

Municipal officials tout Harlem Avenue development

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Five years after the commercial real estate market took a nosedive, officials in several southwest suburbs said Wednesday they're seeing signs of a rebound.

As part of a tour for real estate brokers and developers sponsored by the Southwest Conference of Mayors, municipal officials had a chance to show off development opportunities along the Harlem Avenue Corridor.

Packed into two Pace buses, the tour started at Bridgeview's Toyota Park and ended in Orland Park. Along with showing properties they say are ripe for development, the suburban officials talked up the attributes of their towns and highlighted projects that are in the works.

On the fringe of the soccer stadium's parking lot, on the west side of Harlem Avenue, Circle K plans a gas station and convenience store, and Bridgeview is trying to spur interest in other outlots next to Toyota Park, Joe Kaput, director of the village's building department, told passengers on one of the buses.

While that interest has been somewhat slow to materialize, "I think this is all going to start turning around real quick," Kaput said.

He said the village is trying to be somewhat selective regarding new business development, but it's clear that after years of stagnant activity, communities are eager to see something happen.

In promoting land Oak Lawn has available for development at 95th Street and Harlem Avenue, Mayor Sandra Bury urged developers to be "bodacious" in their plans.

"We're looking for anything," she said.

In Palos Heights, a long-shuttered Ben Franklin store on Harlem Avenue is slated for demolition and redevelopment as Palos Place, which will have retail space on the first floor, offices on the second and apartments on the third, Mayor Bob Straz said.

Also in his city, tentative plans are being floated for a project that would include retail and office space at the northeast corner of Harlem Avenue and College Drive, where a car dealership once stood, Straz said.

Among the most ambitious plans is in Chicago Ridge, where officials hope to redevelop the vacant, 65-acre YRC truck terminal and an adjacent 35 acres. Called Ridge Creek Centre, preliminary designs include an outdoor music theater, multi-story hotels, offices and restaurants.

The property is still owned by YRC, the parent company of Yellow Freight, and no developers have yet committed to make Ridge Creek a reality.

“Anything could go there,” Mayor Chuck Tokar said. “It’s full of potential.”

