

Winnetka Village Council
STUDY SESSION
May 10, 2022
7:00 PM

Emails regarding any agenda item are welcomed. Please email contactcouncil@winnetka.org, and your email will be relayed to the Council. Emails for a Tuesday Council meeting must be received by Monday at 4 p.m. Any email may be subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

AGENDA

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Public Comment
- 3) Elm Street Business District Public Gathering Place – Post Office Site.....2
- 4) Adjournment

NOTICE

All agenda materials are available at villageofwinnetka.org (Government > Council Information > Agenda Packets & Minutes); the Reference Desk at the Winnetka Library; or in the Manager’s Office at Village Hall (2nd floor). Webcasts of the meeting may be viewed on the Internet via a link on the Village’s web site: <http://www.villageofwinnetka.org/government/village-videos/>.

The Village of Winnetka, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, requests that all persons with disabilities who require certain accommodations to allow them to observe and/or participate in this meeting or have questions about the accessibility of the meeting or facilities, contact the Village ADA Coordinator at 510 Green Bay Road, Winnetka, Illinois 60093, 847-716-3543; T.D.D. 847-501-6041.



Agenda Item Executive Summary

Title: Elm Street Business District Public Gathering Place - Post Office Site

Presenter: David Schoon, Community Development Director

Agenda Date: 05/10/2022

Consent: YES NO

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ordinance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resolution
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bid Authorization/Award
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Policy Direction
<input type="checkbox"/>	Informational Only

Item History:

None

Executive Summary:

At the May 10, 2022, Village Council Study Session, President Rintz is scheduled to present a concept plan for a new public gathering space at the current location of the US Post Office in the West Elm Business District. The concept plan calls for development of a space where community members could gather for musical performances, markets, and other events. The space has been designed to serve as an extension of the Business District's "community center" function, and would be improved with elements such as seating, landscaping, and lighting that promote the space for meeting up with friends and other smaller informal gatherings to enhance vitality. With planning assistance from The Lakota Group, a visual representation of what such a space could look like on a portion of the Post Office block will be presented during the study session. Attached is a staff report to provide the Council with background information regarding the Post Office site.

Recommendation:

Following President Rintz's presentation and after hearing comments from the public, the Council will want to discuss its interest to further study the public gathering space concept. If the Council is interested in pursuing the concept, discussions regarding the next steps will be necessary for further refinement to advance the concept.

Attachments:

1. Staff Report



MEMORANDUM VILLAGE OF WINNETKA

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

TO: VILLAGE COUNCIL
FROM: DAVID SCHOON, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
DATE: MAY 5, 2022
SUBJECT: ELM STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT PUBLIC GATHERING SPACE
- POST OFFICE SITE

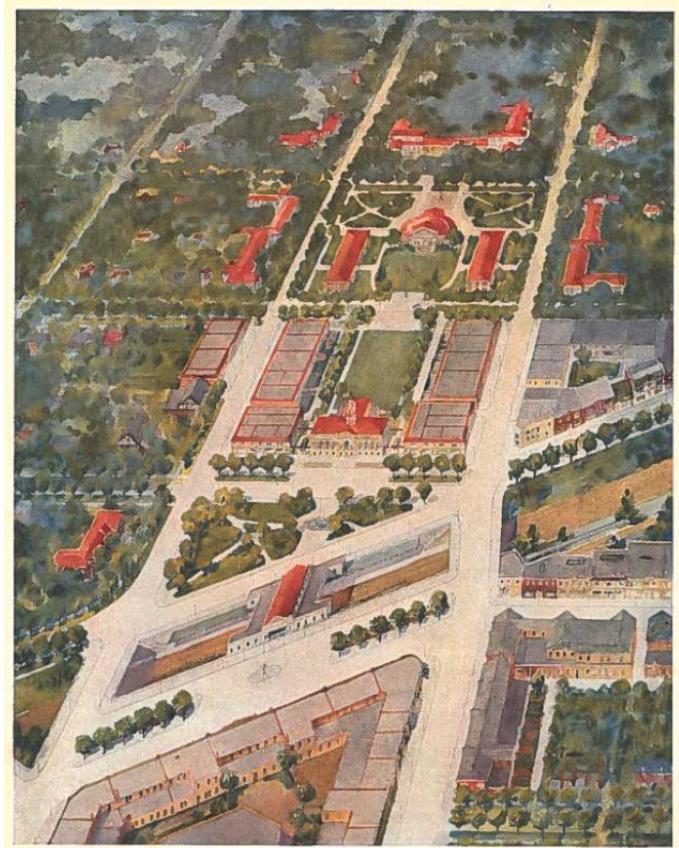
INTRODUCTION

At the May 10, 2022, Village Council Study Session, President Rintz is scheduled to present a concept plan for a new public gathering space at the current location of the US Post Office in the West Elm Business District. The concept plan calls for development of a space where community members could gather for musical performances, markets, and other events. The space has been designed to serve as an extension of the Business District's "community center" function, and would be improved with elements such as seating, landscaping, and lighting that promote the space for meeting up with friends and other smaller informal gatherings to enhance vitality. With planning assistance from The Lakota Group, a visual representation of what such a space could look like on a portion of the Post Office block will be presented during the study session. The purpose of this staff report is to provide the Council with background information regarding the Post Office site.

BACKGROUND

Early History. The current site of the Post Office was the original location of the Horace Mann School, which was constructed in 1899. The Village's first comprehensive in 1921, the *Plan of Winnetka* (often referred to as the "*Bennett Plan*"), specifically identified the creation of a Village Center that included the construction of a new Village Hall with an open court to the west leading to the block with Horace Mann School. The Plan identified that the school building would eventually be removed and replaced with a community auditorium as its central building.

In 1925, a new Village Hall was constructed, and in 1938, voters approved the sale of the Horace Mann School site and the construction of a new school, which would become Crow Island School.



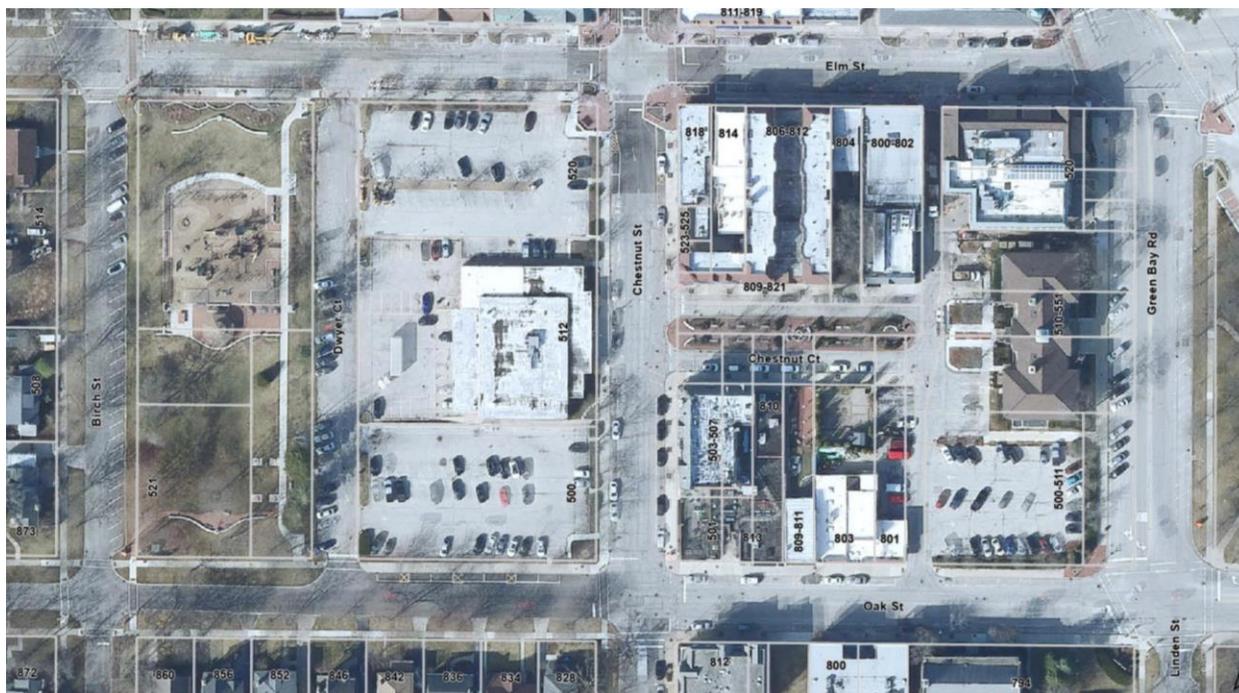
In 1940, the Federal government purchased the site to construct a new Post Office facility; however, that never occurred due to World War II. Horace Mann was demolished in 1942. In 1946, the Village purchased the two lots where the parking lots currently exist, and the Federal Government sold the middle lot to Adlin Realty Co. In 1958, the current Post Office facility was constructed. In 1982, the Village purchased the middle lot where the Post Office building is located and assumed the lease with the Post Office. The reason for purchasing the site was for control of the area to achieve future community goals. During 2014, the Village's current lease with the Post Office was amended and allows either party to terminate the lease with a one-year notice. Also, the Post Office distribution operation was ended, and additional parking was made available to the community.

Since purchasing the site in 1982, the Village has undertaken several efforts to determine how this parcel might be used.

Comprehensive Plan Recommendations. In 1986 the Village Comprehensive Plan described a redevelopment concept for the Village-owned 'Post Office Block'. The plan envisioned relocation of the post office to another location in the business district and the site redeveloped as mixed-use development that included a combination of retail, office, and housing. Importantly, the 1986 Plan's redevelopment concept focused attention on the need to "...maintain pedestrian access in an east/west direction, through the block, connecting Moffat Mall to Dwyer Park."

Later, in 1999, the Village updated its Comprehensive Plan into what is the current Comprehensive Plan, the *Winnetka 2020 Plan*. The Winnetka 2020 Plan expands on the notion of a mixed-use redevelopment of the site. The plan describes the site as "an opportunity to create a special core area that could accommodate many goals at once; aesthetic, economic, parking and social."

Ad Hoc Post Office Committee. The most significant effort to study redeveloping the Post Office site, including both parking lots to the north and south, occurred from December 2004 through April 2008 when the Village Ad Hoc Post Office Committee studied the issue and presented its recommendations to the Village Council.



Dwyer Park, Post Office Site, Moffat Mall and Village Hall - 2020

During this time, the Post Office Committee formally met 27 times. The Village also hired The Lakota group and BauerLatazo Studio to conduct design workshops (focus groups) and to develop conceptual plans for the site. During June and July of 2005, the Village held a series of seven focus groups and two village wide meetings to solicit public input as to how the site might redevelop.

Between September 2005 and February 2007, the Committee undertook several activities including: review of the focus group input; review of concepts plans prepared by the consultant team, establishment of site development principles; review of parking study and parking; and economic modeling of concept plans. In March 2007, two village-wide meetings were held at North Shore Country Day School to obtain public input on the concept plans. Prior to the meeting a "*Status Report of the Post Office Site Redevelopment Committee*" was mailed to all residents.

During the Committee's work, several residents proposed different concept plans for the site, which included mixed-use development ideas, relocation of the public library to the site, and preserving most of the site as open space.

On July 9, 2007, the Ad Hoc Post Office Committee submitted a report summarizing its recommendations for the redevelopment of the Post Office site. Members of the Committee consisted of Julian D'Esposito (Chairman), Paul Dunn, Nan Greenough, Pete Henderson, Louise Holland, Maureen Mitchel, Christopher Rintz, and Roberta Rubin.

The Committee identified two main objectives for redeveloping the Post Office site (1) "to transform the West Elm Business District into a magnet attracting people day and evening on a year-round basis – a gathering place for our families and friends" and (2) "to serve as a catalyst for improvements in the larger West Elm Business District, the level of commercial activity, the uses, buildings, landscaping, lighting, vehicular and pedestrians traffic pattern and streetscape." The Committee identified two reuses of the site that could achieve these objectives:

- 1) A mixed-use development combining a mix of retail uses with upper story residential units and adequate parking.
- 2) Relocation of the public library to the site, which would offer an opportunity to realize a central feature of the Bennett Plan, which envisioned a landscape corridor connecting the Village Hall with another community building. The library as an anchor use combined with some complementary retail uses could also achieve the identified objectives.

The Committee's work focused on planning for a mixed-use development for the Site and made recommendations regarding (a) land uses to incorporate on various portions of the site, (b) the architectural design for the site, (c) parking and vehicular circulation, and (d) the need for public investment to facilitate the development of a mixed-use project. The report included 10 different site plan concept designs for the Site that would achieve to various degrees the recommendations for the redevelopment of the Site.

One of the key design considerations was the focus on pedestrian activity. In addition to creating a focal point at the intersection of Elm and Chestnut streets, which would create four corners of retail and pedestrian vibrancy, a second pedestrian focal point would be to create a landscaped extension of Moffat Mall through the site connecting to Dwyer Park. This extension could be completely pedestrian in nature, such as a landscape area or a plaza, or if necessary, it could be available for vehicular access to parking areas and could be designed to permit a conversion to pedestrian-only setting on occasions when activity in Dwyer Park or the Post Office site is devoted to fairs, shows or markets meeting the gathering place objective envisioned for this block.

Between September 2007 and April 2008, the Village Council discussed the Committee's report and continued to take comments from the public. During its sixth meeting discussing the Committee's report and ideas from the public, on April 18, 2018, the Village Council adopted R-22-2008, A Resolution Expressing Planning and Development Principles for the Post Office Site. The planning and development principles adopted by the Council were a pared down version of what the Post Office Committee had recommended. In addition to setting out planning and development principles, the Village Council also acknowledged that it was providing the Library District time to conduct a needs analysis to determine if a new library building on the Post Office site would meet its operational needs. The Library did not advance any further discussions with the Village.

Due to the Great Recession, the Village put on hold the redevelopment of the Post Office site, and with the economic recovery that followed, the Village focused its attention with the redevelopment of what has become known as the One Winnetka site.

RECOMMENDATION

Following President Rintz's presentation of a vision for a public gathering space on the Post Office site and after hearing comments from the public, the Council will want to discuss its interest to further study the public gathering space concept. If the Council is interested in pursuing the concept, discussions regarding the next steps will be necessary for further refinement to advance the gathering space concept.