

3. The South Main Street Area (where Western and Gregory avenues converge)

Objectives:

- Establish a new intersection of Western Avenue and Gregory Avenue that will correct the problems of the old one-way highway patterns and provide a gateway to the main street district.
- Capitalize on new commercial and residential development opportunities that will be stimulated by correction of the present Western & Gregory convergence.

Development Steps

- Chose among 3 alternative designs for the redevelopment of the Gregory-Western intersection (per the illustrations on the following pages). Under Options 1 and 3, “retrofit” the Gregory overpass by reducing traffic lanes and adding sidewalks with decorative bridge design elements and greenery; create a street that is a scenic platform overlooking the proposed nature trail and the Cal Sag Channel. Under Option 2, demolish the Gregory overpass and return the street to ground level, restoring a block now shadowed by the overpass to productive use.
- Agree with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) on the redesign of the Western & Gregory intersection.
- Along with reconstruction of the intersection, facilitate a major mixed use or commercial development on Gregory between Western and Vermont. Use a 3.5 acre, hillside site for: a small department store or a quality hotel, or a smaller multi-screen movie theater or another type of substantial commercial development.
- Extend development to the James Street and Old Western Avenue districts: Extend the Cal Sag nature trail west of Western Avenue to Greenwood. / Gradually relocate industrial businesses in the James Street area to superior Blue Island industrial locations. / Build or fit a railroad bridge to provide pedestrian & bicycle access across the Cal Sag, between James Street and Old Western Avenue. / Support rehabilitation/construction of mixed use housing/office/artisan shop buildings.

Development Resources

Among other resources appropriate for use in this project, seek these types of public funds for integration with private investment: *Surface Transportation Project (STP)* from USDOT with a state or local match for redevelopment of the Western & Gregory intersection. / *New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC)* from the National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC), Federal Historic Tax Credits & Illinois Heritage Grants to fund redevelopment of historic commercial and mixed use buildings. / *FHWA Transportation Community And System Preservation Pilot Program* for grants to implement creative strategies that address the relationship between transportation and community and system preservation.



Key Building Types:

- Existing Buildings
- Residential: Townhouse
- Residential: Multifamily
- Public
- Mixed-use
- Structured Parking

Western/ Gregory: Concept 1



Western/ Gregory: Concept 2

- 1 Intersection at Western and Gregory**
The existing alignment of Gregory is shown as a dashed line connecting to the bridge. The recommendation in both Concept 1 and 2 is to curve Gregory into Western at a right angle, making Western Avenue the dominant street, orienting the northbound drivers to the downtown main street. The right turn action of the northbound drivers onto Gregory will not significantly affect the traffic flow north and could be accommodated in a designated right turn only lane to further reduce effects of the reconfiguration. The southbound traffic flow will remain essentially the same with the exception of a traffic signal at the new Gregory intersection.
- 2 Western Avenue and Vermont Street Intersection**
This intersection is the most important for vehicular traffic as well as pedestrian traffic along main street (Western Avenue). It links the shopping district to the city hall complex on the west and the station area on the east. Pedestrian crosswalks and expanded/ bumped out corners should be provided to reduce the distance the pedestrian must travel to cross the intersection. A differentiation

in the pavement could serve to alert vehicles to the importance of the intersection and could possibly contain a pattern announcing the downtown, e.g. the Blue Island logo.

- 3 Redevelopment Opportunity**
Moving the Blue Island station to the north of Vermont street and constructing a parking garage for Metra riders to the west of the stations will result in a large redevelopment parcel located between Gregory to the west, the train tracks to the south and east and Vermont Street to the north. This Redevelopment Parcel could be divided into multiple developments or could be built upon by one developer. The building at the corner of Western and Gregory would serve as a gateway building to the downtown. It should be a mixed-use building with a ground floor use complimentary to the downtown retail, such as a cinema, hotel, or small department store. The Vermont Street frontage should also house retail or compatible commercial on the ground floor with residential or office on the upper floors. The buildings between could be wholly residential. Because of the slope of the site, parking structures could be accommodated at the grade of the track one level below Gregory. The views over the tracks from courtyards or plazas above the parking structure would be of the canal and park below.

- 4 Infill Buildings**
Along Western Avenue, several vacant or underdeveloped parcels should be redeveloped with small scale mixed use or commercial buildings. Because of the dominance of 2 to 3 story buildings along Western, these buildings should also be a minimum of 2 stories. Corner parcels should absolutely be occupied by an appropriately scaled building to “hold the corner” and maintain the feel of the main street.
- 5 Intersection at Gregory and Vermont Streets**
In Concepts 1 and 3, the overpass at Gregory is maintained; however, it should be renovated to create an entranceway appropriate for downtown Blue Island. With appropriate detailing, the overpass can become a bridge to the hospital and downtown Blue Island. Revising the lane widths on Gregory will create a widened pedestrian space on the new bridge with pavers extending across the lanes defining the bridge as a special place. Benches, light fixtures and plantings on the bridge will further enhance the feel and reduce the pace on the bridge. Detailed structural railings, along with the light fixtures and plantings will be visible from Vermont Street and will create a positive view from the stations to the downtown. Additionally, the viaduct below the bridge should be enhanced with benches, pavers and artwork, such as a mural,

mosaic or sculpture mounted on the walls of the viaduct.

In Concept 2, the intersection has been restored back to it’s original at grade status, removing the existing, unattractive structure of the overpass and restoring the old downtown quality of the intersection.

- 6 Extension of Main Street along Vermont**
The existing parcels along Vermont Street between Main Street (Western Avenue) and the stations are mostly vacant or under-developed. As Gregory is reconfigured, these parcels should be redeveloped as mixed use structures with ground floor uses compatible with the retail of Main Street to draw visitors from the station to downtown. Parking should be located behind these buildings and entrances should be located on Vermont Street. A minimum level of storefront transparency should be established to ensure “eyes on the street”.

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Western/ Gregory: Concept 3

- 7 Intersection of Old Western and Western Avenues**
This intersection should be preserved because of its historical significance, current value to commercial businesses, and potential importance for the city's development. However, the steep grade of Old Western Avenue possibly prevents a clean connection to Western Avenue with a 90 degree intersection. Also, the split at Western and Old Western is excessively wide, preventing comfortable pedestrian access and crossing. In Concept 1, reducing the width and defining the parallel portion of Old Western with pavers will enhance the pedestrian quality of the intersection and define the primary direction of vehicular traffic. For Concept 2, studying the grades to create a close-to-90 degree intersection would be the best solution for the businesses involved. Concept 3 combines this intersection with a proposed roundabout.
- 8 Parking Structure**
Relocating Irving Avenue to move the intersection at Vermont to the west allows the construction of a large parking structure to house Metra riders' vehicles adjacent to the tracks and closer to the stations for the riders. This structure also frees up prime land adjacent to the canal, currently surface parking lots, for new

- residential development. The structure should be fronted on Vermont Street with commercial or compatible uses on the ground floor to ensure a comfortable pedestrian path along Vermont.
- 9 Station Relocation**
Reconfiguring the tracks and relocating the Rock Island line station to the north side of Vermont Street adjacent to the existing Metra Electric line station combines the two stations into a single destination area for pedestrians and reduces conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles and trains at this busy intersection.
- 10 James Street District**
The area of James Street and Old Western Avenue is currently occupied by a mixture of office, industrial and residential. The highest long-term use of this area for the city lies in the direction along which its current residents are taking it, as a professional office, arts, and residential district. This development should be enhanced through a combination of measures. The pedestrian/bicycle path along the Cal Sag Channel should be extended west of the Western Avenue bridge. Industrial businesses should be relocated to sites that meet their requirements in Blue Island's industrially zoned areas. Through rehabilitation and new construction, mixed-use housing and commercial development should be encouraged, possibly in the form of home-shop condominiums for

- skilled artisans and home-based professionals.
- 11 Western and Gregory Roundabout**
Concept 3 for the Western at Gregory intersection proposes a roundabout to handle the multiple streets intersecting at this point. Although this option does not direct traffic to Western, it does more prominently provide a large gateway opportunity that could indicate the direction of the main street. With no signalization, roundabouts allow continuous flow of traffic, limiting the amount of change drivers would experience from current conditions. Additionally, the roundabout could allow a more celebrated entrance into the James Street district, although Old Western should be one-way, heading south between the roundabout and James Street.



City Hall District Concept

- A Existing Historic City Hall**
The existing, historic City Hall building should be maintained and should serve as the anchor for the new City Hall district. The orientation of this building, however, is to the west; if possible, a new entrance should be created off a proposed civic plaza.
- B Proposed Civic Plaza and New Annex**
The existing fire station should be relocated and the existing annex should be redeveloped. A new plaza should be created as the center of the series of public buildings in the area and a new annex should be developed to serve as the northern edge of the plaza. This plaza, bounded by the existing City Hall, a new annex building, and the existing, historic Post Office, would provide an identifying element for the civic district.
- C New Civic or Office Building**
Redevelopment of existing houses into a civic or office building will provide a similar scale building across the street from City Hall, completing the district.
- D Existing Historic Post Office**
The existing Post Office, located diagonally across Vermont from City Hall, is a symmetrical, historic building. The entrance, centered on the building, faces Vermont, and would provide an axis across the proposed plaza to an entrance to a new annex building. Driveways to the rear of the post office could be located off Greenwood and Artesian and the driveway off Vermont could become a pedestrian walkway.
- E Existing Parking Lot**
The existing parking lot south of Vermont should remain to serve the civic district and the businesses along Western. A new, small infill building should be developed along Vermont to screen the parking lot from pedestrians accessing the civic district from Main Street.