Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb, Illinois
Revitalization Plan
Final Report

Prepared for
The City of DeKalb, Illinois
By

The Lannert Group + M Square / Urban Design Partnership
With Shaw Environmental, Inc.

April 21, 2008
# Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb, Illinois

## Revitalization Plan

### Final Report

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The Project Approach</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Existing Conditions Analysis Findings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Pearl Street Neighborhood Revitalization Goals and Objectives</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Recommended Redevelopment Strategies</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Recommended Redevelopment Strategy D</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Recommended Redevelopment Plan</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Conclusion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1: Neighborhood Location Map                        2
Figure 2: Existing Conditions Analysis Findings             6
Figure 3: Existing Conditions Analysis Findings (Contd.)    8
Figure 4: Recommended Redevelopment Strategies             16
Figure 5: Recommended Redevelopment Concept Plans          17
Figure 6: Recommended Redevelopment Strategy/ Concept Plan ‘D’ 22
Figure 7: Plan Detail: Landscape and Streetscape Recommendations 25
Figure 8: Cross-sections: Landscape/ Streetscape Recommendations 26
Figure 9: Illustrations of Recommended Redevelopment Plan  28

Appendices

1. Appendix ‘A”:       Sample Field Survey Form
2. Appendix ‘B’ :      Table showing Composite Existing Conditions Scores
3. Appendix ‘C’:       Sample Survey Questionnaire for Residents and Businesses
PEARL STREET NEIGHBORHOOD EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pearl Street Plan is the sixth in a series of neighborhood revitalization plans undertaken by the City of Dekalb over the last several years. Its goal, like those before it, is to help create a higher quality of life for those living and working in the neighborhood area. Through a sophisticated planning process, existing conditions were analyzed to reveal realistic opportunities for neighborhood renewal. From this process it was concluded that there is an opportunity to replace residential land uses and obsolete industrial sites with new higher density residential development that is compatible with the mixed-use residential/commercial development proposed north of the Union Pacific railroad tracks. The plan also visualizes opportunities along First Street for new retail development that complements and supports the downtown revitalization.

The planning process pursued the following steps:

- **Existing Conditions** This process was used to identify and evaluate building age, fire and emergency calls, existing tree locations, building and zoning violations, and environmental impacts.
- **Goals and Objectives** This process was used to survey the residents, conduct stakeholder interviews, and build consensus within the city departments.
- **Redevelopment Strategies** These were used to evaluate basic land uses and circulation, test concept plan for fit, and select the preferred redevelopment plan.
- **Streetscape Features** This process was used to coordinate the larger neighborhood context, roadway improvements, sidewalk linkages with off-site conditions were studied to add value.

The recommended revitalization plan and streetscape illustration is the summary of the process outlined above. This plan is marketable, realistic, achievable, financeable, and implementable by phases. The vision for the Pearl Street Neighborhood Revitalization Plan requests the input and support of the Plan Commission and City Council to advance to the next level. These conclusions are detailed in the following report.

J. Christopher Lannert  
The Lannert Group, Inc.  
Mahender Vasandani  
M Square / Urban Design
Illustrative Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan

Illustrative Streetscape along Gurler Street
Emphasizing porch-front houses and streetscape
I. INTRODUCTION

With the goal of creating higher quality of life within its neighborhoods, the City of DeKalb undertook a revitalization study for the Pearl Street neighborhood located close to the City’s downtown. Through a competitive process, the City selected The Lannert Group + M Square Design Partnership (the Consultants) to focus on the preparation of the Pearl Street Neighborhood Revitalization Plan (the Pearl Street Plan, the Plan or the Revitalization Plan). Since a major concern of the City, and one of the main reasons to expedite the Pearl Street Plan, was the existence of an abandoned industrial use in the neighborhood, the Partnership also included on its team Shaw Environmental, Inc. who completed an assessment of the on-site environmental impacts and provided a Phase I Analysis for the neighborhood. The results of this study are summarized in the report below, while the full Phase I Report is available with the City for review.

The Pearl Street neighborhood (the Neighborhood) is located south of the Union Pacific Railroad between South First Street on its east and Pearl Street on its west. The southern boundary of the neighborhood is Gurler Street. (See Figure 1 for the location and the areas surrounding the Neighborhood.)

Along with the environmental concerns within the Neighborhood, the City’s vision for the future of the Neighborhood was guided by one other key factor. With the completion of the Downtown DeKalb Plan that proposed to “extend” revitalization of Lincoln Avenue to the west, the City was keen to complement the potential future uses along the Lincoln Avenue Corridor with the new uses within the Neighborhood. For the properties located north of the Neighborhood (north of the tracks), developers have already discussed with the City the potential for building a new mix of uses to “extend” the Lincoln Avenue revitalization to the west.

While the City of DeKalb undertook this study for revitalizing the Neighborhood, the City will not pro-actively seek relocation of its residents. With a vision for the future that the Plan represents, the City will leave it to private developers to implement the City’s vision. The current Neighborhood residents will have the choice of going along with a developer-proposed offer to buy their property as and when the market conditions evolve to be more favorable for the revitalization to occur. The primary interest of the City is that the Neighborhood revitalization occurs according to the Plan to create a new urban living environment that raises the quality of life for DeKalb residents.
Figure 1: Neighborhood Location Map
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc
II. THE PROJECT APPROACH

The scope of work for the preparation of the Revitalization Plan called for creating a vision for the future of the Neighborhood, taking into account the market viability of proposed uses and how the proposed uses would integrate with and relate to the neighborhood surroundings. Early on, it was decided that since the City had recently completed the Downtown DeKalb Plan and since the Pearl Street Neighborhood was within the primary area of the downtown, a separate market analysis will not be conducted specially for the Neighborhood. A separate market study was considered to be redundant and with the ongoing major shifts in the market conditions, a set of market estimates at such a micro-level as the Neighborhood would not be reliable. The present study thus did not conduct a separate market analysis and instead relied on the market analysis results completed for the Downtown DeKalb Plan.

Concerned that the recommendations for the Neighborhood not be viewed in isolation from the rest of the uses surrounding the Neighborhood, the City was keen for the Consultants to analyze the conditions of the properties located in close proximity to the Neighborhood. As such, the Existing Conditions Analysis completed by the Consultants covered an area larger than the Neighborhood and the recommendations for revitalization took into account the conditions and types of uses located around the Neighborhood.

From the outset the City was sensitive about the future of the residents living in the Neighborhood. The charge for the Consultants was to analyze the existing conditions in the Neighborhood before the City would determine whether a strategy for a selective preservation of existing uses or a strategy for redeveloping the entire Neighborhood at once would be more appropriate.

Considering the City’s challenge in planning for the redevelopment of the Neighborhood, the Consultants also favored an approach where the goals and objectives for the study would be determined after the completion of the existing conditions analysis. The City and the Consultants also wanted to account for the residents’ own interest in and the future of the Neighborhood. A survey questionnaire was thus prepared at the start of the study and sent to all the residents and businesses within and surrounding the Neighborhood. In addition, with a major commercial use (a used-car lot) located within the Neighborhood, the Consultants also conducted a “Stakeholder Interview” with the owner of this business (Spark Chevrolet).

After the existing conditions analysis and after compiling the results of the surveys, the Consultants and the City staff prepared a set of goals and objectives for the revitalization of the Neighborhood.

The Consultants then prepared three alternate redevelopment strategies for discussion with the City staff, including the City Manager, in a final staff meeting. The City staff
provided direction and specific comments on the strategies which resulted in a preferred composite of recommended redevelopment strategies. This preferred redevelopment plan was then reviewed with the members of Re:New DeKalb who generally supported the specific recommendations for the Neighborhood redevelopment. Next, the plan, thus endorsed by the City staff and the members of Re:New DeKalb, was presented to the residents and businesses from the Neighborhood for their comments and support.

At the public meeting it was emphasized that the City would seek residents and businesses’ cooperation in helping implement the redevelopment plan. It was clarified for the Neighborhood residents and businesses that the only goal of the City was to see the Neighborhood redevelopment in a manner consistent with the City’s plan and that the City would not force people to relocate out of the Neighborhood.
III. EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS

This section describes the results of the existing conditions analysis for the Neighborhood which took the following six factors into consideration. Appendix 'A' shows the Field Survey Form used to analyze the existing conditions in the Neighborhood. (For actual record of survey forms, contact the City.)

1. A field survey of exterior building conditions and property maintenance;
2. Review of City records on the age of buildings;
3. Review of City records on fire and emergency service reports;
4. Condition of mature trees on properties;
5. Review of City records for zoning and building violations; and,
6. Evaluation of “Environmental Impacts”
   (Please see the separate Phase 1 Site Assessment Report prepared by our sub-consultant, Shaw Environmental, Inc.)

A. Field Survey Findings

On October 1, October 8, and November 2, the Consultants conducted field surveys of the Neighborhood, visually examining the physical conditions of the exteriors of structures, and reviewing the extent or lack thereof of property maintenance. A survey of conditions inside the properties was not done; instead, the City records on zoning and building violations were reviewed to assess the extent of concerns.

Figure 2 ‘A’ shows the existing building conditions within the Neighborhood which includes 36 properties. Six of these properties as per the Shaw Environmental Report were assessed to have “a recognized environmental conditions” requiring Phase II subsurface investigation.

Of the remaining 30 properties within the Neighborhood, 13 (or 43%) were judged to be in poor physical condition. Another 12 (or 40%) were assessed to be in fair condition. Only 5 of the Neighborhood’s 30 properties were found to be in good condition.

As shown in Figure 2 ‘A’, in the block west from Pearl Street to Kishawaukee River and north of Gurler Street to the UP-RR tracks, 12 (or 55%) of the 22 properties were evaluated to be in fair to poor condition. Significantly, 4 (or 67%) of the 6 properties immediately west of Pearl Street were also in fair to poor condition. This finding had a bearing on the goals and objectives for Neighborhood revitalization.
‘A’. Building Conditions In Neighborhood and Surrounding Properties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Up to 50 years</th>
<th>51-100 year</th>
<th>Over 100 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘B’. Age of Buildings in Neighborhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Up to 50 years</th>
<th>51-100 year</th>
<th>Over 100 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘C’. Fire & Emergency Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reports</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1 to 2</th>
<th>2 +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Existing Conditions Analysis Findings
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc
B. City Records on Building Age

Along with the exterior building conditions, a key factor in assessing the potential to redevelop individual properties was the age of the structures in the Neighborhood. Based on the City records, as shown in Exhibit 2 ‘B’, 22 out of 36 (or 36%) primary structures within the Neighborhood were found to be 100 years old or older. Another six structures (or 17%) were between 50 and 100 years old. Even the remaining eight structures were more than 50 years old.

While some of the 100-year old structures appear to be in good condition from the outside, the interior conditions of these could be a concern. However, without a survey of inside conditions for each structure, an accurate description of internal building conditions is not possible.

Overall, a majority (78%) of the Neighborhood structures were between 50 and 100 years old. Thus the age of structures was a significant factor in identifying the goals and objectives for Neighborhood revitalization.

C. City Records on Fire and Emergency Calls

As shown in Figure 2 ‘C’, the City records indicated that there were only a few incidences of fire and emergency related service calls in the Neighborhood. The apartment building located between the Union Pacific Railroad and Sherman Place had one incidence of a building fire. In addition, a single-family home in the Neighborhood was found at one time to have carbon monoxide. Other emergency calls by the Neighborhood residents were for minor issues.

However, the overall fire and emergency call records were given consideration to assess the overall conditions in the Neighborhood.

D. Tree Survey

Exhibit 3 ‘A’ shows the condition of mature trees located on various properties in the Neighborhood. The majority of the trees in fair to poor condition are located on properties with fair to poor building conditions, suggesting their removal as part of a redevelopment plan may not be objectionable. However, there are a number of mature trees that were found to be in good condition. Any redevelopment of the Neighborhood should aim to maximize preservation of good, mature trees wherever possible.
Figure 3: Existing Conditions Analysis Findings (Contd.)
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc
E. City Records on Zoning and Building Violations

As per the City records, the predominant violations occurred on properties near the intersection of Gurler Street and Haish Boulevard, and on some properties west of Pearl Street, north of Gurler Street (See Figure 3 'B'). However, the City records also indicated the majority of these violations were related to a lack of property maintenance. As per the City’s Building Inspector, most of the violations had already been addressed by the property owners.

Therefore, the overall incidences of violations were only a minor factor in assessing the overall quality of existing conditions in the Neighborhood.

F. Environmental Impacts (As determined by Shaw Environmental)

Shaw Environmental, Inc. conducted a Phase I Environmental Assessment Report for the Neighborhood (see separate report), and found six properties surrounding the Newby Oil site to represent a “recognized environmental condition.” These properties would require further investigation of sub-surface conditions to determine the extent of contamination on properties within the Neighborhood. As such, these six properties were excluded from the discussion below on the overall summary of the existing condition findings. However, an examination of the sub-surface conditions would be essential to determine the types of remedial measures that may be necessary and also their associated costs.

G. Existing Conditions Analysis Summary

In summary, the conditions impacting the overall rating for the properties within the Neighborhood were; exterior building conditions, age of structures, emergency service calls, and building/maintenance violations. For the purpose of a consistent and objective evaluation of the four factors, different weights were assigned to each in order of their importance; exterior building conditions “5” (signifying most important), age of structures “4”, emergency service calls “3”, and building/maintenance violations “2”. The value of each factor was then multiplied by these weights. As shown in detail in Table 1, Appendix B, each of the thirty Neighborhood properties was scored using this process to arrive at a composite conditions assessment.

Figure 3 'C' is a graphic representation of the composite scores by the overall categories of “Good”, “Fair,” and “Poor.” The properties rated as “Poor” or “Fair” overall represented better and more immediate redevelopment opportunities, whereas the properties with an overall rating of “Good,” signified opportunities that may be preserved in the redevelopment plan, or may be considered for redevelopment in a few years after the rest of the Neighborhood has undergone changes.
Specifically, as shown in Figure 3 'C’, the primary redevelopment opportunities consisted of the six properties listed in the Phase I Environmental Assessment Report, plus almost all properties north of Gurler Street, almost all properties along Haish Boulevard, and almost all properties west of South 1st Street. It was recommended that out of these properties greater consideration may be given to those properties judged to be “Fair,” so that their immediate redevelopment may be postponed to occur later but that their redevelopment would still need to follow the overall redevelopment plan.

H. Residents and Businesses Survey, and Stakeholder Interview

Beyond assessing the existing conditions in the Neighborhood and the surrounding areas, the Consultants also wanted to hear from the Neighborhood residents and businesses about how they felt about the area and find out if they had ideas about its future. To achieve this, survey questionnaires were sent to the residents and businesses in the Neighborhood (See Appendix 'C’ for sample survey questionnaire). In addition, to assess the impact of the one major commercial property in the Neighborhood, the Consultants conducted an interview with the business owner. Described below are the findings from the survey and the business owner interview.

1. Survey Findings

Out of a total 42 survey questionnaires mailed, seven responses (16%) were received. Eleven questionnaires were “Returned to Sender,” because the mail was undeliverable and the postal service was unable to forward the mail. Four of the respondents indicated their property is used for commercial purpose, while the remaining three respondents are residents.

Some of the concerns expressed by the residents who responded to the survey include the following:

1. Appearance of the neighborhood is poor and it does not appear “safe”;
2. The rental properties in the neighborhood are bringing in “undesirables”;
3. Traffic flow is a concern when a train is passing as it is difficult to get out of driveway;
4. Newby tanks are an eyesore and not serving any purpose; and,
5. Train track trestle is an eyesore.

The three respondents who listed the above concerns have been long-term residents in the surrounding Neighborhood. They are also planning to stay in the area for more than five years. However, all three respondents live outside the Pearl Street Neighborhood. Other residents from within the Neighborhood either did not respond to the survey, or the mail could not be delivered or forwarded to them.

Among the business owners in the area who responded to the survey, only one has no plans to move from the neighborhood. Of the remaining three, one is planning to sell
The business respondents expressed the following concerns:

1. Levels of contamination from previous owners;
2. Security, lighting and appearance in the area; and,
3. High speed of northbound traffic along Pearl Street.

Collectively, between the residents and businesses, the seven respondents suggested the following ways to improve the Neighborhood:

1. There should be loans or grants for home maintenance;
2. Enforcement of lawn and yards maintenance;
3. Remove the tanks and make the area a sitting park, residential or parking;
4. More aesthetically pleasing and environmentally friendly landscaping to absorb rain;
5. New development should take advantage of high traffic count; it should be attractive and generate revenue;
6. Create a park for children; and,
7. Create trade-related businesses by redeveloping the neighborhood.

2. Stakeholder Interview

The one stakeholder interview conducted for the study was with Mr. Tom Sparks of Sparks Auto Dealership who owns a large property within the Neighborhood. This property located west of South 1st Street and immediately south of the Union Pacific Railroad tracks currently serves as a used-car lot for the dealership whose main store and office is located east of South 1st Street.

In the interview, Mr. Sparks described the industry-wide trends affecting auto business, especially the used-car business. As to the future of the used-car lot, Mr. Sparks suggested that he needs the property to display approximately 200 cars during peak-sale periods. Because of the shifting nature of the used-car business, however, Mr. Sparks indicated that in case he was no longer in the auto-business, the dealership properties might be sold. For the immediate future, Mr. Sparks suggested he would continue to operate the dealership and need the used-car display area located within the Neighborhood.

3. Summary of Survey Findings and Stakeholder Interview

Sixteen percent of the property owners in and near the Neighborhood responded to the survey. The three residents plan to stay in the area for more than five years and have
lived in their present houses from five to 23 years. As these residents also have properties that were judged to be in good or fair condition, it is likely that these properties may not be available for redevelopment in the immediate future.

The majority of existing businesses that responded may not be at their present locations for more than a year. Their properties provide the potential for more immediate redevelopment in the Neighborhood. In regards to the car dealership (owned by Tom Sparks), there would need to be a phased Neighborhood redevelopment plan, so that the dealership can continue to sell used cars for an “interim” period. The City and the dealership will need to have further discussions to mutually define the extent of the interim period.
IV. PEARL STREET NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Given the findings of the existing conditions analysis, the results from the survey and the insights gained from the one stakeholder interview, the City staff decided that the need for selective preservation of homes was not critical. The City staff also resolved that the goal of improving the quality of life in the Neighborhood could be achieved through redevelopment of all properties at once. However, the City staff also wanted to keep the option open for individual property owners to stay within the neighborhood if necessary. The goal of the City is to achieve uniform, neighborhood-wide revitalization as per one future Plan and achieve such a goal in phases, if necessary, such that any resident wishing to stay on could possibly be accommodated for a period of time.

Overall, the City staff set the following goals and objectives for the Neighborhood revitalization:

1. Achieve a uniform vision for the future of the entire neighborhood that could be implemented in phases as necessary to accommodate the residents wishing to stay on in the Neighborhood.

2. Connect the new Neighborhood to its surroundings with special consideration for pedestrian and bike links to the Kishawaukee riverfront to the west and to the “extended” downtown uses along Lincoln Highway to the north.

3. Improve vehicular traffic movement on the Neighborhood streets, especially given the fact the South First Street with at-grade R/R crossing at Lincoln Highway causes traffic congestion and adversely affect vehicular movement on the Neighborhood streets.

4. With grade separation between Pearl Street and the R/R tracks, the majority of traffic moving around the Neighborhood uses Gurler Street and Pearl Street to by-pass the South First Street R/R crossing when it is blocked by moving trains. Given such a condition, the goal is to promote improved traffic movement around the Neighborhood.

5. In conjunction with the above transportation goal, the City also set the goal of improving the traffic turning movement between Gurler Street and Franklin Street -- to the east of the Neighborhood.

6. A key transportation related objective to achieve the goal of an efficient transportation movement around the Neighborhood was to keep the curb cuts for entry to the Neighborhood to a minimum, especially along Pearl Street.

7. Improve pedestrian access from the existing residences located southwest of the Neighborhood to the “extended” downtown along Lincoln Highway, as part of the recommendations for the Neighborhood.
8. Recognizing that the key business use located south of Gurler Street would stay at its current location for the foreseeable future, actions would be taken to “soften” the impact of business on the Neighborhood.

9. For the streets around the Neighborhood, recommend streetscape improvements that add to the quality of life and create a new character for the Neighborhood.

10. Consider locating an “Art District” in the Neighborhood that provides for a variety of activities such as art classes, sculpture studios and display spaces. Such an “Art District” would be an extension of the existing Northern Illinois University activities to enhance the link between the NIU campus and the downtown DeKalb.
V. RECOMMENDED REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

In consideration of the goals and objectives set for the Neighborhood, the Consultants prepared three alternate redevelopment strategies for City’s consideration. (See Figure 4 for the recommended Redevelopment Strategies and Figure 5 for the corresponding Redevelopment Concept Plans.) These strategies and concept plans were discussed with the City staff for their comments. The following are the descriptions of the recommended strategies. Based on staff comments (see Section VI), the three strategies were combined into a Redevelopment Strategy ‘D’ that was then illustrated as the recommended Redevelopment Plan for the Neighborhood. This Plan was then discussed with the members of Re: New DeKalb and additionally with the residents and businesses of the Neighborhood at a public hearing.

The three strategies had some underlying planning and urban design principles that were common to all three. These common principles were:

1. Create a distinct urban form that achieves compatibility with the surrounding existing uses;
2. Consider a diversity of uses to be located in the Neighborhood with the principal use being residential;
3. Locate non-residential uses primarily along South First Street to achieve compatibility with commercial uses across the street. More importantly, make these non-residential uses a draw for the customers visiting the downtown along Lincoln Highway. Accordingly, the urban form of the non-residential uses along the eastern end of the Neighborhood should be visually bold and attractive to draw attention to itself;
4. Integrate the mix of uses such that there is internal pedestrian and vehicular connections between them; and,
5. Provide pedestrian and bike links for the future residents in the Neighborhood for ease of access to the downtown Lincoln Highway uses and the Kishawaukee riverfront.

1. Redevelopment Strategy ‘A’

As shown in Figures 4 ‘A’ and 5 ‘A’, the key aspects of this strategy were to mix medium density residential uses (apartments or condominiums) and townhouses with commercial uses located along First Street and Pearl Street. An “Art District,” could be an alternate use instead of the commercial uses along Pearl Street. One alternate to the recommended townhouses was to consider live-work units along Gurler Street, should the market favor building such units in close proximity to the downtown.
Figure 4: Recommended Redevelopment Strategies
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb, Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc
Redevelopment Concept Plan ‘A’

Redevelopment Concept Plan ‘B’

Redevelopment Concept Plan ‘C’

Figure 5: Recommended Redevelopment Concept Plans
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb, Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc
As illustrated in Figure 5 ‘A’, the Redevelopment Concept Plan shows a row of townhouses along Gurler Street. As an urban design recommendation to enhance the streetscape of Gurler Street, these townhouses should have their garages located at the rear with access from an alley that can also serve as a circulation drive for the proposed apartment/condominium buildings to the north.

Recognizing the need to offset the disadvantage of locating residences close to the railroad tracks along the north of the Neighborhood, it is critical to locate apartment or condominium buildings perpendicular to the tracks around a strong amenity such as an open space courtyard. A well-landscaped open court in front of the buildings would add to the quality of life for residents in the Neighborhood and also help in the marketing of these units.

All the required parking for the proposed apartment/condominium buildings could be provided on surface.

The parking for the proposed commercial uses should be located behind the commercial buildings along South First Street such that it is concealed from the street. The buildings located close to the street right-of-way could add to a better streetscape along South First Street. There would be limited on-street parking in conjunction with the recommended streetscape improvements that would include well-defined parking bays.

In order to enhance vehicular traffic movement around the Neighborhood, it was recommended that Pearl Street and Gurler Street be joined by a curving road and that Gurler Street should form a T-intersection with Pearl Street.

2. Redevelopment Strategy ‘B’

Essentially similar to the Redevelopment Strategy ‘A’, Strategy ‘B’ reduced the types of residential units from two types to one. Instead of including apartment/condominium buildings to the north, this strategy called for locating only townhouses in the neighborhood; with the exception that should live-work units be found to be more marketable, they would be located along Gurler Street instead of townhouses. (See Figures 4 ‘B’ and 5 ‘B’.)

To make living in the townhouses to the north attractive, especially to counter the impact of the train noise in the Neighborhood, two key recommendations were made:

1. Either build a sound wall or install dense landscaping along the periphery of the site along the railroad tracks; and

2. Provide a “public square” in the form of a sizable open space in front of the townhouses. As an additional sound barrier, locate garages of the townhouses
to the rear. This urban design recommendation has the additional benefit of creating an attractive streetscape around the open square in front of the houses.

All other land use, design, and transportation recommendations for Strategy ‘B’ were similar to the recommendations for Strategy ‘A’.

3. Redevelopment Strategy ‘C’

In all regards, the recommended Strategy ‘C’ was similar to Strategy ‘B,” except that instead of townhouses the City could consider detached single-family houses along Gurler Street (See Figure 4 ‘C’ and 5 ‘C’). These houses, just like the townhouses, would have garages at the rear in order to have a more attractive streetscape along Gurler Street. It was also recommended that these houses be located on narrow lots (with a maximum width of 40 to 45 feet) and have porches in front to better integrate the Neighborhood with its surroundings, especially the residential uses south of Gurler Street. An additional benefit of locating the garages at the rear would be to eliminate the driveways from the fronts of the houses thus eliminating interference with traffic along Gurler Street. In addition, this design strategy would also result in a more continuous sidewalk for the pedestrians, without the intervening conflicts with the driveways. Furthermore, with porches facing the street, instead of the garages, the streetscape would be more attractive and more “community-friendly”.

The one difference between Strategy ‘C’ and Strategy ‘B’ was the larger “footprint” for commercial and/or art district uses along Pearl Street. With more non-residential uses along Pearl Street, it was vital to provide an independent access to the uses from the west, i.e. from Pearl Street. The location of the driveway along Pearl Street, however, was seen as a potential problem.

Because Pearl Street slopes down towards the railroad underpass to the north, ideally an access driveway to the Neighborhood had to be located as far away from the underpass so as to increase the travel distance for motorists driving on the road in a southbound direction. However, given the need at the same time to locate an access driveway as far away from the proposed new curved road connecting Pearl Street and Gurler Street created a conflict for its ideal location.

Per the City’s comments (see further discussion of City comments), it was agreed that the proposed commercial and/or art district uses could be better located on the west side of Pearl Street since many of the properties west of Pearl Street were also considered to be “redevelopable” in the near future given their overall “poor” condition.

This discussion also made it clear that it would be best for easy traffic movement around the Neighborhood to not allow an access driveway from Pearl Street.
City Review of Recommended Redevelopment Strategies

Various staff members from the different City departments were involved in the review of the recommended redevelopment strategies and concept plans for the Neighborhood. With comments from the Economic Development Director, the Community Development Director and Principal Planner, the City Chief Engineer, the Special Projects Coordinator, and the City Manager, there was consensus that the entire Neighborhood should be redeveloped at one time per one adopted redevelopment plan. Based on the review of the three strategies, there was further consensus that the area west of Pearl Street would be a better location for a future Art District, the details of which would need to be worked out in discussions with Northern Illinois University. In addition, the City Planning and Economic Development staff recommended that the entire west frontage of First Street should be planned for commercial uses up to Gurler Street.

Also, the consensus from different staff comments was that for the area north of Gurler Street, the planned uses should include single-family detached homes, on narrow lots not to exceed 45 feet, and that these houses should all have porches in the front with garages at the rear of the lots.

Another key recommendation made by City Planning staff was to connect Gurler Street with Franklin Street in order to provide a safer movement for traffic headed west on Gurler Street from Franklin Street. Under the current conditions, vehicles moving west from Franklin Street have to make a quick southbound left turn on First Street to come to a stop at the intersection of First and Gurler Streets. Such traffic movement raises safety concerns and a direct connection between Gurler and Franklin Streets would alleviate such concerns.
VI. REDEVELOPMENT STRATEGY ‘D’

Given the staff comments, the Consultants recommend the Redevelopment Strategy ‘D’ and its corresponding Redevelopment Concept Plan ‘D’ (see Figure 6). The two plans illustrate the composite of strategies that have the best potential to meet the goals and objectives of redeveloping the Neighborhood. The following are the descriptions of the key planning and urban design, and streetscape recommendations.

A. Planning and Urban Design Recommendations

1. Redevelop the entire Neighborhood at one time when economic conditions are favorable;
2. Include the used-car dealership lot within the redevelopment of the Neighborhood after arriving at a consensus with the dealership owner;
3. Extend Gurler street to the east to connect with Franklin Street after working out an acceptable plan of action with the current property owners who would need to be relocated;
4. Create a continuous curved road between Pear Street and Gurler Street with the portion of Gurler Street west of Pearl making a T-intersection at the curved road;
5. Allow no curb cuts along the east side of Pearl Street or driveway access to the Neighborhood from Pearl Street;
6. Allow one major access to the Neighborhood on the axis of Haish Boulevard;
7. Allow parallel street parking on the north side of Gurler Street and the west side of First Street with adequate “bump-outs” and landscaping;
8. Provide most of the parking behind the buildings; commercial or residential;
9. Allow single-family detached homes to be built along Gurler Street with their garages at the rear served by an alley, fronting on Gurler Street;
10. Locate the recommended mid-rise (4-5 story high) buildings for apartments/condominiums behind the single-family houses so as to minimize the impact of the larger building bulk on Gurler Street;
11. Orient the apartment/condominium buildings perpendicular to the railroad tracks and provide a common forecourt between the two main buildings in the form of a park which would include the preserved mature trees rated in good condition;
12. Provide surface parking for apartments/condominiums in the interior of the Neighborhood, with little or no exposure of parking from First, Gurler and Pearl Streets;
13. For the commercial buildings west of First Street, provide an architecture feature, through design or height, that has a prominent presence close to the intersection with the railroad so as to draw attention to itself from Lincoln Highway;
14. Community gathering places, both inside and outside, should be included in the redevelopment project to serve the residents of the Neighborhood;
15. Accessibility improvements should be incorporated in all redevelopment projects; and,
16. Brownfield grant opportunities should be used to provide for clean-up of the older, industrial sites.
Figure 6: Recommended Redevelopment Strategy & Concept Plan D
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental
B. Streetscape and Landscape Recommendations

In addition to the planning and urban design recommendations for the redevelopment of the Neighborhood, a specific charge of the Consultants was to make recommendations for streetscape improvements that were consistent with the redevelopment recommendations. Described below are the key landscape and streetscape elements that form an integral part of the overall redevelopment of the Neighborhood. (See Figures 7 and 8; larger versions of these exhibits are available with the City).

1. Provide decorative street pavers and landscape elements at key intersections and mid block crossings; use a variety of paving textures, colors and styles to break up large expanses of paving.

2. Provide vertical architectural streetscape elements at key intersections, mid-block areas and building entrances including:
   a. Raised planters;
   b. Fencing around street level planters;
   c. Masonry columns with planters;
   d. Kiosks and gateways; and,
   e. Water features.

3. Provide quality streetscape furnishings that are in keeping with other downtown DeKalb areas and that are consistent with the building architecture. Streetscape furnishings can include:
   a. Benches
   b. Trash Cans
   c. Bicycle Racks
   d. Ornamental street lighting, (both pedestrian and vehicular lighting)
   e. Bollards
   f. Newspaper Corrals and Stands
   g. Ornamental Street and Informational Signs

4. Streetscape furnishings should be designed into a well conceived, integrated streetscape design and not located as an after thought.

5. Design parking “bump-out” along curb edge to break up on street parking and to soften the streetscape. Locate the bump-outs adjacent to key building entrances and/or mid-block crossings.

6. Provide large and continuous planting areas instead of individual tree locations; avoid the use of tree grates. Larger planting areas will help conserve water and help establish a healthier root mass.

7. Provide colorful banners or hanging flower pots from ornamental light posts along streets where appropriate.
8. Provide an automatic irrigation system for all planting areas including drip irrigation for all planters and hanging baskets.

9. Wherever possible, provide a streetscape design that utilizes best management practices (BMP’s) to conserve and filter storm water runoff.

The City should pursue funding opportunities through grants to implement the recommended streetscape improvements. Since these improvements benefit the entire community they could be constructed independent of the Neighborhood Redevelopment project and should be programmed into the City’s Capital Plan. Examples of such improvements include re-alignment of Franklin Street, redesign of the Pearl Street and Gurler Street intersection and the related streetscape enhancements along Gurler Street, Pearl Street and First Street. As the major linkage between the neighborhoods and Lincoln Highway, south of the railroad tracks, the Pearl Street underpass and roadway improvements should be scheduled as part of the city’s capital plan.
NOTE: To review the detailed recommendations see larger Exhibit available with the City of DeKalb. Also see Streetscape and Landscape Recommendations in Section of this report.

Figure 7: Plans Detail: Landscape & Streetscape Recommendations
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc
NOTE: To review the detailed recommendations see larger Exhibit available with the City of DeKalb. Also see Streetscape and Landscape Recommendations in Section of this report.

Figure 8: Street Cross-sections: Existing and Proposed Conditions
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc.
VII. RECOMMENDED REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Once the City staff approved the redevelopment recommendations, the Consultants prepared the final exhibits illustrating the Redevelopment Plan and later a rendering to show how Gurler Street will appear once the recommended improvements have been completed. This end state vision of the Neighborhood is for illustrative purposes only. (See Figure 9.)

Review Meetings with Re:New DeKalb and the Public

The City staff-approved Redevelopment Plan was subsequently reviewed with the members of Re:New DeKalb and in a separate meeting with the public and stakeholders to seek their comments.

The members of Re:New DeKalb, present at the review meeting, expressed support for the overall redevelopment plan and the specific recommendations for improvements.

The Consultants next presented the plan and recommendations at a public meeting. Residents and business owners from the Neighborhood engaged in a productive discussion of the role the City would play in the redevelopment of the Neighborhood. It was emphasized that the City would not acquire properties through eminent domain. Instead the City would use the recommended Redevelopment Plan as a vision for the future of the Neighborhood and seek developers to undertake the project as the market conditions permit. The individual property owners would have the right to negotiate with the developer to sell their properties. The overall redevelopment of the Neighborhood would thus occur with the support of the current residents and businesses. The goal of the City is to have a consistent overall new development for the Neighborhood that follows the recommended Redevelopment Plan.
Illustrative Streetscape along Gurler Street
Emphasizing porch-front houses and streetscape landscaping

Figure 9: Illustrations of Recommended Redevelopment Plan
Pearl Street Neighborhood, DeKalb Illinois
Lannert Group + M Square Urban Design Partnership with Shaw Environmental, Inc
VIII. CONCLUSION

The City of DeKalb with an aim to revitalize its various city neighborhoods undertook this study to focus on the Pearl Street Neighborhood as it is a Brownfield site and because of its proximity to the City’s downtown.

Based on the discussions of different redevelopment strategies with the City staff, the consultant prepared the Redevelopment Strategy ‘D’ that was then illustrated as the recommended Redevelopment Plan for the Neighborhood. With positive comments from the members of Re:New DeKalb and generally supportive discussions with residents of the Neighborhood, the City is now poised to formally adopt the recommended Redevelopment Plan for the Pearl Street Neighborhood.

The recommendations for the Redevelopment Strategy “D” are incorporated into the planning document, amended through the public participation process and serve as the basis for the future redevelopment of the area.