



II. COMMUNITY VISION

Throughout the planning process, community input was quite consistent with regard to key concerns and community planning priorities. Overall, the community expressed a willingness to think in a long-range fashion about its future, to be open to change as the community and its surrounding region continue to evolve, and to establish a clear “road map” for the implementation of key planning priorities.

In the recent community-wide survey, 84% of survey respondents indicated that they are at least “satisfied” with their quality of life in Oak Forest. However, fully one-third of respondents indicated that their quality of life was at least “somewhat worse” than it was five years ago. The comprehensive planning process provides a unique opportunity to hone in on the issues that residents consider most troublesome, in order to establish clear policies and implementation strategies to pro-actively address them in the coming years.

Several meetings and other public involvement activities were conducted to share information on the planning process and to solicit input regarding planning issues and opportunities within the City as the Comprehensive Plan was developed. Major meetings held are listed at right.

Comments received at meetings were recorded and summarized for Steering Committee review and consideration. A community-wide survey, the results of which were released by the City in November 2006, also helped to illuminate the preferences of Oak Forest residents. Much of the resulting feedback is summarized in the May 2007 *Background Report*.

2007 Plan Meetings

Kick-Off Meeting:
November 7, 2006

Community Workshop and
Visual Preference Survey:
November 30, 2006

Key Person Interviews:
January 8, 10, 19 & 31, 2007

Community Meeting:
March 12, 2007

Steering Committee
Workshop:
April 30, 2007

Community Meeting:
June 18, 2007

Steering Committee Meeting:
August 30, 2007

Community Meeting:
October 1, 2007

Steering Committee Meeting:
November 14, 2007

Community Meeting:
December 18, 2007

PZC Public Hearing:
January 16, 2008

City Council Adoption:





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ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Key issues and opportunities that were identified through public input, field surveys or other research activities to-date are summarized below in general categories, for ease of reference. A complete listing is available in the May 2007 *Background Report*. These considerations formed the basis for the development of the Goals, Policies and Framework Plans that comprise the Comprehensive Plan.

Key Planning Issues

Community Character and Identity / Urban Design

- The appearance of main corridors detracts from the overall community image
- Remain a moderate-income community
- City divided between east/west, north/south; hard to move between
- Safety and security are a concern

Land Use and Development

- Oak Forest has no "center" or "downtown"
- Commercial corridors are a "hodge-podge"
- Limited annexation opportunities
- Limited sites for large-scale commercial development
- Existing housing is becoming outdated
- A lack of "move up" housing options
- Convenient access to Metra and expressways is key for new residential development

Community Facilities and Services

- Maintain, expand and connect the open space system
- School district lines artificially separate the City
- Maintenance in County areas is insufficient
- Ongoing need for infrastructure renewal, especially as redevelopment occurs
- Respond to findings of water system and storm water management studies (both ongoing)

Access and Circulation

- Links to and between off-street trails are needed
- Commercial corridors are not "walkable" even where sidewalks exist



Oak Forest wants to redefine and strengthen its commercial corridors...



...preserve its unique, small town character...



... and capitalize on nearby natural amenities.





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- Create better pedestrian and bicycle connections between residential neighborhoods and to public areas
- Traffic is increasing on arterials
- Parking lots hard to get in and out of (especially on Cicero)
- Commuter parking demand is expected to increase; how can Oak Forest accommodate more spaces?

Economic Development / Implementation

- Stem “leakage” of commercial revenue to other communities
- Reduce homeowner tax burden
- Competition from Will County for commercial/industrial development
- Appropriate codes and standards not in place to achieve desired development
- Zoning map clarifications are needed

Key Planning Opportunities

Community Character and Identity / Urban Design

- Build on the existing community character; don't try to change it
- Don't become too “commercialized” in appearance
- Embrace increasing community diversity and proactively address emerging needs
- Establish a visual “theme” for continuity along main corridors
- Establish a high quality image with gateway features
- “Raise the bar” with the design of new developments
- Use natural features as visual assets
- Create gathering space(s) for the community
- Enhance public areas (streetscape, medians, parking lot landscaping, etc.)

Land Use and Development

- Build upon the “Gateway TOD” project as a catalyst for further reinvestment
- Prioritize Cicero Avenue revitalization both north and south of 159th, addressing lot depth limitations
- Pursue mixed use development, but not “piecemeal” here and there
- Create clusters of commercial, with restaurants and retail near each other and shared parking





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- Consider strategic annexation and boundary agreements to clarify the City boundary and exercise control over adjacent development patterns
- Conserve and enhance the character of single family neighborhoods
- Encourage reinvestment in single family homes
- Provide varied housing alternatives, including rental housing

Community Facilities and Services

- Maintain and enhance relationships between City and other service providers
- Develop a collaborative response to growing diversity
- Support family-oriented and cultural facilities/programs
- Improve Central Avenue to tie nearby facilities together
- Provide plazas and seating areas adjacent to commercial uses, linked effectively to encourage their use

Access and Circulation

- Build a new, high quality Metra Station
- Improve the “walkability” of commercial corridors (including reducing curb cuts)
- Consolidate access to commercial properties to aid in traffic flow and safety
- Improve connections to commercial areas from neighborhoods (including via pedestrian and bicycle)
- Improve mobility between neighborhoods and across arterials
- Provide convenient parking to support businesses, but in a pedestrian-friendly way
- Accommodate access via all modes of transportation
- Expand and better coordinate local public transit options, especially demand-responsive services (senior mobility, rush hour service to Metra, etc.)
- Expand trail connections within the City and to existing paths at the City’s periphery

Economic Development / Implementation

- 93% of community survey respondents said to aggressively pursue more business development
- Adjust codes to support desired development pattern(s) and quality
- Pursue strong enforcement of City codes
- Establish a marketing strategy to draw in outsiders as shoppers in Oak Forest





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- Proactively work to retain and assist existing businesses
- Work cooperatively with the Chamber to market development opportunities and available incentives to developers

