



# **Arlington Park Racetrack: Transit-Oriented Redevelopment Plans**

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Title Page Image Source: [Hors racingnation.com](http://Hors racingnation.com)

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## Executive Summary

Churchill Downs Incorporated has announced at the end of the 2021 racing season Arlington Park Racetrack will be sold. After examining the site and how it fits within the context of its own community, the surrounding area, and the Chicagoland area as a whole, I developed two potential transit-oriented development concepts for the site. The first is a new urbanist community which focuses on walkability, accessibility to work, essential amenities, and ample green spaces. The second is a new NFL stadium for the Chicago Bears, which features a state-of-the-art complex coupled with an entertainment district. The impact that these concepts can provide to the area are vast, increasing the tax base significantly by providing ample new spaces for business, retail, and thousands of new housing units. With strategic partnerships, careful use of state and federal housing subsidies, and a new tax incremental finance district, these concepts have the potential to become a future reality.

## Introduction

The Arlington Park Racetrack has been a staple of the northwest suburbs of Chicago for nearly a century. The Village of Arlington Heights, faced with the sale of the racetrack, is now challenged to develop the property to replace what the racetrack has meant to the community, both as an economic draw, as well as a visual icon in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. The purpose of this project is to examine two new land uses featuring transit-oriented developments that fit into the already vibrant community fabric of Arlington Heights and its neighbors.



Figure 1 Arlington Park Racetrack logo. source: Arlingtonpark.com

### *Background*

As of March 2021, the owner of Arlington Park Racetrack, Churchill Downs Inc, is planning to sell the park with hopes of continuing races at an unspecified new location in Illinois<sup>i</sup>. Precedent studies were helpful in developing new conceptual designs for the property. Analysis of the site's regional context helps to demonstrate Arlington Park's impact on the area as a whole. It is important to note that Arlington Park's economic impact has been paramount to Arlington Heights and to neighboring municipalities. The Arlington Park racetrack was built in 1927 by Harry D.

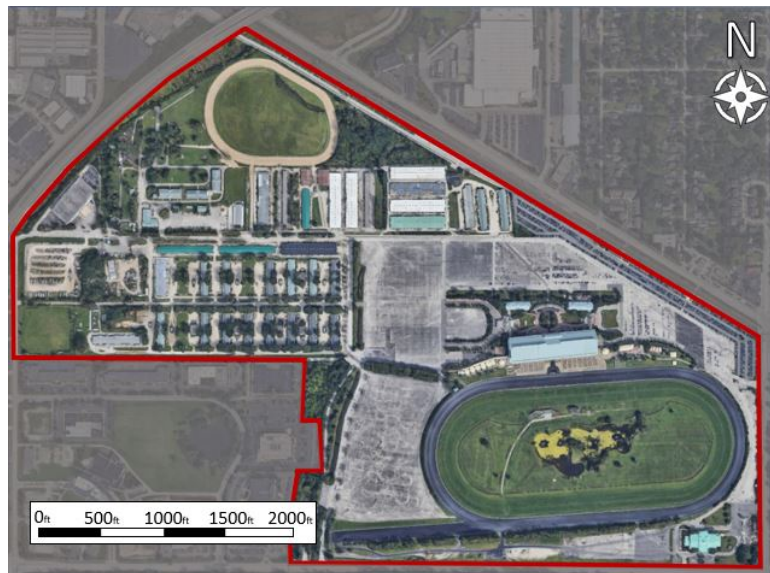


Figure 2 Arlington Park Site.

Brown. The park normally hosts over 20 races annually. It sits on 321 acres, or 14 million square feet of land. Built on the land is over 40 structures, including stables, temporary lodgings, and a 7 story multi-use main structure with indoor, covered, and outdoor seating capacity for 35,000 people. The track itself is comprised of a 1 1/8-mile dirt track and a one-mile-long turf track<sup>ii</sup>. In 2000 Churchill Downs Inc. purchased the park for \$71 million<sup>iii</sup> and has just announced that the track will be up for sale following this racing season. The entire lot is currently zoned as B-3 called General Service, Wholesale and Motor Vehicle District which falls under the same categories as other business and commercial zones in Arlington Heights. The purpose of this zoning is primarily for motor vehicular use, wholesale and retail, and service establishments<sup>iv</sup>.

### Location

The site is located in the Village of Arlington Heights, Illinois but it is on the very edge of the village bordered by both Palatine and Rolling Meadows (Figure 5). The park has easy access to major regional transportation routes, it is situated approximately 20 miles northwest of Chicago and 10 miles northwest of O’Hare International Airport. Adjacent to the western border of the park is Interstate 290 which connects Lake county to downtown Chicago. A few miles south of the site is Interstate 90, which runs from downtown Chicago northwest into Wisconsin. Along the north eastern border is a train station for the Union Northwest Pacific commuter rail line, operated by Metra, which connects downtown Chicago to Harvard, Illinois (Figure 4). Locally, the site is sandwiched by two major local roads, Illinois Route 14, also known as Northwest Highway to the north, and Euclid Avenue to the south (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Local transit map.



Figure 4 Regional context map.

### Amenities

Arlington Park Racetrack is surrounded by an abundance of amenities (Figure 6). The 12 schools within the area suggests possible capacity for increased density. Another important amenity located adjacent to the park is Northwest Community Hospital directly to the west. Four grocery stores can be found within 2 miles of the site. Finally, along the rail line there are two other commuter train stations within 3 miles of the Arlington Park stop.

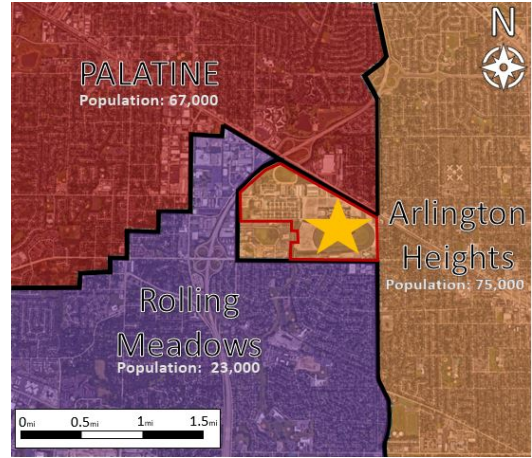


Figure 6 Local municipalities and population.

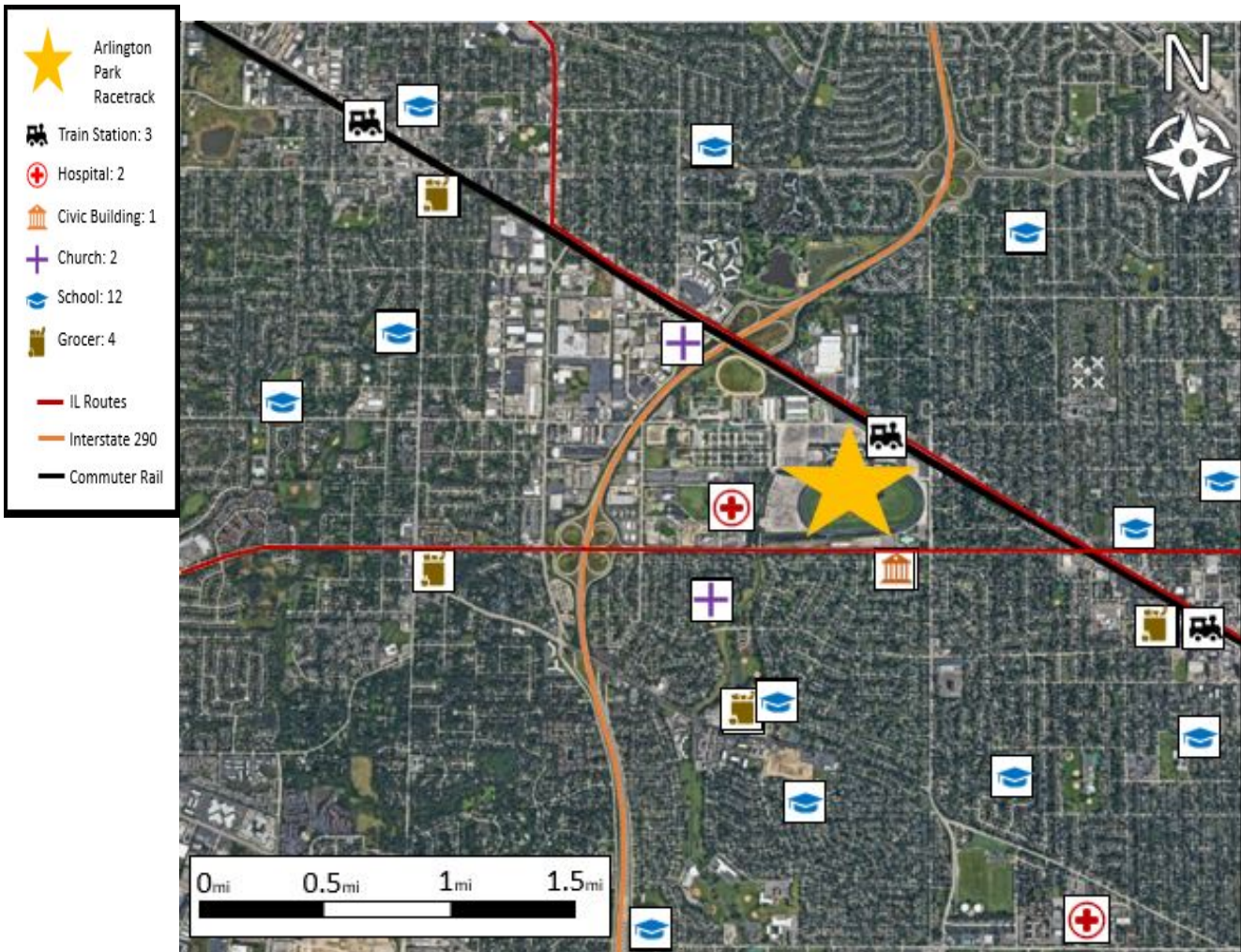


Figure 5 Local amenities map.

## Demographics

Arlington Park is located between 3 municipalities, the Village of Arlington Heights, the Village of Palatine, and the City of Rolling Meadows. Demographically, all three areas are predominantly white followed by Hispanic and Asian (Figure 7)<sup>v</sup>. The median household income and per capita income is well above the state and national averages (Figure 8)<sup>vi</sup>. Nearly a quarter of the population was born outside of the US, most of whom immigrated from Mexico, Poland, and India (Figure 9)<sup>vii</sup>.

## Infrastructure

Arlington Park Racetrack is located near two major vehicular highways and has its own dedicated commuter train station which provides transit to various suburban downtowns and the City of Chicago. It also has important existing infrastructure such as roads, water, and electric on site. Unfortunately, the transit connections have some drawbacks, any future developments have to consider the noise pollution and heavy traffic from the surrounding highways and commuter rail. The existing buildings are designed to accommodate horses and will most likely need to be replaced. Any new development

## Annual Income Levels

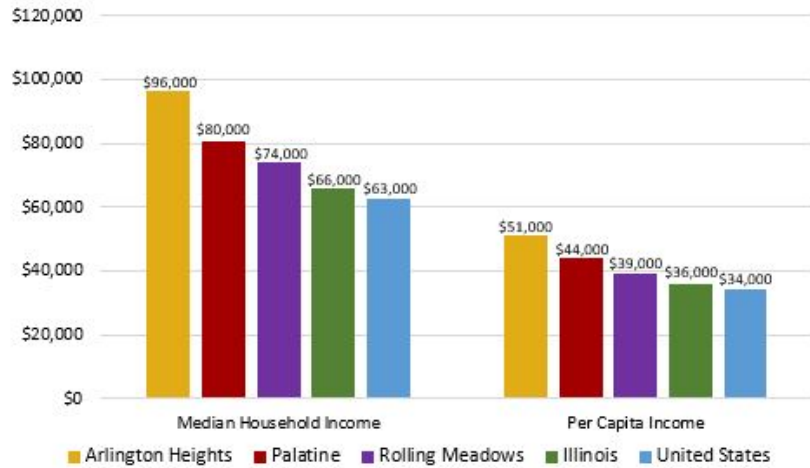


Figure 7 Annual income levels compared to Illinois and the US.

## Demographics

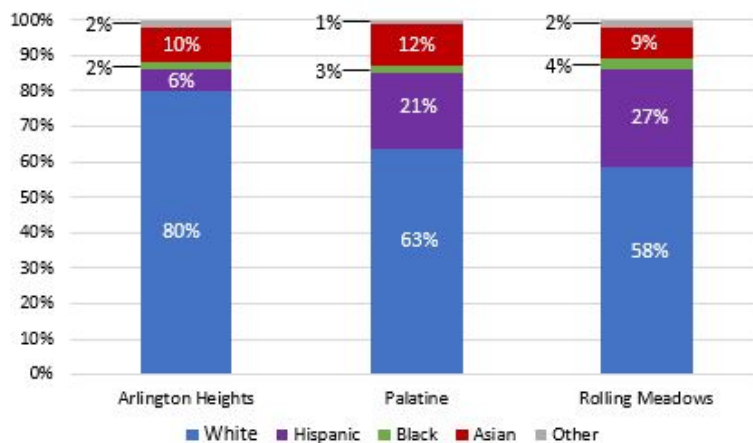


Figure 8 Local demographics.

## Percentage of Residents Born Overseas

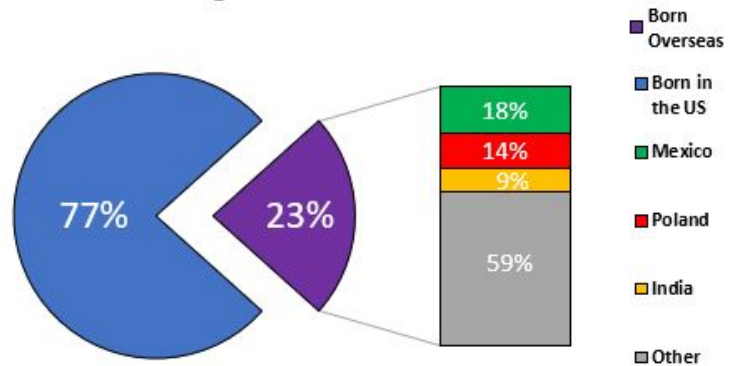


Figure 9 Percentage of local residents born overseas.



of the property for anything other than its original intended use will be extensive.

## Development Concepts

Understanding the contextual knowledge of the area and what the racetrack means to the community, I have developed two very different transit-oriented concepts for the site. These concepts both share a reliance on the commuter train station to increase density while minimizing the reliance for automotive transportation. It is important to note that both development concepts seek to balance the increase in density, diverse types of residential units, and economic anchors.



Figure 10 East facing entrance.

### *The New Urbanist Concept*

New urbanist communities and transit-oriented developments share important ideologies which can be used to create a successful community. Both concepts highlight increased density and walkable communities with fast access to reliable transportation. Similar to what Jane Jacobs said in “Death and Life of Great American Cities”, “You can’t rely on bringing people downtown, you have to put them there”<sup>viii</sup>. Both of these concepts seek to develop a livable, walkable community with walkable access to amenities, leisure, work, and transit.



Figure 11 Parsons Alley, Duluth GA Source: [ParsonsAlley.com](http://ParsonsAlley.com)

### *Goals*

The major goals for this new urbanist transit-oriented development include the following:

- Balance mixed-use and dense development, specifically along the rail and within a quarter mile of the train station.
- Encourage multi-modal transportation accessibility with a focus on walking, bicycling, and rail.
- Construct neighborhoods with mixed residential types, specifically around the peripheries of the site, to suit the needs of different income levels and age demographics.
- Provide ample and accessible public green spaces which are strategically placed both centrally as well as throughout the development.
- Create accessible mixed-skill employment opportunities throughout the mixed-use and business areas of the development.

All of these goals coincide with the New Urbanist concepts of live, work, and play<sup>ix</sup>.

*Precedents*

Approximately 20 miles east, on the site of a former military base, Naval Air Station Glenview, which was closed in the early 1990’s, the Village of Glenview began developing an ambitious 1,000-acre plan to create a new urbanist community development called “The Glen”<sup>x</sup>. Similar to Arlington Park Racetrack, it was built along a commuter rail line, but does not use the train station as a focal point of the development. Instead, the developers implemented a variety of uses including single-family and multi-family residential, and light industrial developments to create a diverse landscape centered around a commercial/office/residential mixed-use downtown area<sup>xi</sup>. They also implemented large parks in the west and east portions of the development. More importantly, when constructing residential neighborhoods, mixed-type housing throughout such as row housing, double flats, and detached single-family homes created natural shared green spaces amongst neighbors.

Despite their successes, there are aspects of The Glen that I believe the future development at Arlington Park Racetrack can improve upon. First, the lack of focus on the existing commuter rail transit and the disconnect between the dense developments and the rail is a major failure. Also, the neighborhoods are walkable and accessible to parks and green spaces, but due to a major road bisecting the site from north to south there is a distinct lack of connectivity from some of the residential neighborhoods to the mixed-use downtown where all of the living amenities are located. Lastly, the affordability of housing on the site is abysmal, homes start in the \$500,000 range and many are worth more than \$1,000,000<sup>xii</sup>. Renting in the area is also extremely expensive, starting at about \$1,500 a month for a one bedroom to nearly \$3,000 for a two bedroom<sup>xiii</sup>. It will be important for the Village of Arlington Heights to use this example when planning their own development to avoid these major pitfalls.

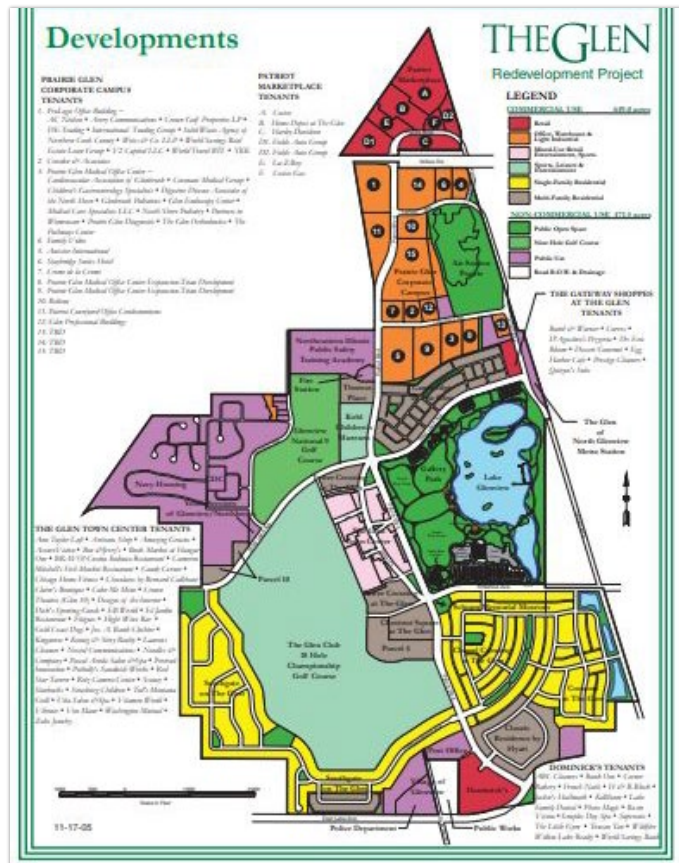


Figure 12 'The Glen' Development plan. Source: [www.glenview.il.us](http://www.glenview.il.us)

*Conceptual Master Plan*

This plan is designed to be flexible and evolve. My proposal merely encompasses general placement and land use to emphasize the types of opportunities available to future developers. My proposal focuses around a dense mixed-use and high-density residential transit-

oriented development, a commercial and mixed-use downtown, two new mixed-type residential neighborhoods, light industrial and business parks along the northwestern peripheries, and a new retirement community adjacent to the bordering hospital (Figure 13).



Figure 15 Light industrial building. Source: Urbanyvrindustrial.com



Figure 17 Illinois Park. Source: Enjoyillinois.com



Figure 18 Row houses in Chicago. Source: Previewchicago.com

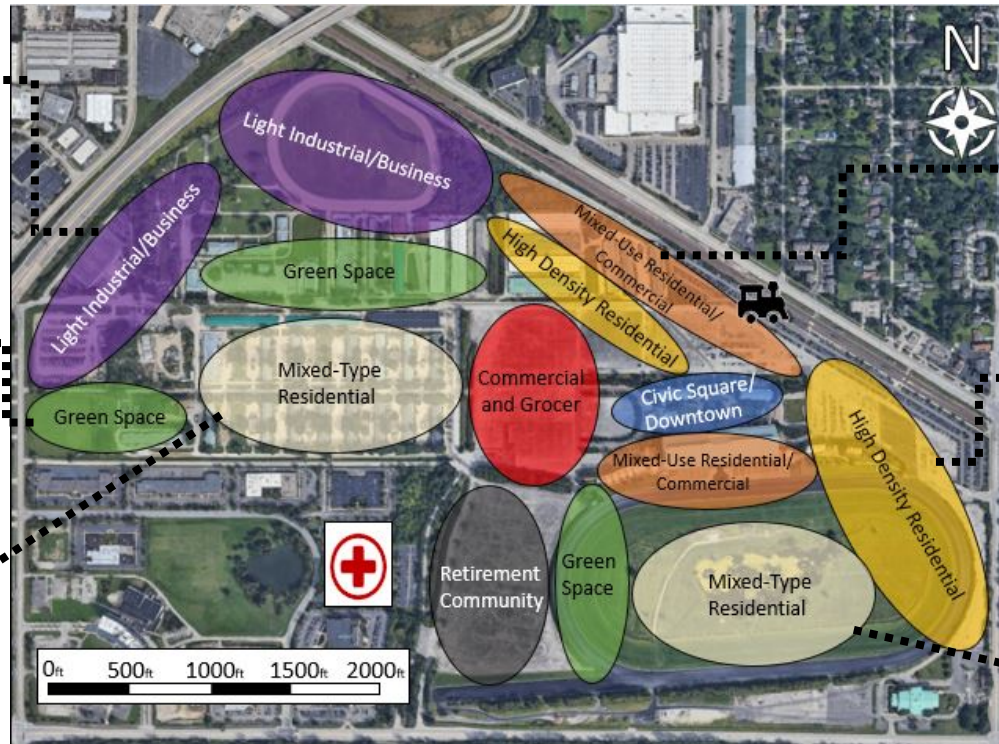


Figure 16 New urbanist concept bubble diagram



Figure 14 Mixed-use community. Source: freep.com



Figure 13 High density residential. Source: chicagoarchitecturecenter.com



Figure 19 Slim single-family homes. Source: markstewart.com

### Mixed-use/Downtown

Mixed-use commercial/residential areas line the existing street along the rail line, encouraging shopping from both within the community and outside the community. Mixed-use development will continue into the City Square/Downtown area. The existing racetrack grandstand will be adaptively reused for mixed-use retail/commercial. West of the Civic Square/Downtown district will include a grocery store and other retailers to serve the needs of the community and surrounding area (Figure 14).

### High-Density Residential

On both sides of the train station along the mixed-use developments there are dense residential areas which will have apartment buildings with limited parking capacity to encourage the use of other means of transit. Due to their proximity to the Metra commuter rail, the goal is to encourage Chicago area commuters, who normally take the train to work, to live within this community. Buildings will be designed to provide ample green spaces and public spaces for residents, while making the apartment campuses walkable with paths to and from the mixed-use developments and the downtown area (Figure 15).

### Mixed-Type Residential

In the south and west portions there are two new mixed-type residential areas not so different from The Glen, that includes mixtures of row housing, double flats, and detached single-family homes. They are aligned in ways which maximizes home frontage with rear facing parking. Shared community green spaces serve as a means of leisure and sustainable means of rainwater absorption and disposal. Added parks along the edges of the site provides needed stormwater retention ponds which serve as beautiful parks and trails for the new communities. Similar to the high-density residential areas, there will be a focus on walkability and connection to the downtown area and the commuter rail station (Figure 16,17).

### Light Industrial/Business

Due to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, the need for office space as we know it may change forever. Unfortunately, without knowing the future of workplace trends because of the rise in working from home, this area will include some light industrial developments. Flexibility in this usage is most important as the economy continues to transform and adapt to the new normal. It will be imperative for the Village of Arlington Heights to find medium to high employment industries which can populate this area and provide ample amounts of new jobs to the community and its surrounding neighbors (Figure 18).

### Retirement Community

To capitalize on the existence of a hospital directly across from the site and the development of a grocery store and downtown area, this is a great opportunity to develop a new retirement aged community. Centered around a large multi-unit building that includes medical care and entertainment facilities, are small one- or two-bedroom cottages with assisted-living to provide resident independence with all the necessary care.

### Roads

Roads throughout the development will be narrow with street parking and dedicated bicycle lanes along the periphery. Large pedestrian crossings will have priority usage as the development will encourage walkability. Also included, will be large pedestrian only pathways throughout the site focused on connecting residential areas to amenities and parks.

### *Stadium Concept*

The second design concept I recommend for this area coincides with local media speculation. News sources are reporting that the local NFL team, the Chicago Bears, are looking for a location to build a new stadium and media outlets have speculated that Arlington Park Racetrack should be the location<sup>xiv</sup>. This would be a massive development that would require many different private and public partnerships but one that is feasible. This development, although highlighted by a state-of-the-art stadium, would have ample space to boast a myriad of other uses which can continue to serve the existing community while maximizing the existence of a new economic driver.

## Goals

The goals for this stadium development concept include the following:

- Build a state-of-the-art stadium which will serve as a Chicagoland icon in the northwest suburbs. By including a retractable roof, it can host large scale events such as Olympic games, concerts, Super Bowls, World Cup matches, and major conventions year-round.
- Develop a new entertainment hub to attract people from all over the Chicagoland area.
- Foster dense residential and mixed-use developments along the commuter rail line.
- Create new and diverse jobs to boost the local economy.

These goals demonstrate an effective economic anchor which provides consistent large corporate tenants and increased tax revenue.



Figure 20 Future rendering of SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, CA.  
Source: architectmagazine.com

## Precedent

This project is a massive undertaking because of the potential development costs and the public and private stakeholder involvement required. There is a similar project still developing in Inglewood, California, south of Los Angeles called the Hollywood Park. The Hollywood Park consists of approximately 300 acres of land. The current plan is expected to have a 300-room luxury hotel, 2,500 new apartments, one million square feet of office/commercial space, and the new 70,000 seat SoFi stadium campus which hosts two local NFL teams, the Los Angeles Rams and the Los Angeles Chargers<sup>xv</sup>. A major pitfall of the Hollywood Park development has been the inflating costs. The original estimated cost of this project was \$2.6 billion, currently the costs are expected to exceed \$5 billion<sup>xvi</sup>.



Figure 21 Hollywood Park development plan. Source: deainc.com



Figure 25 Green parking lot. Source: e-moro.net



Figure 26 Hotel tower. Source: chicago.curbed.com

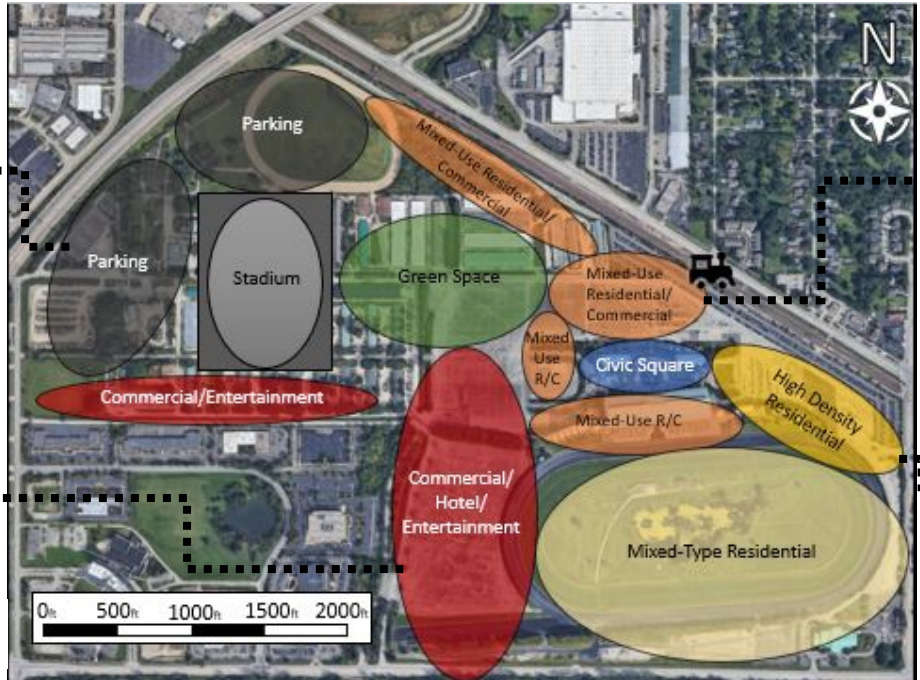


Figure 24 Stadium concept bubble diagram.



Figure 23 Mixed-use community. Source: midamericagr.com



Figure 22 Dense residential buildings. Source: urbanurf.com

### Conceptual Master Plan

The concept plan for this development adds a brand new 70,000 seat stadium in the northwest portion of the site. Parking is located along the west and north portions of the stadium which accommodates well over 10,000 spaces with increased capacity based on the inclusion of parking structures. Along the southern portion of the stadium is a large entertainment hub and commercial district. East of the stadium is a large swath of green space to be used as a buffer for rainwater absorption as well as leisure. Along the western portion of the rail is dense mixed-use commercial/residential which includes the existing mixed-use main building and a large civic square to allow for public and private use. The eastern portion along the commuter rail houses high density residential units to make use of the nearby rail station. To the south is a large new mixed-type residential neighborhood (Figure 26).

#### The Stadium

The stadium is located in the western portion of the site for multiple reasons. This location is highly visible from both the train station and from the adjacent interstate highway, I-290. Both roads north and south of the site have highway exits which allows stadium accessibility via the highway and lessens traffic impact on local roads. Also, this location is accessible to the commuter rail station by the existing road infrastructure which connects the stadium directly to the train station for pedestrians.

#### Parking

Parking to accommodate a huge stadium is imperative for the success of the development. It is important to provide parking around the stadium for those who cannot take the train and for

those who find immense value in activities such as tailgating. The parking area will use strategic green dividers to provide water absorption and safe pedestrian paths. There is also ample space for the development of parking structures to provide additional spaces for those looking to attend an event or those who may simply want to go to the entertainment hub and shop along the mixed-use corridor (Figure 24).

### Green Space

The dedicated green space east of the stadium can provide ample amounts of leisure space for the community and green space for outdoor events such as music festivals and fairs which utilize large fields. This green space also provides an aspect of sustainability by absorbing a lot of the rainwater runoff from the vast parking area. This space also serves as a buffer between the stadium campus and residential units.

### High-Density Residential

The transit-oriented development will encompass mixed-use commercial/residential, a civic square, and high density residential along the commuter rail. This area will foster a new community which relies on walkability and rail transit to neighboring municipalities and downtown Chicago. It will provide many necessary amenities locally with a large civic square as the center of the development (Figure 25).

### Entertainment Hub

The entertainment hub encompasses the southern portion of the site. This flexible space can be used to provide office suites for stadium tenants, hotels, shopping, restaurants, bars, and with the proper licensing, gambling facilities. This area is the major attractor to the site independent of events at the stadium (Figure 23).

### Mixed-Type Residential

Due to the scale of the development, there are opportunities to include mixed-type housing similar to the new urbanist concept which provides different types of housing for various economic and age demographics. This neighborhood includes strategic and accessible green spaces for leisure and sustainability, and a pedestrian connection to the commuter rail station.

### Roads

Roads throughout the development vary in usage. Near the stadium are wider roads with multiple lanes for incoming and outgoing traffic to accommodate events. East of the stadium focuses more on walkability and has narrow roads with lower speed limits and large pedestrian crossings. There are pedestrian only paths connecting the rail station to the stadium, entertainment district, and the mixed-use downtown civic space.

## Final Thoughts

### *Metrics*

These two new concepts add a myriad of uses and tax base to Arlington Park Racetrack. They both add over one million square feet of commercial and business space while providing thousands of new residential units. The property is currently covered by a vast amount of surface parking and green space which is for private use only. The new development concepts will transform the landscape into vast acreages of accessible green space for public use. The current property is highlighted by a 750,000 square foot entertainment venue which will



Figure 27 Metrics comparison

be dwarfed by the potential new 3 million square foot state-of-the-art stadium. Due to the influx of new businesses and residents the redevelopment of Arlington Park Racetrack can provide ample amounts of new tax revenue to offset the loss of closing the park (Figure 27).

### *Strategies and Partnerships*

Both concepts require coordination with the private, public, and non-profit sectors. The village should seek partnerships with businesses that align with their vision for the site. To produce the amount of new housing units necessary and include affordable housing, the village should coordinate with housing non-profits and apply to the state of Illinois for the federal low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC). This will subsidize the costs of residential construction for potential developers. The strategic use of a new tax incremental financing (TIF) district can create the capital necessary to incentivize private and non-profit developers.

For the stadium concept, the village will need to coordinate with the NFL, and the McCaskey family, the owners of the Chicago Bears, to help finance the construction. They will need to work with Cook County, and the city of Chicago as well, since the Bears still have 12 years left on their lease at Soldier Field<sup>xvii</sup>. They will need to coordinate with the state of Illinois if they seek to attain a gaming license. This will require extensive negotiations most likely involving tax allocations regarding the stadium, stadium events, and the adjoining entertainment hub.



### *Conclusion*

Transit-oriented development at the site of Arlington Park Racetrack provides significant new opportunities. The two concepts I propose have the potential to provide increased tax revenue, entertainment, and pedestrian focused residential expansion that is in concert with the fabric of the existing communities. This site is supported by the existing transportation infrastructure including the proximity of two major interstate highways, and the commuter rail which connects the site to downtown Chicago. The sale of Arlington Park Racetrack signals the end of an era in Arlington Heights. Although the historic racetrack can never truly be replaced, the village has the opportunity to provide an even larger impact permeating Arlington Heights, the northwest suburbs, and the Chicagoland area as a whole.

## Endnotes

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