

DATE: June 12, 2025

TO: Joliet Plan Commission

FROM: Jayne Bernhard, Planning Director

SUBJECT: M-1-25: Adoption of the Downtown Joliet Equitable Transit Oriented Development Plan

GENERAL INFORMATION:

APPLICANT: City of Joliet

REQUESTED ACTION: Adoption of the Downtown Joliet Equitable Transit Oriented Development Plan

PURPOSE: To facilitate development and reinvestment opportunities in downtown and surrounding neighborhoods

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In late 2022, the City applied for a technical assistance grant through the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) to evaluate development opportunities for what is locally referred to as the Lyon's Lumber yard site, which is City-owned land just south of Gateway Transportation Center Train Station. The City's 2015 Downtown Joliet Plan identified this site for a transit-oriented residential development. This 2015 Downtown Plan also identified a need for a more diverse array of housing opportunities.

The grant funding request was successful. On May 16, 2024, the Joliet City Council accepted a grant award in the amount of \$114,750 from the RTA and committed a local match of \$20,250 to complete a transit-oriented development plan for not only the Lyons Lumber Yard site but all areas within a half-mile of Gateway Transportation Center. Total project budget was \$135,000.

The RTA, in conjunction with the City, engaged the consultant firm Houseal Lavigne to prepare a plan for this study area titled Downtown Joliet Equitable Transient Oriented (ETOD) Plan. The planning project started in early spring 2024. A fifteen-member steering committee comprised of downtown stakeholders and RTA officials was formed. During the Downtown Joliet ETOD Planning process, the project team held:

- Four steering committee meetings
- One Interdepartmental staff meeting
- Two Community Open Houses: June 11, 2024 & May 14, 2025
- One Community Questionnaire Survey
- One Community Mapping Survey

- Nine stakeholder focus groups
- Presentations and status updates to City Center Partnership and neighborhood councils

DISCUSSION

The Downtown Joliet Equitable Transit Oriented Development (ETOD) Plan is an implementation focused plan that evaluated existing market conditions and recommends measures that:

- create diverse housing opportunities not currently available
- preserve attainable housing options for the existing residents
- increase ridership on existing transit services
- spur new investment in proximity to the Joliet Gateway Center
- enhance economic and cultural vitality of the Downtown
- advance mobility for residents, visitors, and transit users of all abilities
- improve connectivity of the Gateway Center to the broader Downtown

The plan is divided into eight chapters:

- Introduction – reviews the plan purpose, study area, and planning process.
- Community Profile and Engagement - provides a snapshot of the study area's current conditions, demographics, and past plans as well as provides a summary of the public engagement efforts conducted throughout the planning process.
- Character Areas - outlines the distinct character areas, or geographic locations, within the study area, highlighting their unique land uses, design elements, and development opportunities.
- Land Use and Development - identifies land use and development strategies to achieve the goal of an equitable transit oriented development. This chapter also identifies opportunity sites in the study area that are well-positioned for redevelopment or revitalization. These include:
 - Aging, dilapidated buildings and structures in need of significant repair or replacement;
 - Scrapyards, warehouses, and light industrial uses that may not align with the long-term vision for the area;
 - Empty buildings or buildings with upper floor vacancies, leaving prime spaces unused;
 - Buildings that are functionally obsolete;
 - Surface parking lots that do not maximize land use; and
 - Vacant land.
- Urban Design - identifies urban design best practices that can be implemented in the study area, including building design, landscaping, public art, and plazas.

- Multimodal and Transportation – identifies opportunities for creating safe, comfortable, and accessible corridors that balance multi-modal needs – pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and vehicle drivers.
- Development Opportunity Sites – outlines specific recommendations and illustrative design concepts for three catalyst sites: Lyons Lumber Yard site, BMO Harris Drive Thru Bank site, and City Hall site. These three catalyst sites were identified based on their potential to transform the study area by spurring redevelopment or new development at other opportunity sites around it.
- Implementation – translates the ETOD Plan’s policy considerations into direct action by outlining specific steps to assist the City in realizing the Plan’s long-term vision. It includes an action matrix detailing each policy along with their priority, potential funding sources, and appropriate agency or partner.

CONCLUSION

The Gateway Transportation Center is the City’s central transit hub for Amtrak, Metra, and Pace, connecting Joliet to the Chicago metropolitan area and to cities farther away. Though the station sees hundreds of passengers pass through on a daily basis, the land around it is underutilized and disconnected from Downtown and the neighborhoods around it. The City can use the Downtown Joliet ETOD Plan to advance the area’s potential. This document creates a long-term vision and policy framework for the City to enhance the areas around the station into a vibrant, mixed-use district with housing and economic vitality for residents of all ages, income levels, and abilities.