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## Metra lots seen as home sites

### Study says it would make better use of space than parking

By Richard Wronski  
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Acres of parking lots at suburban Metra train stations ought to be used for convenient housing for commuters rather than merely for their cars, according to a study issued Tuesday by a public interest group.

More than 1,100 new residential units and 167,000 square feet of commercial space in mixed developments could be built in nine Cook County suburbs from Arlington Heights to Homewood without a loss of commuter parking spaces, the Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology said.

Development also could provide several hundred thousand dollars in property tax revenue for each of the nine communities--more than \$4 million total--above the parking revenue generated by the lots, the study said.

The new housing could help meet growing demand for more transit-oriented housing in the Chicago area, said the non-profit organization, which has advocated such development since 1993.

By 2030 the demand for housing near transit in the Chicago region will be 1.6 million households, more than double the 2000 number of 787,000, the study said.

"In their current state, these parking lots are robbing our region of economic value because there is a higher and better use for the land," said Jacky Grimshaw, the group's vice president for policy.

The study was funded with the support of the Joyce, Alphawood and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundations.

Metra officials and leaders of suburbs cited in the study acknowledged the need for transit-oriented development, but said this goal must be balanced against the demands of commuters, who want to park as close as possible to their train stations.

"It's kind of a double-edged sword," said Judy Pardonnet, a Metra spokeswoman.

The new Metra station in Elburn is an example of transit-oriented development, Pardonnet said. Elburn officials have planned offices, stores and apartments around the station and single-family homes in a neighboring subdivision.

Suburban leaders, particularly in more established communities such as Oak Park and La Grange, cite severe shortages of commuter and residential parking.

But the center said existing parking lots could be used more efficiently by building new parking decks into the developments.

Arlington Heights Mayor Arlene Mulder, who is also a Metra board member, said the village has won several awards for its

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downtown transit-oriented developments. But residents' concerns must also be taken into consideration, she said.

The center's study recommended turning a 1.5-acre Metra lot in Arlington Heights into a mixed-use development with a parking structure and commercial space, topped off with 72 residential units.

Arlington Heights, local schools and its Park District could get \$640,000 a year in additional property tax revenue, the study concluded.

"As such, Metra riders who drive to the station cost the town and its taxpayers, but the real costs include the lost opportunity costs of not utilizing the land devoted to parking for a higher use," the study said.

Mulder said the village might favor such a development, but residents are opposed to any multistory project on the site, which is in a historic district.

Mulder said she appreciated the center's recommendation, "but residents have to have their input, too."

In La Grange, the study urged turning three lots totaling 1.5 acres into mixed-use developments of up to five stories with 99 housing units. This would produce an estimated \$339,000 in annual tax revenue.

In Tinley Park, the study identified 19 acres within a quarter-mile of the 80th Avenue Metra station designated for commuter parking.

The study proposes using more than 1,700 parking spaces at this station for a major development of town homes, multifamily buildings and commercial property, generating a net \$624,000 in revenue.

The study also recommended more transit-oriented development in Palatine, Hanover Park, Oak Park, Franklin Park, Homewood and Blue Island.

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