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## Riverside gives downtown planning another go

*Central business district study kicks off in March*

By Bob Uphues  
Editor

Riverside next month will embark on a planning effort that officials hope will provide a blueprint for driving economic development in the central business district.

Funded through a federal grant, the planning effort will be led by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) as part of its Technical Assistance Program, which has been developed to implement the agency's Go To 2040 regional comprehensive plan.

In early March the process will kick off with a meeting of a seven-member steering committee, which will include representatives from many of the village's advisory commissions and the Riverside Chamber of Commerce.

The plan will look at such elements as land use, parking, transportation, parks and open space and history, and will recommend strategies for improving the central business district, while keeping an eye on the village's historic character.

"This will be more of ... how to build upon what's here and attract a few additional stores rather than mixed-use buildings," said Village Manager Peter Scalara.

If the idea of a plan for downtown Riverside sounds familiar, it's because it is. The planning process will look familiar to anyone who participated in the village's transit-oriented development (TOD) plan, which was completed in 2006 and adopted by the village board as a planning document that year.

Scalara said that the process itself would likely mimic that of the TOD plan, complete with public hearings and a visioning session where members of the public can provide input into what they would like to see happen in the central business district.

The hope is that the result of the CMAP planning effort will be a document that will be embraced by officials and residents alike. That certainly wasn't the case for the TOD study, which became entangled in an abortive effort to create a TIF district in downtown Riverside. Linked at the hip with the TIF, the TOD plan became radioactive and was shelved soon after its adoption.

There are some critical differences between the TOD plan and the CMAP effort, however. In the first place, the state of the economy is radically different in 2012 than it was in 2005, when the TOD study started. Secondly, the TOD study was funded primarily by Metra.

Trevor Dick, a senior planner for CMAP who will be leading the Riverside study, thinks the end result will reflect the situation in 2012. For example, the TOD plan pushed for building higher-density, mixed use structures along the rail line. That's unlikely to be part of the new plan.

"Since then the situation has changed dramatically," said Dick. "This is an opportunity to revisit that, take a look and see if it's what the community wants as well."

Scalara also believes the CMAP plan will look somewhat different than the TOD plan, though he felt the earlier plan had its merits, particularly with respect to pedestrian flow and traffic circulation in downtown Riverside.

"I thought there were still elements in the TOD that would be helpful to Riverside today," said Scalara, who was not involved in that planning effort. "I thought it was a well put-together plan."

But Scalara said the CMAP plan would likely not include some of the more

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*"I thought there were still elements in the TOD that would be helpful to Riverside today." Peter Scalara, Riverside village manager*

### CMAP planning process snapshot

The Riverside Village Board on Feb. 6 christened the CMAP process by voting unanimously to enter into an agreement with the planning agency to complete the study.

The next step will be for CMAP to meet in March with the village's steering committee, which will include seven people - one each from the Riverside Economic Development Commission, Plan Commission, Landscape Advisory Commission, Preservation Commission, Historical Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission and the Riverside Chamber of Commerce.

In April, there will be a public workshop, followed by confidential interviews with "key stakeholders."

At that point, CMAP will begin to do its existing conditions research, which will result in a presentation of those findings to the village board and steering committee in mid-summer.

In late summer members of the community will be invited to a "visioning charrette" to give CMAP input on what community members would like to see included in the final document.

All of that information will be distilled into a preliminary report that includes recommendations for implementing and funding the plan. That report will be presented to the board and the public in the fall.

A final plan will be produced toward the

controversial aspects of the TOD study, such as recommending the village purchase more property to build parking structures and the like.

end of 2012, with village board adoption scheduled for early 2013.

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"I think CMAP will look at the existing situation and look at more cost-effective methods for dealing with parking," Scalera said.

The timing of the CMAP study is a bit tricky as the entire process is expected to last 10 to 12 months, with a final document presented to the board in early 2013. That will coincide with a political campaign involving a majority of the village board seats, including the president's.

The TOD plan and its link to the TIF effort was used as political ammunition against those who supported it. The political party of the current board majority was born during the fight over the TIF.

Scalera said he hopes the CMAP plan doesn't suffer the same fate.

"I hope it doesn't," Scalera said. "It's way too important for that to happen."