

II. PHYSICAL CONTEXT

This section of the report describes current physical conditions within Oak Forest. An understanding of the City's physical characteristics provides the foundation for the future land use concepts that will be developed in subsequent steps of the planning process.

LOCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1: Vicinity Map (included in the previous section), establishes the regional context within which the City of Oak Forest is located. The City and its extraterritorial jurisdictional area is located in southwest Cook County. Oak Forest benefits from good regional access via I-57 which runs through the southern portion of the City, and provides connections to other major expressways in the area including Illinois Tollway 294 (I-294) and Interstate 80 (I-80). The City also benefits from significant recreational amenities maintained by the Cook County Forest Preserve District and the Oak Forest Park District. These City assets are discussed in more detail in later sections of this report.

The City is surrounded by several communities. Surrounding communities are Crestwood to the north, Midlothian to the northeast, Markham to the east, County Club Hills to the southeast, Tinley Park to the south/southwest, Orland Park to the west, and Palos Heights to the northwest. To the east, southwest and northwest, a significant buffer of forest preserve land is located between Oak Forest and its neighbors. The updated Plan will need to address potential impacts that new development within surrounding communities may have on Oak Forest, particularly with respect to traffic and economic development.

PLANNING AREA

Planning for the entirety of Oak Forest requires the City to also plan for unincorporated areas. These are areas that are outside of the current City boundaries and within its one and one-half (1-1/2) mile extraterritorial planning jurisdiction (ETJ), provided for by Illinois state law. The unincorporated areas within the City's planning area are indicated on [Figure 2: Planning Area](#) on the following page. The Plan will address future land use and development for the large unincorporated area consisting of approximately 40 acres located at the southeast corner of 167th Street and Cicero Avenue. It should be noted that the planning area is limited by a boundary agreement that the City has with

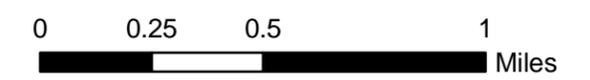
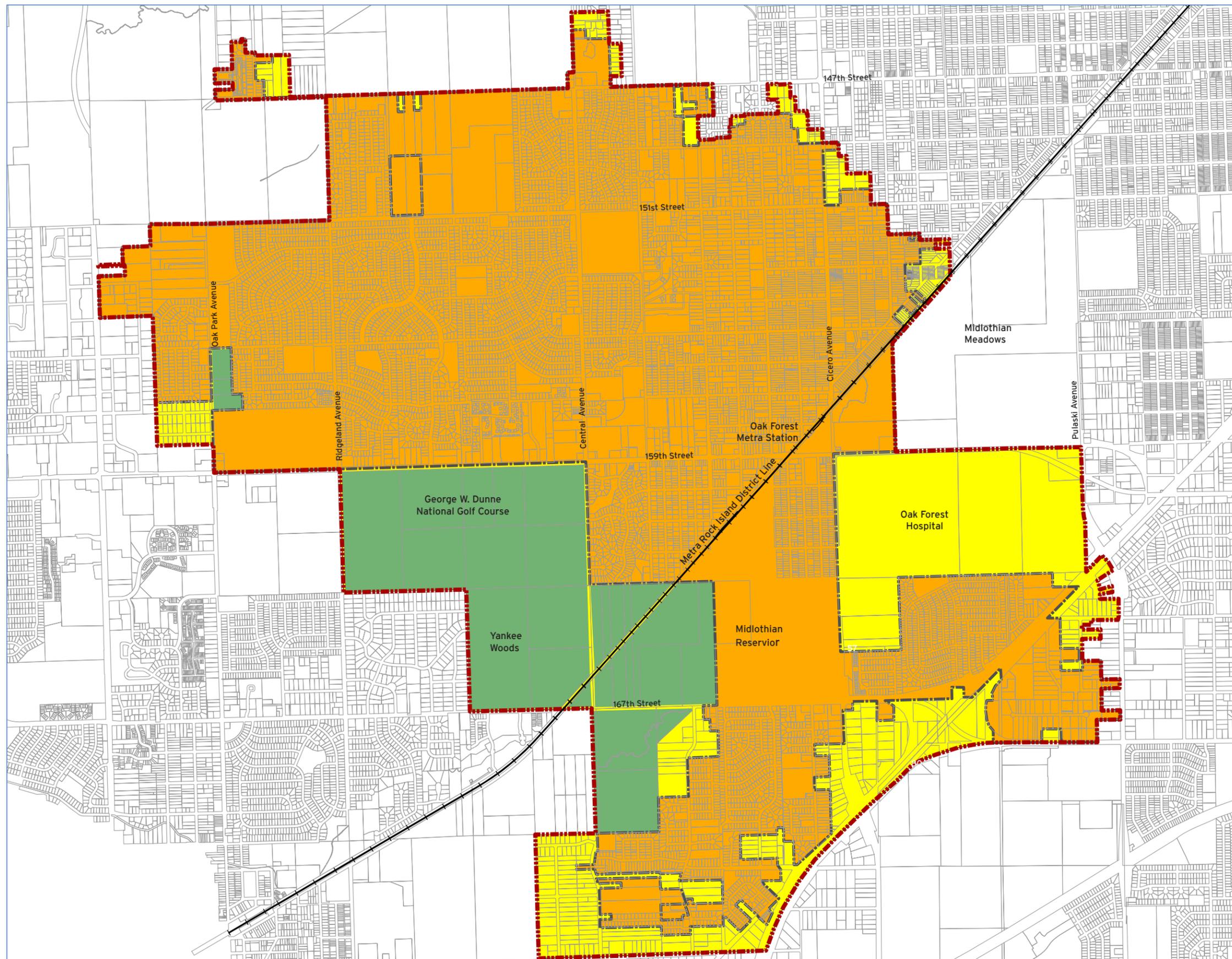


FIGURE 2

PLANNING AREA

LEGEND

-  City Boundary (Includes Forest Preserve)
-  Forest Preserve (Subject to Potential Annexation)
-  Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) Non-Forest Preserve



the neighboring community of Tinley Park. For purposes of this Plan it is presumed that the City does not intend to annex any forest preserve land to the northwest, despite the lack of boundary agreements with Orland Park, Palos Heights, Midlothian or Crestwood.

It is important that Oak Forest clearly state its land use preferences for these adjacent unincorporated areas to help ensure that any future changes do not negatively affect the City and will be consistent with the goals, objectives, policies, and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan. By stating land use preferences, it provides a basis for comment during Cook County's evaluation of proposals for rezoning and subdivision requests. Showing land use preferences also provides the basis for determining appropriate zoning for properties that may be annexed into Oak Forest in the future.

EXISTING LAND USE

This section of the report describes the existing land use pattern within the City. Figure 3: Existing Land Use on the following page graphically depicts this current land use pattern.

To determine the type and location of land uses present within the City of Oak Forest, land use data provided by the City was analyzed and field surveys were conducted in November 2006 and January 2007. Land uses observed at the time of the surveys have been mapped. Existing land use is a strong determinant of future land use patterns. This depiction of how land is currently used in the City will facilitate analysis of policy alternatives.

The City is also in the process of conducting a housing assessment which includes an inventory of multi-family units by ward. As this information becomes available, it will be a useful reference tool for the planning process, as well.

Oak Forest's existing land use areas are briefly described below:

Single Family Residential: This category includes detached single-family homes. The majority of these homes are on individual lots. The age, size and architectural style of homes within these neighborhoods varies, with the oldest neighborhoods located north of 163rd Street and east of Central Avenue.



Top right: An older single family residential neighborhood east of Central Avenue.

Bottom right: A newer single family residential neighborhood west of Central Avenue.

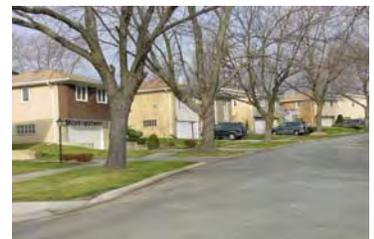


FIGURE 3

EXISTING LAND USE

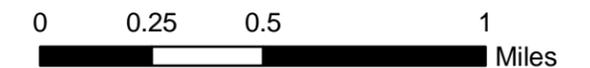
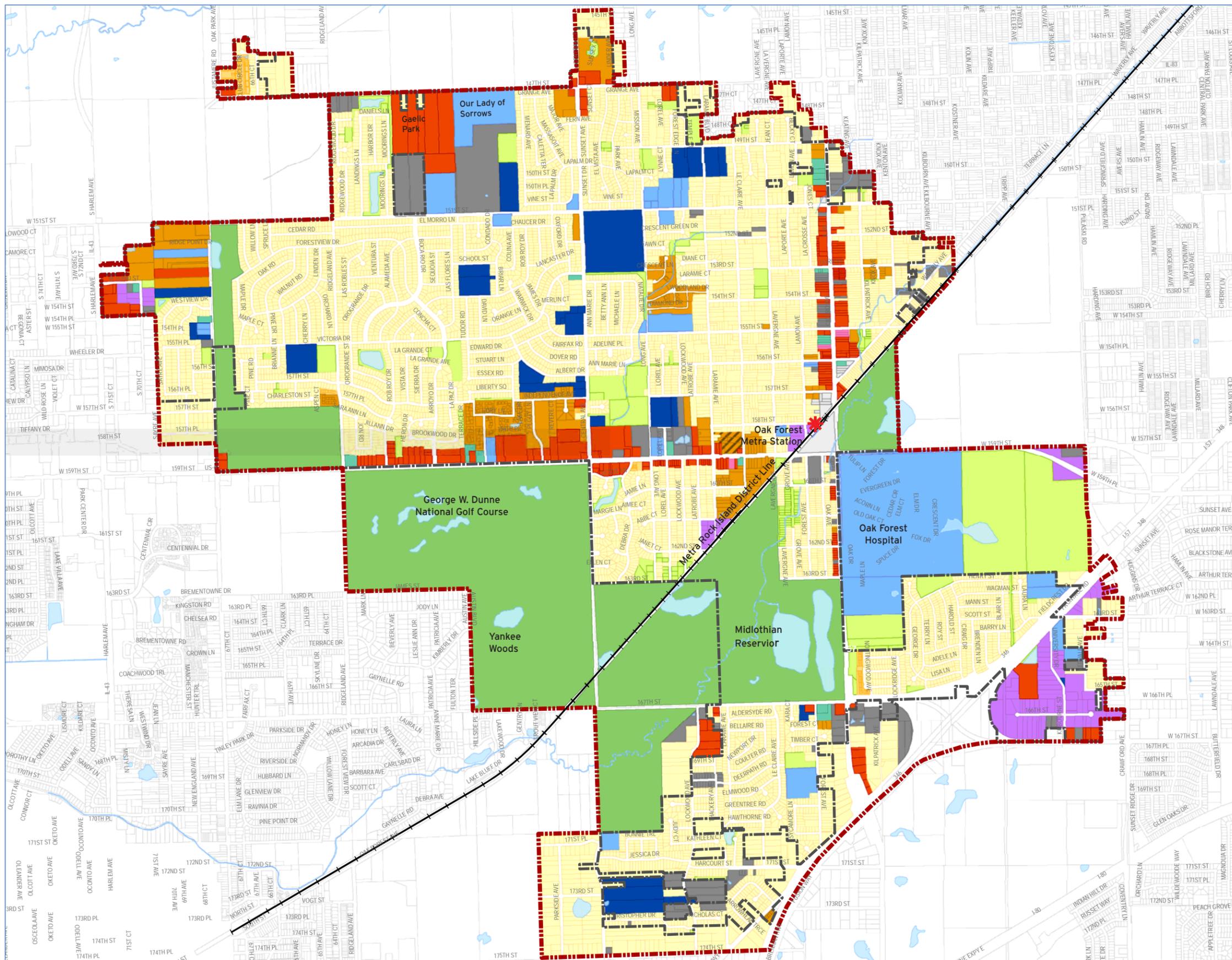
LEGEND

-  City Boundary
-  Planning Area Boundary

Land Uses

-  Single Family Residential
-  Townhouse Residential
-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Mobile Homes
-  Public
-  Institutional
-  Commercial
-  Mixed Use
-  Office
-  Industrial
-  Parks and Open Space
-  Forest Preserve
-  Public Parking
-  Vacant Building/Land
-  Water Bodies

NOTE: Land Use survey completed in January 2007



Townhouse Residential: This category includes buildings containing two or more dwelling units within a single building that are located side-by-side with individual exterior entrances. Townhouses are currently located: on Club Circle Drive, on Aspen Court, west of Central Avenue and south of Corey Lane, and north of 167th Street, just east of Cicero Avenue.



Multi-Family Residential: This category includes buildings that contain multiple dwelling units, whether rental units or condominiums. These developments are generally designed as “walk-up” buildings that either have exterior unit entrances or have common lobby and hallway areas for unit access. Most of these buildings are two to three stories in height. Multi-family residential developments that consist of buildings that exceed three stories in height are at two locations: west of Oak Park Avenue and south of 151st Street, and at the southwest corner of 149th Street and Cicero Avenue.



Mobile Homes: This category consists of manufactured homes that are located within a mobile home park development. There is one such development, Oak Forest Mobile Home Park, which is located on 159th Street between Le Claire and Laramie Avenues.



Public: This category includes facilities owned and/or operated by the City and other governmental bodies, including the City Hall (pictured), public works, police department, fire stations, public schools, the U.S. Post Office, and the library. This category also includes Cook County Oak Forest Hospital. Several of these public facilities in Oak Forest are located along Central Avenue.



Institutional: This category includes places of worship and private schools. Land uses in this category can generate vehicular and pedestrian traffic that is similar to the facilities described in the “public” category. These facilities are dispersed throughout the City.



Commercial: This category includes businesses that provide consumer goods and services, and can draw patrons primarily from within the City and surrounding communities. These commercial uses are located both in small-scale single tenant buildings and in multi-tenant retail shopping centers. Most of the commercial uses in the City are located on the major corridors of 159th Street and Cicero Avenue. Some newer commercial has recently been developed on 167th Street south of I-57 (pictured).



Mixed Use: This category consists of commercial and/or office uses located in multi-story buildings, with residential dwelling units above the ground floor. Presently, mixed uses are only present at two locations: on 159th Street between Le Claire and Laramie Avenues (pictured), and on Cicero Avenue just south of 155th Street. There is also a mixed use building located at 15316 Cicero Avenue, but it is currently vacant.



Office: This category refers to areas that accommodate professional, medical, technical or business services provided to the general public and other businesses. These uses can be located in single- or multi-tenant buildings in integrated developments devoted to office uses, or among retail and service uses in commercial areas of the City. Office uses are scattered throughout the City, primarily on major corridors such as Cicero Avenue (pictured).



Industrial: This category refers to manufacturing, processing, packaging, warehouse and distribution facilities. Within the City, there are a few concentrations of industrial uses. The largest area is a business park located south of I-57 at Kilbourn Avenue (pictured). Other industrial uses are located just north of the Oak Forest Metra Station (Wille Brothers), along Shadow Creek Drive and just east of Harlem Avenue on 71st Avenue.



Parking: There are several public parking lots that provide parking for commuters near the Oak Forest Metra Station. These are generally located at 159th Street and Cicero Avenue, 157th Street and Cicero Avenue, and Waverly and Cicero Avenue.



Parks and Open Space: This category includes Park District properties (whether owned or leased) and privately-owned parks and open spaces that are accessible for passive or active recreational purposes, and which may also serve as storm water detention facilities. These uses are located throughout the City.



Forest Preserves: The City is largely surrounded by County-owned and maintained forest preserve lands, with some areas falling within City boundaries. They provide an important visual and recreational amenity for City residents.



Vacant Building/Land: This category consists of both vacant buildings and land. There are small vacant buildings and parcels primarily located along the commercial corridors of Cicero Avenue and 159th Street. There are also a number of vacant parcels located south of 167th Street. The largest contiguous vacant area is located north of 151st Street, west of Menard Avenue and is surrounded by institutional uses.

A percentage breakdown of existing land uses in the planning area is summarized in Table 1: Net Existing Land Use Distribution.

Table 1: Net Existing Land Use Distribution

Land Use Category	Acres*	Percentage of Total
Single Family Residential	1,922.0	43.2%
Townhouse Residential	13.7	0.3%
Multi-Family Residential	167.0	3.8%
Mobile Homes	4.9	0.1%
Public	144.0	3.2%
Institutional	295.9	6.6%
Commercial	192.6	4.3%
Mixed Use	2.2	0.0%
Office	16.0	0.4%
Industrial	85.8	1.9%
Parks and Open Space	320.5	7.2%
Forest Preserve	1,092.6	24.5%
Public Parking	13.3	0.3%
Vacant Buildings/Land	180.0	4.0%
TOTAL	4,450.5	100.0%

Source: HNTB, February 2007

* Land use acreages exclude public rights-of-way



Building Conditions

Throughout the City, building conditions are generally good. On-going maintenance and renovation are evident throughout most residential areas of the City. However, buildings along the major corridors of 159th Street and Cicero Avenue are aging, and a number are likely to become obsolete over the next 10-15 years. Along these corridors, encouraging redevelopment that includes land assembly will be necessary so that infill development will conform with existing City development regulations for setbacks, access, parking, landscaping, etc. The City's facade improvement program, described in a subsequent section of this report, should serve as an incentive to encourage upgrades to existing properties outside of the tax increment finance districts.

Pending Developments

There are a number of proposals for new development that were recently approved or are currently pending City review and approval (as of late February 2007). These developments are indicated in [Figure 4: Pending Developments](#) on the following page, and summarized as follows:

1. Gateway Corridor Development: Proposed to be located at the northwest corner of 159th Street and Cicero Avenue contiguous to the Metra station, this mixed use development is to include 53,000 square feet of commercial space and up to 158 residential condominiums to be constructed in two phases.
2. Beggar's Pizza: This mixed use development is proposed at 156th Street and Cicero Avenue and is to consist of office/retail development and two apartment dwelling units.
3. Oak Creek Condominiums: This mixed use development is to be located at 15424-26 Cicero Avenue and will include commercial space and eight residential condominium units. Construction is almost complete on this project.
4. Retail Center: This development is proposed at 5310 159th Street, and is to consist of 5,000 square feet of commercial space.
5. Townhouse Development: This development is to be located at 5250 W. 151st Street and is proposed to consist of 16 townhouse dwelling units.
6. Townhouse Development: This development has been approved at 147th Street & Ridgeland Avenue and will consist of 25 townhouse dwelling units.



7. Townhouse Development: The Forest Creek Crossings development has been approved near 153rd and Kenton and will consist of 23 townhouse units.

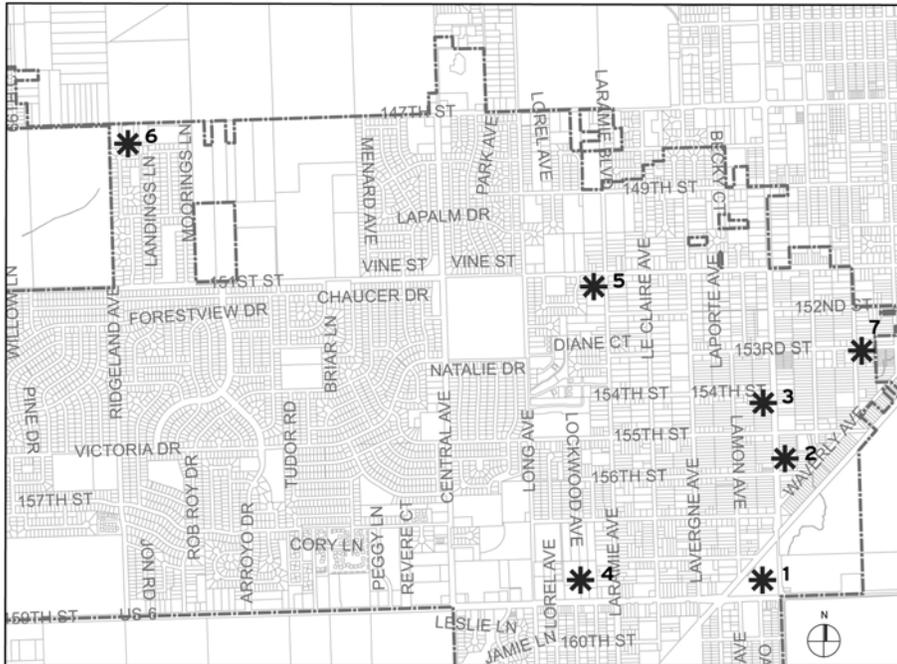


Figure 4: Pending Developments

Not to Scale

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

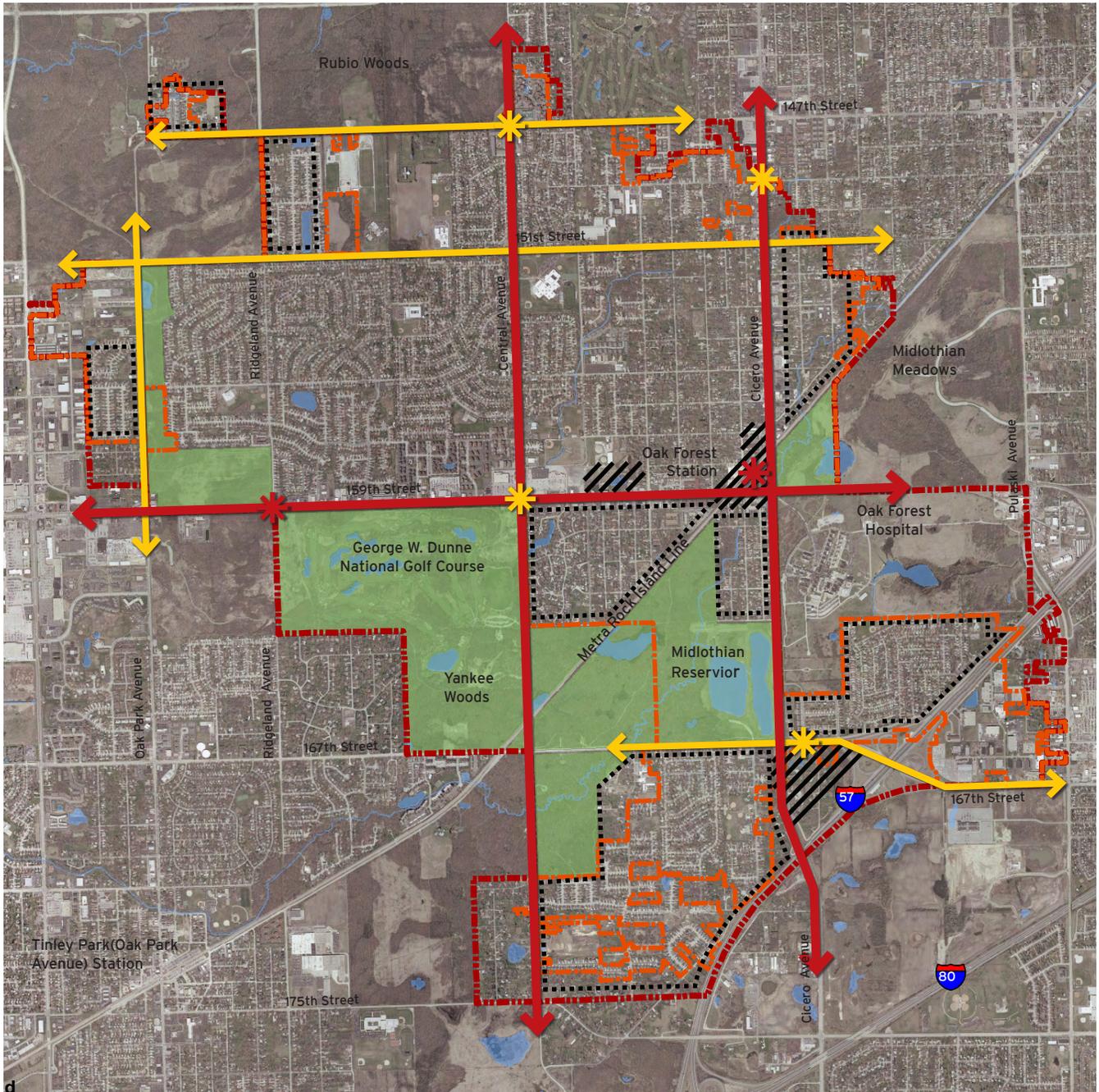
There are a number of existing features that contribute to the community character and identity of Oak Forest and make it distinctive from other communities. These include the following, which are depicted in Figure 5: Community Character and Identity on the following page:

Gateway Redevelopment: As discussed in more detail in the 159th Street and Cicero Avenue Metra Station Sub-Area chapter to follow, a major redevelopment initiative is underway that seeks to transform the existing Metra parking lot on the northwest corner of 159th and Cicero into a walkable, mixed use development adjacent to a new Oak Forest Metra Station. Located at the primary Oak Forest cross-roads location, this redevelopment will significantly enhance the overall “image” of Oak Forest for both residents and those traveling through the City.



FIGURE 5

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND IDENTITY



LEGEND

- | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|---------------------|---|------------------|
|  | Planning Area Boundary |  | Primary Gateways |  | Water bodies |
|  | City Boundary |  | Secondary Gateways |  | Forest Preserves |
|  | Key Character Sites |  | Primary Corridors | | |
|  | "Isolated" Neighborhoods |  | Secondary Corridors | | |



Natural Features: The Oak Forest planning area benefits from a number of environmental features that contribute to quality of life and also affect growth and development patterns. Several creeks traverse portions of the City, providing interesting visual features in residential neighborhoods (pictured). The City also contains a number of small wetland areas, which serve an important stormwater detention and treatment function to reduce storm water run-off. Wooded areas and low-lying floodplains are often found surrounding these hydrologic features, as depicted and discussed elsewhere in this report. While these natural features can constrain development, they also enhance the physical character and quality of life of adjoining neighborhoods.



Forest Preserves: The City is largely surrounded by Cook County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) property to the northwest and southwest, providing a significant natural buffer and wooded character as one travels into and through the community. Upon entering the City from the east or south, one also travels past significant CCFPD property. Several residential neighborhoods, including The Landings, Oak Forest Club and Gingerwood, have a wooded and natural character due to their close proximity to these CCFPD areas. Along 159th Street, the George W. Dunne National Golf Course (pictured) forms a strong southern edge to the commercial corridor between Ridgeland and Central Avenues, creating the potential for a distinctive commercial environment.



There are several initiatives underway that will enhance the community character and identity of Oak Forest in the future. These include the following:

Facade Assistance Program: As described in the Economic Development section of this report, this program provides a financial incentive to commercial businesses to enhance their building exterior, signage and site landscaping. The pictures at right depict a successful façade renovation completed with City facade assistance.



Before (top right) and after (bottom right) images of a facade assistance program project.



Streetscape Program: The City will be replacing street lights and implementing parkway enhancements along Cicero Avenue between 149th and 167th, and also replacing street lights along 159th Street between Cicero and Ridgeland Avenues. The type of street light used will vary based on the overall character of each street section, utilizing a palette of business district street lights, non-business district street lights, and pedestrian lights.

It is expected that the Comprehensive Plan will address several important issues related to community character and identity, as there are several key opportunities for continued improvement. Based on community input to-date, there is a clear consensus that the “tired” and “hodge-podge” appearance of commercial corridors and community gateways are of primary concern to City residents. In addition, residents noted that while most neighborhoods have unique identities and are attractive and well maintained, there is a need to improve connections to and between neighborhoods that are physically isolated from one another and from the central section of the City, to generate a stronger sense of community identity overall.



The appearance of 159th Street (top right) and Cicero Avenue (bottom right) are of primary concern to City residents.

While ongoing enhancement efforts are expected to continue, the Comprehensive Plan will seek to identify policy priorities related to community character and identity. Key considerations will include the following (as depicted in [Figure 5](#)):

- Corridor improvements, both visual and functional, to primary (non-residential) and secondary corridors throughout the City.
- Entryway improvements at both primary and secondary locations throughout the City.
- Special attention to development quality at key character sites along major arterials throughout the City.
- Mechanisms to improve connections to and between neighborhoods located at the perimeter of the City, while maintaining and enhancing their unique identity characteristics.



ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

This section of the report summarizes the current transportation system in the City. In particular, the street system, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, public transportation, and parking are described. Figure 6: Access and Circulation on the following page graphically depicts the existing transportation system serving Oak Forest.

Roadways and Traffic

Regional access to and from Oak Forest is provided by I-57 which connects to I-294 to the northeast and I-80 to the south (refer to Figure 1: Vicinity Map). Access to downtown Chicago, O'Hare and Midway airports, and major employment centers to the north and west of Oak Forest are provided via these routes.

In Oak Forest, the one U.S. highway that is under state jurisdiction is U.S. Route 6 / 159th Street (pictured at right). Other roadways under state jurisdiction are IL Route 50 (Cicero Avenue) and 147th Street. The City receives funds from the state to defray maintenance costs for these state routes, and changes to these roadways require state review and approval. Community input suggests that the City may wish to reconsider the speed limit on 159th Street. Currently 45mph west of Central Avenue, this limit exceeds the allowable speed on 159th Street further east and west.



Arterial roads in Oak Forest that are under Cook County jurisdiction are the following: Central Avenue, 151st Street between Oak Park Avenue and Central Street, and 167th Street. Other arterial roads that are under local jurisdiction and/or are maintained by the City include Ridgeland Avenue between 151st and 159th Streets. Oak Park Avenue is currently under state jurisdiction, but will be transferred to the City after ongoing reconstruction is complete.

Roadways within the City that serve to collect and redistribute traffic from local streets onto more major roadways include: Laramie Avenue, 151st Street between Central and Cicero Avenues, Boca Rio Drive (pictured at right), Arroyo Drive, Victoria Drive, 155th Street, Waverly Avenue, Long Avenue south of 159th Street, Fieldcrest Drive, Lockwood Avenue, and Forest Avenue.



All other streets are local streets that are maintained by the City.

There are grade separations where the Metra Rock Island District Line intersects with Cicero Avenue and 159th Street, which helps to maintain traffic flow along these busy arterials.

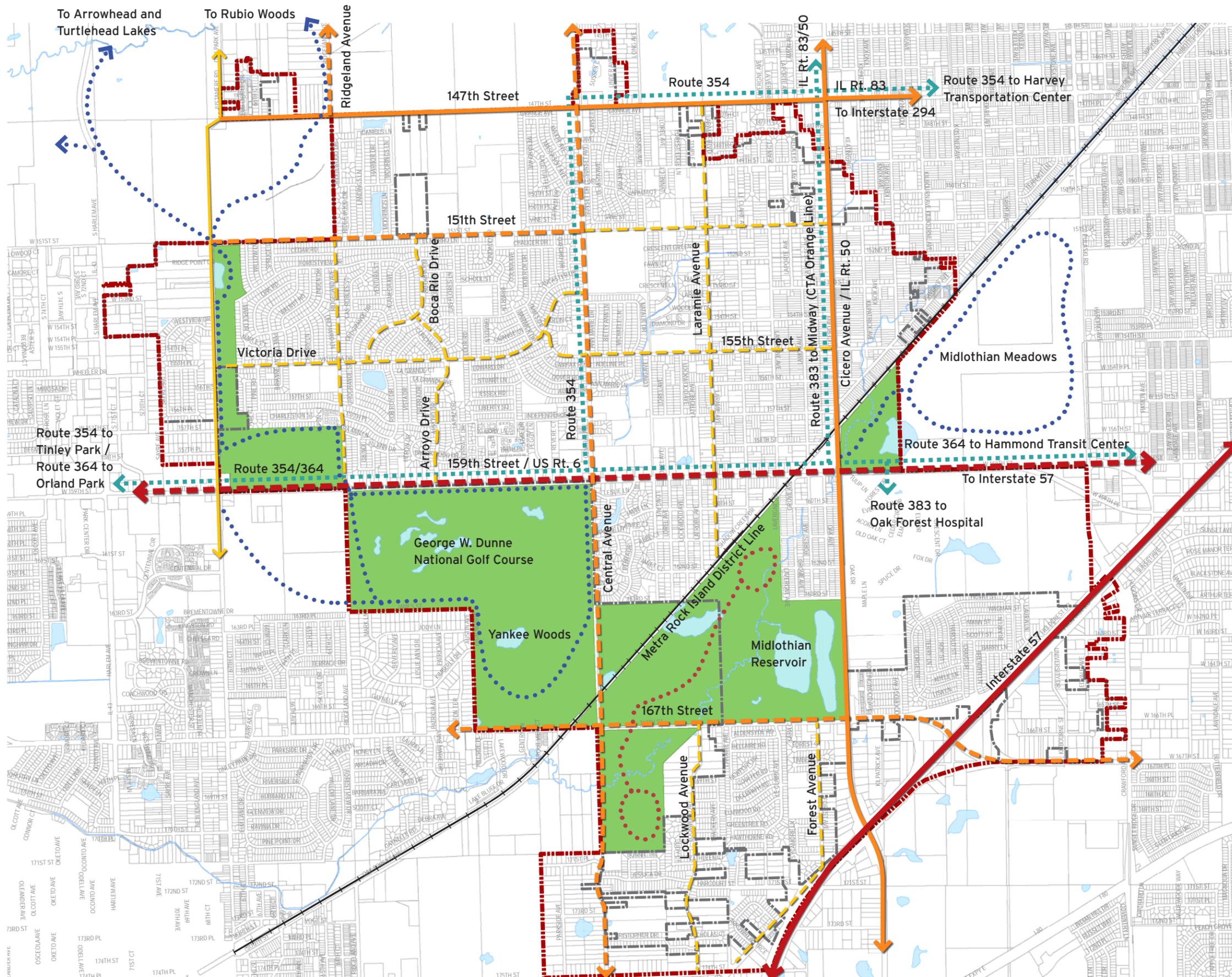


FIGURE 6

ACCESS AND CIRCULATION

LEGEND

- City Boundary
- Planning Area Boundary
- Forest Preserve
- Water Bodies
- Expressway
- U.S. Highway
- State Highway
- County Route
- Other Arterial
- Collector
- Metra Commuter Rail
- Pace Bus Route
- Paved Off-Street Trail (Approximate Location)
- Unpaved Off-Street Trail (Approximate Location)



Recent information regarding traffic volumes on major roadways within the City was provided by the Illinois Department of Transportation. Available average daily traffic (ADT) figures are summarized below in Table 2: Average Daily Traffic Counts. These traffic counts represent all directions of traffic movement along the roadway segment over the course of a day. The busiest roadway segments out of those counted is Cicero Avenue north of 159th Street. This reflects the substantial amount of traffic that passes through the City along the northern portion of Cicero Avenue and traveling east and west on 159th Street to and from shopping and other destinations in Orland Park.

Table 2: Average Daily Traffic Counts

Intersection	ADT
159 th St. east of Cicero Ave.	26,500
159 th St. west of Cicero Ave.	33,900
Cicero Ave. north of 159 th St.	34,900
Cicero Ave. south of 159 th St.	29,100

Source: Illinois Department of Transportation website

The City is currently in the fourth year of its five-year capital improvement program. The Public Works Department will continue to implement its Motor Fuel Tax (MFT) Road Program as part of the fourth year expenditures. Over the past three years, the City has improved approximately 15 streets per year. As such, it is now on schedule with the capital improvements program, and proposes to improve approximately ten streets over the next two years at an estimated cost of \$1 million per year. Other major roadway improvements that have been identified within the City's five-year capital improvement projections and have been recently completed in 2006 or proposed to be completed in 2007 include the following:

- Reconstruction of Lockwood Avenue (completed in 2006): This project was jointly funded by the City, Bremen Township, and IDOT.
- Reconstruction of Oak Park Avenue (to be completed in 2007): This project is currently under construction and is being funded jointly among the City, Bremen Township and IDOT. The City will have maintenance responsibility for this roadway.
- Reconstruction of 151st Street between Cicero and Central Avenues (to be completed in 2007): This project will be funded through the Surface Transportation Program (STP) with a City funding match of \$151,400.

Sidewalks and Bikeway System

With the exception of most arterial and collectors, many residential streets in the older part of town (east of Central Avenue) do not have



sidewalks. There are sidewalks in newer neighborhoods west of Central Avenue, however. At the south end of the City, in residential areas some streets have sidewalks whereas others do not. Where roadway improvements are proposed as described above, sidewalks are typically reconstructed.

Oak Forest residents have convenient access to trails within the Forest Preserves that surround the City, as depicted in Figure 6. Both paved and unpaved trails loop through Midlothian Meadows, Midlothian Reservoir, Yankee Woods, and the George W. Dunne Golf Course. There are also connections to Arrowhead and Turtlehead Lakes and other forest preserves located north of the City (pictured). The City should consider opportunities to construct trails within the City as development/redevelopment occurs to provide improved connections to trails at the City's periphery, to create a continuous trail system that better serves the entire community. In areas with nearby equestrian uses, trails should be designed to be suitable for equestrian use.



As noted in the discussion on Community Character, some neighborhoods are not well-connected with each other. Opportunities to create stronger connections between neighborhoods for pedestrians and bicyclists should be explored.

Public Transportation

Oak Forest is served by Metra Rock Island District Line commuter rail service and Pace suburban bus service. In addition, there is "dial-a-ride" bus service provided for senior citizens by the City of Oak Forest and Bremen Township. The Metra commuter station within Oak Forest is located at 159th Street and Cicero Avenue. A more detailed description of this station area is included in the sub-area section of this report. Pace bus routes serve Oak Forest along 159th Street, Cicero Avenue and Central Avenue.

Metra Rock Island District Line

The Metra Rock Island District (RID) Line runs between Joliet and the LaSalle Street Station in downtown Chicago. Twenty-three weekday trains make the 20.4-mile trip between the Oak Forest and LaSalle Street Stations. Oak Forest is the second busiest station on this line after Tinley Park's 80th Avenue Station. The boardings for the station and stations in adjoining communities are indicated in Table 3. The number of boards was 1,591 in 2002, a slight reduction from 1999. It should be noted that new data on boardings was collected in late 2006 and will be available at the end of the first quarter of 2007.



Table 3: Select Weekday Boardings Over Time: Metra RID Line

Station	1993	1995	1997	1999	2002
Midlothian	1,183	1,262	1,135	1,144	1,179
Oak Forest	1,422	1,508	1,594	1,672	1,591
Tinley Park	1,350	1,331	1,169	1,247	1,193
80 th Ave. Tinley Park	1,148	1,280	1,585	1,822	2,297

Source: Metra, 2002

The decline following 1999 may be partially explained by an ordinance passed by the City of Oak Forest in 2000 limiting permit parking at the Oak Forest station to residents only. This restriction was repealed on July 1, 2006, and as a consequence residents from other communities are able to utilize commuter parking at the station. This regulatory change is likely to increase the number of commuters using the Oak Forest station, particularly if the total number of commuter parking spaces can be increased as redevelopment occurs.

A system-wide on-board passenger survey was conducted by Metra in the fall of 2002 that asked riders the “mode of access” they used to arrive to the Oak Forest Metra station. Of morning boarding passengers surveyed, 69% of all riders drove alone to the station, 10% indicated that they walked, and 16% were dropped off at the station. Two percent carpooled as a passenger or a driver, and only 1% utilized Pace bus service to get to the station.

Metra conducted an origin-destination survey in the fall of 2006; this new data will be available at the end of the first quarter of 2007. However, this section provides a summary of a similar survey conducted in the fall of 2002. With respect to the origin of riders that utilized the Oak Forest station in 2002, approximately 54% riders were Oak Forest residents. The second highest number or 10% of riders were from County Club Hills, which is not surprising considering the lack of a station within that community. Between 2% and 5% of riders came from the surrounding communities of Tinley Park (4.2%), Crestwood (3.1%), Matteson (3.1%), Orland Park (2.9%), and Markham (2.1%). All other riders came from a variety of other communities.

Pace Bus Service

The three Pace bus routes that serve Oak Forest residents are Routes 354, 364, and 383. These bus routes are identified on [Figure 6](#). A description of Pace service is as follows:

- [Route 354 \(Orland-Southwest Shopper\)](#) provides service from the Harvey Transportation Center to the Tinley Park Mental



Health Center and North Creek Business Center (at Harlem Avenue and 183rd Street). This route also serves Oak Forest High School, Bementowne Mall, and the Tinley Park (Oak Park Avenue) and Midlothian Metra Stations. Selected weekday rush hour trips also serve Tinley Crossing Business Park (at 80th Avenue and 183rd Street). Total weekday ridership on this bus route is estimated to be 412 daily. The busiest bus stop on this route within Oak Forest is at Central and 159th, with approximately 18 persons estimated by Pace to board or alight from buses in this location on a typical weekday.

- Route 364 (159th Street) serves major east-west cross-town arterial traffic from Hammond Transit Center to Orland Square Mall. This bus serves River Oaks Shopping Center, the Harvey Transportation Center, and various smaller centers as well as Oak Forest, St. Margaret and Ingalls Memorial Hospitals, and South Suburban College. Weekend service operates between Orland Square Mall and Hegewisch. Route 364 is one of the top ten Pace bus routes in terms of ridership. Total weekday ridership on this bus route is estimated to be 2,808 daily. The busiest bus stop on this route within Oak Forest is at 159th and Cicero, with approximately 81 persons estimated by Pace to board or alight from buses in this location on a typical weekday.
- Route 383 (South Cicero) provides service along Cicero Avenue from the Midway CTA Orange Line Station to Oak Forest Hospital. This route serves Midway Airport, Ford City and Rivercrest Shopping Centers with a stop near the Oak Forest Metra Station. Total weekday ridership on this bus route is estimated to be 1,470 daily. The busiest bus stop on this route within Oak Forest is at Oak Forest Hospital, with approximately 49 persons estimated by Pace to board or alight from buses in this location on a typical weekday.

In September 2005, Pace embarked on the South Cook County - Will County Initiative which entails a comprehensive review and restructuring of service in southern and southwestern Cook and Will counties. As with other initiatives that Pace has undertaken as part of its long-range Vision 2020 Plan, the agency wants to realign its services to better meet current travel needs and demographic trends. Routes 354, 364, and 383 that serve Oak Forest are planned to be evaluated as part of the study.

In March 2007, Pace plans to present the Initiative's overall service concepts to the Pace Board of Directors and then to its Community Advisory Groups and to the general public. The overall service concepts will be refined into more specific service plans to be presented in May, 2007. Pace proposes the initial service changes to take effect late in



2007 to make the most efficient use of their current operations and to increase ridership and service reliability.

Dial-A-Ride Service

The Senior Bus is available to all Oak Forest residents aged 60 and over. Registration is necessary to ride the bus and can be completed at the City Clerk's Office. In addition, Bremen Township offers dial-a-ride service for residents that are 55 years of age and over.

Parking

This section describes parking conditions within the Oak Forest Metra station area. Parking locations are highlighted in [Figure 3](#) and [Figure 19](#) of this report. There are a total of 1,034 standard parking spaces and 15 handicapped accessible spaces that serve the Oak Forest station located in five parking lots. Of the standard spaces, 533 are located on the south side of the tracks and 501 are located north of the tracks. In 2006, Metra estimated that approximately 99% of the regular spaces were being utilized. Data collected by the City between July and December of 2006, however, indicated that on many weekdays anywhere from 150 to 200 spaces were unused. As stated previously, in mid-2006 the City repealed a requirement that only allowed Oak Forest residents to utilize permit commuter parking, and as a result parking demand may increase as commuters from surrounding communities seek access to parking in the station area.

According to Metra, the additional demand for parking by 2030 in the Rock Island District Fare Zone E (which includes the two stations in Tinley Park and the Oak Forest station) is between 900 and 1,500 new commuter spaces. This projection takes into account anticipated development and household growth in the area and is based on the most recent fall 2002 boarding and alighting counts. However, this projection does not take into account Metra's recent expansion in service on Metra's Southwest Service Line. As such, the projection will be re-evaluated after more recent boarding and alighting counts are released at the end of the first quarter of 2007.

In addition, the City completed a parking supply/demand and alternatives analysis in early 2005 related to potential redevelopment in the station area. This study identified that at that time the City and Metra were interested in increasing parking capacity by 300 spaces, and that future development within the station area that would entail redevelopment of parking lots should include adding parking, potentially in a parking structure.



COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

This section highlights community facilities and resources that contribute to the quality of life of residents in Oak Forest. Many of the facilities highlighted in this section are graphically depicted in [Figure 7: Community Facilities and Resources](#) on the following page. Information contained in this section includes responses to a community facilities survey sent to major facility and service operators in the City. Information regarding future plans for expansion or change is included, where it was provided by the various service providers.

Educational Facilities

Public Schools

There are six public school districts that serve Oak Forest. These school districts are listed below:

- Forest Ridge Elementary School District 142 (elementary)
- Prairie Hill 144 (elementary)
- Arbor Park 145 (elementary)
- Community Consolidated School District 146 (elementary)
- Bremen High School District 228 (high school)
- Consolidated High School District 230 (high school)

Of these school districts, four have schools located within the Oak Forest boundary. These include seven pre-elementary and elementary schools, two junior high schools and one high school. The school names and grade levels served are provided in [Table 4](#) below. Of those schools that provided information, both Kerkstra Elementary and Oak Forest High School (pictured at right) have facilities that are adequate, and these schools are not anticipating expansion over the next 10-15 years. The high school has a gravel student parking lot that needs upgrading. All other schools have not reported any expansion plans.



Table 4: Schools within Oak Forest

School
Ridge Early Childhood Center (Early Childhood -Kindergarten)
Lee R. Foster Elementary School (Grades 1-5)
G. Kerkstra Elementary School (Grades 1-5)
Jack Hille Middle School (Grades 6-8)
Scarlet Oak School (Grades 3-4)
Arbor Park Middle School (Grades 5-8)
Morton Gingerwood School (Grades 1-2)
Fieldcrest Elementary School (Kindergarten-Grade 6)
Fierke Education Center (Kindergarten-Grade 5)
Oak Forest High School (Grades 9-12)



FIGURE 7

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

LEGEND

-  City Boundary
-  Planning Area Boundary
-  Forest Preserve
-  Water Bodies
- Land Uses**
-  Public
-  Institutional
-  Parks and Open Space

Community Parks

1. Central Park
2. Don and Loretta Gorman Park
3. El Morro Park (Miniature Golf Course)

Neighborhood Parks

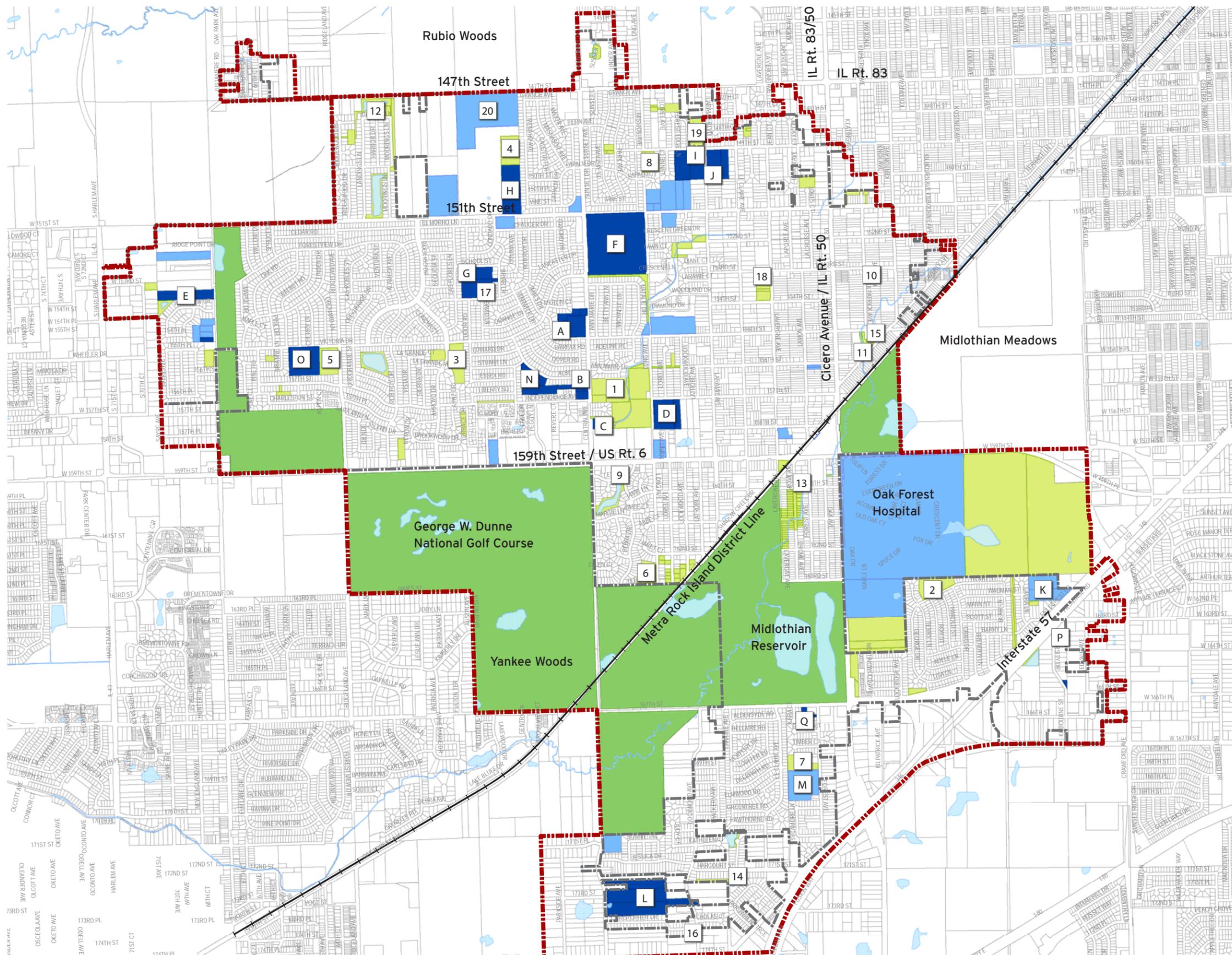
4. Convent Park
5. James W. Jesk Sr. Park
6. Friendly Oaks Park
7. Don Burns Park
8. Heritage Park
9. Lagoon Park
10. Tot Lot Park
11. Waverly Creekside Park
12. Terry Stecko Park
13. Harriet Park
14. Malecky Park
15. Senior Community Center
16. Lockwood Park

Leased Parks

17. Tower Park
18. Vergne-Way Park
19. Gene Leonard Park
20. Gaelic Park Soccer Fields

Public Facilities

- A. Oak Forest Municipal Center (City Hall, Police Department, Fire Station 1)
- B. Acorn Public Library
- C. U.S. Post Office
- D. Public Works Maintenance Facility
- E. Bremen Township Offices
- F. Oak Forest High School
- G. Lee R. Foster School
- H. Jack Hille Middle School
- I. G. Kerkstra Elementary School
- J. Ridge Early Childhood School
- K. Fieldcrest School
- L. Arbor Park Middle School
- M. Morton-Gingerwood School
- N. Scarlet Oaks School
- O. Fierke Education Center
- P. South Suburban College - Dist. 510
- Q. Fire Station 2



Private Schools

There are three private schools in the City: Valley Kingdom School (K-8th grade) at 5217 W. 149th Street, Learn School at 6020 W. 151st Street, and St. Damian Catholic School (K-8th grade) at 5300 W. 155th Street. St. Damian provides elementary education to approximately 700 students, and religious education to approximately 750 students. This institution has adequate facilities and has no expansion plans.

Higher Education

Higher education is provided at South Suburban College University and College Center. Residents west of Ridgeland Avenue are part of the Moraine Valley College District, served by Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills. The South Suburban Center offers associates' degree classes by DePaul University, The College of St. Francis, Chicago State University, Governors State University and South Suburban College. No information has been provided regarding any expansion or significant improvement plans.

Public Facilities

Public facilities include those maintained and operated by the City of Oak Forest's various departments and utility operators.

City Administration

The Oak Forest Municipal Center, located at 15440 S. Central Avenue, houses the Clerk's office, administrative functions, police department, fire department, local cable access channel, and the Oak Forest Chamber of Commerce office. The facility was expanded within the past six years, and thus is adequate to meet the City's administrative needs in the near future.

Public Works and Utilities

The Oak Forest Public Works Department provides a variety of services, including maintenance and repair of City streets, water and sewer services, and maintenance of City buildings and grounds. The Public Works Department offices and facilities are located at 15722 Lorel Avenue. The department has 25 employees. In addition to providing emergency management and animal control services, the various departments that comprise Public Works have the following duties:

- Water Department: Water storage and pumping facilities, water main maintenance and operations.



- Sewer Department: Pumping stations and sewer main maintenance and operations.
- Street Department: Maintenance off all streets, sidewalks, trees, lawn cutting, and snowplowing within public rights-of-way; maintenance of City-owned ponds and retention areas; maintenance of the City's fleet of vehicles and equipment.
- Buildings and Grounds: Maintenance of all municipal buildings.
- Senior Bus Service: Operation and maintenance of the City's senior bus service.

The Public Works Department is in the fourth year of its five-year capital improvements program (CIP), and is in the process of preparing a new CIP this year. As part of the new CIP, the City will be incorporating recommendations from a water study completed in February 2007. This study identified a need for water main installation and replacement with an approximate cost of \$6.5 million through 2011. Another major facility expansion project that is proposed is construction of a salt storage facility. While there are several sites that are being evaluated, the salt storage facility may be constructed on the existing Public Works site, as additional land is available, although it is currently being leased by the Oak Forest Park District and used for soccer fields. The water study also identified a need for additional water storage and therefore, a new reservoir may also be constructed on the existing site. Other major water and sewer projects that were recently completed or are proposed to be completed in 2007 are identified below. Roadway projects were described previously in the Access and Circulation section of this report.

- 159th Street Lift Station: This new sanitary lift station was recently completed in 2006.
- SCADA System: This is a computer controlled water and sanitary sewer system that was newly installed, with completion in 2006.
- New Pump Station Generators: New generators are proposed to be installed for three pumping stations in 2007.
- Water Leak Detection System: To be completed in 2007, Oak Forest will be the first community to install a City-wide system in the state of Illinois.
- Sewer Improvements: This project entails rehabilitation work on linings and point repair with an estimated cost of \$1 million to be completed over the next four years.

The City is working with the City engineer to identify needed improvements to the existing storm water management system, in the context of regional issues identified by the two watershed planning councils that have been established. The 1991 storm water atlas will be updated in 2007 and will define watersheds, assess local and regional problems and identify improvements that need to be made to the current system.



In addition to water and sewer service provided by the City, the following utility providers serve Oak Forest:

- Electric: Commonwealth Edison
- Natural Gas: Northern Illinois Gas Company (NICOR)
- Cable/Internet: Comcast Corporation and WOW Cable
- Telephone/Internet: AT & T and Sprint MCI

Police Department

The City is served by the Oak Forest Police Department. The Police Department is co-located with the Oak Forest City Hall, at 15440 S. Central Avenue. It is comprised of 46 trained officers who are responsible for maintaining the security and protection of Oak Forest residents and businesses. In addition, the Department employs an Investigative Division of four investigators/juvenile officers, and a Communications Division staffed 24 hours a day by 12 telecommunicators and clerks. The Police Department also oversees the City's 18 school crossing guards.

Among the programs that the Police Department participates in is the Oak Forest Crime Free Multi-Housing Program which is currently utilized in cities in 40 states and four provinces of Canada. This program addresses the crime problems associated with rental properties through a coalition of landlords, their employees, residents and the police department. The program entails completion of three elements by rental property owners which include police and fire department-led training and credit and background checks of potential tenants. In exchange the police provide property owners notification of all incidents on their property with the purpose of facilitating the removal of criminally-inclined residents.

Fire Protection

The Oak Forest Fire Department has its offices in the Oak Forest Municipal Center. The Oak Forest Fire Department has a Class 3 insurance rating and is responsible for fire prevention and suppression, inspection, safety education and emergency medical services. It is staffed by a full-time fire chief, a deputy fire chief, 25 career firefighters/paramedics, and 35 paid-on-call firefighters a number of whom are also paramedics. Fire safety programs are offered to residents of all ages, as well as local businesses. Programs are offered both through the schools as well as to individuals and local groups and organizations.

The department currently operates two fire stations: Station 1 located at 5620 James Drive and Station 2 located at 4907 W. 167th Street. It also



oversees Emergency Management Agency (EMA) operations at 5301 West 157th Street. The existing fire stations are no longer adequate in terms of size, condition, and location. Station 1 is 35 years old and has become outdated and undersized. The administrative functions should be separated from living quarters. There are no separate quarters for female employees, and the building is not ADA compliant. Existing gear storage is also inadequate. The pre-alerting system needs to be updated with possible tie-in to lighting, and a fire alarm system is needed. Other building features and systems including the boiler and HVAC systems are also inefficient. Station 2 is also too small. Storage space is insufficient. In this building, there is a mold and mildew problem, and the HVAC system needs to be addressed. As with Station 1 the pre-alerting system needs to be updated. There is the potential to develop a training facility behind Station 2 which could be utilized by both the fire department and public works.

The fire department has identified a need for an additional station either at the west end of the City or in a more central location, particularly in response to the recent increase in population in this area of the City, especially an increase in senior citizens. Without an additional station such as on Oak Park Avenue, the fire department will find it increasingly challenging to provide timely emergency service for the current and future population.

The local water supply is adequate for firefighting within City limits, however, it is inadequate in the far south end of the City which does not have fire hydrants. Of particular concern is protection in the unincorporated area of Oak Forest between Lockwood and Central and on 174th Street at the southeast corner of 167th and Cicero. Water supply in the area of 153rd and Kilpatrick, Kenton, and east is also very poor.

Public Library

The Acorn Public Library District serves the City of Oak Forest from its facility located at 15624 S. Central Avenue, along with some adjacent unincorporated areas. This facility was constructed 30 years ago. The library provides access to an on-line catalog of more than 1 million titles of books, periodicals, cassettes, videos, CDs, DVDs and other library materials. These materials can be accessed on the library's website utilizing SWAN, their System Wide Automated Network. The library has a number of computers that provide Internet access for its cardholders. As part of the Metropolitan Library System, the library shares the costs of technology advances, while also being informed and up-to-date within the funding means available.

The library was recently approved to be a Cooperating Collection of the Foundation Center of the New York City. It will soon have twenty or more resources and a database to assist nonprofit agencies find grants



to suit their needs. It also serves as a community meeting place, providing two areas for meetings as well as offering a variety of programs for adults, young adults and children of all ages. All programs are well attended, with the Summer Reading programs often being highlights of the year.

With respect to needed improvements, the district is working on updating the electronics in the HVAC system to make it more reliable and energy efficient, as funds are available. They are also improving most of the internal lighting with an energy grant covering 75% of the cost. Both of these projects should be completed by the library's 40th anniversary on March 1, 2008. The condition of library parking lots is being discussed as part of the strategic plans for the next three years; the staff access area is particularly troublesome during rain and snow.

Space in the building is another issue. There is not enough space for new types of resources, storage or even adequate programming. The meeting rooms and staff lounge do not have sufficient space, and there is insufficient room for storage. As the community changes, the library will strive to meet the needs of both current and future patrons. The goal is for: 1) an updated energy efficient building; 2) a library that provides resources and activities to meet informational, recreational, educational and cultural needs in a welcoming, pleasant and safe environment; and 3) a library with a friendly, qualified staff that is passionate about service. Also, technology will be increasing rapidly, and a separate room and staff for developing, updating and keeping all aspects working will be needed.

The library has space for expansion, but not the funding. They hope to find an architect within the next three to five years for advice on possible expansion options. If funding were available, the library would like to have a small branch near the train station or a secure kiosk that would have the City and/or library's website with links to all related resources.

Post Office

The U.S. post office is located at 15811 Central Avenue. No expansion needs or plans have been reported for this facility.

Recreation and Open Space Resources

There are several key recreational resources within the City that are primarily operated by the Oak Forest Park District and Cook County Forest Preserve District.



The Oak Forest Park District is an independent municipal agency with the same boundaries as the City, which owns or leases and maintains twenty community and neighborhood parks located throughout the community totaling approximately 72 acres, excluding the Gaelic Park soccer fields (as indicated in [Figure 7](#)). The Park District has a full-service health and fitness center located at 15601 S. Central Avenue which offers many classes and programs for its resident and non-resident members; most indoor programs occur at this facility. The community parks within Oak Forest are Central Park (including the Health and Fitness Center) located at 15601 S. Central Avenue; Don Gorman Park, located at 4412 Henry Street; and El Morro Park (including a Miniature Golf Course) located at 155th and Arroyo. Neighborhood parks are located throughout the community. The Park District has indicated a need for additional sports fields as program enrollment continues to grow. Soccer fields that are currently located on property leased from the Public Works Department may be eliminated to enable Public Works to expand.

One of the key amenities for Oak Forest is the significant amount of forest preserve land surrounding the City. The forest preserves are maintained by the Cook County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD). These areas serve a vital environmental protection and recreational function for the City and the entire region. They offer diverse natural areas for hiking, biking, equestrian activities, cross-country skiing and observation of wildlife. The forest preserves within the City's planning area are identified on [Figure 7](#).

In addition, the George W. Dunne National Golf Course and Forest Preserve National Golf Club are located at 16310 South Central Avenue. Recognized by Golf Digest as one of the top public courses, George W. Dunne National Golf Course is the forest preserve district's premier 18-hole course. Dunne National offers the unique features of bent grass fairways and greens, eight lakes, tree lined fairways and an abundance of wildlife. The facility also features a lighted driving range and an on staff PGA professional.

Natural and Environmental Features

The Oak Forest planning area contains environmental features that serve both an aesthetic and environmental protection function. These primarily consist of creeks and small wetlands and water bodies that are located throughout the planning area, and are usually surrounded by areas of floodplain. A number of these flow into the forest preserves on its periphery. These hydrologic features and the adjacent forest preserves are generally identified in [Figure 8: Natural and Environmental Features](#) on the following page. While these natural features contribute to the overall character of adjoining neighborhoods,



they also can constrain development. Many of the remaining vacant parcels in the City are significantly impacted by the presence of floodplain and/or wetlands.



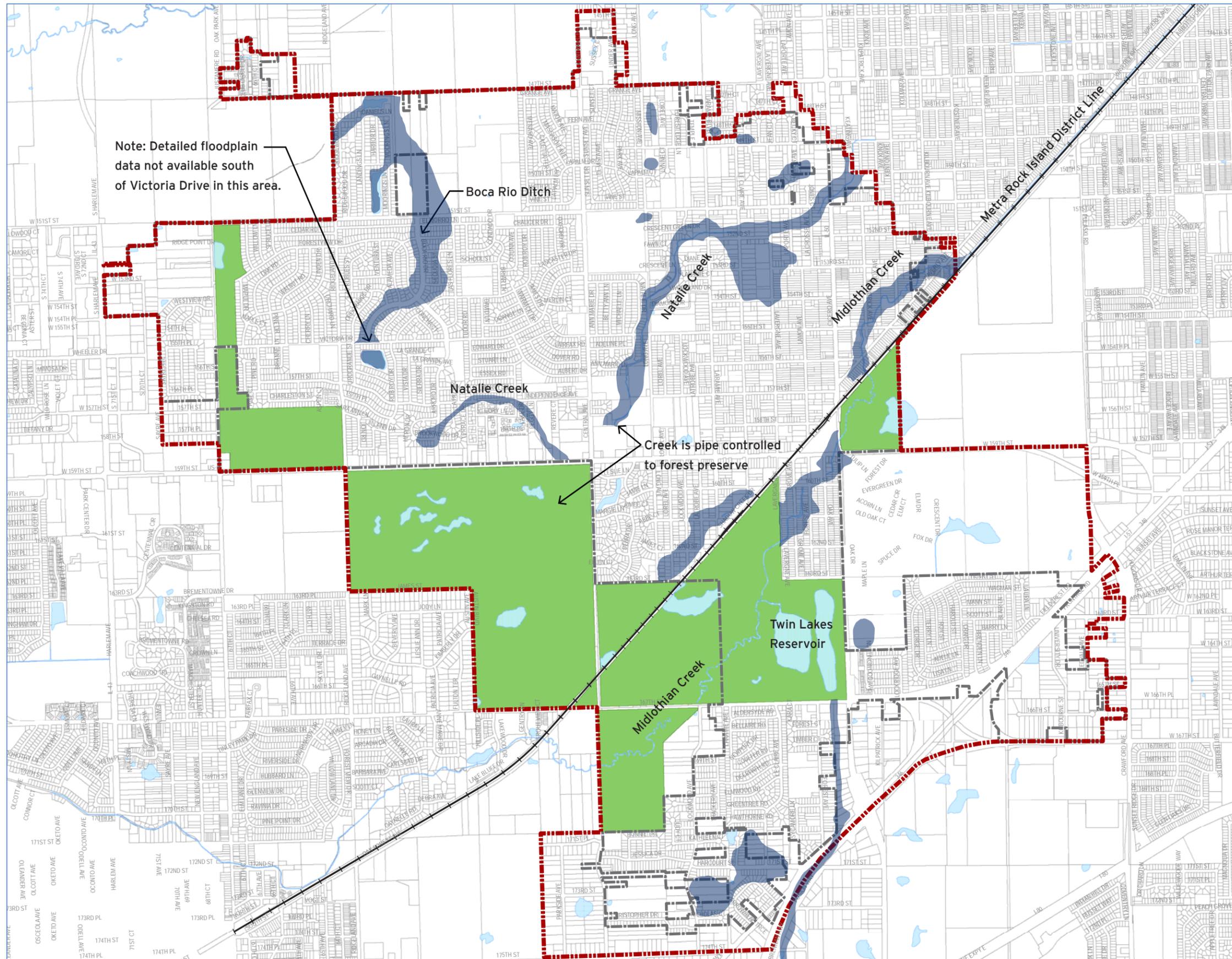
FIGURE 8

NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES

LEGEND

-  City Boundary
-  Planning Area Boundary
-  Forest Preserve
-  Water Bodies
-  Approximate Areas of Floodplain and/or Wetlands (Not in Forest Preserves)

(Note: Generalized from on-line FEMA floodplain data dated November 6, 2000)



Note: Detailed floodplain data not available south of Victoria Drive in this area.

Boca Rio Ditch

Natalie Creek

Creek is pipe controlled to forest preserve

Twin Lakes Reservoir

Metra Rock Island District Line

Midlothian Creek