



JASCULCA TERMAN
STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

River Forest Community Dialogues – 11.19.24 – 1400 Block of Clinton
Notes from Resident Comments

Who was in attendance?

- 9 residents
- Matt Walsh (Village Administrator)
- James Chase & Nell DeCoursey Brennan (Jasculca Terman Strategic Communications)

Overall River Forest Comments

- Appeal of River Forest
 - A small, walkable community.
 - River Forest isn't a "cookie-cutter suburb"
 - The Chicago area's "best kept secret"
 - Proximity to the city and access to public transportation systems
 - School system is strong. Also has "some ethnic diversity."
 - Families stay in the community for a long time
- Concerns
 - Traffic and speeding are major concerns. Residents believe there is a lack of enforcement of speed limits
 - Multiple attendees expressed that there has been an increase in crime that is not being reported to the public fully or in a timely manner
 - Taxes are higher than in other communities
 - Limited tax base. Lots of the Village taken up by universities, churches, schools. Need for more businesses.
 - Limited parking in some areas.
- Village and Community Communication
 - Multiple residents said they have had negative experiences speaking at public meetings and they said that, in some cases, summaries/notes from these meetings do not accurately reflect their comments (one resident said comments have been "whitewashed")
 - Multiple residents also expressed that many of the comments they made during this 11/19 community dialogue had been given to the Village previously in other settings. These residents are seeking some form of affirmative response, action, acknowledgement, etc. so they can be confident they are being heard
 - Many residents said the Village should slow down when it comes to making major decisions

- The Village has not been transparent recently – and to rebuild trust with the community, transparency is an important step
- Ample notices must be given about meetings through a variety of means. Ideally more than one round of notices.
- Overall, communication between residents and the Village was a major theme of this community dialogue. The conversation turned from development issues to communication issues several times.

Concerns & Wants re: Madison & Ashland

- Residents had questions about why the Village purchased these plots
- What could go there that would benefit the entire community?
 - Recreation center (public or private) – something other communities have that we don't
- New Businesses
 - Missing things like restaurants, diners, casual hot dog or ice cream joints, shopping, cafés, gyms/yoga studio. People go elsewhere for that
 - One resident expressed dismay at the number of empty storefronts in River Forest.
 - Can River Forest learn why some businesses do not want to come to River Forest or why businesses have left? Suggestion from residents for the Village to have conversations with business-owners that choose other communities or business-owners that leave—an “exit interview.” Sometimes businesses leave for reasons related to a community or to municipal governance, but sometimes it's completely unrelated (e.g., landlord issues).
 - Example: CorePower leaving
 - How can River Forest support small business owners in the community?
 - A local business-owner in attendance expressed frustration with Village's permit requirements, fees, and similar issues. They found it particularly difficult to open their business.
 - One resident pointed to invest incentives and investments made available by other municipalities, and stated that River Forest appears to lack those
 - Can the Village get data about what residents would be interested in to share with potential businessowners?
 - When the Village evaluates commercial development opportunities, it needs to consider any new business's impact on traffic and parking, as well as the business's clientele.
- Residents at this dialogue were more opposed in general to new housing at Madison & Ashland and Village-wide.
 - There were questions about whether the Village has looked into a population limit that can be supported, given River Forest's small geographic size
 - No big buildings “like in Oak Park.” They don't fit with the community and cannot be maintained/supported.

- Fears expressed that the Village cannot support an increase in population from “big apartment complexes”
 - While more housing means more property tax revenue, it comes with the trade-off of more residents using schools and municipal infrastructure. Some residents preferred commercial development because it expands the tax base without this trade-off.

Development in River Forest

- The Village should more actively communicate when there are new development proposals, proposed zoning changes, public meetings, etc.
 - Information should be – at the very least – in the Wednesday Journal, on the Village website, and in weekly newsletters. Overcommunicate.
 - More frequent communication. Communication given with more notice
 - Use postal mail for important news and announcements
 - Don’t make people “work hard” to inform themselves and provide input
 - Some residents feel there is a sense of “secrecy.”
 - Note: We listed all of ways we are aware of that the Village communicates on these issues. Most residents expressed that this is not enough.
- One resident said it can be difficult to navigate the Village website when searching for these kinds of announcements.
- One resident referenced a series of meetings the Village held with prominent River Forest institutions at some point pre-COVID. These meetings were intended to discuss current issues of significance, including development. The resident suggested the Village bring this idea back in some form and also make the meeting open to the public.
- Questions about the Village’s “overall plan”
 - Many residents felt that a Comprehensive Plan developed before the COVID pandemic is likely out of date at this point.
 - Are there opportunities to review the Comprehensive Plan more frequently or develop additional plans apart from this specific document?
 - Can the Village conduct market analysis/research that can support development plans either on Madison & Ashland or elsewhere
- Many residents wanted to hear what developers are telling the Village about their needs, and what the Village is telling developers to attract them
- Multiple residents expressed that it’s problematic for “a minority to determine the outcome for the majority” in the village. They cautioned against deferring too much to “NIMBYs.”
- Most residents expressed interest in development providing things the whole community can use, as opposed to development that is strictly residential. “Something people can get excited about.”
- One resident in attendance tried to explain the strong feelings felt by many in River Forest about development: There is a sense that River Forest community is a “fragile oasis” that is very different from the villages surrounding it. People live in River Forest because of its unique character. When they look at much of the newer development in

surrounding communities, it reinforces the notion that River Forest's character would be very easy to lose without careful decision-making.

- Lake & Lathrop
 - Residents had many questions about the future of this property and how to move forward – who plays a role, what power does the Village have, etc.
 - Village needs to show the lessons learned at Lake & Lathrop and show how another experience like that will be avoided in the future
 - This experience has led to “mistrust” of the Village on development issues.
 - One resident said that the appearance of “wasted money” makes people less willing to accept Village arguments about expanding the tax base
 - During the Lake & Lathrop conversation, one resident also mentioned the difficulty of developing a property at Park & Lake