

# GROWING a Small Town



Looking Back at 20 Years of  
Economic Revitalization in  
Barrington (1997–2017)



Story by **PATTY DOWD SCHMITZ**

Photography by **LINDA M. BARRETT**

Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and our grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.

*Daniel Hudson Burnham, Chicago Architect  
and Urban Planner (1846–1921)*

**O**VER 100 YEARS AGO, Daniel Burnham and his fellow Chicago architects and urban visionaries were busy making their big plans for the city's lakefront; for its 1893 World's Fair; and for the high-rise buildings that were yet to come.

In that booming time during the height of the Industrial Revolution, Burnham and his contemporaries knew that their work would live on for generations, and they refused to settle for making "little plans." Instead, they dreamed big and set their sights to executing their dreams, resulting in the vibrant and thriving city we have today.

100 years later and just 40 miles to the northwest, here in Barrington many of our own town leaders were faced with the same crossroads in the 1990s. As the building boom of that decade saw housing developments and retail centers springing up on the wide-open plains to the west, south, and north of Barrington, our community faced a decision: Allow our town to become a sleepy, drive-through village where shoppers, diners, and visitors looked elsewhere, or envision big plans to reimagine, rejuvenate, and recreate our downtown to keep its small-town heritage intact while attracting the types of retail, shopping, and community entertainment our citizens desired.

It did not take much deliberation for our town leaders to choose the latter. But it would take plenty of vision, hard work, and dedication by many individuals to bring the town to where it is today, with a newly revitalized and thriving downtown that showcases vibrant restaurants, dozens of unique shops, and plenty of newly re-imagined cultural and entertainment offerings.

So how did the Village get to where it is today?

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*Left: Teaming up to re-imagine Barrington's town square (from left) Karen Darch, Tim Roberts, Tom Zabor, Jeff Lawler, Peggy Blanchard, Peter Rusnak, and Jim Daluga.*



*The heart of downtown in 2000: a Citgo gas station at Main and Hough Streets. The gas station would later be torn down, along with several other buildings, to make way for the current Village Center redevelopment. (Photo: Dana Shadrick)*

## A 20-Year Timeline

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>Pre-1997</b> | Village leaders envision a revitalized downtown                        |
| <b>1997</b>     | Strategic Planning Commission formed                                   |
| <b>1999</b>     | Village Center Master Plan created                                     |
| <b>2000</b>     | TIF District created   |
| <b>2001</b>     | Streetscape improvements begin   |
| <b>2003</b>     | Memorial Park opens  |
| <b>2004</b>     | Cook Street Plaza Opens with Francesca's as anchor                     |
| <b>2006</b>     | Village begins to buy properties along West Main Street                |
| <b>2008-09</b>  | Great Recession halts progress   |
| <b>2010</b>     | McGonigal's opens as a cornerstone in Cook/Station Street area         |
| <b>2015</b>     | Barrington's White House Community & Cultural Center opens             |
| <b>2015</b>     | Village Center Opens with Starbucks, Shakou, and Egg Harbor as anchors |
| <b>2015</b>     | Barrington Celebrates its Sesquicentennial                             |
| <b>2017</b>     | Barrington's leaders continue to look to the future                    |

### THE 1990S: THE NEED FOR A MASTER PLAN

According to current Village President Karen Darch: "Ron Hamelberg, the Village President during the 1990s, and several of the trustees during that period, including David Schmidt, Jerry Connors, Mike Ryan, Tim Dunn, Donn Branstrator, and Dan Frommeyer, had a vision for the economic redevelopment of the downtown area. They formed the Strategic Planning Commission in 1997, and then produced what was called the 'Village Center Master Plan' in 1999. This included creating a TIF district (see sidebar on page 143), an often-used municipal mechanism by which new property tax revenue generated from the value created by redevelopment in a defined area or district is directed toward an economic development

project or public improvement project in that district. We also brought Peggy Blanchard on board at that time as our economic development director. She had assisted Highland Park in redeveloping their downtown, and we knew that she had the contacts and the execution ability to help us move a large-scale project like this forward."

The Village Center Master Plan outlined several key initiatives for redevelopment in downtown Barrington:

- Improve the Village Center's streetscape with new trees, special pavers, decorative lighting, trash/recycling bins, planters, sidewalks, landscaping, and street/directional signage
- Improve dated building facades to enhance the appearance of the Village Center
- Develop a wayfinding signage plan which identified strategic locations for directional and identity signs for parking and shopping areas
- Connect the Village Center to the Metra Train Station by creating a pedestrian rail walk.

In addition, the plan specified other detailed developments in various areas across the Village, including:

- Implement a plan for the northwest corner of Cook and Station Streets that includes mixed-use development of the entire block, with retail at the ground floor level and residential above, incorporating a parking deck below the building (this would become Cook Street Plaza, opened in 2004).
- Redevelop the gas station site at the southwest corner of Hough and Main streets with a new retail building (this property, along with the former Chase Bank property and several parcels along Main Street, would become

the “Barrington Village Center,” a retail development opened in 2015).

- Create open space in the Village Center for special events and activities (this would become the Memorial Park site on Hough Street across from Hough Street School)
- Develop “Old Barrington Center” with additional historic structures such as the blacksmith shop and other historic buildings (this was accomplished in 1998 when the blacksmith shop was relocated from the current Village Hall site to the Historical Society’s property).
- Redevelop retail buildings in Redevelopment Area #1 (commonly known as the “Golden Triangle” and bordered by Hough Street on the east, the Metra Tracks to the south and the EJ&E Tracks to the northwest; this project is still underway today).

### 2001–2004: TAKING THE FIRST STEP WITH COOK STREET PLAZA

Once the TIF District was created in 2000, the doors were open for the Village to work with various developers to envision a newly rejuvenated retail area at Cook and Station Streets. After much public discussion amid some very turbulent years in Village government, the three-story Cook Street Plaza was settled on.

As a “mixed use” development—meaning retail on the first floor, residential space above, and including a parking garage for both public and private use—this project would set the tone for further redevelopment of the downtown that was yet to come.

“Cook Street Plaza really was the starting point for the downtown redevelopment,” says Peggy Blanchard, the Village’s economic development director. “It was the vision of



*Right: Former Village of Barrington Trustee Tim Dunn and President Karen Darch in front of Cook Street Plaza, which was the first major project undertaken in the redevelopment effort.*

Harold Lipofsky, whose store had stood on that property for many years until it burned in 1989. Bill Braithwaite, Ben Borkin, and David McClintock were instrumental in getting this project off the ground, and then the Village Board was eventually able to push it through during some difficult times in local politics. But as we can all see today, Cook Street Plaza truly created a vibrancy in that area of the Village Center which spurred the addition of McGonigal’s Pub, Cook Street Coffee, and Francesca’s as important anchors in that section. Soon, other thriving businesses followed, and today, the Cook and Station Street area is simply alive with shoppers, diners, and residents who enjoy spending time downtown.”



*This site at the northwest corner of Cook and Station Streets had been home to Lipofsky’s department store, which was opened in the pioneer era. In the late 1980s, the store burned, leaving the empty lot you see here, which would then be re-imagined as today’s Cook Street Plaza. Lipofsky’s Shoe Shop did not burn; it is the building with the mural on it. (Photo: Dana Shadrick)*



*"It takes a Village" to keep our streets and signs looking beautiful and professional. The volunteers and Village staff who make it happen are (from left) Cathy Robinson, Mike Syzmanski, Peggy Blanchard, Ralph Kuhlman, and Chris Larson.*

*Left: Each season, Cathy Robinson and her Garden Club volunteers beautify our streetscape with pots and planters.*



## 2000–2004: BEAUTIFYING THE TOWN WITH STREETSCAPE AND WAYFINDING SIGNAGE IMPROVEMENTS

As Cook Street Plaza was underway, the Village was also undertaking the streetscape and wayfinding signage improvements that had been recommended in the Master Plan. Brick pavers, planters, and greenery were installed throughout the Village to create a cohesive look and give the entire Village a facelift.

Decorative street lamps were installed along the streets in the Village Center that included room for beautiful hanging baskets in the summer and twinkling lights at the holidays. The lamps also provided room for colorful street banners, which created a visual message to let residents and visitors alike know that the Village of Barrington was a “great place to live, work, and play.”

An important part of this effort was a directional (“wayfinding”) signage program, which provided a coordinated visual look to signs across the Village to indicate parking and shopping areas. Today, the distinctive red and black look of the signs help residents and visitors find their way to anything they might need in the Village. These enhancements are maintained by the Village’s Public Works Department and the Barrington garden clubs, who assist with designing the public planters and spaces in the Village Center and the Metra Train Station. “The streetscape was the first project to be undertaken,” Blanchard says, “but maintaining the streetscape is an ongoing process, and we continue to improve our public spaces every year.”

### 2003: MEMORIAL PARK CREATED

Part of the Master Plan was also to create an open space area in the Village Center for activities and gatherings. When the Barrington United Methodist Church at Hough Street and Lincoln Avenues burned in 1998, the opportunity arose for the Village to purchase the property and turn it into such a park.

Then-trustee Beth Raseman was enlisted to spearhead the project, with former Village President and Cuba Township Supervisor David Nelson and Barrington Township Supervisor Gene Dawson leading the effort to raise private donations. After much community discussion and brainstorming about the best use of the land—and in light of the then-recent September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks—a “passive park” dedicated to our public safety officers was decided upon.

“We felt that this was a wonderful opportunity to create a memorial to all of our first responders and to have a beautiful park right in our downtown area, which had been part of our Master Plan,” says Raseman. “9/11 had just happened, and also, one of our Barrington police officers had had a heart attack and passed away during an on-duty call, which was the first time an active duty officer had passed in the Village. Memorial Park became a way to show our community’s respect and gratitude for our public safety officers.”

As is the custom in Barrington, everyone pitched in to help. Nelson and Dawson got donations from the public, which funded the park, including

a sculptor who created the park’s beautiful bronze statues based on actual police and firemen as models. Others from the community donated landscaping services and the hand-cut archway at the entrance. Members of the community purchased brick pavers, which are engraved with donor names, with the center section reserved for the names of public safety officers.

“We finished the park in time for the second anniversary of September 11, and we held our dedication ceremony on September 11, 2003,” says Raseman. “It was a true collaborative effort that became a wonderful commemorative and respectful space, as well as a community gathering place for events such as the annual Scarecrow Festival.”



*Right: The bronze sculptures in Memorial Park were paid for by donations and were modeled after actual public safety officers.*



*The community came together after September 11, 2001 to create “Memorial Park” on Hough Street. From left: Gene Dawson, Beth Raseman, Steve Miller, David Nelson, and Jeff Lawler.*



*Several of the original members of the Village's Strategic Planning group envisioned "al fresco" dining around town, which is now prevalent throughout Barrington, including at NeoTeca. From left: Jerry Conners, Ginny Conners, David Schmidt, and Ron Hamelberg.*

## 2006–2015: VILLAGE CENTER REDEVELOPMENT

After the success of Cook Street Plaza, the Village once again decided to take advantage of the TIF District and purchase properties along the southwest corner of the Hough/Main intersection for a new development. The site had stood empty as an abandoned gas station for years, and it was becoming unsightly on the downtown square.

The first step, according to Village President Karen Darch, was to purchase adjacent properties so that the Village could provide a comprehensive site to a potential developer, who would be more interested in the project if he or she did not have to purchase all the properties separately. As was the case in other projects, several events coalesced to afford this opportunity.

“When Gary Hines (owner of Chuck Hines, a former men’s clothing store on Main Street) let us know that he would be leaving his downtown location, we felt that the time was right to consider purchasing these adjacent properties to add to the space where the [Citgo] gas station had stood,” Darch said. “So, in 2006 we began buying the properties with TIF funding, including the Chase building [at the corner of Hough and Station Streets] as well as the Chuck Hines building and the White House.”

During the next two years, Peggy Blanchard and Village Board and staff entertained proposals from developers for the site. But then the bottom dropped out of both the real estate and the stock market during the Great Recession in 2008–09, and suddenly, all plans stalled.

“Everything came to a halt and nothing was moving for several years,” Darch says. “We had torn down the Chase building, so now we had a big, empty parking lot right on our main corner in town. It kind of became a local symbol of the Recession. People often would ask me why things weren’t moving more quickly on that corner, but the truth was that the Recession had brought development to a stop, and we also had turned down proposals from developers that we knew would not be the right fit for our Village. We needed to wait for the right time and the right project.”

Patience paid off. As the nation began to edge toward economic recovery in 2011, the Village began discussions with Arthur Hill & Company and Envision Realty Advisors (AHC ERA HM, LLC) to partner with the Village. The developer team was led by Peter Rusnak, and his group envisioned developing a retail center that called for 31,000 square feet of retail space along Main Street, with 150 adjacent parking spots to be created in back along Station Street as a part of the development.

Blanchard, Village Manager Jeff Lawler, Village staff, and the commissions of the Village Board worked with Rusnak and his group to refine the plans and create the beautiful stone-façade buildings that now are home to anchors Starbucks, Shakou, Egg Harbor, and NeoTeca, as well as Blue-mercury, AT&T, 18|8 Men’s Salon, College nannies + sitters + tutors, and AssureVision.

“When we first started the strategic plan, we felt that bringing al fresco dining to Barrington was a major opportunity to energize the downtown,” says Blanchard. “It is so wonderful to see our community eating outdoors upon the sidewalks, on the rooftop at Shakou, or at the beautiful outdoor spaces at our other restaurants. During the summer, this element brings the town alive.”

But perhaps the most significant aspect of this development plan was the creative and unique structure of the redevelopment deal. “The Village is a true partner with AHC ERA HM, LLC,” says Blanchard. “While the developer owns the buildings themselves, the Village has maintained control of

## What is a TIF District?

The first step toward implementing these bold plans was to create a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District to provide a mechanism for public and private funding to work together to achieve the Village’s goal of a revitalized downtown. There is often confusion about what a TIF District is and how it works.

A TIF district covers a designated area which has met certain criteria regarding the need for redevelopment in order to qualify as a TIF. A portion of the property tax revenue generated from the properties in the TIF area is used by the municipality to spur the redevelopment in that area; for example, by putting properties together for private development, creating new streetscapes, or offering private owners building enhancement programs.

The remainder of the tax revenue generated from the value of the TIF district properties before the TIF’s creation continues to be paid to the municipality and other taxing bodies (school, library, park district, etc.). The TIF district ends after 23 years, and at that time, all property tax revenues generated from it thereafter are once again paid to all the taxing bodies, so that everyone benefits from the newly developed, more valuable properties.

In Barrington’s case, a 98-acre TIF District was created in 2000 and includes the majority of the Village Center as encompassed by the Village Center Master Plan. The Project Area includes 22 full and partial blocks in the area generally bounded by the east line of the EJ&E Railroad on the west; Station Street, Lake Street, and Main Street frontage on the south; Northwest Highway, Cook Street and North Avenue on the east; and Main Street, Franklin Street, Washington Street, Liberty Street, and the EJ&E Railroad on the north.

The TIF district is set to expire in 2023, at which time the full amount of the property taxes on those developments will return to the Village and the other local taxing bodies.

the land and the parking lot. We have a ground lease with the developer at a nominal cost. This structure allowed for the Village to maintain control of the land and future use of the property, while the developer owns and manages the improvements and receives all the benefits of owning a retail shopping center. We are very proud of our partnership with the development team.”

## 2013–2015: A NEW COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL CENTER: BARRINGTON’S WHITE HOUSE

As downtown redevelopment and revitalization were moving into full swing, another major community effort was underway at the Robertson House across from Jewel, a long-time community treasure that was designed by architect Fred Lines, and built in 1898 by Julia and John Robertson. It was home to numerous families and businesses over the decades.



*Barrington Trustee Jim Daluga and Bryan McGonigal were instrumental in revitalizing the Cook Street area by bringing McGonigal's, an authentic Irish pub, to the old First State Bank of Barrington building.*

The Village had purchased the building in the late 2000s as a part of the Village Center redevelopment. But community leaders had a special vision for this historic home.

“We envisioned the White House becoming the hub of cultural and community activity in Barrington,” says Karen Darch. “We were lacking such a gathering place in the Village, and we knew that this building had the potential to become just such a space.”

A steering committee was formed. The group decided there would be both private and public events within the house’s three stories, with the first floor serving as a public space for small gatherings, cultural events, and receptions. The third floor, originally a ballroom for the Robertsons, would be restored and provide a larger event space for musical events, weddings, and corporate meetings or community gatherings. Meanwhile, the second floor would be renovated to provide space for three nonprofit community organizations, which would pay rent to help support the upkeep of the building.

Once again, Village and community leaders came together to raise private funds to support the complete renovation and restoration of the historic structure. Beth Raseman was again tapped to manage the project, while local philanthropist Mary Smith was chosen to chair the Steering Committee to oversee fundraising, renovation, and interior decorating. Smith, along with Karen Darch, Molly Hamman, Tom Hayward, David Nelson, Freddie Smith Pederson, Beth Raseman, and Gillian Stoettner, raised more than \$6.8 million over a multi-year campaign to support the 2015 opening of the White House, which coincided with the Village’s Sesquicentennial Celebration that year. Over 650 donors supported the effort, with leadership gifts from the Smith Family, Kim Duchossois, Barbara and Paul Hills, and the Richard J Stephenson Family.

Led by Barrington-based Pepper Construction, skilled tradespeople meticulously restored the house inside and out, including all the woodwork, pocket doors, and floors. The original stained glass windows were cleaned and repaired, and new stain glass windows were made for the landings and over the front door. The original foundation was reconditioned and the basement was dug out with new drain tiles put in. The roof was removed and replaced to address the renovation of the ballroom. Every detail, including the décor and furniture, was painstakingly and thoughtfully considered to make the house a true community gem.

Today, the White House is now listed on the National Register for Historic Places and has quickly become the cultural and community hub that had been envisioned. Cultural events from art receptions, musical performances, and guest lectures occur all season long. The house plays host to a multitude of weddings, showers, corporate and nonprofit meetings, fundraising receptions, and more.

“All of us in the Barrington area could not be more thrilled with the White House project,” says Karen Darch. “Our community is so generous with its time, talents, and resources, and this house has become a cornerstone of what Barrington is all about.”

## 20 YEARS LATER: A SOLID VISION, A CHANGEABLE PATH

The redevelopment of so many critical areas in Barrington’s downtown over the past 20 years has shown that when community leaders come together and create a long-range vision, wonderful things can happen. But those who were involved will tell you that the path to achieving the plan was never easy, nor was it straight.

“Our vision and the strategic plan kept us focused, but there were many twists and turns along the way,”




*Some of the White House Steering Committee members are (from left) David Nelson, Mary Smith, Beth Raseman, and Peggy Blanchard. (Photo: Susan McConnell)*

says Darch. “We had four years in the early 2000s where our Village government was in turmoil, with little forward progress being made. And that certainly set us back. And then once we got going again, we ran into the Great Recession. But we stuck with it, and the revitalized downtown that we see today, just 20 years after we began this journey, is a testament to what can be done when everyone works together and keeps their eye on the long-term goal.”

Linda Goodman of Goodman Williams Group, a real estate research firm that has worked with area suburbs on downtown redevelopment projects, was enlisted to help the Village with a market analysis study in 2006. She says, “At the time, I was very impressed with both the talent of the Village Board and Economic Development staff as well as the seriousness with which they undertook their redevelopment project,” she says. “The Village

clearly understood the importance of a plan that recognized the market realities of Barrington—that it was a transit-oriented downtown and that it wanted to keep its small-town character. They were also willing to make strategic modifications to the plan when it was required, such as when the housing crisis hit in 2009.”

Goodman was also impressed with the fact that in 2012, Heinen’s Grocery Store chose Barrington for its first location outside of its hometown Northeast Ohio market. “That was very significant,” she says. “Heinen’s had a number of choices for its first Chicago-area location, and the fact that they chose Barrington really showed the market that Barrington was the place to be.”

Long-time Village Trustee Jim Daluga has been a part of the redevelopment process since the early 2000s as well. “It’s critical to have a plan,” he says. “But you have to be willing to change and adjust the plan as circumstances dictate. We certainly did that over the past 20 years, but I think that all of us who have been involved are very pleased with where things are today, and where Barrington is headed for the future.” 

*Patty Dowd Schmitz is a long-time Barrington resident who works for the Village of Barrington as its Communications, Marketing & Events Manager. Learn more about the Village of Barrington at [www.barrington-il.gov](http://www.barrington-il.gov).*

*Photographer Linda M. Barrett is a regular contributor to QB magazine. Visit her work at [www.lindambarrettproductions.com](http://www.lindambarrettproductions.com).*

*Special thanks to Dana Shadrack of Barrington for the use of his photos taken in town in the year 2000. He was also a contributor to the chapter on trains and railroads in QB’s Special Edition for the Sesquicentennial in 2015. Copies are available at Village Hall.*