



North Avenue Corridor Revitalization and Mobility Plan



Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the groups, residents, students, business owners, and elected officials who participated in the creation of this plan.

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CORRIDOR VISION STATEMENT

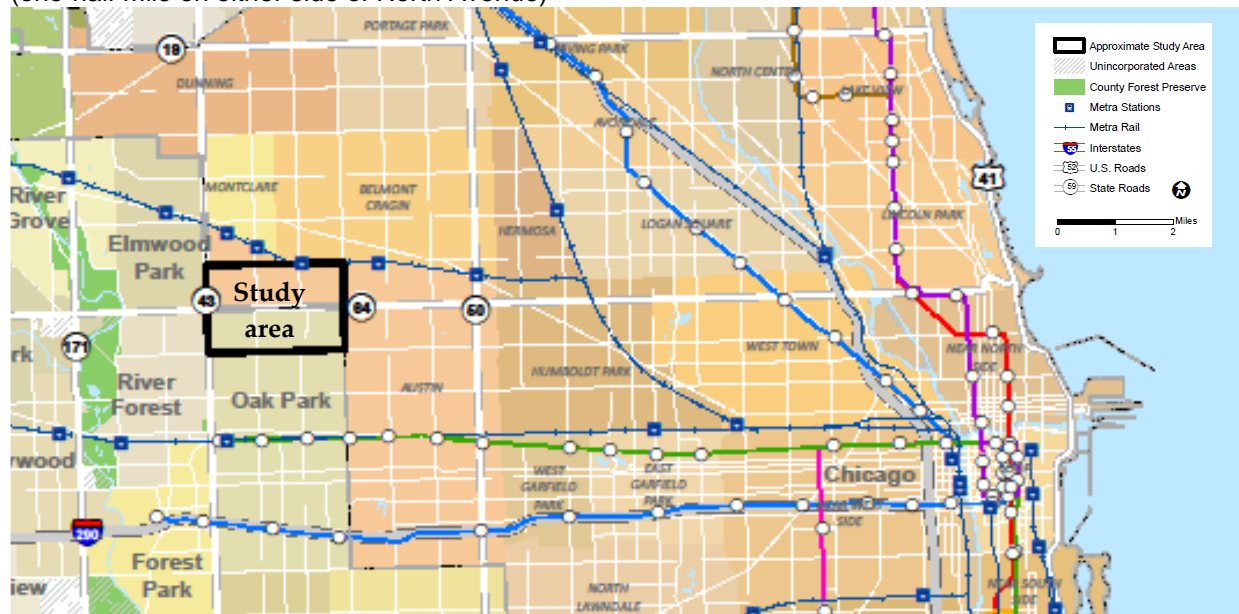
We envision North Avenue as a safe, inviting place to live, work, shop, dine, and walk.

Introduction

The North Avenue Corridor Revitalization and Mobility Plan presents a vision for the future and a framework for making decisions to implement that future. It is the result of over two years of work led by The North Avenue District (The District), the City of Chicago's 29th Ward (City), the Village of Oak Park (Village), and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), along with the communities' residents, business owners, workers, and leaders.

The study area is in Cook County, approximately 10 miles northwest of downtown Chicago. The North Avenue corridor, between Austin Boulevard and Harlem Avenue, serves as a boundary between the Village of Oak Park and the Galewood neighborhood of Chicago. Neighboring municipalities include Elmwood Park and River Forest. Neighboring Chicago community areas include Montclare and Belmont Cragin. The corridor is serviced by Interstate 290, one Metra station, and CTA and Pace bus lines. About 14,756 people live in the study area.

Figure 1: Locational context: North Avenue study area
(one-half mile on either side of North Avenue)



Need for the corridor plan

North Avenue was once a vibrant commercial stretch along two neighboring communities — Chicago and Oak Park. In recent years, with changing retail formats and strong competition from other corridors, North Avenue has experienced challenges with vacancies. North Avenue needs a plan that can renew its place as a commercial center and guide revitalization and mobility along the corridor in ways that align with community priorities.

Residents and community stakeholders want to direct today's choices through a long-range vision for the corridor. The District, the City, and the Village engaged CMAP's Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program to develop a plan that builds on the area's valuable assets. This plan draws on these assets to help guide and strengthen the North Avenue corridor in the decades ahead, incorporating input from community organizations, residents and public agencies in the area. A framework for future reinvestment and redevelopment along the corridor, the plan will help The District, the City, the Village, elected officials, village/city departments, residents, business owners, and potential investors make informed decisions on land use, transportation, infrastructure, and capital improvements.

To implement its recommendations, the plan identifies action items and relevant partners both within and outside government. The strategies in the plan are not meant to be a comprehensive list but rather, suggested next steps that will help bring the plan to reality.

Planning process

The process to create the North Avenue Corridor Revitalization and Mobility Plan included multiple steps over approximately two years. The process was crafted with assistance from a steering committee of various community stakeholders, as well as public input. In early 2018, The District, the City, and the Village met with CMAP staff to develop a scope of work for the project. A work plan established program tasks, a timeline for the program, and recommended participation by the community steering committee.

Additionally, to help develop strategies for revitalization and mobility along the corridor, CMAP engaged the Urban Land Institute Chicago (ULI Chicago). ULI Chicago is a district council of the Urban Land Institute, a membership-based, multidisciplinary real estate forum. Through its Technical Assistance Services Program, ULI Chicago offers communities strategic advice from development experts. In partnership with CMAP, ULI Chicago convened a workshop to study the corridor, come up with strategies to revitalize the corridor, and strengthen its development potential. The recommendations in this plan largely are drawn from ULI Chicago's report, which is included in Appendix A.

Lastly, the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT), with support from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), conducted a traffic safety and mobility study for the corridor to prioritize transportation improvements. Public engagement for the CDOT study was



done in coordination with this plan. Relevant recommendations from the draft report will be included in this plan as supporting strategies. The draft report is included in Appendix B.

Engagement

To create a plan that reflects the community's vision, the planning process included several approaches for public participation. The project team used interviews, steering committee meetings, focus groups, surveys, and an interactive website, and attended events and meetings in the community. Through the engagement process, the project team identified the top concerns for the corridor.

TOP CONCERNS FOR NORTH AVENUE

- **HIGH TRAFFIC SPEEDS AND UNSAFE PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT**
- **LACK OF CONVENIENT, SAFE PARKING**
- **UNATTRACTIVE, UNFRIENDLY STREETScape**

The highlight of the community engagement process was the public workshop, which took place on November 15, 2018, at Redeemer Church on North Avenue in Chicago. Approximately 100 people attended the workshop, including residents, local business owners, and representatives of community organizations. CMAP shared the purpose of the plan and presented key findings from the existing conditions analysis, which is included in the appendix of this plan. Throughout the workshop, CMAP facilitated the use of electronic keypads to gain real-time feedback from the audience on the findings, potential directions for the plan, and the community's priorities for the future.



Stakeholders attend a public visioning at Redeemer Church.



In December 2018, and in partnership with CMAP, ULI Chicago convened a two-day workshop to study the corridor, develop strategies to revitalize the corridor, and strengthen its development potential. The panel included experts in various aspects of the real estate industry, including residential, commercial, and mixed-use development, as well as land-use and transportation planning, architecture, urban design, finance, and law. Based on the panel's review of extensive background information, a community tour, and interviews with community stakeholders, ULI Chicago released a report titled, *Revitalization Strategies for the North Avenue Corridor*. The recommendations in this plan largely are drawn from ULI Chicago's report (see Appendix A).

On May 9, 2019, more than 80 people attended a public open house at Trinity Galewood Church in Chicago to present the findings of ULI's workshop. Community members reviewed the recommendations, identified the strategies they were most enthusiastic about, and discussed the plan with the project team and panelists.

The tools and techniques CMAP staff employed during the planning process varied according to the activity, amount of time available, and specific characteristics of each group. To ensure full participation from a broad range of participants, CMAP staff developed an interactive website using MetroQuest to engage people who could not attend meetings. This online tool served to educate the community about the project's purpose and gather input about their priorities and preferred choices for the North Avenue corridor's future. More than 1,700 people submitted responses to the online survey, breaking a survey participation record for CMAP. Paper surveys also were provided and distributed to businesses and residents. More than 400 paper surveys were completed.

Purpose of the document

The North Avenue Corridor Revitalization and Mobility Plan is organized with implementation in mind. The following sections outline recommendations from the ULI report (Appendix A) and the aligning, more detailed recommendations from the CDOT study (Appendix B). Sections with recommendations conclude with an implementation table that summarizes actions to be undertaken by the City, the Village, and its partners following adoption of the plan. While the implementation table identifies potential partners, the City and the Village primarily remain responsible for all action items. The table lists potential partners but does not indicate a commitment or responsibility on their behalf.



Mobility, streetscape, and safety

North Avenue is a major regional thoroughfare that carries lots of traffic. Although the corridor is car centric, improvements to its physical infrastructure can help make travel easier for all users, create a more pedestrian-friendly environment, and improve safety for all users. The following strategies are designed to improve mobility, streetscape, and safety along the corridor.

Strategy 1: Improve pedestrian safety

Traffic travels fast on North Avenue because of a wide right-of-way, poorly defined lane markings, and relatively low number of signalized intersections. Stakeholders feel unsafe walking and biking on North Avenue. The following safety enhancements will make the corridor more accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists, including for those crossing North Avenue.

ULI recommendations: Medians / refuges

- Medians allow pedestrians to cross halfway and wait in a safe location before they can cross over to the other side.
- Medians narrow pavement width for drivers and control high speeds.*
(VOP and The District support modifying islands to add higher curb or planters to reduce road salt impacts to landscaping.)

Aligning CDOT recommendations: Medians / refuges

Section	Street/s	Project
Harlem to New Castle	Harlem	Expand pedestrian landing/refuge area on southeast corner
	Neva to Belleforte	Extend median from Neva to Belleforte
	Kenilworth to New England	Extend existing center median east of Kenilworth to New England
Oak Park to Rossell	Rutherford to Linden	Install center median (include small curb extensions at ends)
	Columbia to East	Add medians west of Columbian in front of PNC Bank and on North west of East, across from Galewood Plaza Include pedestrian refuge island on median west of Columbian
	Elmwood to Rossell	Add pedestrian refuge islands and median between Elmwood to Rossell
Naraganssett to Austin	Narraganssett to Mobile	Add medians between Narragansett and Mobile
	Harvey to Austin	Install medians west of Ridgeland to McVicker
	Lombard	Install median with pedestrian refuge



ULI recommendations: Curb extensions

- Curb extensions shorten crossing distance for pedestrians.
- Curb extensions clearly define on-street parking.
(VOP does not support curb extensions on the north-south side streets, just on North Ave.)

Aligning CDOT Recommendations: Curb extensions

Section	Street/s	Project/s
Harlem to New Castle	Neva-Belleforte	Add curb extension on north side of North in front of Bank of America building
	Belleforte	Provide curb extensions on the east and west sides of Belleforte
	Nordica	Install curb extension on north side of North, east of Nordica (where CTA bus stop is located) Install curb extension at south side of Nordica
	Forest through New Castle	Implement East-West curb extensions at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East side of Forest • Both sides of Sayre • Both sides of Woodbine • Both sides of Newland • Both sides of Kenilworth • Both sides of New England • Both sides of Newcastle
	Grove	Install curb extensions on both sides of north/south crosswalks
Oak Park to Rossell	Oak Park to Nagle	Implement curb extensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North side of North, east of Oak Park • Along north side of North from west side of Rutherford to west side of Linden • Both sides of Nashville • Both sides of Fair Oaks • Both sides of Natchez • West side of Nagle
	Columbia-Natoma	Install curb extensions on north and south sides of North, near Columbian and Natoma (at both ends of north/south crosswalks)
	Elmwood-Rossell	Provide curb extensions on north and south ends of crosswalks



Aligning CDOT recommendations: Curb extensions (continued)		
Section	Street/s	Project/s
Naragansett to Austin	North near Narragansett	Install curb extensions on north side of North, west of Narragansett
	Narragansett to Ridgeland	Install curb extensions along south side of North
	Lombard / North	Add curb extension on the north and south sides of new midblock crosswalk at Lombard
	Harvey-Austin	Implement curb extensions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •East side of Harvey •East side of Merrimac •East side of Lombard •Both sides of Melvina •East side of Taylor •West side of Meade •Between Meade and McVicker •East and west sides of McVicker •In front of Austin Plaza (between McVicker/Austin)
	Hayes	Install curb extension on both corners of Hayes
	Moody / North	Add curb extensions on the north and south sides of crosswalk Provide a curb extension on north and south sides of North

ULI recommendation: Improve bike connectivity

- Bike-share stations should be added along and near the corridor to enhance bike access. *(Recommendation is focused on Chicago-side of the corridor)*

Strategy 1: Implementation table			
Project	Lead (Partners)	Potential funding sources	Timeframe
Strategy 1: Enhance pedestrian safety			
1.1 Install pedestrian refuge islands	CDOT VOP (IDOT Umbrella organization)	ITEP, Invest In Cook (IIC), IDOT	Medium term
1.2 Install curb extensions	CDOT VOP (IDOT, Umbrella organization, 29th Ward)	ITEP, IIC, IDOT, HSIP	Short term/ medium term
1.3 Improve bike connectivity	Umbrella organization	ITEP, IIC, TAP, RTA Access to Transit, IDOT SPR (for planning)	Short term/ medium term

NOTE: short term: one year; medium term: one to two years; long term: two to five years.



Strategy 2: Enhance parking demand and safety

A lack of convenient and safe parking options along North Avenue was identified as an issue. There are several sections along North Avenue with underused street parking. High traffic speeds also make parallel parking extremely difficult and dangerous. The following strategies will allow for existing parking resources to be better utilized and strategically create more parking, if needed.

ULI recommendations: Enhance parking demand and safety	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing on-street parking should be improved by clearly defining the parking lane, using fresh striping, and curb extensions (<i>CDOT curb extension recommendations listed in Strategy 1</i>). Shared parking should be encouraged to maximize use of the corridor's off-street parking spaces Vacant parking lots should be utilized to provide off-street parking Additional side-street parking should be added to complement shallow lots on the corridor, where possible 	

Aligning CDOT recommendations: Side-street parking		
Section	Street/s	Project/s
Harlem to New Castle	New England	Add angled parking
Oak Park to Rossell	Natchez-Nagle	Add angled parking on existing side streets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natchez Nagle
Naraganssett to Austin	Mobile	Modify existing parallel parking to angled parking on east side of the street

Strategy 2: Implementation table			
Project	Lead (Partners)	Potential funding sources	Timeframe
Strategy 2: Enhance parking demand			
2.1 Improve on-street parking	Umbrella organization (IDOT, VOP, and/or CDOT)	Local funding sources for restriping, painting; ITEP, IIC, IDOT	Short term/medium term
2.2 Encourage shared parking	Umbrella organization (IDOT, VOP, CDOT, and/or property owners depending on locations)	Local funding sources for improvements, if necessary	Short term/Medium term
2.3 Utilize vacant parking lots	Umbrella organization (Chicago, VOP, and/or property owners depending on locations)	Local funding sources for improvements, if necessary	Short term/Medium term
2.4 Add side-street parking	Umbrella organization IDOT, VOP, and/or CDOT depending on locations	Local funding sources for improvements, if necessary	Short term/Medium term

NOTE: short term: one year; medium term: one to two years; long term: two to five years.



Strategy 3: Improve traffic efficiency

North Avenue is divided into two different jurisdictions, with Chicago to the north and Oak Park to the south. Each municipality has its own set of rules, regulations, resources, and priorities. There are inconsistencies on side streets, such as barriers on the south side and one-way traffic on the north side. These inconsistencies cause confusion for drivers and create cut-through traffic on side streets and alleyways. Large, offset intersections also are challenging to navigate for both cars and pedestrians. The following strategies will allow for improved efficiency of traffic operations.

ULI recommendations: Improve traffic efficiency

- In place of barriers and one-way traffic, other coordinated measures, such as narrow travel lanes, on-street parking, speed tables, and special paving, should be used to manage spill-over and cut-through traffic.
- Large intersections should be redesigned for pedestrian uses, such as a gathering spot or plaza.

Aligning CDOT recommendations: Right-size intersections

Section	Street/s	Project/s
Naragansett to Austin	Austin / North	Convert the existing channelized lane on Austin to a pedestrian plaza (close off road and construct flush surface with sidewalk and island) Modify existing radius on NE corner to better allow for right-turn movements
Oak Park to Rossell	Oak Park / North	Reconfigure south leg of Oak Park to align with the north leg

Strategy 3: Implementation table

Project	Lead (Partners)	Potential funding sources	Timeframe
Strategy 3: Improve traffic efficiency			
3.1 Coordinate traffic management	IDOT VOP, and/or CDOT [location dependent]	ITEP, IIC, IDOT, HSIP depending on necessary improvements and eligibility	Long term
3.2 Right-size intersections	CDOT VOP (IDOT) [location dependent]	ITEP, IIC, IDOT, HSIP depending on improvements / eligibility	Long term

NOTE: short term: one year; medium term: one to two years; long term: two to five years.



Strategy 4: Create an attractive, coordinated streetscape

The current streetscape is uninviting. Neither passing drivers nor residents are drawn to shopping or conducting business along North Avenue. The following strategies will help create an attractive and inviting corridor for all potential users.

ULI recommendation: Improve efficiency of traffic operations

- Parking lanes and crosswalks should be clearly marked, and excess pavement should be repurposed for on-street parking and/or plaza space (*CDOT median and curb extension recommendations listed in Strategy 1*).

Aligning CDOT recommendations: Crosswalks		
Section	Street/s	Project/s
Harlem to Rossell	Harlem / North	Enhance existing crosswalks at intersection to provide high visibility ladder markings
	Marion-Newcastle	Enhance existing east-west crosswalks with high visibility ladder markings at Marion, Neva, Belleforte, Nordica, Forest, Sayre, Woodbine, Newland, New England, and Newcastle
	Nordica	Enhance existing crosswalk on east leg of North/Nordica with high visibility ladder markings
	Grove	Add high-visibility ladder markings to north/south crosswalk
Oak Park to Rossell	Oak Park / North	Add high visibility north-south crosswalks on both sides of Oak Park and east-west crosswalks on both sides of North
	Oak Park to Nagle	Enhance existing east-west crosswalks with high visibility ladder markings at Oak Park, Euclid, Rutherford, Linden, Normandy, East, Natchez, and Nagle
	Columbian to Natoma	Enhance existing crosswalks on west leg of North/Columbian and east leg of North/Natoma
	Elmwood-Rossell	Install new mid-block pedestrian crossing with high visibility ladder markings on east leg of North/Elmwood and west leg of North/Rossell
Narragansett to Austin	Merrimac-Meade	Enhance existing east-west crosswalks with high visibility ladder markings
	North / Lombard	Install new midblock pedestrian crossing on the west leg of North at Lombard with high-visibility ladder markings.
	Moody	Install new midblock pedestrian crossing on the west leg of North at Moody with high-visibility ladder markings
	Austin	Add high-visibility crosswalk on west leg of north/south Austin.



ULI recommendation: Create an attractive and coordinated streetscape

- Streetscape elements, such as lighting, banners, public art, and street furniture, should be continued throughout the corridor

Aligning CDOT recommendations: Lighting, banners, art, and furniture

Section	Street/s	Project/s
Oak Park Ave to Austin	Austin	Engage businesses and community to contribute to public space design and programming to activate the pedestrian plaza, such as activity/art installations, street and pedestrian lighting, landscaping, benches, outdoor dining, bike racks, and other amenities.

ULI recommendation: Open space

- Open spaces, such as the Kenilworth pocket park and the US Bank plaza, should be maximized and activated to create gathering spaces

Strategy 4: Implementation table

Project	Lead (Partners)	Potential funding sources	Timeframe
Strategy 4: Create a coordinated and attractive streetscape			
4.1 Medians, curb extensions, crosswalks	Umbrella organization (IDOT, VOP, and/or CDOT [location dependent])	ITEP, IIC, IDOT, RTA Access to transit, HSIP depending on necessary improvements and eligibility	Medium term/ long term
4.2 Lighting, banners, art, and furniture	Umbrella organization	Local funding, philanthropic funding	Short term/ medium term
4.3 Open space	Umbrella organization VOP or Chicago [location dependent]	Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD)	Medium term/ long term

NOTE: short term: one year; medium term: one to two years; long term: two to five years.



Development opportunities recommendations

The mile-and-a-half-long corridor changes in character from east to west, which means development potential changes significantly throughout the corridor. The following strategies will help guide overall redevelopment, as well as leverage the various opportunities present throughout the corridor.

Strategy 1: Suitable land uses

In targeting developer and/or tenant recruitment, it is important to understand the types of uses that most likely will succeed, including:

- Residential
 - Multi-family residential should be encouraged on the corridor. First, the added residents would bring customers to area businesses. Second, the corridor is well-connected by transit and has many shops and services, making it an attractive area for new residents and existing residents looking to age in place.
- Restaurants
 - Food-related businesses are economic development drivers. Stakeholders consider restaurants and delis as popular destinations along the corridor. If new multi-family and mixed-use developments come into play, this will bring additional residents and create larger demand for social places, such as restaurants and cafes.
- Commercial service
 - Commercial service businesses, such as salons and child-care centers, should be encouraged along the corridor. These businesses are resistant to online sales and draw on nearby residents and people driving through the corridor.
- Retail
 - Along the corridor, parcels are shallow and only appeal to small retail businesses. Additionally, as online shopping continues to rise in popularity, the corridor is unlikely to attract many new retailers.
- Office
 - The corridor has significant office space vacancies, indicating low demand. Service providers, such as medical offices, attorneys, and certified public accountants, are more practical for the corridor as they generate significant customer traffic. Co-working spaces should be explored for their flexibility, convenience, and opportunity for small businesses.



Strategy 2: Focus redevelopment efforts

Development opportunities differ significantly across the corridor. To drive revitalization, redevelopment efforts should be focused on strategic nodes. Additionally, a development and design program throughout the corridor will make for a vibrant street environment. These combined efforts will help jumpstart revitalization, expand development opportunities, and strengthen the corridor.

- Node A
 - The intersection of North and Harlem is the site of the former Sears building. This is the largest development opportunity and will serve as an anchor on the western edge of the corridor.
- Node B
 - New developments are underway from Oak Park Avenue to Rossell. On the Oak Park side of this segment, two new multi-family residential buildings were constructed and a cigar lounge opened. On the Chicago side, the US Bank building is being redeveloped for residential use. The site of a former IHOP is vacant, but ideal for a restaurant or food-related business.
- Node C
 - From Narragansett to Mobile/Ridgeland, further east along the corridor, is the site of a former Walgreens. Only a half-mile from the Galewood Metra station and near shops and services, this site is ideal for new residential. The site is within a tax increment financing (TIF) district, which could finance a new project as well as public infrastructure improvements.
- Node D
 - At the intersection of North and Moody, the Monumental building is being redeveloped as a headquarters for Melvina Masterminds, a youth center for arts, science, and technology. This site can be an anchor for creative activity on the east side. A nearby, complementary site for community programming should be explored.



Leadership and funding

Implementing cohesive change along an interjurisdictional corridor will not be easy. But if both communities are committed to revitalizing the corridor, it can be done. Combined with the support of residents, businesses, civic leaders, elected officials, and transportation agencies, the following strategies will help bring about cohesive change across the corridor.

Strategy 1: Umbrella organization

Currently, various volunteer efforts are working to revitalize the corridor. While their efforts have been admirable, the corridor needs a single umbrella organization with dedicated staff to lead North Avenue's revitalization. A unified, umbrella organization could facilitate a coordinated approach and pool all available resources. With a unified vision, dedicated mission, and a board made up of representatives from key community stakeholder groups, the umbrella organization could revitalize North Avenue, and be a resource for the corridor's businesses and property owners.

Strategy 2: Dedicated staff

To implement the umbrella organization's priorities, a dedicated staff person needs to be hired. In the short term, the Village of Oak Park and the 29th Ward should co-fund this position. The creation of a Special Service Area (SSA) and programs like Chicago's Neighborhood Business Development Center (NBDC) could provide long-term funding of this position and organization.

Strategy 3: Funding

To revitalize the corridor, it is important to secure funding for the umbrella organization and its staffing. A SSA is a property-taxing mechanism that can fund expanded services and programs (in addition to basic municipal services) within a defined geographic area of a municipality or jurisdiction. This allows local governments to establish such areas without incurring debt or levying a tax on the entire municipality.

A lower-cost SSA should be established for both the Chicago and Oak Park sides of the corridor. To create a stronger and more supportive business environment along North Avenue, the unifying umbrella organization should manage the SSA and receive funding from it. Recognizing that establishing an SSA increases the tax burden on businesses that already might operate with thin margins, the SSA should not be used to initiate high-cost or higher maintenance improvement projects, such as elaborate landscaping. Only selected services and small-scale improvements, identified as most useful/critical by businesses, should be funded via the SSA.



Looking ahead

Guided by a clear vision and a new unifying umbrella organization, North Avenue can realize its potential. By capitalizing on existing strengths and addressing challenges, North Avenue can be transformed into a safe, inviting place to live, work, shop, dine, and walk.



Appendix

A: [ULI Chicago: Revitalization Strategies for North Avenue Corridor](#)

B: [CDOT: Draft North Avenue Traffic Safety and Mobility Report](#)

C: [CMAP: North Avenue Corridor Revitalization and Mobility Plan: Existing Conditions Report](#)



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The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is our region's comprehensive planning organization. The agency and its partners developed and are now implementing ON TO 2050, a new long-range plan to help the seven counties and 284 communities of northeastern Illinois implement strategies that address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality-of-life issues. See www.cmap.illinois.gov for more information.