

## First Street

## First Street, L.L.C.

St. Charles, Kane County

Creating a new mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly downtown for St. Charles, Ill.

### The Development

Located in St. Charles, Ill., First Street is a mixed-use, mixed-income development that has created a new, pedestrian-oriented downtown district for the city. The project will help to preserve the area's historical and small-town qualities, develop underutilized land, maintain diverse retail options, capitalize on its magnificent waterfront location along the Fox River, and eventually spur further, long-term development in downtown St. Charles.

The City of St. Charles saw an opportunity to build a more vibrant downtown district that would attract residents and visitors. In 2000, the city adopted the Downtown Strategy Plan, which outlined long-term goals and identified First Street as the largest area suitable for additional investment and development. In accordance with these larger goals, in 2002, the city, in consultation with the First Street Task Force and community members, adopted the First Street Guidelines to direct development over the next several years. Part of the area was designated within a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district in March 2002. Once funding was in place, the project got underway in May 2006 and is expected to be complete by mid-2012.



### Target

To create a new mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly downtown for St. Charles' residents.

### Development Information

**Type:** Retail, Office/Commercial, Residential

**Retail Space:** approx. 136,500 sq. ft.

**Office/Commercial Space:** approx. 115,000 sq. ft.

**Total Residential Units:** 79 condos and 16 apartments

**Total Affordable Units:** 16

### Funding Sources

Tax Increment Financing (TIF); private financing; \$67 million invested by developers; federal grant, in conjunction with METRA, to fund the parking deck.

### Success

As such a large-scale project, First Street required a massive amount of coordination between various interests and stakeholders. Staff from six city departments now work on the project, and help to coordinate the interests and assistance of six consulting firms, four architects, three state agencies, three federal agencies, and five landowners with 20 parcels of land in the project area. Also, public outreach is crucial, not only to get input on the initial plans, but to inform residents about development and construction progress.

### Lessons Learned

The city established a public commission to provide input on the designs for First Street's open spaces (two plazas and a riverwalk). Because the city established the commission after all architectural and engineering specifications had been finalized and approved, it was difficult for the committee to work within physical and budgetary limitations for these spaces. It would have been valuable to have had this input on the open spaces at the front end of the design process.

## First Street

## First Street, L.L.C.

St. Charles, Kane County

The First Street Redevelopment Project is located on 7.42 acres, and includes five city blocks in the heart of downtown St. Charles. The First Street Redevelopment Area is bounded by Main Street on the north, the Fox River on the east, Mount St. Mary's Park on the south, and Second Street (Route 31) on the west. When the development is complete, it will include approximately 136,500 sq. ft. of retail space (including a new Blue Goose supermarket), approximately 115,000 sq. ft. of office or commercial space, 79 condos, and 16 apartments — the latter which are affordable for-sale and rental units. The development plan also includes two public garages, street parking, and surface parking lots (943 spaces in total).

Improvements include pedestrian-oriented streetscape features such as wider sidewalks, crosswalks, planters, and greenery, and well as improved electric, water and sewer facilities. First Street also comprises a number of public spaces, including a two-level riverwalk along the Fox River, and two larger plazas. River Terrace Plaza leads to the riverwalk, and First Street Place is intended to function as a gathering place for various activities, from farmer's markets to festivals to musical events.

Because First Street is located in the St. Charles Historic District, the city and developers worked with the Historic Preservation Commission to ensure the new buildings would complement the existing architecture. The project has spurred significant environmental improvements to the area, including better floodplain management and water quality for the Fox River, brownfield renewal benefits (for the site that previously carried heavy industry), and better air quality through reduced vehicle trips.

### Creating Affordability

First Street, L.L.C., incorporated affordable homes into the First Street Development even prior to the 2008 passage of St. Charles' Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance. The city negotiated First Street's affordable set aside with the developer on a voluntary basis in 2007. The development has 16 affordable apartments, all of which were leased by October 2008. First Street's affordable housing

component has served as a model for how to incorporate affordable housing under the inclusionary zoning ordinance.

### Financing

Jointly financed by public and private ventures, the project is expected to exceed \$105 million, with developers investing \$67 million. The establishment of a TIF district was very significant and helped to spur initial development activities and finance the project overall. The First Street TIF district provided funding for land acquisition, demolition, infrastructure installation, a public plaza, a parking structure, environment site assessment, and other soft costs.

St. Charles also entered into an agreement where METRA would apply to the Federal Transit Administration (with funds from SAFETEA-LU) to finance the parking deck, with the understanding it was part of an intermodal commuter hub. METRA will reimburse the city \$3,753,347 upon completion of the project over four years.

### Public Involvement

St. Charles sought public input on the creation of both the Downtown Strategy Plan in 2000, and the First Street Guidelines in 2002. A public workshop in June 2002, in which participants worked in small groups to provide feedback on First Street's initial plans, greatly contributed to the overall vision for the development articulated in the First Street Guidelines.

The city has also kept the public updated on the project's development and construction. Anyone can subscribe to *First Street e-news*, which is sent out weekly. The city also posts weekly updates on its web site, maintains a hotline to take questions, and provides a detailed progress report in every city newsletter. These efforts not only inform the public about the development, but excite and engage residents as well.

**Contact** Rita Tungare, Community Development Planner  
**Phone** 630.443.3676  
**Email** rtungare@stcharlesil.gov

As of February 2010