

# East Side Development Opportunities

## SECTION 6

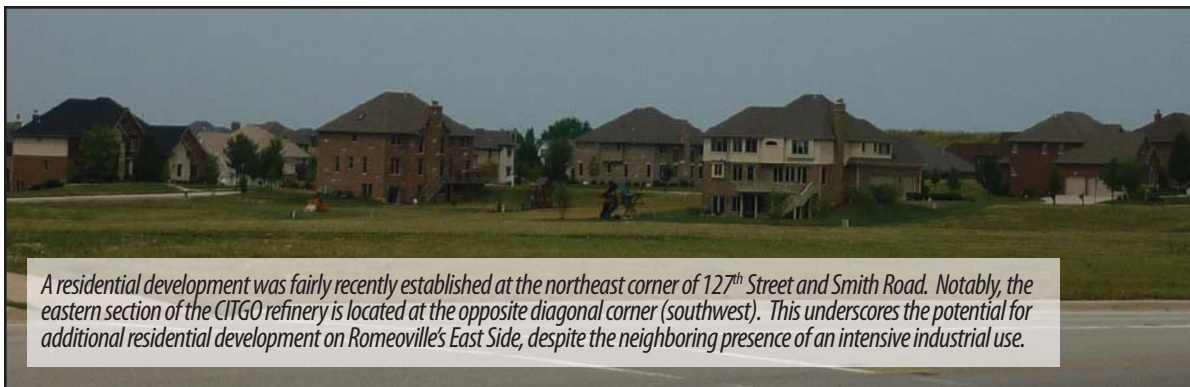
The East Side TOD Area presents a complex set of issues — presenting issues and offers opportunities for development that must be considered in relation to the establishment of transit supportive land uses. This section explores the potential for various land uses that might be appropriate for this part of the Study Area, including commercial, industrial, and residential for development within the vicinity of the proposed Metra station on the East Side of Romeoville (see the Study Area Map in Figure 1-3 in Section 1).

### Development Influences & Opportunities

Existing land uses, lack of infrastructure, utility and pipeline corridors, dramatic changes to topography, and high quality natural areas combine to pose various constraints on development potential for the East Side. However, current plans by Metra call for the establishment of a new commuter train station at the southwest corner of the intersection of

New Avenue and 135<sup>th</sup> Street, which signal the opportunity for new public and private investments that seek to capitalize on such service. While initial estimates indicate daily ridership is very low, growth in ridership in nearby stations and long term development potential on the East Side and greater Romeoville area provide the potential for increased ridership.

Ultimately, the TOD area in Romeoville will derive its distinction and success from the linkages it will make to connect employees to jobs, customers to businesses, residents to diverse housing options, explorers to trails, and travelers to the region. While the availability of utilities, impact of heavy industrial uses, and environmental constraints are significant determining factors in the types of land uses that can be supported, the East Side possesses unique characteristics that both provide an opportunity for establishment of high quality projects. The presence of extensive



Source: Tekka Associates, Inc.

*A residential development was fairly recently established at the northeast corner of 127<sup>th</sup> Street and Smith Road. Notably, the eastern section of the CITGO refinery is located at the opposite diagonal corner (southwest). This underscores the potential for additional residential development on Romeoville's East Side, despite the neighboring presence of an intensive industrial use.*

steep slopes, high quality woodlands, topographic variety, and open space corridors along natural waterways provide opportunities for environmental conservation, open space preservation, sustainability initiatives, and unique development opportunities.

Improving options to serve local travel markets within the Village, plus enhancing regional travel markets, could include modes of travel that extend beyond the commuter rail line. This could provide an opportunity for the East Side to achieve new potential beyond its historic industrial roots through the planning and provision of critical transportation linkages, including pedestrian and bicycle connections, and residential developments that can take advantage of proximity to excellent transportation options, as well as high quality natural features.

### Commercial Development

Although existing uses pose significant barriers, the natural characteristics of the area may provide some opportunities for unique uses catering to nearby business that would take advantage of trails, biking, and other recreational opportunities.

Real estate professionals and property owners interviewed during this process suggest that limited commercial uses oriented to serving Metra commuters and nearby residential areas may be possible at the intersection of Smith Road and 135<sup>th</sup> Street.

Uses in this area should complement other commercial offerings in the area, cater to local neighborhood oriented needs, and in particular should not detract from the downtown commercial area.

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The establishment of significant commercial uses in the East Side TOD Area is constrained by several locational disadvantages, including the following:

- ❑ The absence of an agglomeration or clustering of commercial uses in the vicinity of the site.
- ❑ Current lack of sufficient residential density to support commercial development.
- ❑ Proximity to the CITGO refinery which creates a disamenity for commercial uses within the immediate vicinity of the refinery.
- ❑ The lack of a positive image or identity as an office location, which is typically defined or branded by the character and image of the neighboring uses; the neighboring use of a refinery does not increase the locational value and image of the site for office users.
- ❑ Location not central or highly accessible compared to alternatives.



*The open space corridors along the local creeks, particularly Long Run Creek, provide opportunities for environmental conservation, sustainability initiatives, and unique development concepts.*

Source: Tekna Associates, Inc.

## Industrial Development

The East Side TOD Area possesses several disadvantages for successful modern industrial developments. It lacks the requisite access and identity to key transportation links; lacks proximity to support services; and lacks the image or identity as a place for contemporary industrial businesses. In addition, the I-55 industrial market in which space built at the site would compete is highly competitive with no shortage of building space options for users.

### I-55 Submarket Trends

According to the market assessment report (see full report in Appendix C), the amount vacant industrial space, combined with lower rents than typical prior to the recession, provide significant completion in areas with better location.



Source: Tekka Associates, Inc.

*The CITGO gas station at the corner of 135<sup>th</sup> Street and New Avenue is one of the only commercial businesses that is presently located on the East Side. There may be options for other complimentary commercial uses.*

In addition to the significant amount of existing available industrial space, according to the Village of Romeoville Community Development Department, the Village contains approximately 500 acres of land available for industrial, office, and warehouse uses. In addition, the Comprehensive Plan contemplates an additional 200 acres of land for future development of industrial uses if such land is annexed. The local airport also contains significant acreage on which industrial development could occur.

Although the proximity of the CITGO refinery will likely deter many larger, higher quality industrial users, especially those which depend upon engineering and other high skill labor, from considering the location, certain smaller independent and entrepreneurial companies seeking access to Metra may consider locations on the East Side, similar to the concrete business (Concrete By Wagner, Inc.) on High Road.

## Residential Development

Site observations, combined with information provided by real estate professionals and land owners, suggest opportunities may exist over the long term for residential development of various types and densities. However, the costs of extending public utility service will likely make the site less appealing to residential developers, given the availability of other sites with utilities and already established as residential locations near employment nodes, schools, shopping, and other services and amenities.

Furthermore, proximity to the CITGO refinery may act as a disamenity to development. Multiple oil and natural gas pipelines that are present in the area may pose real and perceived safety hazards to prospective households. In addition, the presence of these pipelines and the associated

easements could raise development costs or otherwise have an impact on development.

Upon investigation of the area, existing single family homes in the mid to upper price ranges, have been established in the area since the establishment of the CITGO refinery, some include newer subdivisions to the northeast of the Study Area. As described previously in the site analyses summarized in Section 3, the East Side's significant asset is its varied topography, with wooded areas along floodplains and along ridges that mask the physical presence of the refinery. Careful site planning and extensive landscaped buffer areas may be able to mitigate these location limitations, and provide opportunities for residential uses that would take advantage of access to the new Metra station, existing regional bike paths and future bike routes that will connect the East Side of Romeoville to the station and Downtown.

However, in the near term several factors suggest that housing development in the East Side will not likely occur due to the economic recession and downturn in the housing market; ample, alternative housing locations are readily available; and the negative image associated with a residential location adjacent to a major refinery.

Accordingly, residential uses should be given a low priority in the near term as the Metra station area will not have the service or ridership to generate interest, and will not likely justify Village investment in utilities or other public services. Given the civic priority indicated for the Downtown Area, priority in terms of infill residential development should be given to the Downtown.

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