

Comprehensive Plan

City of Oak Forest, Illinois

Background Report: Community-Wide & Sub-Area Conditions, Issues & Opportunities

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HNTB

In association with GOODMAN WILLIAMS GROUP

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I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Oak Forest, Illinois has initiated a rewrite of its 1964 Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is the City's official policy guide for future land use, development and conservation within the community. The new Plan will address land use, transportation, community facilities, open space, housing, and economic development from a community-wide perspective, while also placing an emphasis on development, transportation, and urban design issues within the Oak Forest Metra Station Sub-Area. This Background Report is the first major element of the rewrite process.

It is important to emphasize that a Comprehensive Plan is a policy guide. Unlike codes and ordinances that are legally enforceable, the Comprehensive Plan will be an advisory tool to be consulted by the Planning and Zoning Commission, City Council, staff and other officials when land use changes, capital facilities or other projects are considered. It is long-range in orientation and intended to express general community aspirations. Yet, it is specific enough to guide day-to-day activities of the Planning and Zoning Commission, City Council and City staff.

NEED FOR AN UPDATED PLAN

The City of Oak Forest is located approximately 20 miles southwest of downtown Chicago. The City gets its name from the original oak forests that were in the area, some of which remain today within Cook County forest preserves located on the periphery of the community. The City's history dates back to the 1800s and the area currently known as Oak Forest was originally called Cooper's Grove, named after Mr. Cooper who settled in the area in the 1830s. The area became more populated as people settled to farm in what is now Oak Forest in the mid to late 1840s. The Cooper's Grove post office was renamed New Bremen in 1848, and neighboring Tinley Park was part of the community known as New Bremen until it was incorporated in 1892.

A major catalyst in the growth of Oak Forest is the Cook County Oak Forest Hospital which was established in response to overcrowded conditions at the County Poor Farm, which was located on the northwest side of Chicago. This institution was completed in 1910 as the Oak Forest Infirmary, and by 1932 accommodated more than 4,000 patients who were destitute due to poverty, mental illness, and other health problems including tuberculosis. This hospital remains an



important part of the Cook County health care system, providing over 600 patient beds and employing approximately 2,400 people.

The community was incorporated in 1947 as a village, at which time it was populated with 1,618 residents. Oak Forest experienced significant growth in the 1960s, and by 1970 had a population of almost 18,000 residents. Oak Forest incorporated as a city in 1971, and since that time, it has continued to grow and is now comprised of 28,051 residents, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Oak Forest is ideally located with excellent access to the regional transportation system, as its southern boundary intersects Interstate 57 (I-57). The Metra station located at 159th Street and Cicero provides commuters with easy access to downtown Chicago. Residents also benefit from access to high-quality municipal facilities, schools, institutions, and services. Other amenities include an abundance of forest preserve land with trails and bikeways on the periphery of the City and a large number of community parks and other public facilities. There is also a public golf course on the periphery of the City. [Figure 1: Vicinity Map](#) on the following page identifies the location of Oak Forest, along with surrounding communities and regional access routes.

The City's current Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1964. As useful as it once was, the passage of time has rendered this document largely obsolete. Updates to the City's land use map were adopted in 1997, and a plan update addressing the corner of 159th Street and Cicero Avenue was undertaken in 2000. However, a community-wide assessment of all issues impacting the community's future has not been completed since 1964. For this reason, the City has undertaken the development of a new Plan that will address the changed conditions in and around the City and provide effective policy guidance over the next 10 to 15 years.

In addition, the new comprehensive plan will include a sub-area plan for the Oak Forest Metra Station Sub-Area. This separate plan element includes more detailed recommendations for land use, circulation, parking, multi-modal access, and urban design for the area within approximately one-quarter mile of the Metra station.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the updated Comprehensive Plan is being guided by a Steering Committee comprised of local officials, residents, representatives of City organizations, and members of the business community (see Appendix A for a complete listing of Committee members). The planning process is being facilitated by HNTB Corporation, an urban planning and design consulting firm. HNTB is assisted by Goodman Williams Group, a firm that provides market assessment expertise.



Oak Forest Comprehensive Plan Process

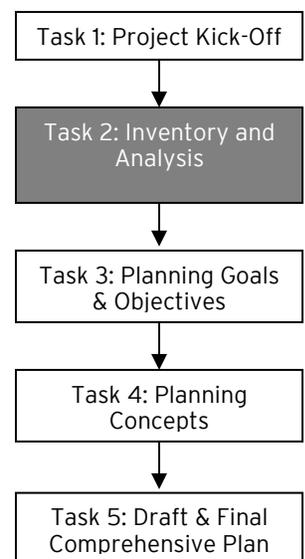
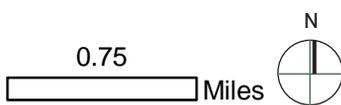
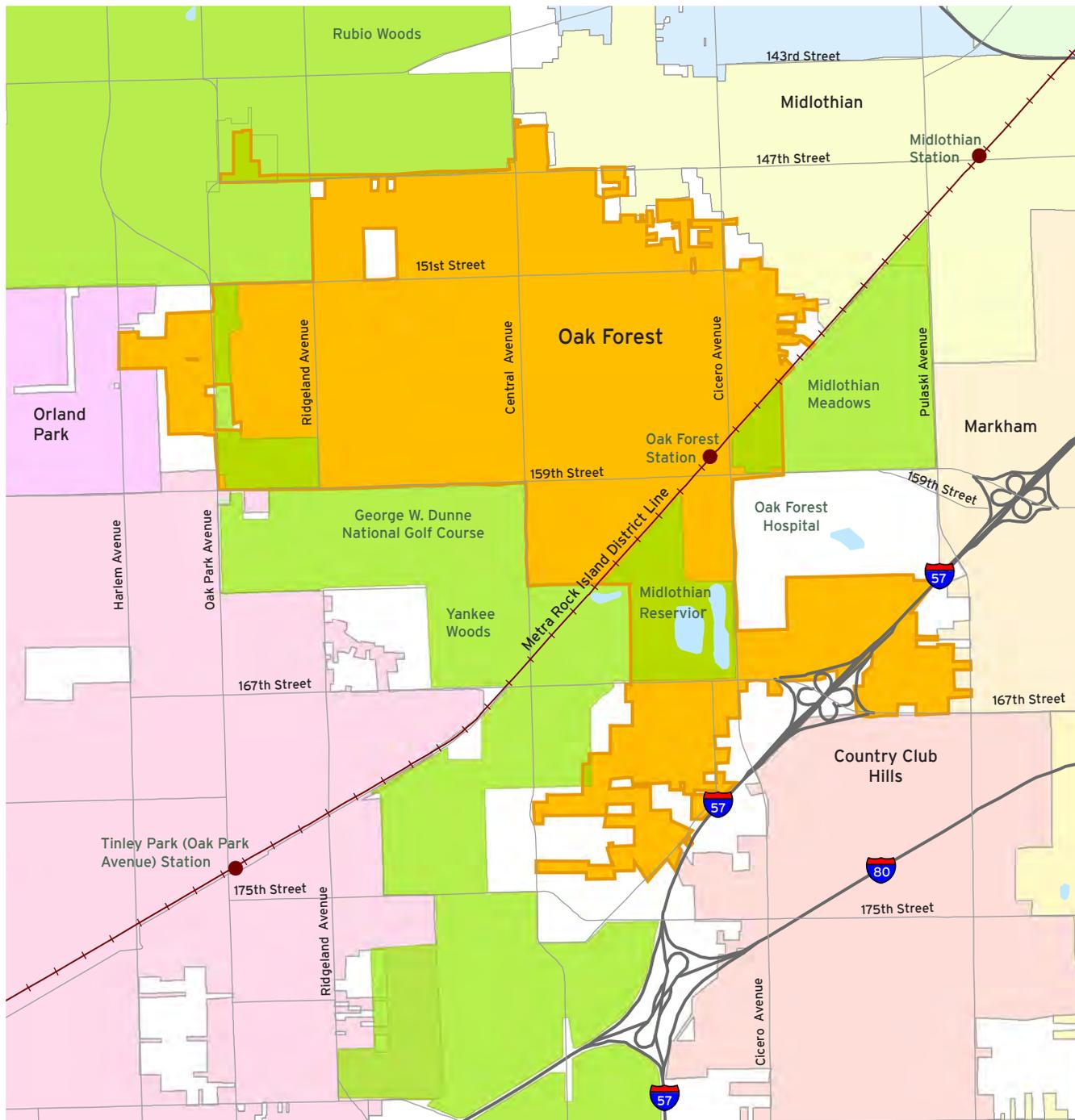


FIGURE 1

VICINITY MAP



This report culminates the second major task in the Comprehensive Plan process, following project kick-off activities. It summarizes the results of background analysis on existing community conditions and public input provided to-date. After review and discussion of the contents of this report with the Steering Committee and interested members of the public, the consultants will work with the Steering Committee to develop preliminary planning goals and objectives and physical planning concepts for the City as a whole, as well as the Oak Forest Metra Station Sub-Area. The alternative plan concepts will be presented to interested members of the public for review and comment. The Steering Committee will select a preferred land use concept for the community as a whole and the sub-area and authorize the consultant to prepare a complete draft of the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan document will set forth long-range plans and policies for community-wide systems, including future land use, transportation, community facilities and open space, and natural and environmental features, and will comply with all current requirements of the State of Illinois' Local Planning Technical Assistance Act. The Plan will also include specific recommendations and an illustrative plan for the sub-area.

After review and approval of the draft Comprehensive Plan by the Steering Committee and the community, it will be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Commission for review and comment at a public hearing. After refinement based upon Planning and Zoning Commission and public comments, the final Comprehensive Plan will be sent to the City Council with a recommendation for adoption. Once adopted by the City Council, the Comprehensive Plan becomes the policy guide for the City with regard to land use and development issues until such time as it is updated again.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT TO-DATE

Meetings and other public involvement activities have been conducted to share information on the planning process and to solicit input regarding planning issues and opportunities within the City. Activities have included the following:

- Steering Committee Kick-Off Meeting, November 7, 2006
- Community Workshop and Visual Preference Survey, November 30, 2006
- Key Person Interviews, January 8, 10, 19 and 31, 2007
- Community Facilities Surveys, distributed in January, 2007

Comments received at meetings have been recorded and summarized for future reference by the Steering Committee and consultants. In addition, information about community issues and aspirations were



gleaned from a recent community survey, the results of which were released in November 2006. Complete summaries of comments received during the aforementioned meetings and from relevant sections of the City's community survey are included as an Appendix to this report.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report includes six main sections, as follows:

Physical Context - This section describes: the locational framework of the City; the planning area; existing land uses and conditions; community character and identity features; access and circulation; and community facilities and resources.

Policy Context - This section provides a general assessment of development regulations and a summary of economic development initiatives currently being undertaken by the City.

Socioeconomic and Market Context - This section, prepared by Goodman Williams Group, contains an overview of demographic characteristics and community-wide market trends.

Oak Forest Metra Station Sub-Area - This section describes existing conditions in the sub-area with an emphasis on land use, parking, access and circulation, intermodal relationships, urban design features and characteristics, and pending development plans.

Issues and Opportunities - This section summarizes the key planning issues the Plan must address and the key opportunities the Plan can build upon, based upon the background research and input summarized elsewhere in the report.

The Appendix contains several important pieces of reference information. This includes identification of the Steering Committee members guiding the work of the process, a list of Stakeholder Interview participants, and complete summaries of meetings conducted to-date. Also included is a summary of selected responses from the community survey conducted by the City that are specifically related to issues that will be addressed in the new Comprehensive Plan.

