



Lincoln Park's Path to Certification

March 15, 2007

A Charter Member of the Suburbs Alliance since 2003, the City of Lincoln Park has long been an active, enthusiastic participant in developing solutions to the many challenges facing southeast Michigan's mature communities. Although the city was not selected to participate in the 2005 Redevelopment Ready Communities pilot program, Lincoln Park officials independently launched an effort to become redevelopment ready. Following the RRC Best Practices, the city began evaluating internal processes and identifying modifications that could be made to zoning ordinances, development procedures and communications to create a more business-friendly redevelopment climate in Lincoln Park. These proactive steps prepared the city for the thorough evaluation and analysis experienced in the RRC program, which it officially joined in May 2006.

RRC is an 8-step program that challenges cities to integrate a set of best practices into their redevelopment processes, ultimately creating a more attractive environment for redevelopment. To gain certification, cities must demonstrate achievement of these best practices through an evaluation by a team of consultants. At the heart of RRC is a commitment to creating a community-built vision for the city, permanently integrating public engagement into redevelopment processes, shaping efficient, open processes that reduce risks, costs and project timelines, and increasing communication and education about redevelopment opportunities within the community. Lincoln Park has internalized these values, as can be seen below through the efforts the city made over the past ten months to become redevelopment ready.

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Goal: Build a Redevelopment Culture

Through mayoral and city manager leadership, Lincoln Park made a decision to shift its historical approach to tackling redevelopment. This decision entailed creating the vision, goals, objectives and implementation plan for its economic development strategy.

- The city stresses the importance of acting as "one team" to all relevant boards and commissions, and ensures all city leadership voices are communicating a clear, consistent message about the need for redevelopment and the plan to implement the strategy.
- In June 2006, Lincoln Park conducted a strategic planning session for economic development, with active involvement from the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Economic Development Corporation (EDC), Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, Chamber of Commerce, Mayor and City Council.
- In January 2007, the city published the Strategic Plan for Economic Development, a blueprint to ensure economic prosperity for Lincoln Park's future.
- Throughout 2006, the city focused on increasing dialogue about the need for redevelopment with community groups and business leaders through town hall meetings, the Business Expo, Master Plan visioning sessions, and economic development forums, and added a redevelopment component to the city's publication, *Happenings*.

Results:

Lincoln Park now has a detailed, community-supported vision for its future and is aware of the challenges it will have to address to achieve it. With a plan in place, the city is prepared to move forward with implementing its vision, and potential developers can be confident investing in a community that has clearly articulated its goals.





Goal: Update the Redevelopment Framework

The Master Plan is an essential document for redevelopment. It serves a guide for economic and neighborhood development in the city. In 2006, Lincoln Park began updating its Master Plan to include a focus on redevelopment. Community engagement was a key component in this process.

- The city engaged citizens early in the master planning process through town hall meetings and other forums to ensure the needs and wants of residents were integrated in the vision and strategic plan.
- The city set a goal to survey its residents annually, using the outcomes from the 2006 survey as a springboard for the Master Plan update.
- In the Master Plan, the city included guiding principles for targeting redevelopment efforts, stemming blight, and protecting existing local businesses. Key targeted sites include the Lincoln Park Mall, a former school site, and the four corners of Dix and Outer Drive.
- The city conducted a vacant lot survey to identify additional redevelopment opportunities.

Goal: Increase Efficiency of Development Review Processes

A major focus for the city was reviewing the internal development review process functions to determine what procedures could be modified to become more efficient. One particular area of focus was regulations in the zoning ordinance, which the city reformed to reduce the time an application waits for approval.

- In 2006, Lincoln Park amended the zoning ordinance to delegate the Site Plan Approval and Special Use approvals to the Planning Commission.
- The revised zoning ordinance establishes clear procedures for site plan review design standards which include architecture (building form, details, and features) and building materials. The ordinance requires a pre-application conference by the Planning Commission prior to a public hearing and recommendation to city council.
- The city holds weekly staff meetings to address site plan applications and resolve initial problems.
- The city updated the Site Plan Application flow chart to clarify the application process by clearly delineating the steps a potential investor has to follow.
- Lincoln Park amended its city code to expand the duties of the Superintendent of Building to become the Manager of Building and Engineering. This move increased the efficiency and coordination of the staff and creates further opportunities to streamline the review process.

Results:

Before the zoning amendment, Special Use approvals and Site Plan approvals had to go through city council and/or the Zoning Board of Appeals, increasing the time the application sat in the approval process. The zoning ordinance amendments reduced processing time for site plans and special uses by 2 weeks to 2 months. The city has established effective communication channels to ensure staff, applicants and appropriate boards are on the same page about site applications. The Site Plan Application flow chart clearly details the procedures and steps a customer has to follow to obtain approvals. These changes will not only benefit developers; they also benefit the city by improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of processing plans.

