

Mell predicts rosy future for 33rd Ward

Alderman taking a second look at traffic circles for Ravenswood Manor

By **PATRICK BUTLER**

Staff Writer

Things are looking better than ever in the 33rd Ward, Ald. Richard Mell told his advisory council last week.

"A lot of my biggest worries seem to have been solved just in the past few weeks," an ecstatic Mell said, noting that the redevelopment of the 3100 block of West Irving Park Road is now "one store away" and that Kedzie Avenue bus service should resume by the end of 1999.

During his report at the group's Thursday, Jan. 22, meeting at Horner Park, 2741 W. Montrose Ave., Mell said Walgreens is ready to build on the northeast corner of Irving Park Road and Kedzie as soon as the owner of one remaining parcel in the middle of that block agrees to sell.

Only a few weeks ago, Mell had predicted the revitalization of that strip might take longer than originally planned after Delray Foods dropped out as the project's anchor store.

But that was before Walgreens stepped in, said Mell, adding that the pharmacy chain will also continue operating its store at Kedzie and Montrose.

Another positive turnabout, he added, is the possibility of restoring bus service along Kedzie from Logan Square to Bryn Mawr Avenue, where a new charter high school is scheduled to open by the end of 1999.

According to Mell, CTA officials have told him about initial plans to run the buses only on weekdays, "I think we'll be able to get Saturday and Sunday service as well," Mell said.

Local organizations like ACT-NOW had been pressing for a resumption of even limited bus service along Kedzie, especially to accommodate the area's large senior population.

The day after the ward meeting, CTA spokesman Jeff Stern said that, "It's a little early to make a statement on this. We're aware that they are planning this high school and I'm sure we'll be working with the appropriate people, but there's no decision about (resuming bus service) at this time."

Mell added that he got still another shot of good news when he recently learned that two manufacturers are interested in the site at Kimball Avenue and Addison Street, which was previously eyed by Home Depot.

"Addison is already too congested, especially when you've got three high schools -- Gordon, Lane and Schurz -- and Cubs Park along that street," Mell said.

A "big box" store isn't going in there, said Mell, adding that if the "good, clean industrial plants" don't take the site, "I'll get some residential in there."

But "Industry is my first choice," said Mell, adding that he may even get community residents and organizations to write to the current property owners -- International Paper Co. -- asking them to "be good neighbors" and not try to hold out for higher offers from prospective residential developers.

And Mell conceded there's plenty of developer interest in the ward these days.

"Our office probably gets calls from one or two developers a week asking about properties here," said Mell, adding that when the ward boundaries were redrawn, "I seriously considered retirement because I had some real concerns about the future of Albany Park."

Turning to other issues, Mell promised to "re-evaluate" both permit parking and "traffic circles" in his ward.

Mell said "zoned parking" has already been rescinded on the 4200 block of North Albany Avenue and, "We'll be talking to people block by block to see if we really need it.

"A lot of the people who originally supported it aren't even here anymore."

"And there are plenty of people who would switch their vote," a woman in the back of the room added.

Opinions have also changed on the "traffic circles" scheduled to go into the Ravenswood Manor area this spring, said local residents Glenn Swift and Frank Newell.

Swift said he originally thought "traffic calmers" sounded like a good idea, "Until I changed jobs and started driving a big truck for a living. It may have seemed like the way to go, but I think we need to go back to the drawing board."

Fire Department Chief William Kugleman agreed.

"They keep buying us bigger and bigger apparatus that can't get around those things," said Kugleman, who works out of the firehouse at 4426 N. Kedzie Ave.

Newell distributed a memo from Assistant Deputy Fire Commissioner Biagio Gariti noting that, while the department has no objections to a traffic circle at Wilson and Francisco avenues, it advises against putting them along Sunnyside Avenue at California, Francisco, and Sacramento avenues and Mozart and Richmond streets.

The May 16 memo to Bob Cyboran of the city Transportation Department warned that traffic circles at those locations would seriously impede emergency vehicles which often use Sunnyside Avenue when Montrose Avenue is too congested.

"We expect problems in this area similar to what we are experiencing in the Edgewater area: cars parked too close to the traffic circles; vandalized no-parking signs; and less-than-adequate enforcement of the parking restrictions," Gariti wrote in his memo.

Noting that, "The people in Ravenswood Manor have never been shy about anything," Mell promised to "take another look" at the traffic-circle concept.

"I don't want to have people coming to me telling me that because of these things," Mell said, "the Fire Department couldn't respond quickly enough and their house burned down."

Comments, compliments or complaints about this story?

[\[News-Star/Booster\]](#) | [\[Local Newspapers\]](#) | [\[In The Loop Homepage\]](#)