

THE★STAR

Hazel Crest Deemed 'Good Value'

September 27, 2007

By David Schwab, The Star

Continued development in public transit- and pedestrian-friendly areas of the South Suburbs is affordable and makes economic sense, new research says.

The Center for Neighborhood Technology, an advocacy and public policy organization headquartered in Chicago, recently released findings on four towns: Hazel Crest, Midlothian, Oak Forest and Riverdale. The findings were based on analysis of the Housing and Transportation Affordability Index, released by the Brookings Institute.

The H+T Index, as it's called, shows what officials call the "true affordability" of a community by adding together transportation and property costs associated with living there. These two costs are the biggest expenses for most families.

The center's analysis indicates these four towns exemplify how older communities, which are often overlooked by commercial and residential developers in favor of newer areas or undeveloped farmland, are "good values" in terms of places to live and set up businesses.

These communities "have been undervalued" by consumers and developers, said Janice Metzger, senior project manager for the center.

"The assets are there," she said, referring to Metra stations, sidewalks and other infrastructure already in place. Living in these areas "allows people to do a lot of their trips by bike, walking and public transit," she said.

While most people are aware of what they spend on housing, Metzger said few know what they spend on transportation. Factoring in gas, repairs, parking and other costs associated with driving often make living near public transit a better deal.

This study, according to Reggie Greenwood, director of economic development for the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, is a kick-off point to encourage what is called "transit-oriented development" in the South Suburbs.

Given the infrastructure in these communities, "more people could economically locate near these transit sites," Greenwood said, and so could more businesses.

While part of the study praised the "true affordability" of these communities, part of it dealt with finding ways by which the communities could improve themselves.

The analysis recommends increasing activity level around transit centers, Metzger said. Moving parking lots into the background of the transit area, making distances shorter between businesses and relocating open spaces to less transit-friendly areas are examples of ways city planners can help build up these areas.

<http://www.starnewspapers.com/lifestyles/574939,hc092707azhouseafford.article>