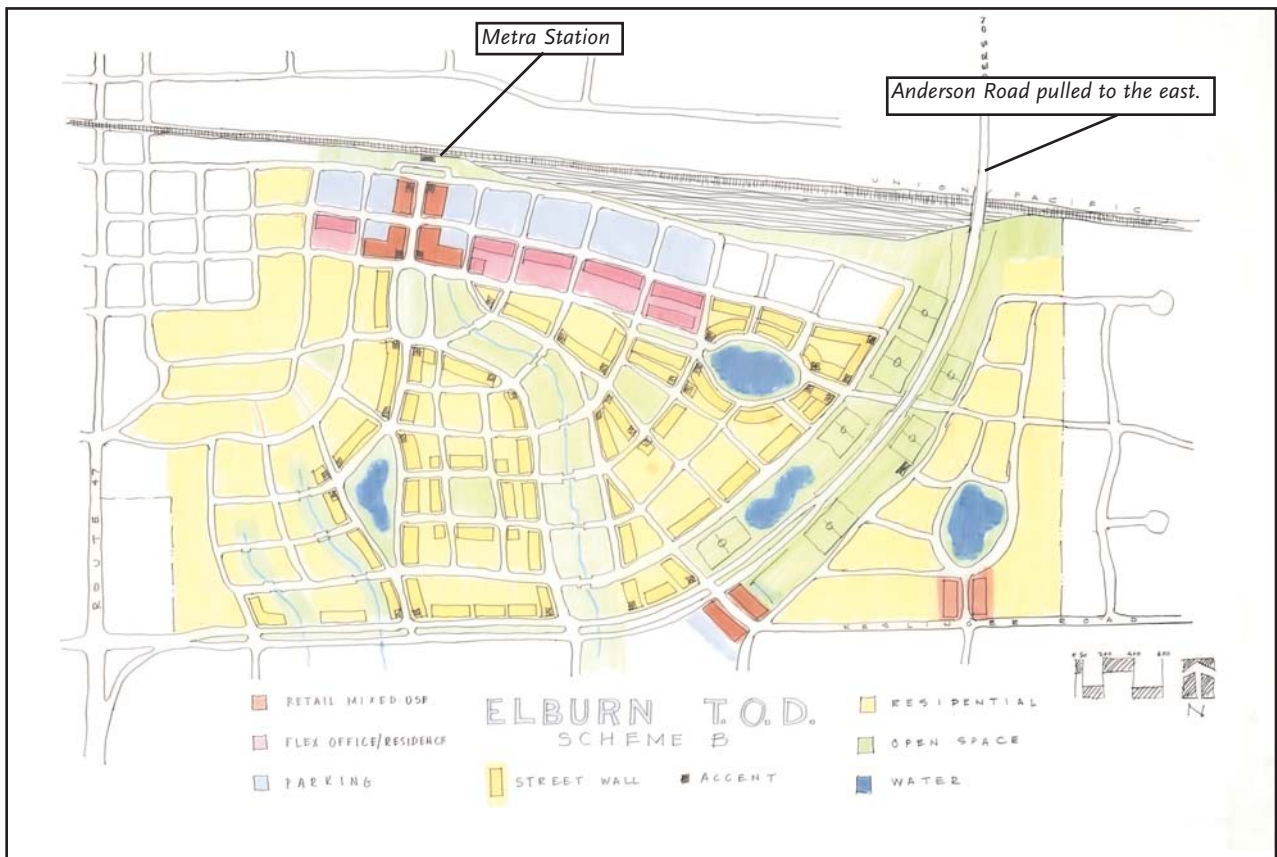


Figure 11 Proposed Building Types for Transit-Oriented Development Site

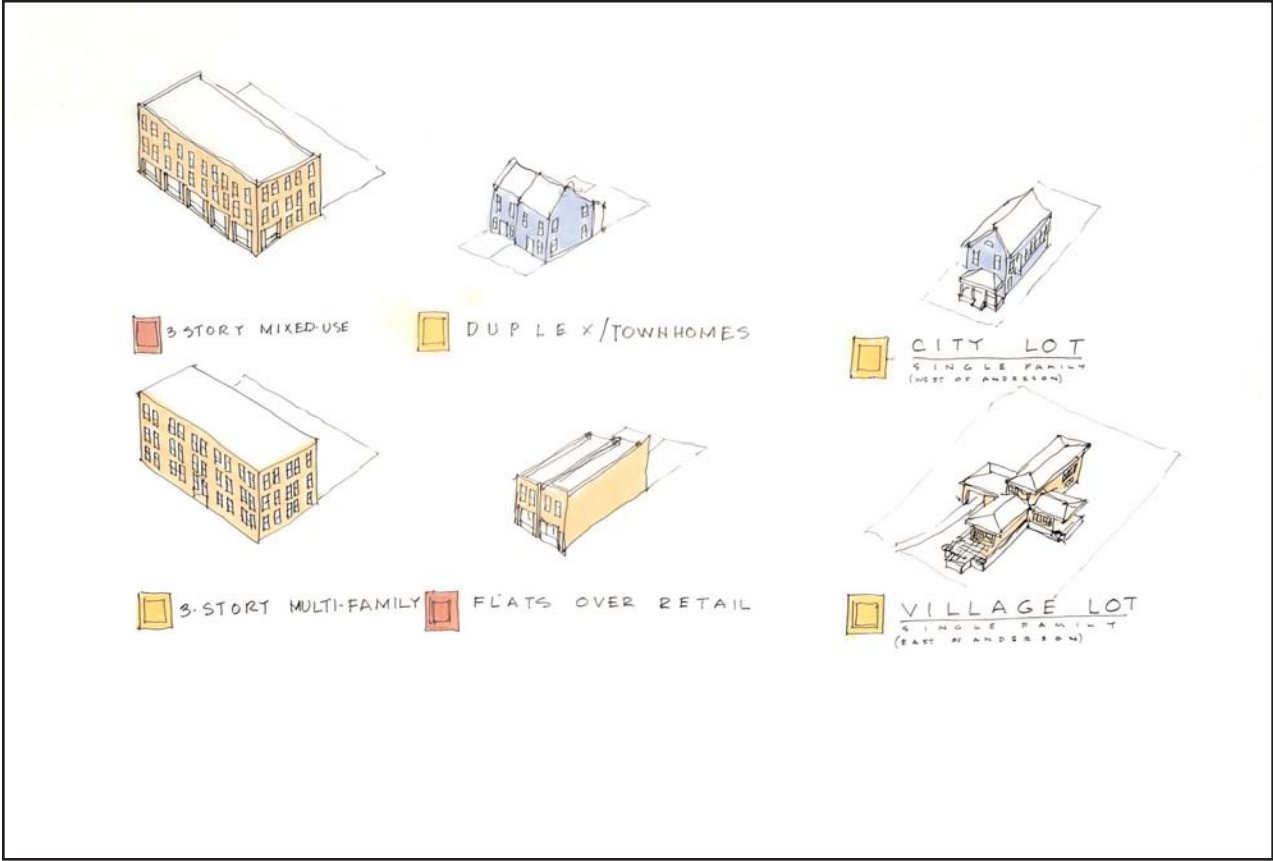
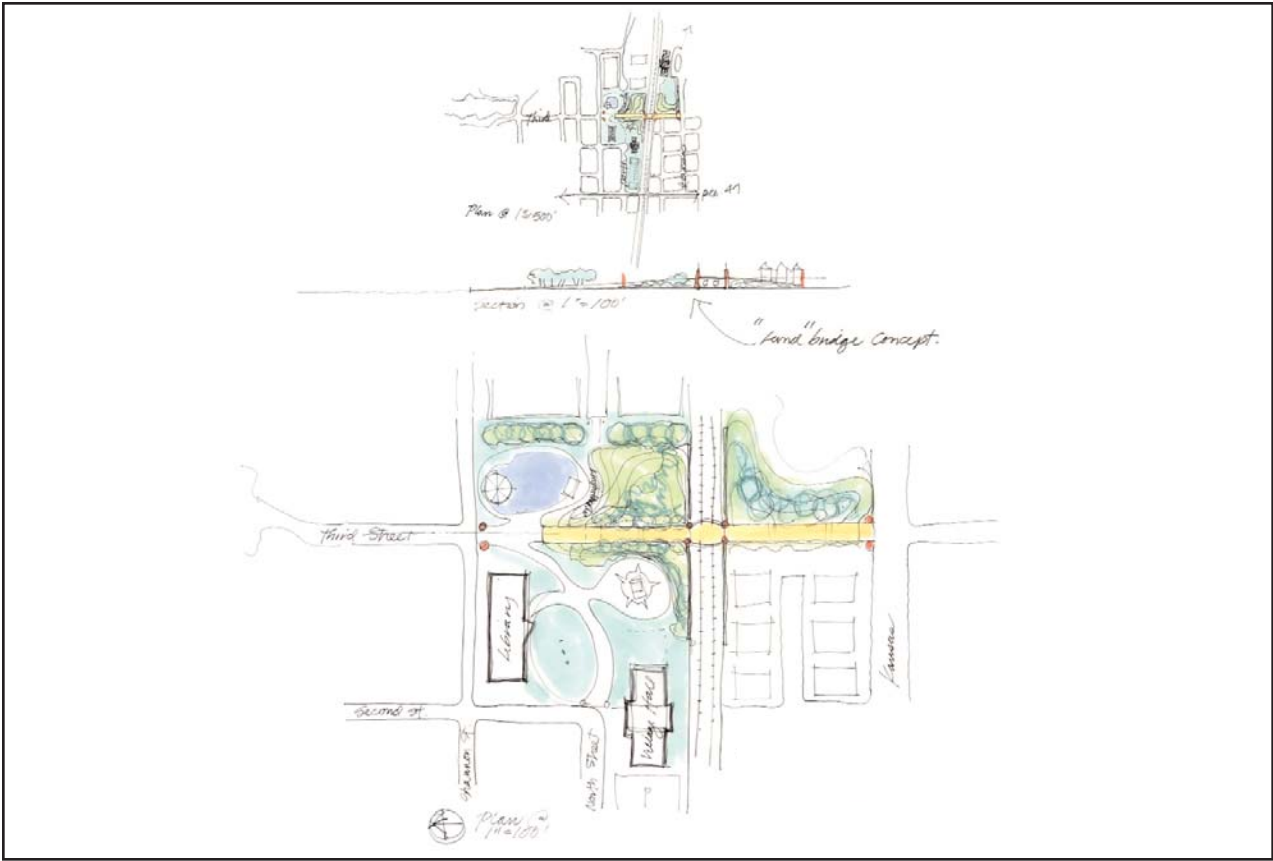


Figure 12 Pedestrian Bridge Detail





**Figure 13** Residents get together over lunch in the downtown.

member David K. Hill, chairman and CEO of Kimball Hill Homes, encouraged Morrison to ask developers for “32 flavors” of housing to balance family sizes and bring about a reasonable mix to finance schools more adequately.

Morrison said a proposed development by Kirk Homes would include a school site and a park. “Putting schools back in the neighborhoods saves money and increases the sense of community,” he said, adding that “bicycle paths [among neighborhoods] also create more of a commingling of community.” Morrison said he would love to see mixed-use developments, particularly near the Metra station, although stores often prefer to be at a major intersection like Routes 38 and 47, if they can pay roughly the same rent. Panel member Bruce A. Reid, of Arthur Hill & Company, LLC, suggested that residential properties could “fetch slightly higher prices” if retail amenities were in place. The village might think about offering incentives for retail development, Reid said. “You’ve got to impose retail standards and then reward it when it comes.” Hill offered the hope that Elburn “could have significant retail traffic” near its station.

Morrison reviewed Elburn’s financial situations, noting that Elburn has seen 13 to 17 percent growth per year in equalized assessed value (EAV). Kaneland School District 302 assesses an impact fee for schools of \$4,500 on a \$250,000 house but nothing on a \$450,000 house, he said, based on a formula using the rationale that higher-

priced homes pay their share in property taxes. Farmland that fetched \$17,500 an acre five years ago now sells for \$60,000 or more “inside the box,” Morrison said, but only for about \$22,000 outside. Although the county board currently does not want development west of Elburn, that could change with subsequent elections. The town wish list includes a pool and park district, as well as in-house planning and engineering staff.

## Resident Comments

**P**anel members met with several groups of citizens, business owners, and other stakeholders to hear their perspectives.

The first group included business owners and a school superintendent. One business owner described the traffic situation downtown as “hideous at best” and thinks the proposed Prairie Parkway would “help some” by routing trucks and other long-distance traffic from I-90 to the north to I-88 and other interstates to the south. He also said the Anderson Road link would have “limited impact” since it would only affect traffic going north on Route 47 and east on Route 38, and vice versa. Another thought the link would significantly relieve the problem of traffic stopped on Route 47 due to freight train crossings. He believed small-town Elburn disappeared 30 years ago, and said the town had lacked “rural character” for some time. He said it was “horrible to have extra referenda to pay for growth,” and added that builders should be responsible for the up-front costs for schools through impact fees like those paid for roads and sewers.

The school superintendent said the elementary school capacity should last until 2007-09 and the high school should be sufficient until 2008-10; the middle school already has reached capacity, with nine mobile classrooms that must be evacuated during every tornado warning. Different municipalities within the sprawling district have different perspectives on growth. “Growth has an unavoidable structural deficit for a school district,” since each child costs \$5,000 to \$7,000, and “we don’t start getting revenue from a new house for 18 months.” The bottom line is that people who have lived in the district for 50 years see their taxes go up for no additional services. Growth costs them.”

The superintendent noted the school district facilitates recreational activities on the strength of “agreements with eight different sports-related organizations.” The business owner agreed that it’s “hard to get financing” for referenda, with the schools and library having “failed repeatedly.” “The voting down of the referenda have been indications from the population. They don’t want to be taxed anymore.”

The second panel consisted of local business representatives and local officials who offered further insights. Elburn was trying to “insulate” itself by picking natural boundaries such as streams on which no one would want to develop. “We’re trying to expand far enough to build a buffer that keeps us quaint, yet viable,” one said. Another thought that the proposed Prairie Parkway would relieve Route 47 of some congestion and establish a western boundary to the surrounding area, drawing some growth past Elburn rather than toward it. Another wasn’t so sure of the road’s purpose, and expressed concern that it “might actually increase traffic due to the land shifts. You’ll remove some traffic, but you’ll replace it with the development that occurs.”

A business owner said the grocery stores expected to come at the intersection of Routes 38 and 47 will have Prairie-style architecture, but the village’s larger concern is a façade program to help revitalize downtown. Another business leader said he’s seen the financial statements of many of those businesses, which struggle to serve the local market while competing against Randall Road. “(A grocery store) has not put its store up because there are not enough rooftops,” he said. To keep downtown viable, “(The village is) going to have to find businesses that don’t depend on traffic.”

A third panel was comprised of the village engineer consultant, a zoning committee member and retired teacher, and a new management consulting business owner. According to the engineer, water and wastewater capacity will be the biggest challenge facing Elburn, since the wastewater plant will be tapped out once the Blackberry Creek subdivision is built out. Stormwater issues are “pretty much resolved,” one official said, but since 1996, drinking water levels in deep wells have been declining and not enough shallow wells have been drilled.

The zoning committee member sees the need for more analysis of the effects of growth, saying he’s concerned about Route 47 traffic and overcrowded schools. The business owner believes the village needs to balance residen-

tial with commercial development: in spite of the competition from Randall Road, becoming a bedroom community would place too much burden on homeowners, who currently pay approximately \$5,000 per year in property taxes for a \$250,000 house. Recreational amenities are well provided through park facilities and leagues for baseball, basketball and soccer, although some people believe the village needs a park district, he said. Elburn needs to reserve land for school development, the group agreed, and new ballfields should be placed in the floodplain.

A fourth panel consisted of Metra staff and a village trustee. The Metra staffers reported the new train station would be “full service,” with 300 parking spaces and room to expand on 20 acres, a warming shelter, and a pedestrian bridge. Metra will contribute \$165,000 to these facilities, with developers helping to pay for the bridge. The village hopes to develop the area around the parking lot with retail and multifamily residential, perhaps swapping some land with Metra in the process.

## Final Presentation to the Community

The panel spent a full working day deliberating over what they had heard from the city leaders and other participants and applying their expertise to the problems at hand.

About 50 people gathered for the panel’s final presentation, titled “Thinking Inside and Outside the Box: In-town and Country,” at the end of the second day. The panel divided its recommendations into three areas: Market and Finance; Conservation Development and Natural Resource Protection; and Transit-Oriented Development.

### Market and Finance

First and foremost, Panel Chair Greg Hummel said, Elburn must proactively execute its vision in the face of accelerating development through such approaches as boundary agreements with surrounding towns, protection of the “green necklace,” a comprehensive plan that establishes the town’s framework and design principles, and both regulatory and financial implementation tools. The panel emphasized the need for agreements with fast-growing towns like Sugar Grove, and was heartened by the news that Elburn officials were poised to begin talks with that



**Figure 14** The village was advised to protect the “emerald necklace” of green and streams that ring the downtown. Creating a protected greenbelt requires natural barriers – 250-ft. along the river – and developer incentives to protect the waterways.

town within the following month. “Outside the box, discussions are limited. That is an animating principle of the dialogue that we think needs to be changed,” Hummel said.

Elburn has little demand for office or industrial space, panelist Steve Friedman said, but there is demand for retail – a supermarket and big-box stores at the intersection of Routes 38 and 47 – as well as niche businesses in the downtown. To further that effort, Elburn should explore becoming a “Main Street” (state offered program) community. “You are right on the verge of a great deal of growth,” Friedman said. “The [retail] competition from Randall Road is substantial. There is a need to serve the community and tax base [with bigger box stores]. But don’t overwhelm your vision.”

On the residential side, Friedman said, there is a demand for a variety of housing types, ranging from single-family homes to apartments and condos to accommodate young couples and seniors. The latter housing would not put

additional pressure on the schools. The housing mix should be encouraged within each subdivision, not solely in the transit-oriented development in town. “Remember that open space adds value to all housing types, he said. “It’s central to your vision. As you grow, if you only provide certain housing types, you will lose that type of [multigenerational] character.”

#### Conservation Development and Natural Resource Protection

Hummel urged city leaders to do more to protect the “emerald necklace” of green space ringing the downtown (Fig. 6, Pg. 7). Creating a protected greenbelt requires natural barriers – 250-ft. along the water – and other environmental rules that may not be in place. Elburn also should offer “carrots,” or developer incentives, Hummel said, to protect the waterways and concentrate development within the protected parcels. Incentives could include creation of a transferable development rights bank or village acquisition of some parcels.



**Figures 15 and 16** The panel recommended integrating green space throughout new developments, using native landscaping around detention ponds, and keeping open the views of undulating cornfields.

Panelist Joyce O’Keefe, associate director of Openlands Project, went into more detail. Village leaders should prioritize preservation of key parcels and creatively use open space to provide recreational opportunities, she said. “We understand that you already are planning to retain the 250-foot buffer. We think that is going to be critical in protecting water quality and providing an aesthetic that I think you all value.” The Kane County Forest Preserve District may be interested in acquiring and managing the land within the easements, she added. Bicycle and pedestrian paths should “both go through the emerald necklace and connect it to the community.”

To help preserve green assets, the village should inventory its forests, wetlands, and stream headwaters, O’Keefe said. The village must protect those, using floodplains solely for recreational activities and establishing a park district. Nationally, minimum standards call for 10 acres of park per 1,000 people. Developers should be required to build those measurements into their plans. “This is a good time in the life of your community to be looking at establishing a park district,” she reiterated. The village also should work with the gun club to protect its land for open space or recreation in perpetuity.

Elburn should work to encourage healthy lifestyles among its residents by adopting a formal, community-wide bicycle trail plan where paths link into a network, O’Keefe said. “You’ve seen many articles that talk about the concern over fitness. Encourage that healthy lifestyle here,” she said. The trail system could provide alternative transportation as well as recreation, she added. “If it’s done right, it can relieve the traffic.”

To free up usable open space, the village should cluster its housing; to provide options for people of all ages and incomes, it should mix uses, O’Keefe said. The village should also consider larger sites to heighten the protection of water features and promote wildlife habitat while offering density bonuses for developments with more than two units per acre that feature decreased impervious surfaces. “We’re recommending that you begin to think about managing stormwater,” she said. “Integrating natural landscaping throughout the subdivision provides a natural water flow. Natural plantings will make stormwater management much more efficient – and the area lovely.” To further this goal, the village should adopt a landscape ordinance that would encourage native landscaping.

To further improve stormwater management as well as promote safer streets, Elburn should reduce required street widths and think about subdivision design more creatively, using natural vegetation, increasing the size of required trees in new subdivisions, and naturalizing detention ponds, O’Keefe said. “Good stormwater management means reducing impervious surfaces,” she said. Speaking specifically about the street widths, she added, “A lot of engineers come to that kicking and screaming. But we’ve found that it works” in reducing water runoff. Another benefit: “You don’t need traditional curbs and gutters if you’ve adapted best practices for conservation design.”

Panel member Diane Legge Kemp, of DLK Architecture Inc., expanded on the principle of using open space to tie the community together, saying the village should be “connecting the green on the edge to the green as you go into town and to new parks.” She noted that additional parks



will be needed for recreation as the village expands, and “we think you should say where they are going to be.” While the village is doing that, it should map out new streets and desired development densities “so it’s no mystery,” she said. “So developers will know, coming in, what you want.” And, she advised, require developers to pay to help create bicycle paths within their subdivisions that connect to the village-wide network.

Presenting drawings of the ideas developed by the panel (Figs. 6-12, Pgs. 7-10), Legge Kemp recommended the village work more aggressively to create and link greater amounts of green space in future developments, creating “true parkways” on major collector streets by requiring developers to build houses set back from the street and facing them – rather than being backed up to arterials like Route 38 and Keslinger Road (Fig. 8, Pg. 8). Native landscaping would provide a buffer between the private properties and major thoroughfares while providing stormwater retention. Gesturing to a majestic photo of an undulating cornfield (Fig. 16, Pg. 14), she said, “It’s those beautiful open views that make this place unique. It doesn’t have to be farmland; it can be native grasses. Developers don’t lose any units with clustered development. It’s how you distribute them.”

### Transit-Oriented Development

There is a rare opportunity in Elburn to create a transit-oriented development near the new train station and rail yard. The site will consist of a smart design of parking lots, the right mix of housing and retail, and a focus on community building activities such as a farmers’ market on weekends, with extra efforts to link the new area to the older downtown. Panel member Reid explained that the panel focused on re-routing truck traffic and providing alternative north-south automobile routes, while creating links from the new station to the municipal campus (across the tracks) and existing downtown (on the west).

The panel’s approach to design around the new station was to reduce internal vehicle trips by providing “some amenities in the new development that would allow people to easily walk to their destinations. The physical characteristics of the site provide challenges given the contours and slopes, but those features do provide opportunities for views and innovative design that respect the land. Other issues to contend with will include third-party landownership, hydrology, and the best location for the Anderson

Road overpass. On the plus side, the development will be able to take advantage of a large “canvas” of 260 acres, and there is both strong market demand and low interest rates.

Panel member Douglas Farr, of Farr Associates Architecture and Urban Design, put forth concepts for the plan that included a boulevard-like design for the Anderson Road overpass, noting that a “standard, IDOT five-lane road is pedestrian-hostile and divides a town.” The median makes the street easier to cross, since it can be done one lane at a time. “IDOT does not like this,” he said. “You’ll have to drag them (to it). But it does not separate the town. It links the town.”

Opposite the train station, the panel envisions about two blocks of retail and then higher density housing development with flexible uses to respond to market demand. Soccer and other play fields underneath the overpass will provide a buffer, and parking lots near the station could be used for recreational purposes in the evenings and on the weekends. Additional parking could be located north of the tracks. The housing types could range from single-family homes at three to six units per acre to two-story townhomes at 14 to 20 units per acre, but also include two-story duplexes (six to 10 units per acre), three-story multi-family (12 to 15 units per acre), and mixed-use residential and retail (six to 10 units per acre). “We think there’s a whole mix of choices here. They’re key to a successful plan,” Farr said. (Fig. 11, Pg. 10)

The panel drew up a second possibility for the Anderson Road bypass, labeled “Scheme B,” (Fig. 10, Pg. 9) with a wider sweep to the east for the road, which would create the potential for a larger transit-oriented development area and possibly be less expensive to build, since it would cross the train tracks at a narrower point. “We think this is a winning proposition,” Farr said, which would bring in more property tax and sales tax revenue and do even less to divide the site. “That many more people and that many more homes will be within walking distance” of the train, he said. “Go toe-to-toe with IDOT folk in getting this right,” he urged the village.

Panel member Randy Tharp, of A. Epstein & Sons, said this “nontraditional bypass” would enhance the new community by minimizing the number of times residents need to get into their cars, and would create parking efficiencies

by locating the ballfields near the station. “There’s always a shortage of parking near recreational fields,” he said, noting that the ballgames would occur at “complementary times when Metra parking is not heavily used.” A farmers’ market could help draw people to the station area, he said, as would bicycle and pedestrian links to the village complex, downtown, and elsewhere.

### Financing and Development Strategies

Friedman turned attention to how best to ground the planning efforts, noting that “comprehensive plans are not binding documents. Articulating your vision at that policy level isn’t sufficient.” Elburn’s leaders need to make the “tough decisions” necessary to create a framework of where streets, parks, and public facilities will be located. This framework should preserve the village’s small-town feel and green infrastructure. Mixed-use developments “should happen in each segment of the community,” Friedman said, with multi-generational housing to achieve fiscal balance.

The village’s master utility plan for sewer, water, and stormwater “should not be project by project,” he said, and neither should standards for such infrastructure as the primary and collector level street plan, the size and character of blocks including setbacks and heights, and the layout and feel of streets, parkways, sidewalks and bicycle paths. “You need to make sure you reflect your vision and enforce your vision,” he said. “You tell the landowners what you want. It will shape how your community feels, how walkable it is, and how interconnected it is.”

Hummel laid out essential first steps for preserving the “emerald necklace,” including developing an ownership inventory, prioritization of key parcels, securing venture capital, developing a financial plan for acquisitions, and beginning an outreach strategy of going owner by owner. “It’s all about money and planning,” Hummel said. “You’ve got to have both.” He predicted, “You’re going to need the private sector as your partners.” The village has a number of financial tools at its disposal, including bond purchases, conservation easements, pre-annexation and annexation agreements, exactions and incentives. Financing could come from a variety of federal, state, local and nonprofit sources. “The Speaker of the House represents you. You have an incredible opportunity,” Hummel said, adding, “Chicago is full of major not-for-profit foundations who would embrace what you want to do.”

The regulatory tools village leaders should consider include pre-annexation agreements that concentrate development in appropriate areas, and recrafting development regulations to reflect Elburn’s vision based on model codes and ordinances. Priorities should include all quadrants of the intersection of Route 47 and Keslinger Road, as well as the gun club and its surrounding areas. The village also needs a financial plan based on such techniques as general obligation bonding, alternative revenue bonds, developer exactions, and special service areas, Friedman said. A TIF should be pursued for downtown. “As you try to accommodate or adjust to this growth, you’re going to need a financial plan that is more expansive,” he said.

The panel identified several potential sources for seed money to kick off the village’s efforts, including the U.S. and Ill. Environmental Protection Agencies, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ill. Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Kane County (for planning grants), and area foundations. “Seed money is where it all starts,” Hummel said. “We’ve identified some specific possible sources. It’s not exhaustive. The seed capital helps support the enterprise; project financing transfers into specific areas.” The panel envisions an L-shaped TIF district that extends along Route 47 and then eastward toward the Metra station, he said, while special service assessments (SSAs) “are tied in with preserving the green necklace.”

Summing up, Hummel told village leaders and residents they have unique potential to develop based on smart growth principles. “You have an absolutely wonderful opportunity that is rare for an exurb,” he said. He urged them to move forward to make the vision happen.

Mayor Willey thanked the panel for its efforts. “We hoped for some fresh eyes and fresh ideas. We certainly got a boatload of ideas,” he said. “The energy level was intense. The sincerity level of this group from the very first minute was palpable. We’ve got a lot to think about.”

# Panel Recommendations

## Conservation development and protection of natural resources

- Work with Kane County Forest Preserve District to acquire land and/or to use conservation easements.
- Establish a park district for both land acquisition and programming. Preserve the Lions Club ball field and the gun club (southwest of town) for recreation through conservation easements.
- Adopt a community-wide bicycle trail plan, with all paths linking into a village-wide network. Require developers to connect bicycle and pedestrian paths in new developments.
- Retain 250-foot buffers on both sides of the streams that make up the “box.”
- Encourage mixed-use and multi-family housing in new developments, cluster housing and increased density of more than two units per acre.
- Plant natural vegetation and naturalize all detention ponds (leaving an area open for fishing in those ponds the village stocks).
- Plant more and larger trees as well as native landscaping along parkway collector streets; set houses back from major streets but require that they face the streets.

## Transit-oriented development

- Mix housing and retail uses, scatter parking lots, focus on a weekend draw like a farmer’s market, and link new area to the older downtown.
- Include building types of mixed-use residential and retail; mixed-use flats over retail; multi-family; duplexes, townhomes and single-family residential.
- Build a bypass road that extends Anderson Road south and then west to connect Route 38 to Keslinger Road to maneuver traffic around the transit-oriented development without bisecting the town.
- Consider a divided parkway design for the bypass with a wide sweep around the new development.

## Financing options

- Use additional and innovative regulatory and financial implementation tools. Explore using all available financing forms, including general obligation bonds, revenue bonds, grants, planning seed money from county and foundations.
- Consider using a tax-increment financing (TIF) district as a conservation tool for the area of the existing downtown and the transit-oriented development.
- Explore becoming a Main Street community, focusing on a niche market.
- Set aside land near Routes 38 and 47 to bring in larger-scale retail, and sales tax revenue.
- Consider the area west of town near I-88 to accommodate industrial uses to provide additional revenue for the village and school district.

## Maintain the vision of the community

- Negotiate boundary agreements with all neighbors, particularly fast-growing towns like Sugar Grove, to manage growth, keep suburbia from engulfing Elburn, and permanently stamp the area along the “emerald necklace” as open space.
- Create a detailed comprehensive plan establishing the town framework and include design principles, down to the block level, including block sizes, narrower street widths, park locations, sidewalks and bikeways, and tie it to a financial and implementation plan.

ULI CHICAGO AND CAMPAIGN FOR SENSIBLE GROWTH  
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