



COMMERCIAL WINNER

Bethel Commercial Center

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Bethel Commercial Center is a mixed-use transit-oriented commercial center adjacent to a Green Line “L” station in a low-income neighborhood on Chicago’s west side. The 22,000-square-foot (2,044-m²) center includes ground-floor retail space, employment and job-training offices, a bank—the only full-service one in the neighborhood—and a daycare center, allowing residents to drop off and pick up children and to get to and from work, all without the use of a car. The building, which uses approximately 50 percent less energy than conventional construction, achieved a LEED-Gold rating in 2008.



JURY STATEMENT

Arising out of a community effort to activate development along the Green Line train route serving Chicago’s West Garfield neighborhood, Bethel Commercial Center houses ground-floor retail space, employment and job-training offices, the only full-service bank in the neighborhood, and a daycare center, allowing residents to drop off and pick up children and commute to and from work, all without the use of a car.



DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Owner/Developer
Bethel New Life
Chicago, Illinois
www.bethelnewlife.org

Design Architect
Farr Associates
Chicago, Illinois
www.farrside.com



The idea for Bethel Commercial Center developed in the late 1990s from a community response to save the Green Line train route, which serves Chicago's West Garfield neighborhood. The community, where only 6 percent of residents own cars, had lost more than 60 percent of its residents since 1960; of those who remained, approximately one-third had incomes below the poverty line. The potential closure of the Lake/Pulaski "L" station and entire Green Line threatened to sever the already isolated neighborhood from downtown employment opportunities.

Bethel New Life, a community development corporation affiliated with West Garfield's historic Bethel Lutheran Church, recognized the threat posed to the neighborhood by the planned closure. Having built more than 1,000 residential units and rehabilitated an old hospital, Bethel New Life was already invested in the community and formulated the Lake Pulaski Transit Village Plan to prove the viability of the station and line. The plan called for affordable, energy-efficient homes, commercial development, and expanded parks and greenways. At the center of the plan was the proposed Bethel Commercial Center, where new jobs, improved transportation, and affordable child care would come together.

The plan worked. Rather than close the elevated train line, the Chicago Transit Authority announced it would renovate the station as part of a \$300 million upgrade to the Green Line. The public improvements catalyzed the revitalization, jump-starting the redevelopment of the West Garfield neighborhood. The linchpin of this resurgence was the two-story Bethel Commercial



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALAN SHORTALL PHOTOGRAPHY (26); BALLOGG PHOTOGRAPHY (27L, 28L, 28R, 29); FARR ASSOCIATES (27R)



Center, which sits on the north side of the Lake/Pulaski station and connects directly to the station by a bridge.

The second level of Bethel Commercial Center combines an employment services office, which provides job counseling and placement, with the Community Technology Center, which offers computer and Internet training. It also houses the child care facilities, which provide affordable child care to parents who work or attend school. On the ground floor are six retail spaces, occupied by a sandwich shop, an attorney's office, two nonprofit foundations, a child development facility, and the neighborhood's only bank, offering residents an alternative to payday lending and check-cashing establishments.

In addition to promoting economic and social stability in the neighborhood, Bethel Commercial Center was designed to be sustainable. The brownfield project uses water-efficient landscaping and low-flow plumbing fixtures to cut water use by approximately 30 percent. A green roof absorbs stormwater, reducing the amount of runoff reaching the city sewer system. Two photovoltaic systems—a 25-kilowatt roof tile array and a 6.6-kilowatt awning system—provide approximately 11 percent of the building's power, and the green roof and high-thermal-mass insulation limit temperature fluctuations throughout the day, reducing heating and cooling loads.

The financing for the \$4.9 million project, somewhat complicated by the incorporation of green technologies, was funded through a mix of grants and new market tax credits.

Bethel Commercial Center has spurred new development in the neighborhood, including more than 100 affordable housing units, a new park, and a planned grocery store. "The Bethel Commercial Center is the anchor of a larger commitment to activate redevelopment along the Green Line," according to Stacey Flint, senior director, real estate development for Bethel New Life.

PROJECT DATA

Web Site

<http://www.farrside.com/RoomToRegion.aspx?cat=2&sub=1&id=1>

Site Area

0.53 acres (0.21 ha)

Facilities

22,000 sf (2,044 m²) commercial

Land Use

office, retail, education, restaurant

Start/Completion Dates

May 2003–August 2005