



CICERO STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWS SUMMARY

March 12, 2021

As part of the Community Outreach Plan established in the work plan, the consultant team consisting of the Savoy Consulting Group LLC (lead consultant), and Egret & Ox Planning LLC (sub-consultant) has over the past several months gathered background information about zoning issues in Cicero through a review of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan, a tour of the community, meetings with Town staff, and many other stakeholders representing a broad cross-section of the Town through focus group interviews and direct outreach. The purpose of interacting with Town officials, residents, and stakeholders is to gain a perspective on how the community views the effectiveness of the current zoning regulations in regards to addressing neighborhood problems, or as either a barrier to or incentives for development. All of this information provides a reality check as to the impact of current practices and the ability to achieve desired improvements. Below is a summary of the stakeholder interviews identifying common zoning issues to be addressed in the update of the Cicero zoning code.

Stakeholders:

- Craig Pesek (Town Projects Manager)
- Tom Tomschin (Building Commissioner)
- Dave Mavrincac (Deputy Building Commissioner)
- Ismael Vargas (Cicero Business License Director)
- Ruthie Ortega (ZBA Member & Business License Department)
- Jose Alvarez (ZBA Member & Grant Coordinator)
- Lenny Cannata Jr. (ZBA Member, Atty, West Central Muni Conference Coordinator)
- Emilio Cundari (Township Assessor)
- Lido Manetti (Water Supervisor)
- Joe Virruso (Town Supervisor)
- Fran Reitz, (Town collector)
- Roosevelt Road Committee
 - Barbara Harris
 - Dominick Gatto
 - Louis Guido
 - Lucy Schmidt
 - Merrie Neal
- Jessica Jaramillo (ZBA Chair, Executive Assistant to Town Clerk)
- Leticia Navarro (Legal Assistant and Zoning Clerk)
- Stephanie Vargas (ZBA Board Member, Town Assessor, and Town Clerk)
- Business Advisory Committee Mtg
 - Maru Ayala (Cicero Chamber; Town Business Outreach Associate)
 - Daniel Seropian (Past Resident, Local Businessman)
 - Jeff Davis (Town Media Manager, Local Business Owner)



CICERO UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE

- Paul Dimenna (Resident, Local Business Owner)
- Jim Baker (Resident, Local Business Owner)
- John Ionnas Mihalopoulos (Resident, Local Business Owner)
- Jim Terracino (School Board, Business Committee, Past Town Staff)
- Ben Borbor (Local Business Owner, Business Committee)

Non-conforming Uses

- The piecemeal approach to zoning often referred to as 'spot zoning,' has led to a significant amount of legal non-conforming uses, including commercial uses in residential blocks, higher density residential uses in primarily single-family neighborhoods, and residential uses in commercial/manufacturing areas, such as areas around 55th Court, 54th Street, 16th Street, 12th Place, and Roosevelt Road.
- Review current restrictions on additions and alterations to legal non-conforming uses to provide more flexibility for owners of these buildings to make improvements.
 - Require that a non-conforming use cannot be made more non-conforming with an addition or alteration.
 - Only allow modest changes in limited designated areas, such as additions for dormers.
 - If a second story addition is proposed, only allow if an internal stairway is provided to the basement and second story. Prohibit outside access to the basement to deter illegal units.
 - Consider creating new standards that will streamline the approval process regarding non-conforming uses to avoid the need for variances.
- Review inappropriate uses in neighborhood areas.
 - E.g.: Tavern in the 1400 block of Central Ave. Do not allow these or similar uses in the middle of the block. Also, consider allowing these uses at corner locations as a special permit.

Streamline the Development Approval Process

- Consider reducing the number of building applications requiring special zoning approvals by establishing or expanding Town staff authority to approve certain permit variations administratively, and by reducing the number of uses that require special zoning approvals by making more uses allowed as permitted or allowed 'By-Right' without having to go through the Zoning Board of Appeals process.
 - E.g.: New business openings in existing buildings. If an insurance business on 35th Street sells to a vitamin shop and needed parking is similar, but the zoning code requires more spaces the new business needs zoning relief. Consider eliminating the need for zoning approvals by making these cases subject to staff administrative review and approval only, with appropriate standards for staff to follow.
- The zoning approval process is confusing – need to clarify on the process for opening a new business so that owners can get answers without having to always rely on or need staff assistance. Clear, unified standards that are easy to understand are very important to businesses. Costs associated with operating a business are excessive and therefore, there is a need to explore more efficient, less expensive zoning approval processes. Often parking issues arise with new businesses due to the lack



of parking, resulting in the need to secure a parking variance. The goal should be to either eliminate this requirement or make it subject to administrative approval only.

- E.g.: Blue Island TOD Code provides clear direction as to what is required to secure zoning approval.
- Most requests for ZBA zoning approvals are for commercial businesses, usually due to a lack of parking.
- The overall processes for various zoning approvals work well, with no need for major changes.
- Need to clarify the sign approval process.
- Consider revising standards that address elements that are typical variance requests, like fences, to reduce the number of variances.

General Use Standards

- Garage overhangs for outside patio/entertainment areas
 - Allow only when constructed as an extension of the roofline, or as a continuous part of the roof, not as a separate attached structure.
- Cellular Towers and Small Cell Applications
 - Ensure standards do not conflict with Federal requirements.
- Outdoor Displays/Sales
 - Prohibit or limit outdoor displays of product in neighborhood commercial areas.
 - When allowed ensure they do not block the public way. Review the current process in place for sidewalk sales. Problems tend to occur with dollar and furniture stores.
- Allow and Provide Standards for Alternative Energy Sources
 - Wind turbines are currently allowed at 14th Street and Cicero Ave.
 - Consider encouraging solar energy installations on residential and commercial properties.
- Residential Storage
 - Explore allowing additional storage on residential properties, such as sheds, to free up spaces in garages for vehicles, with controls oversize. Also, review garage sizes to determine if sufficient to store larger vehicles than was typical when homes were built. A lot of tradesmen in the Town use their homes for inventory, truck parking, and equipment storage.
 - Also, consider using vacant adjacent lots for additional storage facilities. Storage buildings can deter new construction/redevelopment.
- Accessory Structures
 - Review requirements for coach homes or accessory dwelling units (ADUs), particularly for substandard lots that do not have basements. Limit new coach homes and require removal of existing coach homes when properties are sold or amortize these units to reduce density.
- Building Lot Standards
 - Remove the ability of owners to place two buildings on one lot. Typically, the Town only has control when properties change ownership. Consider adding amortization provisions.



- Home Occupations
 - Review current regulations that allow home offices, with the intent to continue to allow them with significant restrictions, such as home businesses are not open to the public, no storage of product allowed, and no regular deliveries. Currently, the Town requires a signed affidavit acknowledging restrictions.
 - Generally, home occupations are not a problem, with exceptions for businesses like home life healthcare and mechanics working in garages that see more regular use from clients.
- Impervious Surface Standards
 - Need more control over the amount of impervious surface allowed, due to the impact of increased stormwater runoff on sewers. The Town already experiences frequent flooding.

Zoning Districts

- Amend zoning districts or create new districts to bring them into compliance with the land use recommendations of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan.
- Protect areas for Cargo Oriented Development (manufacturing and distribution districts) through rezoning and new standards.
 - E.g.: United Scrap is a major landowner, including multiple properties along Cicero Ave.
- Establish Form-Based Codes, similar to the Roosevelt Road Form-Based Code, for other neighborhood and major commercial road corridors.
- Update the permitted and special use lists to address more modern uses, such as video cafés, cell towers and dish antennas. Currently, video cafés are allowed only as part of a restaurant. Current regulations are not easy to administer.
- In response to the trend towards continued retail decline due to economic changes and website purchases, consider the inclusion of multiple-family developments, or more mixed-use buildings in place of older retail areas, such as occurring in Oak Park. A similar approach is in place for the FBC along Roosevelt Rd.
- Need to update outdated use lists and definitions.
- Need design standards to beautify corridors with a consistent character.
- Promote mixed-use development in TOD areas. Consider providing greater building height as an incentive, as the current 60-70 ft height limits may be too low to support the density needed or desired for these areas.
- Cicero Road corridor, south of ICRR
 - Town purchased most of the area.
 - Plan to leave as manufacturing, with an option for commercial use.
 - Need flexible zoning district (planned development district?).
- Amend the Code to promote more condominium developments
 - Require multiple-family units to be 80% owner-occupied.
- 14th Street Corridor (btw Laramie & Cicero) – Grant Works Neighborhood
 - Allow ‘low-impact’ retail/commercial uses that are neighborhood serving focused.
- 35st Street Corridor (Laramie to Cicero)
 - Preserve the mixed-use area and character with FBC.



- 25th Street Corridor (Central to Eastern Border)
 - Preserve the mixed-use area and character with FBC.
- 26th Street Corridor - Evaluate the existing zoning approach
 - Currently, more auto-oriented uses exist east of Austin.
 - Parking conflicts exist between commercial and residential areas.
- 16th Street Neighborhood District
 - Haphazard land use mix of industrial, commercial, residential.
 - Desire to keep neighborhood-oriented businesses.
 - Allow for the limited use of small-scale commercial uses near intersections.
 - Longer-term parking issues need to be addressed, some areas have parallel parking, with businesses taking up residential spaces.
 - 16th Street (Austin to Central) has commercial uses interspersed within homes; cars parked for long stretches and an inadequate amount of parking available.
- Junior HS area north of Cermak
 - Maintain the previous plan for an aquatic center.
 - Keep as a future recreational area for open spaces and parks.
 - Consider establishing a civic zoning district in the area north of the Junior HS to 16th Street, to allow for parks, civic buildings (such as animal shelter, PW facility), and recreational uses.

Development of Substandard Lots

- Example: Grant Works Neighborhood
 - Many residential lots are 'non-standard' 25'x125'; 3,500 sq. ft. or less.
 - Non-standard lots are buildable only if brick masonry due to the narrow separation between homes (2-4 ft. typ), to reduce fire hazards.
 - Prior to 2009 3,500 sq. ft. non-standard lots were not buildable.
 - No basements are allowed due to concern over illegal units.
 - Allow split level units (several built examples).
 - Lots have been combined in several locations with townhomes/duplex built as allowable infill options in otherwise single-family neighborhoods.

Residential Neighborhoods and Parking

- Need to address problems with spot zoning that results in an inappropriate mix of uses (e.g. bars). Continue to prohibit tattoo businesses and limit hooka parlors, beauty salons, herbal life/health stores/gyms (e.g. Zumba classes) smoke shops, and similar uses as these uses create parking problems and lack loading zones. Promote more mom & pop stores that cater to the local populations. Ex: keep the cap on the number of beauty salons.
- A long history of conversions of single-family and 2-family homes to multi-unit buildings.
- Need to strengthen restrictions on conversions due to crowding, over population, and resultant parking problems.



- Parking problems are also the result of the conversion of garages for storage, entertainment rooms.
- Single-family construction standards – allow siding and non-brick masonry only if more than 50% of existing homes on both sides of a block have siding.
 - Prohibit CMU (concrete masonry unit) on all visible elevations from the street; consider options such as a more decorative natural limestone finish, do not allow flat surfaces.
 - Allow less expensive brick siding materials applied to facades vs full-face brick. Need to be careful not to make home construction too expensive.
- Need standards for parking on vacant lots. These properties are not maintained, usually are adjacent to homes, and often consist of junk cars. Concern over the impact on home values. Consider screening and fencing requirements, paving, limiting the time-period cars can be parked and not moved, and providing low-level security lighting.
- Limit parking lots to certain locations, require landscaped/screening setbacks, limit the types of vehicles allowed, such as truck parking, and require a minimum lot size for a parking lot.
 - Allow separate standalone parking lots only as a special use.
- Explore how to reduce density in residential areas particularly in neighborhoods that have a high percentage of multiple-family housing. Encourage conversions to single-family dwellings.
 - Review the definition of how many individuals can occupy a single-family home. The Town lost a 1992 legal challenge which resulted in a consent decree establishing that the Town cannot limit household size. The decree ended in 2009. There remains a concern over the impact of population density and safety due to illegal or inappropriate conversions of single-family homes. For example, a fire in 2010 on Valentines' day resulted in 10 deaths in a home that had 30 people.
 - Explore regulations in other towns, such as Berwyn that have restrictions in place for the number of people/bedroom.
 - This is a particular problem in the Grant works neighborhood which has an estimated population density of 20,000 people/sq. mile.
- Need to clarify requirements and procedures for residential additions to minimize the need for staff interpretation.
 - E.g.: 26th Street residential additions have been allowed that are larger than the 1st-floor footprint. The ZBA has not reviewed these cases. Need to clarify when the ZBA needs to be involved in the review of residential additions, and what types of controls should be put in place that limits staff's ability to make administrative decisions.

Parking

- Update parking standards for high impact service businesses (e.g., doctors, barbers, spas, salons, etc.); consider 3 spaces per chair/service area to account for current customer and customers waiting for service.
- The current parking standard for shops or restaurants is 1 space per 150 sq. ft. of the area open to the public, not including storage areas; consider changing to gross floor area.



- Reduce parking standards in Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) areas (25% reduction; approved administratively).
 - Allow shared parking provisions that reduce the required parking based on the mix of uses in a project or area, particularly uses that have different peak-hour parking demands, such as residential and business uses.
- Require all new businesses to provide an off-street parking and loading plan. Require a parking utilization study for any new occupancy or significant business expansion, or encourage the Town to undertake a comprehensive parking plan for each business district to address near and long-term solutions. For those businesses without sufficient spaces on or off-site consider requiring a financial contribution or payment of a fee-in-lieu into a parking fund for the construction of additional parking and loading facilities in areas of most need.
 - Require that any commercial vehicles parked in lots in residential areas must be registered with the Town to be stored overnight, with a sticker displayed for the zone in which it is allowed.
 - Explore undertaking a parking study to understand utilization, needs, and solutions in areas of most need.
- Need to adopt regulations for the increase in open parking pads in the back yard, next to the garage, usually on a non-paved surface. Some pad areas include a swing gate. Need standards for types of gate, pad construction, and requirements for enclosure of pads on 3 sides.
 - Concern over long-term storage.
 - Pads should have a hard surface composed of pervious pavers only to reduce flooding. Construction standards for pervious pavements should be included.
 - Limit pads to not exceed the depth of the garage.
- Need to address parking requirements for video gaming cafés within restaurants or other businesses, and other similar hybrid uses. Parking for video gaming café's is currently determined by the Liquor Commissioner on an ad-hoc basis.
- Requirements for handicapped parking are excessive, particularly for smaller lots as it reduces the availability of limited spaces. Explore parking solutions that consider a larger area. This is particularly a problem for businesses that are surrounded by residential uses.
- Reduce the number of variances allowed for mechanic shops, and the number of businesses allowed in an area through minimum separation between businesses or other zoning controls. Consider limiting the number of businesses based on parking availability, and creating specialized zoning districts for mechanic shops and hair shops. For instance, limit mechanic shops to manufacturing areas with vacant lots. Also, do not issue a business permit without proof that a business can provide its on-site parking or prove that there is an adequate supply of available parking in the area.
 - E.g.: 25th Street – the Town receives many complaints about conflicts between businesses; parking is unattractive due to cars in poor shape.
 - 26th Street has an excessive number of parked cars in disrepair, which is increasing with little ability of the Town to control these uses.
- Allow a business to purchase or rent parking in off-site locations within a certain distance of the principal businesses.



CICERO UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE

- For instance, businesses on Cermak Avenue that are near the public parking areas adjacent to the L-tracks would be allowed to purchase or rent these spaces.
- Attract development to certain areas by using parking as an incentive.

Signs

- Continue to prohibit flashing lights. Consider flashing lights on business signs only during daytime hours with limited messaging.
 - Review existing restrictions in the sign code for LED lighting. If allowed, consider different requirements for major corridors vs local neighborhood commercial areas.
- Prohibit painted surfaces, with possible exceptions to be explored for higher quality art installations. Prohibit plywood painted surfaces.
- Digital sign boards - keep current standards that permit only limited display areas.
- Restrict the use of window signs, banners, and advertising flags. Need to clarify standards for how much windows can be covered by signs, and requirements for awnings.
- Create uniform signs standards.
- Encourage Gooseneck lighting and awning signs that are not internally illuminated.
- Require the removal of 'ghosting' remnants from old signs (removal of old sign residue within 90 days if space not reoccupied, including all building-mounted equipment/structures).
- Review standards for signs overhanging sidewalks (i.e. limit the overhang to 2-3 ft for canopies). Consider high quality projecting/blade signs.
- Need standardized definitions for different types of signs, including banners, flashing signs, business signs, and temporary signs.
- Projecting signs are not a big problem as there are not a lot remaining – just keep safe, clean, repaired.
- Allow for special sign approvals, such as the banner signs on Freddie's building.
- Need control over the type of materials used on signs. Provide for special allowance for grocery stores temporary sales signs and portable signs on sidewalks. Make these approvals administrative with controls over location, length of time, and materials.
 - Example: 35th Street – random signs, signs on buildings, paper signs, sign clutter in windows.
- Cicero Avenue lacks uniform standards.
- Sign regulations should not be overly restrictive or cause negative impacts on business visibility. Given that the Town has so many different types of signs consideration should be given to grandfathering in or amortizing existing non-conforming signs over a long period.
- Projecting signs and banners attached to buildings should be allowed.
- Prohibit freestanding, temporary banners which can be 3-15 ft. high and are often a safety hazard as they are not installed correctly.
- Explore options for temporary signs. These signs are now limited to 30 days.
 - E.g. Larger retail stores such as Target's temporary hiring banner should be allowed beyond the 30-day limit. Consider applying different standards to different zoning districts or uses. Allow temporary signs/banners for special events, such as grand openings beyond 30 days, with minimum maintenance provisions.



- If LED lights are allowed, restrict them to neon only with no flashing lights. Prohibit moving images as they are a safety hazard and distracting. LED signs are acceptable if not too big. Need to regulate the brightness of these signs. Controlling LED signs will likely be difficult and cause many problems if allowed. Consider prohibiting LED signs.