

The Park East Corridor

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

November, 2000

Published to inform the community about ongoing discussions on the Park East Corridor

A short history of the "Park East"



A dramatic new redevelopment project will soon begin in downtown Milwaukee. Starting in 2001, the elevated Park East Spur will be removed and replaced with a surface roadway. The removal will release a minimum of 20 acres, now covered by the spur, for redevelopment. The redevelopment potential of another 3 acres immediately adjacent to the spur will be enhanced by the elimination of the physical and visual barrier created by the spur.

Removal of the spur also will improve the physical and visual connections between downtown and the neighborhoods immediately to the north: Schlitz Park, Brewer's Hill, and Historic King Drive. Drivers will have access to and through the area via the new surface roadway. The new roadway will connect with I-43 at the Hillside Interchange, replace McKinley Avenue west of the river, cross the river on a new bridge, and continue on an improved Knapp Street to Jefferson Street.

The City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, and the State of Wisconsin endorsed the Park East redevelopment in

Fall 1999 and initiated the engineering and design work needed to implement the project. That work has progressed so far that a draft environmental assessment is available for public review. A public hearing on the draft environmental assessment has been scheduled for Wednesday afternoon and evening, December 13, 2000. (More information about the hearing is provided on page 4 of this newsletter.) Because the public hearing will focus only on the topics required in an environmental assessment analysis, this newsletter addresses the broader reasons for and benefits of the Park East redevelopment.

What is commonly referred to as the "Park East Freeway" is not really a freeway at all. It is a remnant of an abandoned plan to circle the entire Downtown with freeways. The Park East would have connected to a freeway running along the lakefront past Juneau Park and connecting to I-794 where the Calatrava addition to the Milwaukee Art Museum is now being built.

Roughly half of the Park East was built before the "freeway revolt" halted

construction on it and other sections of freeway in the Milwaukee area. The unpaved, block-wide swath of land cleared for the completion of the Park East remained empty for years until the state "de-mapped" the corridor. That land returned to productive use with the creation of the popular East Pointe Commons neighborhood. The 2000 assessed value of this once blighted land is almost \$52 million.

The part of the Park East that was built was designed for large volumes of through traffic. However, today it only provides access to Downtown at three points (4th Street, Broadway, and Jefferson Street) leaving it overdesigned for its current use. As a result, its removal will not significantly effect traffic in the Downtown or on the remaining Downtown freeway segments.

It wouldn't be the first time

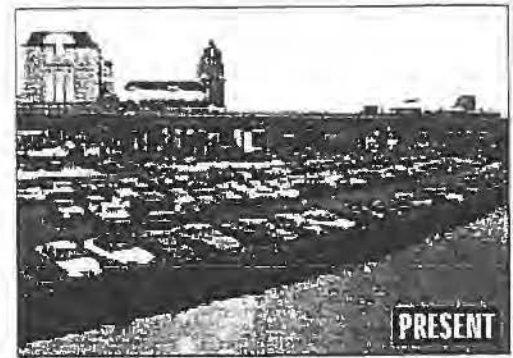
The removal of the Park East "freeway" would not be the first time a major urban area has benefited from the demise of a section of freeway that was never completed.

In Milwaukee, we are carefully studying the options and opportunities the Park East corridor represents. San Francisco was given the opportunity to address one of its unfinished freeway segments when the Loma Prieta Earthquake cracked the Embarcadero Freeway.

In 1953, San Francisco had planned to encircle the city with a ring of freeways. The plan reflected a postwar emphasis on cars and movement around and away from urban centers. The San Francisco revolt against destructive freeway building occurred in the early 60s. Work on the Embarcadero halted, but left an unfinished freeway segment that blocked views of the Bay and led to the decline of the area in and near the elevated roadway.

As early as 1974 there were calls to remove the Embarcadero freeway, but it was not until the 1989 earthquake that the opportunity to reclaim the land and the view became possible.

Today the area has been transformed with millions of dollars in public and private investment pouring into an area the freeway had occupied. A date palm-lined surface roadway has replaced the once elevated freeway. Commerce has flourished. And traffic did not come to a halt.



Why remove the Park East?

As a result of its removal, a 30 year rift between Downtown and the near north and east sides of the city will be repaired. Up to 23 acres of land, according to a *Journal Sentinel* report, can be put back into productive use. And the City and County tax base will be strengthened with the potential of over \$220 million of commercial and residential development.

How much land could go back on the tax roles?

As much as 1.5 million square feet of land now occupied by 7 blocks of freeway ramps will be returned to productive use. That area:

- is larger than Brookfield Square,
- is equal in size to 8.5 Wal-Marts,
- has as much "floor space" as 1.5 Firststar Centers (add 20 stories to the building's current 40 stories!)

Much of the land currently occupied by the Park East ramp is public land and as such contributes nothing to the tax base.

Where will all the traffic go?

Traffic will have more options because of the Park East reconfiguration. The new surface roadway follows nearly the same route from the Hillside Interchange to Jefferson Street as does the Park East, but offers many more connections to the grid of cross streets. Drivers will have the choice of any number of streets and bridges, not just three ramps. Typical travel times to cover the same distance that the Park East now traverses are expected to increase by only seconds, not minutes.

The area isn't very attractive. Who would build anything there?

It's the very presence of the Park East that has inhibited development in the area. The Park East's noise and pollution, and the visual "wall" it creates separating Downtown from Schlitz Park, Brewer's Hill and King Drive, has made the area unattractive.

With the Park East removed, this land becomes some of the most valuable property in Wisconsin.

Just one block south of this area, developers have proposed the \$30 million River Tower condominium on a site with approximately 40 feet of river frontage. With the removal of the Park East's elevated roadway, more than 1,300 feet of riverfront will become available for development.

Real estate experts are fond of saying that "Location, Location, Location," are the three most important elements to consider in real estate. The cleared land 1.) straddles the Milwaukee River right next to the downtown RiverWalk, 2.) is immediately north of the Water Street entertainment district, and 3.) is just south of the planned Harley-Davidson Museum, expected to be one of the most visited attractions in the state.

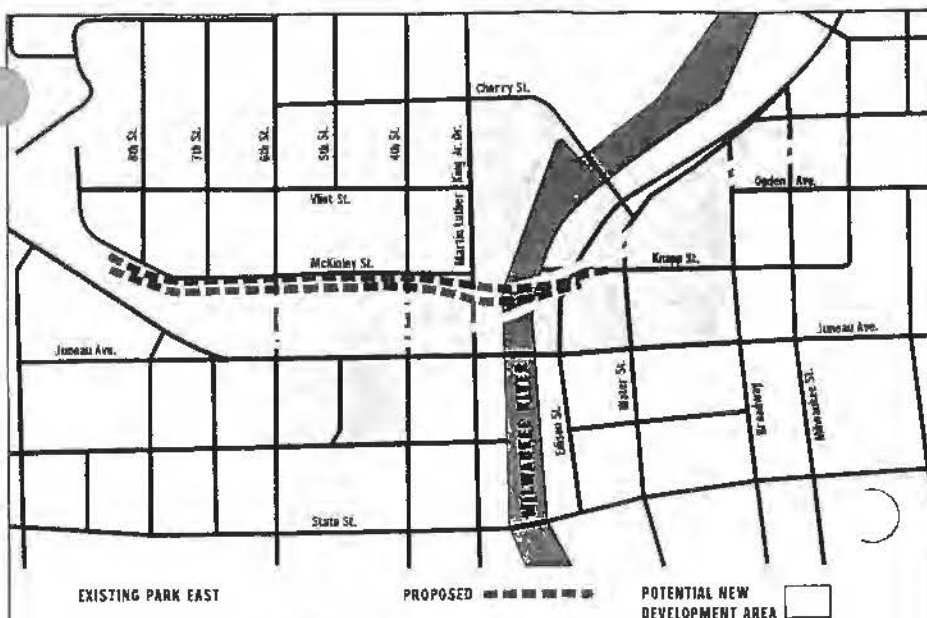


How do you know what the land might be worth once the Park East is removed?

Take as an example the East Pointe Commons mixed use development, which stretches from Jefferson to Prospect. That project was built on land cleared for a part of the Park East freeway which was never built. Long-vacant, the land contributed nothing to the tax base.

That land returned to productive use with the creation of the popular East Pointe Commons neighborhood. The 2000 assessed value of this once blighted land is almost \$52 million.

The land occupied by the Park East freeway is potentially even more valuable due to its location on the Milwaukee River, and its proximity to downtown, the Harley Museum and Brewer's Hill.



23 acres of opportunity

For any urban center, the chance to develop 23 acres of land is a golden opportunity. To get an idea of the potential this represents, this map shows the existing footprint of the Park East roadway and one possible plan to mend the rift between the near north side and downtown. The Downtown Plan suggests the development of 4 to 5 story structures in this area and fully utilizing the property's proximity to the River.

Much of the land under the freeway is now used for parking. Where will those cars park?

Since land under the elevated roadbed of the Park East was good for little else, that space was paved over to accommodate parking. Once the spur is removed, any new development will be required to include parking. The number of parking spaces built underground and in parking structures as a part of any new development will far exceed the current number. As an example, the city block that contains the Pabst and Milwaukee Repertory Theaters, the Wyndham Hotel and the Milwaukee Center once contained a small surface parking lot on the corner of Water and Kilbourn. The 1987 \$100 million development built on that site now contains more than 800 underground parking spaces.

What can we expect to see built?

The Downtown Plan has suggested mixed-use development. A combination of offices, shops, entertainment venues and housing would bring new life to the area.

Plans also call for open green space.

A new park would fill the triangle bounded by Water, Knapp and Edison Streets. And, of course, each development would be expected to provide adequate parking for owners, customers and tenants.



Won't there still be times when parking is a problem?

The Downtown Plan also includes a "Park Once" concept to address this issue. Milwaukee County Transit's new Downtown Trolleys are the first component of a plan which enables residents, workers and visitors to park once and then travel from destination to destination without having to move their car. Currently underutilized (and cheaper) lots will become more attractive as parking alternatives under "Park Once."

There are many other ways to address parking issues. Some creative shop owners and restaurants already provide free valet parking for their customers.

What about the hassle caused by demolition?

The City, County and State all realize that with improvements there can be some temporary problems. All parties are committed to keeping the impact of demolition and construction to a minimum. And with the number of route options made possible by the Downtown street grid, resilient Milwaukee drivers should have no problem getting to their favorite shop or restaurant.

To help facilitate traffic flow during construction, consultants are investigating a phased demolition leaving the eastbound roadway open during most of the project. Two-way traffic will be allowed on the eastbound roadway to provide freeway access in and out of downtown.

The Park East Corridor



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Park East Corridor e-updates!

If you would like to be kept up-to-date on the project electronically, just send an e-mail to:
glpeter@mkedcd.org, and we will add you to our e-mailing list.

Park East Redevelopment Project



Illustrative rendering of proposed plaza



Goal

To remove the Park East Freeway and replace it with a mixed-use district that reinstates the traditional street grid

Objectives

- Make this district a "one of a kind" destination.
- Enhance the success of the Water Street bars and restaurants with new entertainment venues.
- Design and construct a regional entertainment venue
- Enhance the entertainment development with the Harley Museum and cafe
- Promote residential and mixed use development.
- Incorporate the river as a visual features of this district
- Extend RiverWalk in front of the new mixed use buildings.
- Provide green open space
- Enhanced pedestrian connections across the River.
- Enhance transportation linkages with a multi-modal transfer facility incorporated into the Park Once system

Benefits

- Increases patrons for existing services
- Generates new business opportunities
- Complements existing entertainment and shopping uses.
- Enhances residential appeal.
- Enhances attraction of the convention center.
- Increases city tax revenues
- Increases Downtown jobs

Responsible Parties

This complex development project will have two phases with different parties responsible for implementation in each phase. The first phase is the removal of the Park East Freeway from North Fourth Street to North Jefferson Street. This requires the completion of inter-governmental agreements on the removal, on changes to the surface streets to accommodate the existing traffic, and on the disposition of the land currently occupied by the freeway. The responsible parties for this phase are

- U.S. Department of Transportation
- Wisconsin Department of Transportation
- Milwaukee County
- City of Milwaukee

Following completion of the intergovernmental agreements, the redevelopment of the former freeway land can begin. This principally will be a private sector undertaking. The responsible parties for this phase are

- The Milwaukee Redevelopment Corporation
- Private Developers

Rationale

Removal of elevated section of the Park East Freeway, from 4th to Jefferson Streets, will reclaim approximately 11 developable blocks. The development within this area will augment the successful Water Street entertainment district. It will expand the potential for mixed use, riverfront development and RiverWalk attractions. It will provide an opportunity to create an extensive entertainment complex.

Recommendations

The Plan calls for new development to meet certain standards for land use and design. These are

1. The grid pattern of streets should be preserved and re-established where it has been





Aerial view of Park East freeway and surrounding blocks



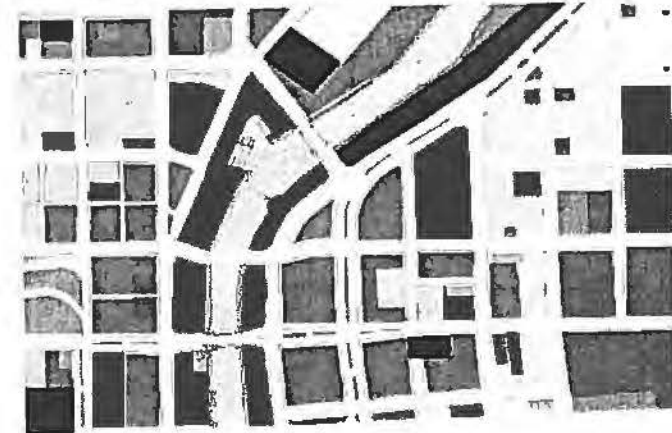
Plan of existing conditions illustrating impact of elevated road



Location of potential redevelopment blocks
and reconnected street grid



Illustrative rendering of redevelopment potential, above; illustrative site plan, below



- INTERVIEW
- 0001 Appointment
- 0002 Receptionist/Office
Jen Smith
- 0003 Nurse Admin Unit
- 0004 Doctor/Office/Unit
- 0005 Hospital of Angel Clinic
- 0006 Medical
- 0007 Employment
- 0008 Dental Office
Office
- 0009 Tests:
- 0010 Nurse Admin Unit
- 0011 Spelling Test Book
- 0012 Spelling Test
- 0013 Doctor
- 0014 Nurses

interrupted.

2. Buildings should be mixed use, with an emphasis on entertainment activity on Water Street (extending across Cherry Street to the Harley Museum at Schilitz Park) and residential use in the remainder of the area.

3. Buildings generally should be four to six stories in height.

4. Development on and near the river should include continuation of the RiverWalk and facilitate river access.

The redevelopment strategy focuses upon two activity generators: the Harley Museum and an entertainment complex on Water Street. The plan proposes further infill development to include residential buildings with ground floor office or retail use, two parks, a hotel, a multi-modal parking structure and transit transfer building, a pedestrian bridge and streetscape improvements. Mixed use river front buildings will center on a plaza that frames river views; ground level outdoor cafes will provide the choicest seats for viewing river activity or park activity. This will become one of the liveliest spots in Downtown.

The Downtown Plan calls for the existing street grid to be continued. The new streets on the East side will include the extension of Edison, North Market, East Ogden, and the connection of McKinley to East Knapp Street via a new lift bridge. On the West Side the extension of North Commerce and Vilel Street are recommended. Pedestrian connections could be enhanced with a new pedestrian bridge linking the activity generators on both sides of the River.

The Plan recommends the following building types. Most of the buildings will be from four to six stories. It is recommended that they have professional services or retail on the ground floor with residential units, apartments, flats, live/work—above. They have views of either the river or one of the new parks. Mixed use riverfront buildings will have outdoor cafes and marinas. These buildings will provide on site parking.

The Plan recommends that the mixed use entertainment complex be an impressive sig-



nature building with a six story massing

A mixed use parking deck and multi modal transfer center are recommended to enhance regional accessibility to this new district. This will be an important location in the Park Once system. The Plan proposes that several lines of the transit system will intersect at this facility or in front of the entertainment complex. These transit connections will allow this district to be reached from anywhere in Downtown. The Plan also recommends that the suburban buses entering Downtown from the north transfer their riders here for transfer to the Downtown Transit Connector.

A recommendation for the east side park edge is a signature hotel. This is an important site because it is the visual termination of Water Street. The building should be of height and massing to complement the size of the proposed park. Additional retail frontage is recommended on Water Street.

Two new parks and a new plaza are proposed as contributions to Downtown's open space. The plaza would be an extension of the RiverWalk into the urban fabric. This allows direct access from the new entertainment complex to venues across the river. The plaza will become a very popular water taxi stop. Two urban parks are proposed, one on either side of the river as focal points of the mixed use buildings. They are necessary because many residences in the north section of the city can not access an open space within a five-minute walk.



Aerial view of Water Street park concept plan



Concept view from inside entertainment center

