

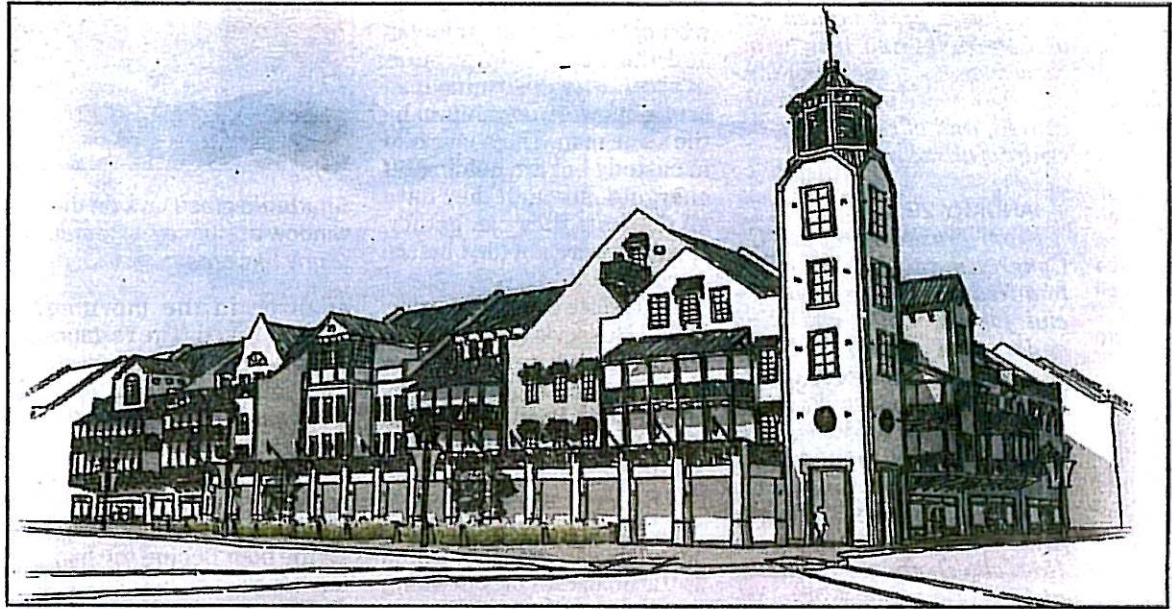
Soft economy is right time to plan for economic development in WH

By MERIDITH JUMISKO
FOR THE ZION-BENTON NEWS

Winthrop Harbor isn't letting a sour economy put a damper on its economic development plans that have been sprouting for many years now. In fact, the village has unveiled the concept drawings for the TIF redevelopment proposal that could be the stimulus to greatly change the future of the village.

It's at times like this when the development community does its planning, according to Pat DiPersio, Director of Economic Development in the village. Fully aware that the current economy obviously affects plans, he says they will be in position to be ready when the market turns around and goes back up.

The pieces are coming together and the big picture is becoming clearer, just as when a jigsaw puzzle is pieced together. The pieces have been talked about for many years now. The Triangle. The 7th Street Streetscape. The METRA station expansion. Further lakefront development. Some of these ideas have been talked about



Here is how "the triangle" in Winthrop Harbor could look in the future, as proposed by LM Development Partners. This is the view of the concept building design from the southwest intersection of Seventh Street and Sheridan Road. Photos courtesy Winthrop Harbor Economic Development

longer than others. All affect residents in the village. And all lead to the same goal: generate new revenues for the village.

The village is working with

LM Development Partners in planning the redevelopment of an eight-acre parcel of land on the northeast corner of Sheridan Road and Seventh Street, the so-called "triangle" area. Conceptual drawings, prepared by JMH Architects, have been released, "depicting a mixed-use development, combining retail, office and residential to create a new and vibrant town center," according to DiPersio. The development would serve as a catalyst to future development along Sheridan Road in the business district, DiPersio states.

The village is continuing to negotiate with the developer regarding this project. The developer is reviewing the proposed agreement, and DiPersio expects a response in the coming weeks. Back in October 2007, a TIF district was established for the area. TIF is a financial incentive used to attract the interest of developers, in which expected future revenues are used to pay for current improvements.

The 7th Street Streetscape project consists of defining the downtown with the installation of a nautically themed streetscape along Seventh Street from Whitney to the railroad tracks, and 300 feet in each direction from Seventh Street on Sheridan Road. Preliminary engineering is complete and the project is ready to go out to bid once funding is secured.

An application for funding has been submitted to the Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program. The applications are being reviewed, and the village hopes for a response after February. There is a matching component, with the village having to put in money. When the village receives a response will determine if construction can begin as early as this coming summer. If funding is not approved, the village will explore other options, DiPersio says, including possibly using TIF money, to get the project finished.



This is the proposed look for Seventh Street in Winthrop Harbor, going east to the marina, once the Seventh Street Streetscape project is completed.

WH DEVELOPMENT
FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, the METRA parking lot on Seventh Street is set to double its capacity for vehicles, while the warming shelter will be replaced with a larger, indoor, heated warming shelter. METRA is responsible for the funding of this project and according to its contract, construction is to be completed by this coming July. The lot will be completed first.

Studies show that even in a poor economy, development continues to happen around train stops and public transportation, DiPersio says. People who live near a transit system will use it to go to work, to shop and for recreation. The immediate plan is to get people to come to the village on the train for recreation purposes, but it can grow from there, DiPersio says. "The value of a METRA stop can't be overstated."

As train riders know, the stops to Winthrop Harbor aren't as frequent as those to Waukegan. DiPersio would like the train yard in Kenosha, Wis. to expand so it can have the ability to accept more trains. Then, there could be more stops in the village. A public transportation survey has been available on the village's Web site, as an attempt to show METRA officials that if there were more stops in the village there would be more riders.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the opening of North Point Marina "and the promise for economic prosperity that would follow," according to DiPersio. He is not focusing on why more prosperity may not have happened in the past. His eyes are on the present and future and

taking advantage of the fact the marina is here.

DiPersio said the marina is a unique and obvious aspect to attract people to town, though not necessarily the only one. But it's something few other communities have. It's the largest inland marina in the United States. Not every community can brag about that. It's leverage that gives the village a competitive advantage in the market. It's an attraction; a destination.

A proposal was presented, nearly a year ago, to the state for the development of property at the state-owned lakefront. Private investors have expressed interest in building a hotel/resort, restaurants, and shops. The area would also be improved with a nature center and trails that would connect the lakefront to the METRA station and downtown.

At this point there has been "no quantifiable response" from the state, DiPersio says, and village officials are hoping to sit down with officials at the state level to discuss the proposal. A copy has been sent to the governor's chief of staff, the Department of Natural Resources that manages the property and many other elected officials. The proposal would provide the village and the state with "significant revenue," DiPersio says. They are asking the state to consider the joint venture, in which private, not village or state money would be used. "We are trying very hard to find ways to support our village financially," DiPersio says.

The plans are very preliminary. In addition to the proposed new buildings, there would be open space preserved and protected from eventual erosion. The environment would be enhanced and

protected as opposed to diminished and damaged. While the marina now provides a narrow market opportunity that attracts boaters, they want to attract everyone and provide more public access, DiPersio says. He points out the lakefront is in the position to be further developed immediately, as there are no brownfields or industrial plants to be removed.

What do all these plans mean for residents? There would be new revenue to pay for services that won't come from taxing the residents, DiPersio says. As well as a vibrant business district offering goods and services that residents want and need, increased lakefront facilities with more access to more residents, and even more pride to live in the village.

All the pieces do fit together. They are part of a larger plan and the village wants to find a way to have it happen, DiPersio says. He acknowledges that if one piece doesn't happen, the whole plan doesn't necessarily collapse. However they do all support

each other. The "triangle" developer doesn't want to be the only development happening. The streetscape project is not for the benefit to make one street look pretty and take away from other needs in the community, DiPersio says. Not only does the street lead to the lakefront, but the village can show the state that besides wanting to develop the state land, the village is working to improve what they already have.

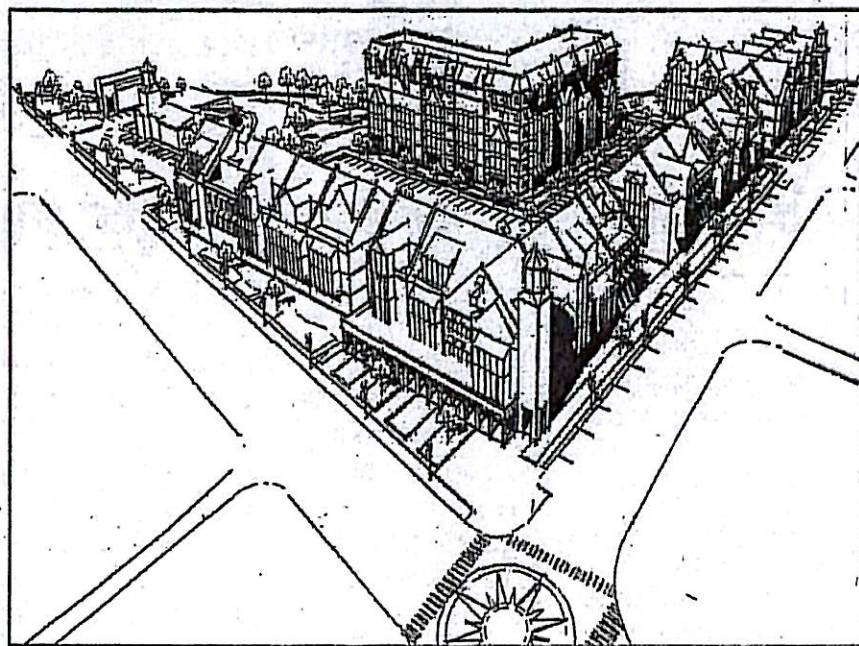
The METRA station is the hub of it all. More attractive walking trails leading train passengers up to the town and down to the lakefront can lead to more foot traffic for stores, restaurants and the lakefront. Visitors can spend the day both at the lake and in town. There are no other METRA stops in a state park in Illinois, DiPersio points out.

DiPersio says if the village is able to do all of these things overnight, "Winthrop Harbor will change." This would further develop and be something positive for the region, the county, and the state, DiPersio believes.

DiPersio says the job of the village officials is to serve the residents of Winthrop Harbor. The plans all along have included input and public meetings with the public. More input from residents, businesses and organizations is needed now. In the coming months, brochures will be distributed, display boards will be paraded out, and meetings will be held for feedback. Plans can also be seen on the village's Web site: winthrop-harbor.com.

If anyone has questions or comments, contact DiPersio at 847-872-3846 Ext 255 or email pdipersio@winthrop-harbor.com. Residents are also encouraged to voice their support to their elected officials at the state level, to help drive the state's decision makers to take action on the proposal.

All of these pieces coming together, DiPersio says, will "redefine the business district and business opportunities for Winthrop Harbor for the next 100 years. It can really have that significant impact."



A bird's eye view of the concept site design from the southwest intersection of Seventh Street and Sheridan Road.

3
I
O
C
A
L
N
E
W
S