

CHAPTER 14

THE CITY

For many municipalities in Illinois and throughout the nation, Evanston has been a model of local government: clean, representative, professional and, at times, cutting edge - - often because urban problems occur first in mature communities over 100 years old. Evanston has never been immune to problems, nor have solutions to problems escaped vigorous debate. As in many communities exhibiting diversity and hosting institutions of higher education, every resident is likely to be an “expert” on one issue or another. Fortunately for Evanston, its moderate size permits a legitimate “sense of community” and its culture invites disparate points of view, but eventually produces constructive, if not ideal, results.

Local elections are presumably “nonpartisan”; candidates do not declare a party affiliation. However, based on national political profiles, it is fair to say that for its first century and into the 1970s, the Mayor and majority of the 18-alderman City Council exhibited Republican perspectives. In 1991 Evanston’s voters approved a referendum to reduce the City Council to nine aldermen, one rather than two from each ward. Since the 1970s, the majority of voters in Evanston and the smaller City Council, even the Mayor, represented Democrat perspectives. At virtually all times in the past 50 years, however, downtown revitalization leadership was the product of a coalition of Republican and Democrat elected officials sufficient to produce a consensus and majority vote. Disagreement, even hostility, was not absent, nor is it today, but eventually rational, decision-making prevailed - - most of the time.

Mayoral policy leadership peaked under Mayors Vanneman and Lytle; continuity was provided under Mayor Barr. Eventually, the role of the Mayor was curtailed by the new City Council as aldermen vied for more power. However, Mayor Morton, beloved by parents and children alike for her years of extraordinary service to the community as an educator, has distinguished herself by her perpetual enthusiasm for progress and revitalization, and for her “healing” presence in turbulent times, especially on the subject of “town-gown” relations.

CITY OF EVANSTON OFFICIALS

Mayors

John R. Kimbark	1953-1962
Otto R. Hills	1962
John D. Emery	1962-1970
Peter D. Jans	1970
Edgar Vanneman, Jr.	1970-1977
James C. Lytle	1977-1985
Joan W. Barr	1985-1993
Lorraine Morton	1993-present

City Managers

Bert W. Johnson	1953-1962
Wayne Anderson	1962-1970
Edward Martin	1970-1982
Joel Asprooth	1982-1990
Eric Anderson	1991-1995
Roger Crum	1995-2004
Julia Carroll	2005-

While many communities may support downtown revitalization in response to the survival instinct of downtown business interests or citizen desire for “a sense of place,” downtown revitalization in Evanston is an economic and fiscal imperative. Because of its mature character and the lack of vacant land since the 1950s, the city has not been able to offer inexpensive, “greenfield” sites to real estate developers of shopping centers and business parks during the past five decades. Its only options for enhancing the non-residential tax base have been through the process of redevelopment, a process by which industries have moved out, making their sites available for new commercial development, and by which downtown properties have been converted to higher density, mixed use. The city’s commitment to its residential neighborhoods and the real estate market’s endorsement of Evanston as a good place to live have resulted in virtually no conversion of residential land to commercial use.

In addition, Evanston is characterized historically by a substantial portion of its real estate being exempt from property taxes – i.e. schools, parks, churches, universities and colleges, and non-profit organizations. One exception is Rotary International, which despite its non-profit status, has decided to be a good corporate citizen and is downtown’s largest property tax payer. Historically, much of the land under downtown and many of the buildings were owned by Northwestern University. With few exceptions, cooperation of the university with the city has resulted in virtually all of these properties being sold and placed back on the property tax rolls.

Several municipal bodies are integral to the process of real estate development in Evanston and its downtown prior to decisions being reached by the City Council itself. However, four of them are essential. First is the Site Plan and Architectural Review Committee, members of which are primarily city staff members. Its purpose is to provide initial review of developer proposals in relatively informal public meetings to advise prospective applicants of city codes, ordinances, expectations and offer professional suggestions before the project enters the formal process of review, approval or rejection. Recommendations are advisory and not binding, except when explicitly covered by a regulation.

The second body is the Plan Commission which reviews most projects, especially “planned unit developments,” to determine consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and other formally adopted or administratively applied guidelines.

Following recommendations from the SPAARC and Plan Commission, the City Council’s Planning & Development Committee reviews all projects and recommends action to the City Council. If the city is a financial or economically invested partner in the project, the Economic Development Committee will also have a key role, sometimes in project initiation as well as review.

Evanston has been among the first municipalities in Illinois to take advantage of legislation passed by the Illinois General Assembly to establish Special Service Areas (1974), Tax Increment Finance Redevelopment Districts (1985), public-private partnerships, IDOT Transportation Center funding, federal and state research park funding, art in public places funding, etc.

On the other hand, anticipated funding sources can disappoint Evanston. For example, until as late as December, 2001 the CTA had committed \$32 million in its capital improvement program for the replacement or repair of viaducts in Evanston. Early in 2003 city officials recognized that most of this funding had been eliminated or postponed by the CTA and only the Main Street viaduct would be subject to replacement. City officials, together with state and federal elected representatives, are now working to have funding restored for additional viaduct projects.

In the 1990s the city sponsored a Commercial Area Assistance Program to encourage property owners and business tenants to upgrade the external appearance of their buildings and storefronts. Implemented by the Planning Department and its design team, the program provided up to 50% reimbursement or a maximum of \$5,000 per storefront to applicants who completed improvements in accordance with the city’s design guidelines and the previously approved plans. This was eventually expanded to \$10,000 per storefront, or for larger stores, to \$10,000 per 50 linear feet fronting on a public right-of-way, with a maximum of \$40,000 per building. Some approved projects were in the downtown; most were in neighborhood business districts to encourage revitalization throughout the community.

2004 CITY COUNCIL		
Ward	Alderman	
1	Arthur Newman	E, P
2	Lionel Jean-Baptiste	
3	Melissa Wynne	E,P
4	Steven Bernstein	P
5	Joe Kent	P
6	Edmund Moran	E
7	Elizabeth Tisdahl	P
8	Ann Rainey	E
9	Gene Feldman	E
Mayor	Lorraine Morton	
E - Economic Development Committee		
P - Planning & Development Committee		

Evanston has also been blessed with a highly professional city staff, including former and present City Managers, Public Works Directors, and Community Development Directors, etc. who have worked together as a team over the years. Of particular note is Judith A. Aiello, Assistant City Manager, who has served the city for over 30 years, spanning the terms of three Mayors and four City Managers. Hired as a planning intern in 1976, Ms. Aiello rose to become Assistant City Manger in 1982. She serves as the city's point person on economic development "deal making." On several occasions she has served as Interim City Manager following the resignations and retirements of City Managers.

2004 PLAN COMMISSION

Members

- Sharon Y. Bowie
- Douglas A. Doetsch
- Albert Hunter
- Stephen R. Krutsen
- Lawrence B. Raffel
- Alice Rebechini
- Kenneth Rodgers
- Lawrence Widmayer, Chair
- James G. Woods

Associate Members

- Richard Cook
- John R. Lyman
- Steve Samson

The City of Evanston has often turned to outside consultants for specialized consulting and design services. For example, the city has frequently retained Kane, McKenna and Associates, Inc. to advise it on matters related to tax increment financing. Subsequently, its decision to hire U.S. Equities, specifically its Partner Martin Stern, in the 1990s was of significant importance. This important real estate development resource permitted the city to act in a business-like manner throughout the process of selecting a developer for the Church Street Plaza project, and throughout the process of negotiating a win-win development agreement with the Arthur Hill Company. Mr. Stern continues to be retained by the city to assist with subsequent negotiations with real estate developers.

Clearly, the city's investments, substantial though they have been, have produced handsome returns, measured by increased property tax base, increased private sector jobs, new housing, and investor confidence -- to name but a few indices. Beginning with the 2008 tax levy, resulting in taxes paid in 2009, all taxing bodies in Evanston will enjoy a substantial windfall of tax revenues from Tax Increment District No. 1, Downtown II. For example, an analysis prepared by the City of Evanston in 2002 projected that School Districts 65 and 202 would realize roughly \$3.2 million and \$2.3 million, respectively, when the Downtown II TIF district reaches the tax rolls in 2009. Similarly, revenues from Tax Increment District No. 4, Washington National, will be distributed to all taxing bodies beginning in 2018. In January, 2004 the City Council amended all four of its TIF project plans to delay distribution of revenues one year, i.e. to 2010 and 2019 respectively.

2005 provided an opportunity for the City of Evanston to enter a new era of leadership, planning and decision-making. The new City Manager, Julia A. Carroll, arrived in January. Almost immediately she distinguished herself as a leader committed to the future of Evanston. Among her goals:

- Formulation of a policy consensus leading to a strategic plan and annual goals to guide the performance of elected and appointed officials and staff.
- Improvement of the city's development project review process, incorporating decision-making guidelines and updated zoning regulations.
- Attention to key infrastructure maintenance and construction.
- Affordable housing and effective growth services.
- Economic development and budget priorities.

April elections further suggested a fresh opportunity when three incumbent alderman (Arthur Newman, Joseph Kent, and Gene Feldmen) announced they wouldn't seek another four term. Three new aldermen were elected: Cheryl Wollin, 1st Ward; Delores Holmes, 5th Ward; and Anjana Hansen, 9th Ward. Mayor Lorraine Morton easily won her race for a fourth term.

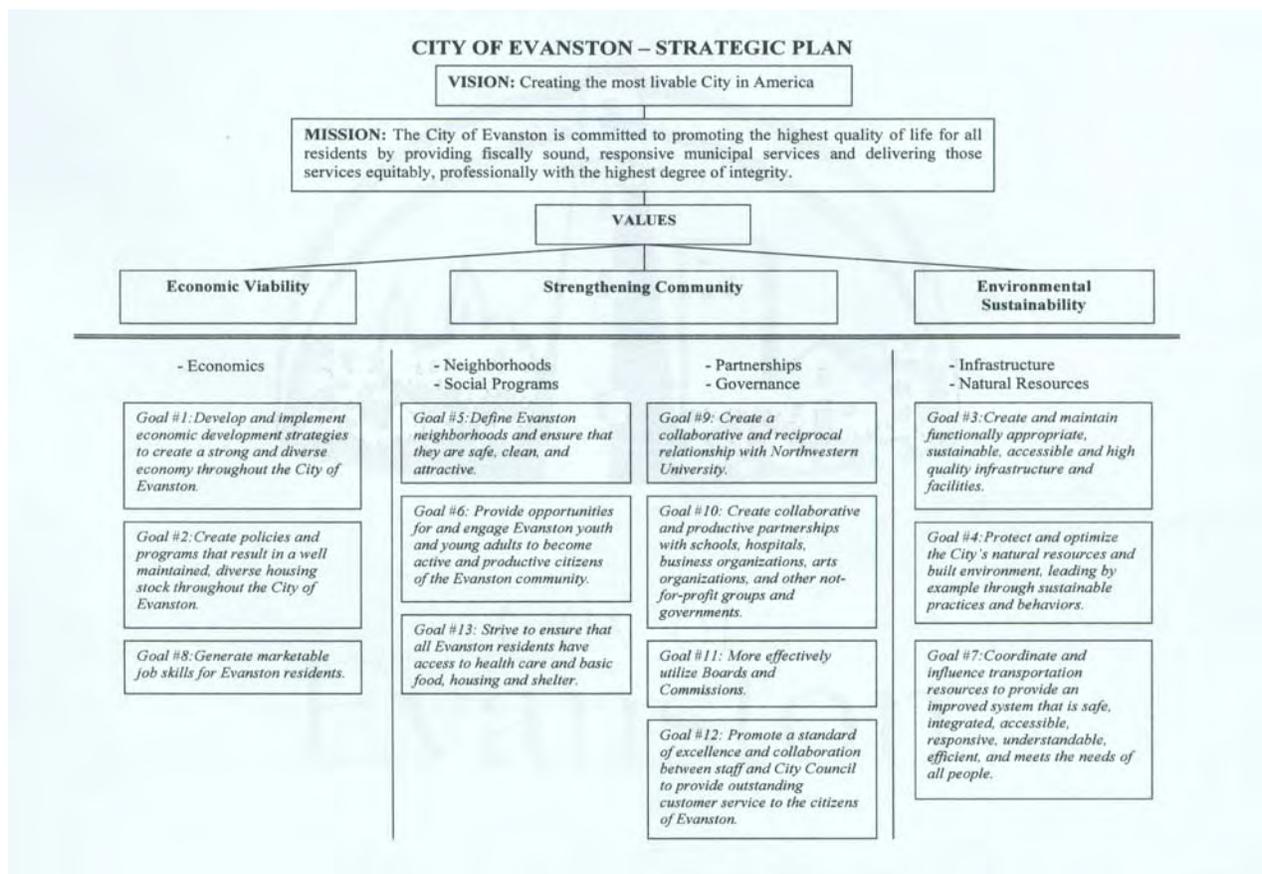
Shortly thereafter, City Manager Carroll introduced a new strategic planning process for the City Council and staff, taking advantage of inputs from the public. By the end of the year a draft of the Strategic Plan was placed on the City's website and distributed for public review, with the intention of adoption by the City Council in February. By its very nature, the Strategic Plan was like no other plan previously prepared by the city or reviewed by the public. Certainly, it did not seek to emulate or update the city's Comprehensive General Plan, last adopted in 2000, nor the Plan for Downtown, adopted in 1990. In fact, one was hard pressed to find any mention of downtown in the Strategic Plan.

The public release of a draft Strategic Plan was lauded by many citizens. However, it drew serious concern from special interest groups and civic organizations who had eagerly awaited its unveiling after an extended period of closely held drafting. Many of these groups joined together to request an extended review period and submitted constructive comments.

The City Council adopted the Strategic Plan on March 27, 2006 with few amendments.

The Vision of the City Council was: "Creating the most livable city in America". While Evanstonians zealously enjoy and promote the quality of life in their community, this appeared to many to be a vague and unrealistic vision (even if well intentioned), lacking a clear image of what the community truly is and can be aspired to legitimately.

The Strategic Plan focused on thirteen goals, none of which contain the word "downtown". The only place that word was mentioned is as one of many business districts to be addressed in the context of preparing a new economic development plan for the entire city. No mention was made of downtown's contribution to the unique character (livability) of Evanston, its "sense of place" or its "spirit of community". This strongly implies to the reader, intended or unintended, that the overwhelming concern for downtown is economic development.



Source: City of Evanston

Based in part on citizen concerns expressed in recent years about the city's development policies, project review procedures and zoning decisions, the City Manager commissioned an independent professional study by Virchow Krause & Company. The consultant's "no holds barred" report, Evaluation of the City of Evanston, IL Development Review Process, was released in March, 2006. Among its most important findings are:

- The City of Evanston lacks a shared vision for development.
- Reviewing bodies send conflicting messages to applicants about project requirements.
- Staff knowledge and expertise are not fully leveraged by Boards and Commissions.

The Executive Summary states, "It is our recommendation that the City needs to improve its approach to more efficiently and effectively manage and ensure quality development that is aligned with community values as follows:"

- Create a clear vision for development, including a visioning statement with supporting documentation and linked to a robust comprehensive plan;
- Adopt a more customer-focused approach to the process used to review and approve permits;
- Differentiate between different types of customers/applications and the necessary process steps or level of analysis;
- Ensure a seamless, multi-disciplinary/departmental approach to development review that clearly defines the relative roles of staff, along with reviewing and approving bodies;
- Resolve issues relative to permit processing timelines by reorganizing the Department and implementing a one-stop shop, increasing the use of customer self-help tools and using available technology to improve workflow and tracking of overall department and individual staff performance; and
- Establish accountability for a responsive review process through the establishment of performance and outcome standards.

In July one development decision left many observers wondering about the City Council's reaction to the Virchow Krause recommendations. That decision came on July 10 when the City Council approved (6-

3) the 18-story, 165-unit condominium project called Carroll Place at 1881 Oak Avenue, actually fronting on Emerson Street. A research park office building had been previously approved by the city for this site, but never built.

The proposed residential use of Carroll Place was not incompatible with the adopted research park plan. However, the 18-story height and related density were inconsistent with the research park plan and nearby buildings (3 to 9 stories), the neighborhood to the north, the Plan Commission's designation of the area as a "Transition Zone", and the long-standing (since 1960's) concept of downtown being developed with the tallest buildings in the core and lower buildings at the periphery. Although recent City Council approvals of the Mather Lifeways retirement community (10-11 stories) and the Sienna project at 1100 Clark (8 stories) pushed the limits of this concept, it remained much intact. By approving Carroll Place, the City Council rejected the recommendations of the Site Plan & Architecture Review Committee (city staff), the Plan Commission, and Design Evanston, all of which would have restricted height in the range of 8-10 stories. Several alderman indicated that they approved the project because of the tax revenue it would generate. Many observers considered this decision to be contrary to the recommendations of the Virchow Krause report.

This decision, being made in the absence of an updated Plan for Downtown (1989) or a new vision that many had hoped would come from the Strategic Plan (2006), leaves one to question how future decisions will be made and whether the opportunity created by a new city leadership team in 2005 is being captured.

As could be predicted following the City Council's precedent setting zoning decision at 1881 Oak Avenue, a new proposal was submitted to the City in November to construct a 14-story building on the abutting property at 1890 Maple Avenue. This building would provide 152 rental dwelling units, 40,000 s.f. of retail space and 313 parking spaces. This site is currently occupied by the first privately developed office building (three stories) in the Northwestern University/Evanston Research Park. Once again the City's decision-making process will be tested.

Temperance has always been an issue of sorts in Evanston, especially because of the religious values of its founders, its headquarters of the WCTU, and it being a college town. Since barriers on the sale of alcoholic beverages were officially broken by the City Council in 1973 the laws have become increasingly liberal. The number of liquor licenses issued has increased, the variety of sales venues has increased, hours of operation have increased, and taxes levied on sales have increased. Generally, such legal access to alcoholic beverages has been well received by residents of Evanston and the larger market area, well managed by licensed businesses, and well controlled by law enforcement, yet not without incidents often involving underage customers.

In October, 2005, the City Council voted 7-1 to prohibit 18-21 year olds in bars after midnight, even if they were not drinking. Immediate opposition arose from Northwestern University student organizations which had been legally holding charitable fund raising events in certain venues late at night (early at night for many students). In early January, 2006 the City Council amended its new ordinance to permit such events under responsible conditions. These included informing the City two weeks before a bar night is held, persons younger than 21 wearing wrist bands, and having an off-duty police officer present.

The future of the Evanston Civic Center building and site at 2100 Ridge Avenue continued to be discussed throughout 2005-2006. The key issues being debated in front of the City's Civic Center Committee (composed of all nine alderman) include:

- Should the city rehabilitate the building for continued use as a civic center or move elsewhere?
- Should the civic center be declared a historic landmark and preserved regardless of its future use?
- Should the city sell the building and its site to a developer?
- Can the building be effectively converted to residential use and at what price?

In 2004 the City Council committed to selling the property and moving elsewhere. However, the election of three new aldermen, intervention by the Preservation Commission, and formation of a citizens' sponsored Friends of the Civic Center organization caused that commitment to be reviewed. Nevertheless, the City retained US Equities to oversee a space needs program for a future civic center facility.

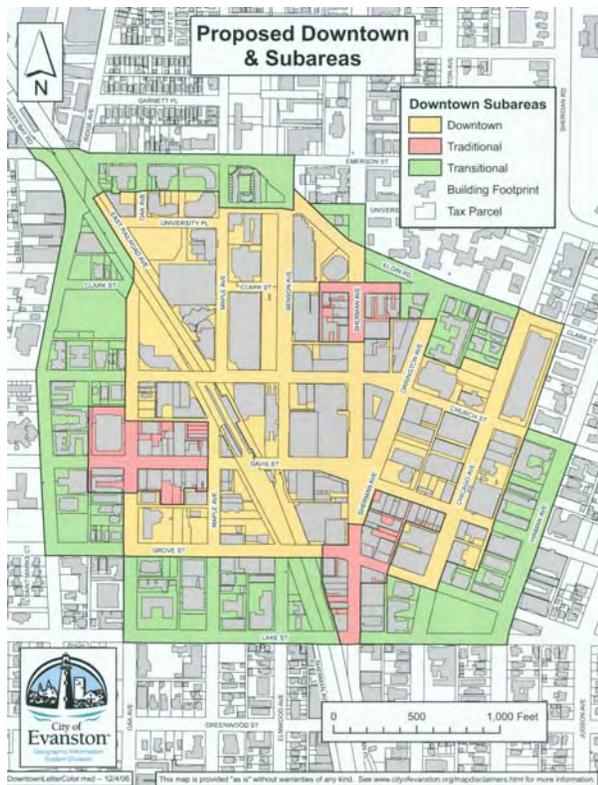
The major issue which has not yet been debated publicly is: If the civic center moves, where will it be located? Rumors indicate that some civic leaders would support a downtown location, perhaps even renting a new or existing building from a private owner who would retrofit it for public use but continue to pay property taxes on the real estate. The window for this option, however, may have passed.

In the Fall of 2006 City officials turned their attention to the parking lot owned by Northwestern University behind the Hilton Garden Inn. This is currently the site of the Farmers' Market. To date NU officials have rejected this alternative use of the property, claiming its importance to the future of the university.

Complicating the process is the effort by preservationists and the official recommendation of the Preservation Commission to formally designate the existing building as a "local landmark". To date, the City Council has postponed its decision, pending more input from the real estate development industry regarding the feasibility of adaptive reuse. In the meantime, the City Council has engaged Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, LLP as consultants to study and articulate the programs and services, and their space needs, to be incorporated in a new city headquarters.

Throughout 2006 the Evanston Plan Commission began to focus more on the future of downtown in addition to its current work load of reviewing developer proposals for planned development. A first order of business was to appoint a Downtown Plan Committee and reconsider the official boundaries of downtown, the most significant result being a recommendation to relocate the western boundary from Asbury Avenue to Ridge Avenue. The Plan Commission also studied the potential of "form based zoning" as a successor to existing downtown zoning regulations. Form based zoning would incorporate more detailed design concepts for each block downtown. Pilot studies might be undertaken in 2007.

On December 12, the Plan Commission held a public forum to announce its intention to update the 1989 Downtown Plan with a draft for public review by the end of 2007. Guiding that effort would be a new map of the downtown with its proposed boundaries and three subareas: Downtown, Traditional and Transitional. The announced planning process will be led by the Downtown Plan Committee, utilize city staff, be coordinated with the Preservation Commission, and invite public participation. Perhaps this process will produce the new vision, the design guidelines, and the implementing actions that many Evanstonians have sought and that the City Council will endorse.



Source: City of Evanston