



# Village of Lake Villa Downtown Vision Plan



# Acknowledgments

Thanks to the residents, business owners, developers and real estate professionals, Village trustees and staff, and other community members who participated in the development of this vision through interviews and the community survey.

From September 19 to October 21, 2024, we held 25 interviews with community members, and had 143 survey responses, 73 comments on the Social Pinpoint map, and 59 comments across 3 Facebook posts.

Special thanks to the steering committee for reviewing the reports, analysis, and early draft of this Downtown Vision:

- Mike Strong | Village Manager
- Scott Bartlett | Village Trustee
- Jake Cramond | PCZBA
- Tracy Lucas | PCZBA
- Junior Martinez | Downtown Business Owner
- Don DeBello | Downtown Business Owner
- Robert Frank | Real Estate Professional
- Katie Burau | First American Bank

Downtown Vision prepared for the Village of Lake Villa, Illinois  
by Better City LLC & Teska Associates



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# The Vision for Downtown

At the turn of the century when Downtown Lake Villa sprang up next to the Wisconsin Central Railroad's new station it was a bustling hub of activity. Visitors to Ernst Lehman's Lake Villa Hotel dined in its many restaurants and shopped in its quaint shops.

The Vision for Lake Villa's downtown is to recreate the dynamism of its early years and make it the cultural and entertainment hub of the Village. Similar to how other historic downtowns in the area have experienced renaissances, the key will be to preserving the historical charm of the buildings while creating a friendly, vibrant ambiance with outstanding retail and restaurant options and compelling community events.

This Vision Plan outlines the next steps to continue Downtown's revitalization.

## Downtown Revitalization:

- Visual Identity
- Street Reconfiguration
- Parking & Wayfinding
- Business Recruitment
- Downtown Community Events

## Site Developments:

- 209 Mixed-Use Development
- Lehmann Park
- Railroad Ave to Lake Ave Crossing

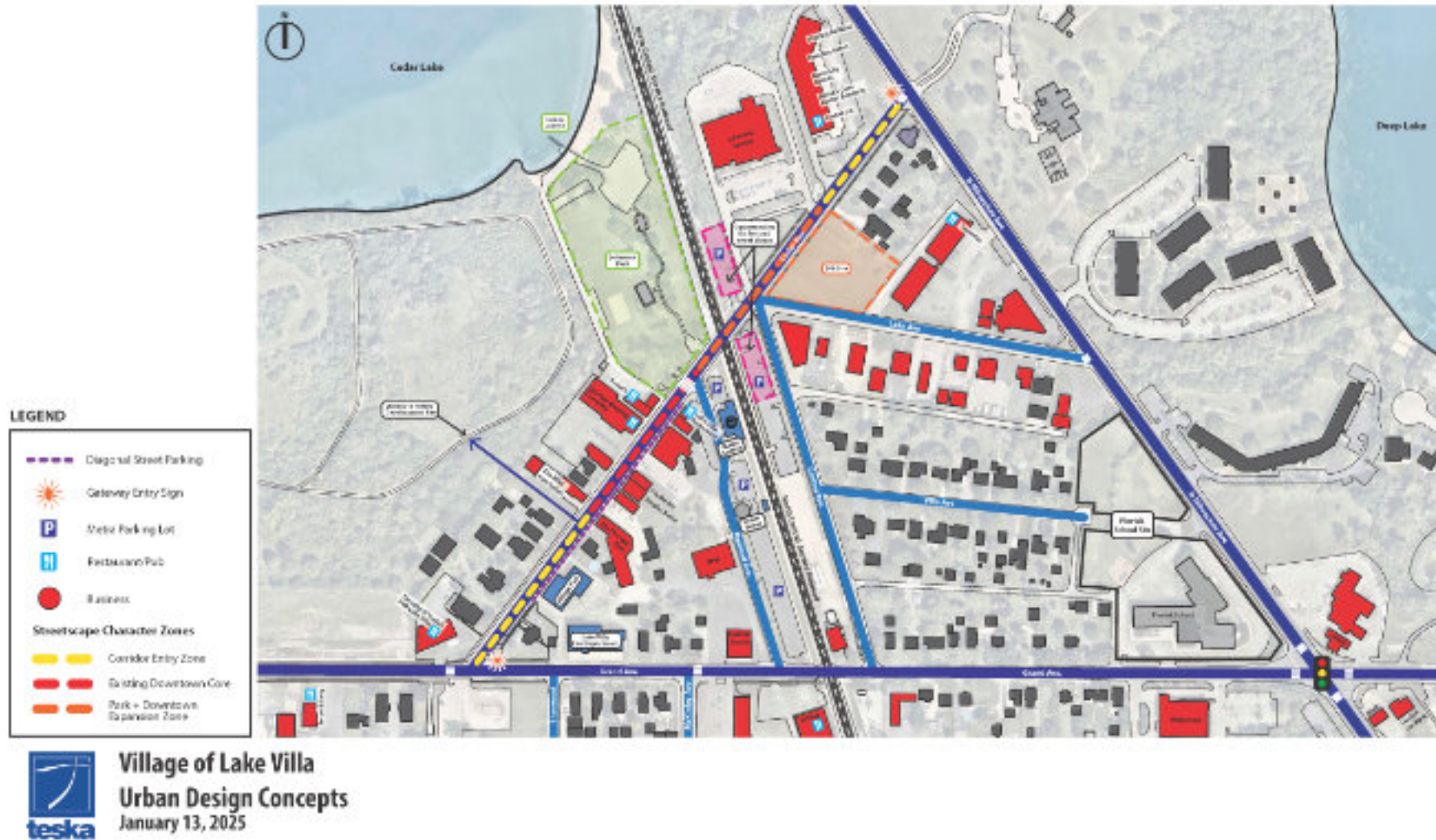


*Downtown Lake Villa*



*Downtown Lake Villa*

## DOWNTOWN LAKE VILLA | EXISTING CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES MAP



The Downtown Triangle, bounded by Cedar Avenue, the Milwaukee Avenue, and Grand Avenue, defines the larger Lake Villa downtown area.

The focus of the current revitalization effort and Vision Plan is the historic district along Cedar Avenue from the Post Office to the Therapy Tree.

As this Vision Plan is implemented, the Village will conduct additional visioning and planning for the remainder of the Downtown Triangle.

# Downtown Revitalization

# Visual Identity

*Charming & Historic*

Restoring the historic charm of Downtown while welcoming new developments will require architectural design standard – for example, using brick façades and vintage signage.

Improvements to the streetscape and existing building facades will amplify Cedar Avenue’s identity and brand, and set the stage for it to become a thriving social hub.

Improvements could include:

## Building Façades:

- Through education and incentives, work with business owners to improve the appearance of downtown through maintenance, historically-accurate awnings and decorative elements

## Streetscape:

- Add new benches, planters, and vintage signage
- Bury the power lines or relocate them behind the buildings

## Downtown Identity:

- Create a Downtown brand and promote through consistent, collaborative marketing campaigns with the Village of Lake Villa, the LCRRRR Chamber of Commerce, and Downtown businesses



# Street Reconfiguration

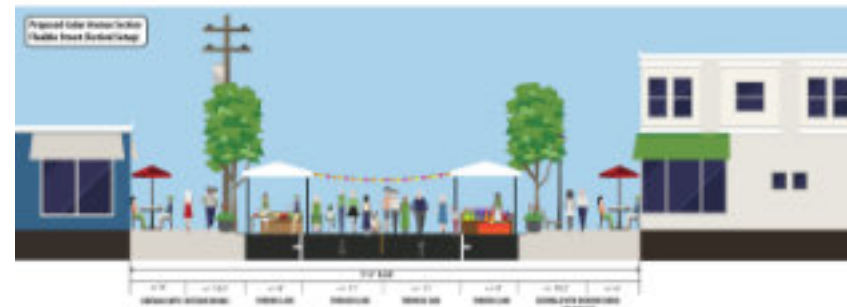
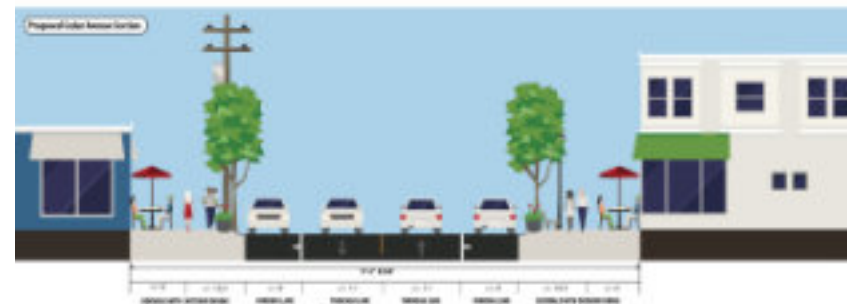
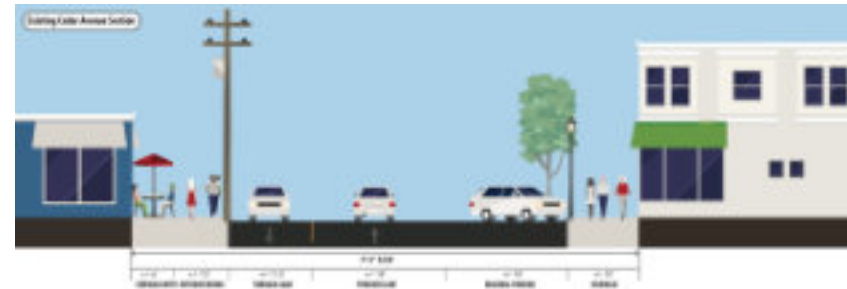
## *Dynamic Public Space*

A redesign of Cedar Avenue between the Metra train tracks and Grand Avenue would create a more dynamic flexible space that is functional not only as a traffic thoroughfare but also accommodates events well. The changes are:

- Parallel parking on both sides of the street
- Raise the street level so that there is curbless transitions to the sidewalks
- Bollards, planters and other natural barriers would provide separation from the road and sidewalks

Main streets that utilize these designs benefit from:

- The same number of parking spaces
- More equitable parking for businesses along both sides of the street
- Improved access for people with disabilities
- Less encroachment onto the sidewalks
- Enhanced pedestrian safety due to separation between sidewalks and moving traffic
- Increases sidewalk space for outdoor seating, landscaping, or other amenities
- Curbless roads enhance the experience for festivals and events



# Parking & Wayfinding

## *Welcoming & Navigable*

Many residents and business owners cited lack of parking as an impediment to the growth of the Downtown. An objective analysis, however, reveals that the parking ratio (the number of parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of commercial buildings) is higher along Cedar Avenue at 2.0 than downtown Antioch at 0.6 and downtown Grayslake at 1.6.

A vibrant, walkable, pedestrian-scale downtown, by design and definition, has higher density of uses and parking is less convenient. Businesses benefit because pedestrians spend 65% more than drivers ([FastCompany](#)).

The concerns about parking availability may be more a matter of perception than fact. The reality is that there is abundant available parking that is very close to Cedar Avenue. It is only 277 feet from the Metra parking lot to Cedar Avenue — compared to the 950 feet one needs to walk to get milk in Walmart.

Clearer indications of where free public parking is available and creating more inviting, clearly demarcated pathways will change the perceptions around the availability of parking.

Specific improvements could include:

- **Wayfinding:** Clear, visible signage to direct visitors to free public parking lots and spaces at the Metra station
- **Pathways:** Create clearly-delineated, well-lit, highly-visible walkways between the parking lots and Cedar Avenue
- **Event Parking:** Designate and advertise Metra lots for events



# Businesses Recruitment

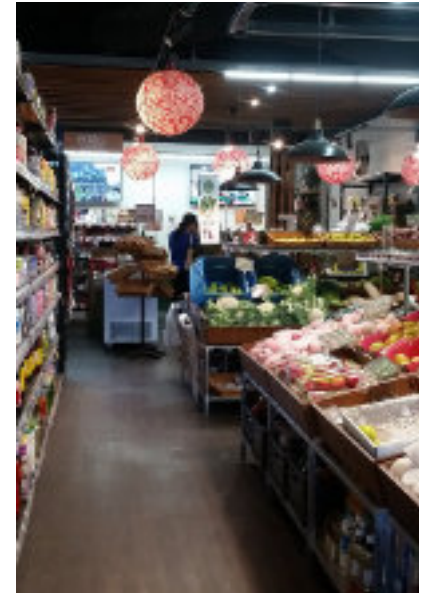
## *Desired Restaurants & Shops*

During interviews, residents and business owners were asked which types of businesses they thought would be successful in Downtown. The most frequently cited responses were evaluated based on the number of competitors within the trade area of Downtown.

Locally-owned, non-chain businesses are the best fit for Downtown. The establishments should be destinations for socializing and recreation, attracting both residents and visitors from surrounding towns. Adding a diverse mix of businesses that offer new experiences and shopping alternatives will increase foot traffic for existing businesses.

The business that were rated highest were:

- **Upscale Restaurants:** Restaurants offering high quality food and service
- **Coffee Shop**
- **Specialty Food and Beverage:** Ice Cream, Bakery, Candy Store, Soda Shop, Boba Tea, Smoothie, Bagel, etc.
- **Artisanal Retail**
- **Fitness & Activities:** Gym, Yoga Studio



# Events

## *Create Vitality*

Events on Cedar Avenue are a valuable way to increase awareness of the Downtown, drive foot traffic, and support local businesses. Thoughtfully planned, Village-scaled events can showcase the Downtown's unique offerings, foster community connections, and boost sales through collaborations with merchants on promotions or event-specific deals. Events create opportunities for residents and visitors to explore the area and engage with its unique offerings.

Expanding the event calendar with events tailored to the character of the area can consistently attract visitors, establish Cedar Avenue as a vibrant hub for shopping, dining, and entertainment, and maintain a steady stream of activity year-round.

Events could include:

- **Pop-Up Markets:** Featuring local artisans, farmers, and vendors
- **Live Music Nights:** Small-scale performances from local bands or solo artists
- **Art Walks:** Showcasing the work of local artists in businesses and outdoor spaces
- **Mini Parades:** Intended to draw niche audiences and be more small-scale than holiday parades, such as a pet parade, a kids-on-wheels parade, and other themed parades
- **Scavenger Hunts:** A fun way for participants to explore local shops and landmarks, and can be an event that runs for an extended time, such as a full week or month
- **Fun Runs:** Host a 5k that starts and ends on Cedar Avenue, and can be sponsored by local nonprofits or businesses to raise funds for local causes



*Photo courtesy of Kimmie Rocha*



*Photo courtesy of the Port Townsend Main Street Program*



*Photo courtesy of the EtchRock Blog*

# Site-Specific Enhancements

Target sites for development and redevelopment to support the Downtown Vision include:

- 209 Mixed-Use Development
- Lehmann Park
- Railroad Ave to Lake Ave Crossing

# 209 Mixed-Use Development

The 209 Cedar Avenue Site will be a showcase project and the catalyst for reimagining and rebranding Downtown Lake Villa. This Village-owned site is a greenfield development opportunity and has an ideal location — adjacent to Downtown, the Metra Station, Lehmann Park, and Cedar Lake.

This site is envisioned with 10,000 square feet of commercial space and 60 residential units. The design will be consistent with the character of the historical buildings along Cedar Avenue and will create a cohesive, consistent look and feel.

The commercial space includes the full ground floor frontage along Cedar Avenue and an upper floor event space. The design aims to create a welcoming atmosphere that integrates with the downtown area, featuring surface treatments and vertical elements to enhance aesthetics.

The end cap anchor space is envisioned as a restaurant, which provides both the rooftop dining deck and an outdoor dining patio on the corner of Cedar Avenue and Lake Avenue.

Outdoor public plaza spaces, vertical design features, lighting, and landscaping should appear as an extension of the downtown streetscape, providing continuity between the east and west sides of the railroad tracks.





# Lehmann Park

Lehmann Park currently provides functional recreational features, such as a picnic shelter, bathroom building, Cedar Lake beach + pier, and public parking. Lehmann Park can become a vital part of the Downtown Lake Villa experience and create an inviting, iconic connection between shopping and dining and Cedar Lake recreation.

The vision is for Lehmann Park to create a cohesive and engaging community space that blends recreation, nature, and appealing gathering places and event venues.

Key features of the reimagined Lehmann Park include:

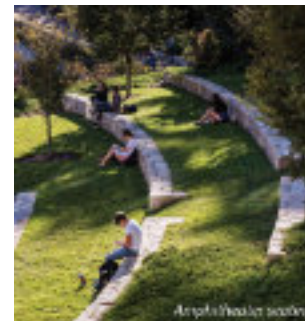
- Performance shelter and amphitheater seating, framed by the backdrop of Cedar Lake, with a grass field behind the seating area allowing children to play while parents enjoy performances
- Redesigned parking to accommodate more vehicles
- Clustered athletic court area for basketball, tennis, and volleyball
- Nature based play, naturalized plantings, and creek bed, set back from the street and near athletic courts
- Gathering places and a redesigned and memorial area with expanded connections to Downtown along Cedar Avenue
- New concessions stand, paddle board rental shack, and fishing dock



Flexible outdoor community space



Pergola structure



Amphitheater seating



Nature based play



Creek bed and naturalized plantings



# Metra Parking Endcap

Transforming the endcap area of the Metra parking into an inviting open space will establish a visual and perceptive connection between the 209 Site and the historic Downtown.

By prioritizing pedestrian-friendly design, the area can be reimaged with seating, landscaping, and pathways that encourage foot traffic while creating a welcoming public gathering spot. Thoughtful placement of greenery and benches will soften the transition from parking to pedestrian areas, tying the space into the aesthetic and historic charm of Cedar Avenue while fostering connectivity and community engagement.

Although building development near the Metra crossing is restricted, vertical markers can serve as a creative solution to visually link the areas on either side of the tracks. These markers — such as decorative poles or art pieces — can reflect the character of the surrounding architecture while providing a sense of continuity and identity. Positioned strategically, they can draw the eye across the tracks, enhancing cohesion between the 209 Site and Cedar Avenue and reinforcing the area's sense of place without disrupting the functional constraints of the crossing.



Enhanced Roadway & Pedestrian Spaces



Temporary Plaza for Events



Vertical Gateway Features



Conduct Streetscape Test

