

# RIVER FOREST FORWARD

— A VISION FOR OUR FUTURE —



VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST

## Issues & Opportunities Memo

DRAFT FOR  
STAFF REVIEW

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## INTRODUCTION

The Village of River Forest is a beautiful, historic community at the heart of the Chicago Metropolitan Region. The Village offers architecturally rich neighborhoods, tree-lined streets, excellent schools, attractive and well-appointed parks, and proximity to environmental features such as the Forest Preserve and the Des Plaines River. Most of the Village's commercial uses exist along its perimeter corridors, along with multi-family and institutional uses. The community is home to two universities on beautiful campuses nestled into traditional neighborhoods. Along with excellent regional access and proximity to Downtown Chicago and two major airports, River Forest remains a highly desirable community offering a very high quality of life for residents.

As a fully built-out community, the Village has limited opportunity for new development. Each infill redevelopment opportunity requires a heightened level of sensitivity and creativity to appropriately balance the Village's existing character with the need and desire for economic development and enhanced commercial and residential options for residents. Balancing these factors requires a plan that can serve to direct the community's resources and efforts moving forward.

In the Fall of 2017, the Village of River Forest kicked-off a yearlong process to update its Comprehensive Plan. The new Comprehensive Plan will establish a community vision for the Village and provide guidance over the next 10 to 20 years for issues related to land use and development, transportation, bicycle and pedestrian mobility, community facilities, environmental features and open space, economic development, community character and sense of place.



## Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is the Village's official policy document outlining plans for land use and development, and effectively serving as a foundation for future decision-making. Authorized by Illinois State Law (ILCS 5/11-12-5), it informs development standards regarding land use, infrastructure, transportation, parks and recreation, and community services and facilities. The Village's most recent Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2003.

## Purpose of the Issues and Opportunities Memorandum

This *Issues and Opportunities Memorandum* provides a critical understanding of the conditions within the Village of River Forest. It provides a snapshot of the Village's current characteristics by summarizing community outreach and technical information related to existing land use, zoning, demographic trends, market potential, transportation networks, community facilities, parks, environmental features, and open spaces. This catalogue of information facilitates informed decision-making by allowing all community members to start from the same facts. The Report lays the foundation for forthcoming recommendations by identifying issues that need to be addressed or assets that should be protected or enhanced. This memorandum is an important first step in the overall comprehensive planning process.

## Planning within the Community Context

It is important to keep in mind the context of the River Forest community and its values and priorities when considering the issues and opportunities identified in this report. As the Comprehensive Plan is developed in the next steps of the planning process, priorities such as maintaining and enhancing neighborhood character, promoting economic development, enhancing property values, decreasing the residential tax burden, and providing a safe community must be kept in mind. As the community evaluates the formulation of plan recommendations and strategies, this report will help to ensure the new Comprehensive Plan is specifically tailored to best serve the needs of the community and be reflective of River Forest values and priorities.



## Planning Process

When completed, the River Forest Comprehensive Plan will be the product of a community-driven, multi-phased process that involves residents, business owners, community stakeholders, local officials, Village staff, and the consulting team. The *Issues and Opportunities Memorandum* is an interim deliverable that summarizes the initial steps of the planning process. This Report contains information and documentation collected and analyzed as part of the first three steps of a seven-step planning process.

- ♦ **Step 1: Project Initiation (Complete)** – Includes kick-off meetings with Village staff, the Village Board, the Plan Commission, and other Boards and Commissions to establish a foundation for the planning process and begin analysis of existing conditions and critical issues.
- ♦ **Step 2: Community Outreach (On-going throughout project)** – Includes traditional and web-based activities and tools to engage the community and gather information about issues, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses, including workshops, interviews, online business and resident surveys, and online map-based outreach focused on issues identification across the community.
- ♦ **Step 3: Existing Conditions Analysis (Complete)** – Includes research and analysis of existing conditions and future potentials to provide an understanding of the community that will guide goals, objectives, and recommendations within the Plan. Analysis included land use, zoning, market and demographic information, community facilities, transportation, environmental features, open space, and more.
- ♦ **Step 4: Vision, Goals & Objectives (On-going)** – Includes establishment of an overall ‘vision’ for what the Village aspires to be in the future, supported by goals and objectives necessary to make that vision a reality.
- ♦ **Step 5: Corridor and Village Center Plan Updates** – Includes the development of updated subarea plans for key areas of the community, including several commercial corridors (North Avenue, Lake Street, Harlem Avenue, and Madison Street) and the Village Center area, generally located in the area defined by Lake Street, Lathrop Avenue, Central and Park Avenues.
- ♦ **Step 6: Village-Wide Plans & Policies** – Includes preparation of Village-wide plans, recommendations, and policies to be reviewed and vetted by Village staff and key stakeholders, including areas related to land use, transportation, community facilities, environmental features and open space, community character, and implementation.
- ♦ **Step 7: Plan Document and Adoption** – Includes development and refinement of a draft Comprehensive Plan document for local review and consideration and presentation to the Plan Commission for public hearing and the Village Board for adoption.



## Community Outreach (Step 2)

The River Forest Comprehensive Plan is supported by an extensive community outreach process designed to engage the public and gather input from a diverse range of community stakeholders, including residents, business owners, developers, Village Officials, Village staff, and more. A combination of traditional, face-to-face events and online engagement tools helped to collect feedback regarding issues, concerns, opportunities, priority projects, strengths, and assets within the Village. Engaging the community will inform the planning process and guide recommendations and strategies within the Plan, ensuring the document is directly responsive to the needs and desires of River Forest.

In total, over 325 individuals participated in public engagement activities. The following outreach events and tools have been utilized to engage the River Forest community.

- ♦ Plan Commission Workshop (July 18, 2017)
- ♦ Food Truck Rally Tent and Questionnaire (August 26, 2017)
- ♦ Resident Questionnaire (September, 2017 through March, 2018)
- ♦ Business Questionnaire (September, 2017 through March, 2018)
- ♦ Youth Questionnaire (September, 2017 through March, 2018)
- ♦ Village Board Workshop (October 16, 2017)

- ♦ Joint Boards & Commissions Workshop (October 19, 2017)
- ♦ Business Workshop (November 14, 2017)
- ♦ Community Workshop (November 16, 2017)
- ♦ Stakeholder Interviews (February 1, 2018)

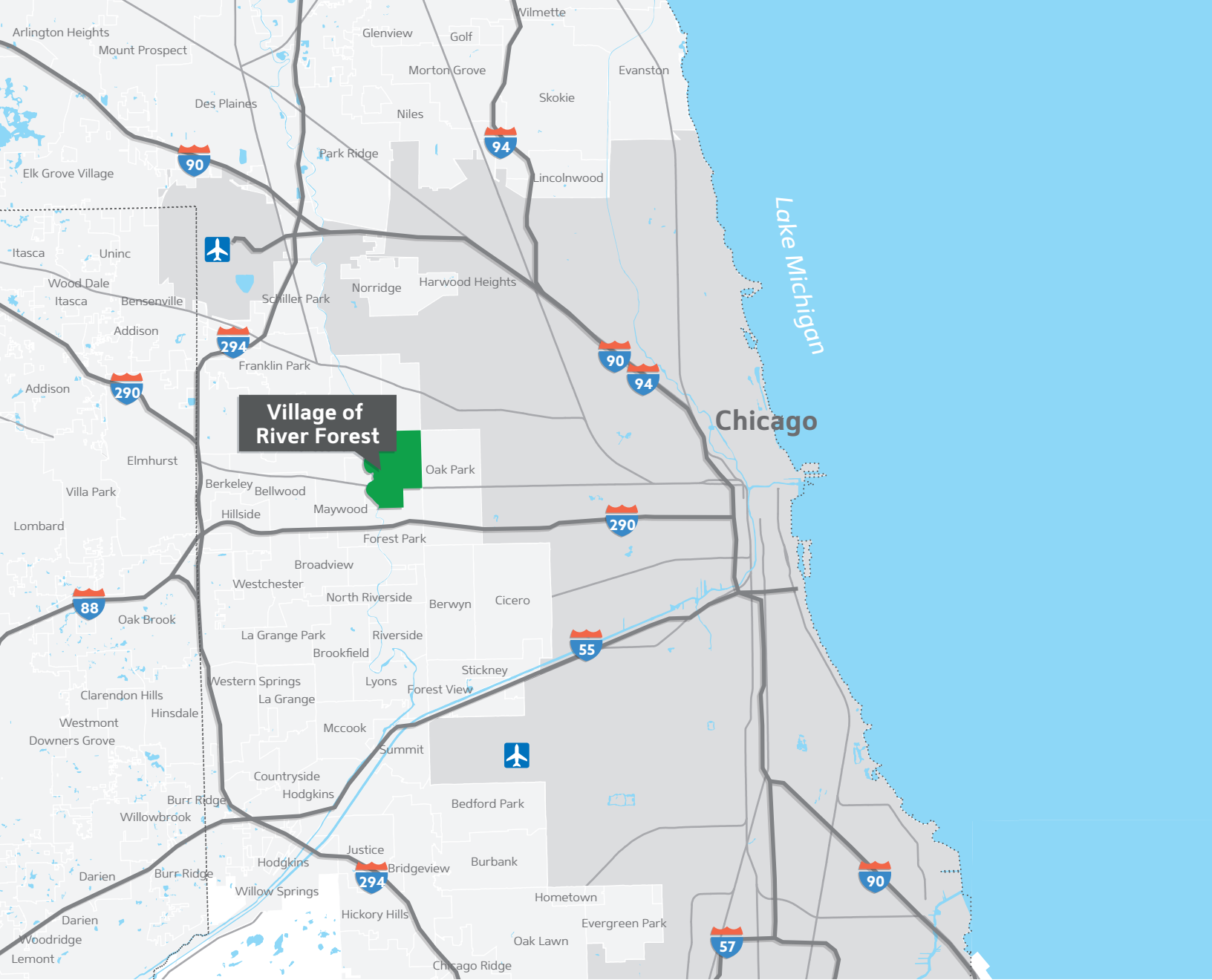
Input received through the community outreach process has been directly incorporated within the **Issues & Opportunities Chapter**. In addition, findings from the outreach process will be utilized as a resource throughout the planning process to guide development of goals, objectives, recommendations, and strategies within the Comprehensive Plan. Detailed summaries of all outreach events are publicly available through the project website.

# 2



## COMMUNITY PROFILE

Long-range visioning and planning is founded upon an understanding of where the community is today, and where it wants to go. This chapter provides important background information about the community, including the community's regional position, its history, relevant past plans and studies, a demographic and market analysis, existing land use, and the current zoning. Collectively, this information paints a profile of the River Forest community and establishes a foundation for more detailed analysis within the Comprehensive Plan.



## Regional Context

The Village of River Forest is a desirable suburban community of just over 11,000 residents in the heart of the Chicago Metropolitan Region. Located in central Cook County, the Village shares borders with Oak Park, Forest Park, Maywood, Melrose Park, Elmwood Park, and the City of Chicago. The Village is known for its high quality of life, amazing public and private schools, attractive and architecturally rich neighborhoods, tree-lined streets, beautiful single-family homes, and historically significant properties.

Accessible by commuter train, River Forest has a Metra station with service to Chicago on the Union Pacific West Line. In addition, the Village is directly adjacent to Downtown Oak Park, which includes a CTA Green Line station and an additional Metra stop. Interstate 290, just south of River Forest, provides widespread automobile access to Downtown Chicago, O'Hare and Midway airports, and the greater Chicago and Midwest region.

The geographic area of River Forest is 2.5 square miles, dominated by residential neighborhoods and forest preserve lands. Maintained by the Cook County forest preserve, whose headquarters is also within the Village, the forest preserve is part of a regional greenway along the Des Plaines River, which runs along the western edge of the community.



# Market

To support this planning effort, a thorough review of market and demographic information was completed, based in part upon the Village’s 2015 North Avenue and Madison Street Market Analysis. This provides an overview of existing conditions and short-term projections for demographics, housing, and retail development. In cooperation with Village staff, more detailed analysis of specific sites will be conducted as necessary to address recommendations and policies within the Plan. Esri Business Analyst, the American Community Survey, and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) were utilized to prepare this analysis.

# Demographics

Data indicates that the Village population has declined since the 2010 U.S. Census and is projected to continue to decline through 2022. The same trend is true for the Village’s households at similar rate.

The fastest growing segment of the population are those residents age 65 and over. This is not due to new older residents moving into the Village but rather existing residents getting older and staying in place. To the contrary, there is not a draw to the community for older individuals. There is, however, a small increase in the number of households age 25 to 34. This bodes well for future reinvestment as this is an indication that as older residents leave their larger single-family homes there are younger householders and future families moving in.

Incomes within the Village are rising with the median household income projected to increase by nine percent between 2017 and 2022 to over \$139,000. The largest growth will occur in the segment of the population earning over \$100,000 per year.

River Forest Demographic Summary (2010-2022)					
	2010	2017	2022	Project Change (2010-2022)	
Population	11,172	10,660	10,484	-688	-6.2%
Households	3,961	3,779	3,712	-249	-6.3%
Employment	5,978	5,219	4,451	-1,527	-25.5%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst; Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning; Houseal Lavigne Associates

## Housing

The majority of housing in the Village consists of owner occupied single-family detached structures. Nearly one quarter of units are contained in multifamily buildings. A much smaller percentage of units are within single-family attached units. According to Esri Business Analyst, less than 10 percent of the Village's housing is renter occupied. Based upon data from the American Community Survey, overall vacancy in River Forest is nearly 10 percent and is projected to increase to over 11 percent by 2022. However, the majority of vacancy is concentrated in renter-occupied housing units, at 12 percent, compared to a significantly lower vacancy rate for owner-occupied units at 1.5 percent.

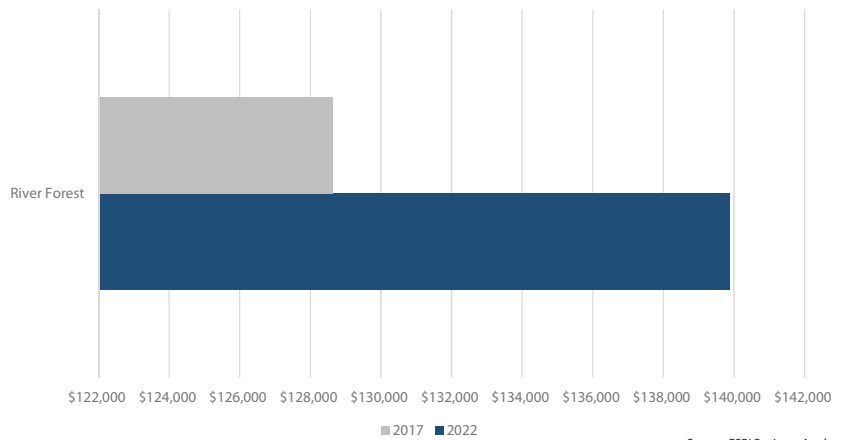
Over 78 percent of the Village's housing stock was built before 1960 with more than half constructed before 1940. This is reflective of the Village's historic character. Despite the tear-down phenomena of the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, only two percent of the Village's total housing stock was built during this period.

### Implications

The Village is a relatively stable, affluent, community with a strong historical character. Housing stock, while aging, is high value and appreciating. These assets can be leveraged to attract future commercial and residential investment and development. While the Village's population is included in the larger market area of surrounding communities, the attractiveness of locating within River Forest is a positive consideration.

Median Household Income (2017, 2022)

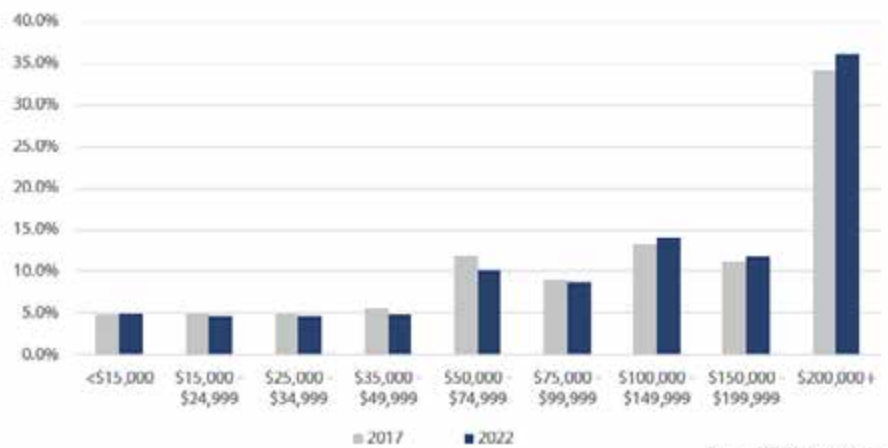
River Forest



Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Households by Income (2017, 2022)

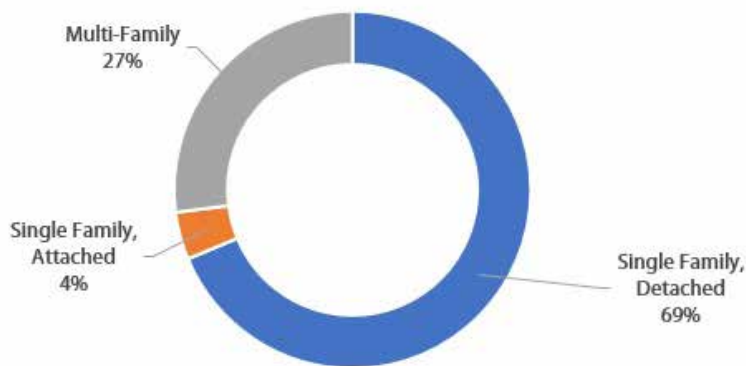
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Source: ESRI Business Analyst

## Housing by Type (2012-2016 Avg.)

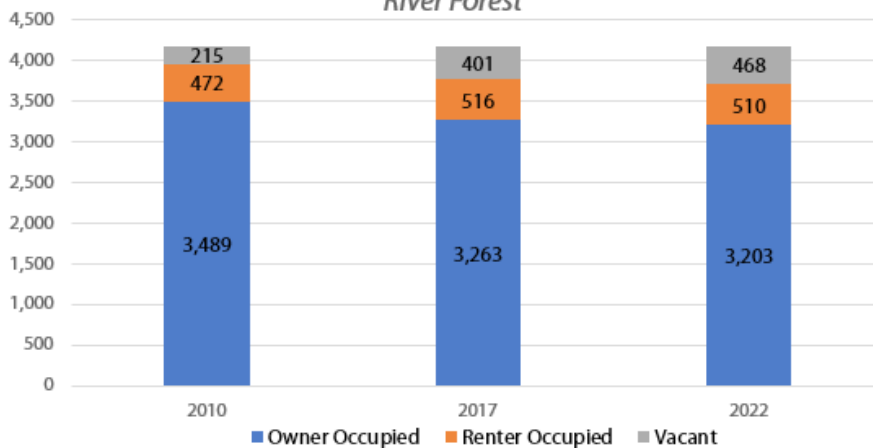
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Source: 2012-2016 5-Year American Community Survey

## Total Housing Units (2010, 2017, 2022)

River Forest



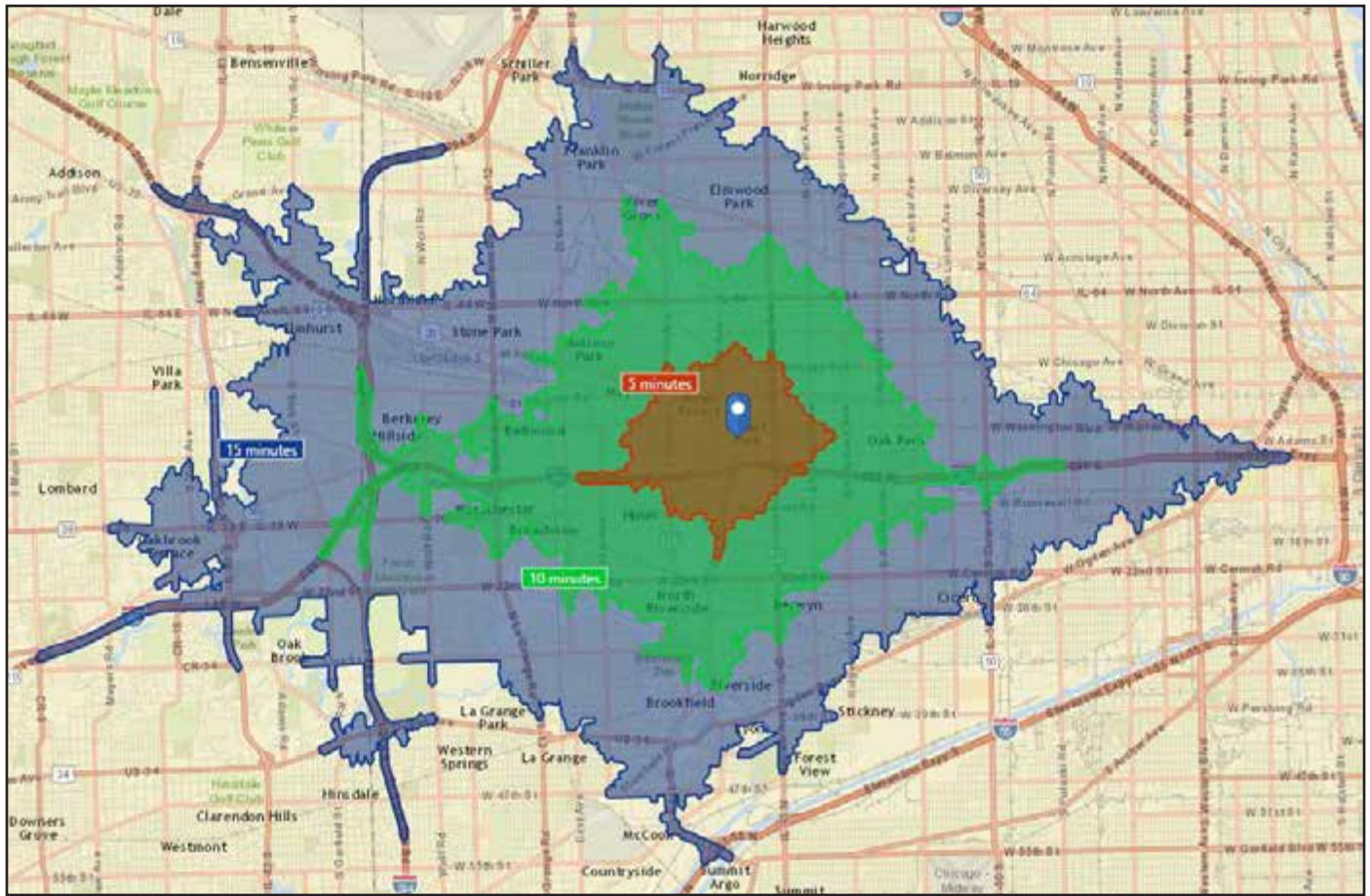
Source: ESRI Business Analyst

## Retail

This section of the market analysis is taken directly from the corridor market report for the Village conducted by the consultant in 2015. The timeliness of the data and fact that the Village has remained largely unchanged since its development ensures that the information provided is both accurate and relevant.

The Village was analyzed in terms of ability to attract new development and capture a proportionate share of area market potential. To do so, a drive-time analysis was prepared. Defining the market area by drivetime better emulates potential in that consumers are more motivated by the amount of time that it takes to get to a given location as opposed to mileage or municipal boundaries.

A five-, 10- and 15-minute drive time was analyzed from the intersections of North Avenue and Harlem Avenue and Madison Street and Lathrop Avenue. The five-minute drive time from both locations is more indicative of convenience retail and local potential. The 15-minute drive, for the most part, exceeds the likely draw and influence of either location. The 10-minute drive best identifies the market reach of the corridors in that it includes both the local population and a reasonable regional draw.

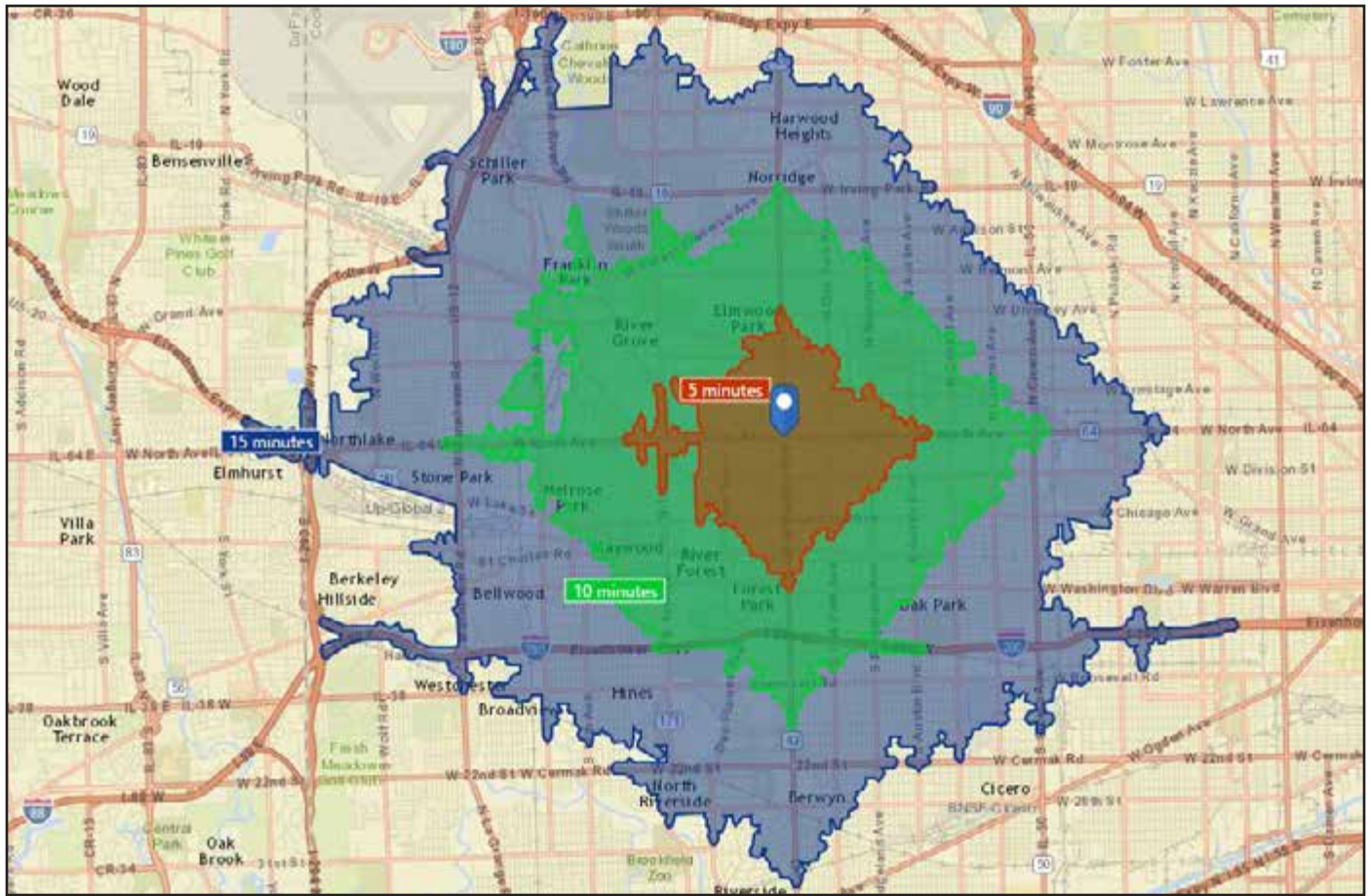


## Retail Gap Analysis Summary (2015)

### River Forest: Madison Street & Lathrop Avenue

Summary Demographics	5 Minute Drivetime		10 Minute Drivetime		15 Minute Drivetime	
Population	38,470		203,097		637,020	
Households	17,908		77,434		224,500	
Median Disposable Income	\$43,161		\$42,352		\$38,597	
Per Capita Income	\$38,985		\$30,033		\$24,700	
Overview	5 Minute Drivetime		10 Minute Drivetime		15 Minute Drivetime	
Total Retail Gap	-\$31.6		\$105.0		\$201.3	
Total Retail Trade	-\$13.6		\$158.1		\$289.4	
Total Food & Drink	-\$18.1		-\$53.0		-\$88.1	
Retail Gap by Industry Group	Retail Gap (\$M)	Potential (Sq. Ft.)*	Retail Gap (\$M)	Potential (Sq. Ft.)*	Retail Gap (\$M)	Potential (Sq. Ft.)*
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	\$37.2	--	\$182.8	--	\$394.0	--
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	-\$11.5	-28,765	\$6.2	15,607	-\$1.7	-4,179
Electronics & Appliance Stores	\$7.4	18,616	\$0.7	1,655	\$13.9	34,750
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	\$18.2	45,387	\$44.0	109,902	\$62.9	157,239
Food & Beverage Stores	\$2.2	5,451	\$55.5	138,795	-\$95.1	-237,847
Health & Personal Care Stores	-\$171.9	-429,774	-\$257.5	-643,749	-\$375.8	-939,542
Gasoline Stations	\$29.3	--	\$133.0	--	\$295.8	--
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	-\$5.9	-14,839	-\$60.0	-149,901	-\$84.0	-209,908
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, & Music Stores	\$9.4	23,580	-\$7.2	-18,005	-\$10.3	-25,636
General Merchandise Stores	\$32.6	81,484	-\$64.2	-160,624	-\$107.8	-269,413
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$6.0	14,930	-\$4.5	-11,183	\$6.1	15,337
Nonstore Retailers	\$33.4	--	\$129.4	--	\$191.3	--
Food Services & Drinking Places	-\$18.1	-45,139	-\$53.0	-132,593	-\$88.1	-220,129

\*Potential is based on an average sales of \$400/sq. ft. Motor Vehicles & Parts Dealers, Gas Stations, and Nonstore Retailers are not included in this calculation.  
Source: ESRI Business Analyst; Houseal Lavigne Associates



## Retail Gap Analysis Summary (2015)

### River Forest: North Avenue & Harlem Avenue

Summary Demographics	5 Minute Drivetime		10 Minute Drivetime		15 Minute Drivetime	
Population	45,418		247,253		624,612	
Households	17,507		90,451		214,049	
Median Disposable Income	\$52,760		\$41,230		\$37,812	
Per Capita Income	\$39,674		\$27,689		\$22,439	
Overview	5 Minute Drivetime		10 Minute Drivetime		15 Minute Drivetime	
Total Retail Gap	\$158.4		\$679.5		-\$78.7	
Total Retail Trade	\$164.7		\$674.4		-\$54.1	
Total Food & Drink	-\$6.3		\$5.1		-\$24.6	
Retail Gap by Industry Group	Retail Gap (\$M)	Potential (Sq. Ft.)*	Retail Gap (\$M)	Potential (Sq. Ft.)*	Retail Gap (\$M)	Potential (Sq. Ft.)*
Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers	\$94.4	--	\$278.2	--	\$443.0	--
Furniture & Home Furnishings Stores	-\$2.6	-6,435	\$3.4	8,528	\$4.0	10,106
Electronics & Appliance Stores	\$10.3	25,672	\$22.5	56,295	\$10.1	25,194
Bldg Materials, Garden Equip. & Supply Stores	\$15.4	38,621	\$34.5	86,270	\$83.8	209,592
Food & Beverage Stores	\$4.8	11,997	-\$6.0	-14,907	-\$248.4	-621,067
Health & Personal Care Stores	-\$81.7	-204,298	-\$162.3	-405,730	-\$473.8	-1,184,573
Gasoline Stations	\$44.2	--	\$160.8	--	\$245.0	--
Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores	-\$1.7	-4,303	\$57.2	143,019	-\$89.1	-222,797
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book, & Music Stores	\$10.2	25,441	\$15.6	39,112	\$25.2	63,093
General Merchandise Stores	\$16.5	41,258	\$70.5	176,158	\$194.9	487,224
Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$1.0	2,478	\$10.2	25,586	\$8.9	22,129
Nonstore Retailers	\$53.9	--	\$189.7	--	-\$257.7	--
Food Services & Drinking Places	-\$6.3	-15,748	\$5.1	12,669	-\$24.6	-61,531

\*Potential is based on an average sales of \$400/sq. ft. Motor Vehicles & Parts Dealers, Gas Stations, and Nonstore Retailers are not included in this calculation.  
Source: ESRI Business Analyst; Houseal Lavigne Associates

While there is an active daytime population and activity generators in close proximity to both corridors, it is not significant enough to have an influence that would alter market dynamics. For example, the office environment in Oak Brook produces a daytime population that is significantly higher than the resident population, thus creating opportunities that otherwise would not exist. Another factor for consideration is interstate access and proximity. While both corridors are within a relatively short distance to I-290, neither is positioned to capture traffic leaving or entering the highway. The interstate does, however, increase the market reach somewhat, but also provides the conduit for enhancing accessibility to other market areas such as Oak Brook and Elmhurst.

In a suburban market such as River Forest, consumers will typically travel ten minutes or less for day to day items and services such as groceries and dry cleaning. The market extends further for larger purchases and durable goods such as appliances and electronics. All needs can be accessed within a relatively short distance from the homes of every Village resident.

In addition to surplus and leakage figures, the accompanying charts also include supported retail potential in square footage. Converting leakage figures into square footage allows a visualization of what size and scale of retail could be supported. While sales-per-square-foot revenues vary by individual retailer and industry sources, general assumptions of supported square footage can be made by using a benchmark average. A generally accepted range for national retailers is \$200 to \$400 per-square-foot. The use of a per-square-foot amount on the higher end of this range allows for a more conservative approach so as not to overstate retail potential. As shown in the Gap Analysis tables, when a per-square-foot amount of \$400 is applied, demand is effectively translated to a potential number of square feet that could be supported within a five, ten, or fifteen minute drivetime. Equally, if there is a surplus, the amount of square footage in which the market is oversupplied is indicated.

It is important to note, however, that calculations cannot be effectively applied to uses such as car dealerships or gas stations. This same methodology is applied to each of the market areas.

To help envision development potential in square footage, the following provides the average size of an assortment of retail stores (not including parking), based off of data obtained by industry sources. Supported square footage from the Retail Gap Analysis can be compared to this list for context. It is important to note that these stores are listed merely for contextual purposes and not to support development of any particular brand over another.

- ♦ Chipotle – 2,650 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ CVS – 19,856 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Buffalo Wild Wings – 5,600 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Olive Garden – 7,336 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ The Gap – 12,503 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Barnes & Noble – 25,525 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Whole Foods – 33,739 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Best Buy – 38,631 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Kohl's – 75,230 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Walmart – 102,683 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Home Depot – 105,192 ft<sup>2</sup>
- ♦ Macy's – 181,946 ft<sup>2</sup>

## *Madison Street*

The River Forest portion of the Madison Street corridor is comprised of those areas on the north side of the street between Thatcher Avenue on the west and Lathrop Avenue on the east. The pedestrian friendly 'main street' qualities that characterize Forest Park's Madison Street gives way to a more auto-oriented retail environment as Madison Street travels west and into River Forest. Retail strip centers and residential uses intersperse among smaller stretches of inline retailers. Similar to its Forest Park counterpart, businesses within the Corridor are chiefly comprised of small, independent retailers. Average daily traffic counts for Madison Street are roughly 13,000 vehicles per day which would limit the likelihood of attracting national or regional tenants. There is a notable concentration of restaurants and bars near Ashland Avenue on the southern side of Madison Street in Forest Park. Building off of the success of the Forest Park portion of the corridor, restaurants/bars may be supportable and appropriate for this area of Madison Street. The number and scale would be dependent upon the availability of sites. Development, is impacted; however, by the fact that this is a one-sided corridor within the Village.

Existing residential uses and recent development provide some of the foundation for potential new residential units. Depending on the site and how it is integrated into the Madison Street environment, additional attached single-family and/or multi-family development could be supported in this corridor. An appropriate sized and scaled mixed-use development could also include residential above retail as well. Recent development of attached single-family residential along Forest Avenue demonstrate the viability of residential along the corridor.

In discussions with brokers, developers and business representatives, restaurant/bars were frequently identified as the development type that could have potential on Madison. The gap analysis indicates a surplus of space, which is due to the proximity of uses within both Forest Park and Oak Park. While this represents competition it also is the catalyst for potential development.

## *North Avenue*

The North Avenue corridor extends the length of the Village's northern border running east from Harlem Avenue to Thatcher Avenue on the west. North Avenue is characterized by a mix of commercial and residential uses similar to that found along stretches of the corridor in adjacent communities. Average daily traffic counts along North Avenue are in the range of 35,000 cars per day which is well within that desired by most national retailers.

Compared to the other corridors, the North Avenue Corridor is relatively balanced with regard to the number of commercial buildings on either side of the street. However, a large percentage of the commercial space along the corridor is office and service related uses. The development patterns and context of the North Avenue corridor does not lend itself well to new residential development.

There are indications of market potential in several categories; however, North Avenue is located within an extremely competitive environment. Future development and investment potential will be contingent on factors beyond supply, demand, and traffic counts. As an aging commercial corridor with shallow lot depths and immediate adjacency to residential neighborhoods, development opportunities are constrained. While larger sites would enhance marketability and development potential, the need for assembling adjacent residential properties places serious limitations on realizing this potential.

Site assembly of contiguous commercial properties could help facilitate reinvestment. In addition to providing larger development sites with greater flexibility, it would also provide opportunities to consolidate curb-cuts and provide cross access between properties. In addition, there is currently a lack of synergy between uses that helps catalyze development. Creating larger cohesive sites provides an opportunity to attract uses that complement and build off of one another and/or create a destination environment. This would likely require Village participation in the form of development and financial assistance such as Tax Increment Finance (TIF) and other tools.

## Market Implications

It is important to point out that market potential is for the entire market area and is not exclusive to River Forest. A saturated market area does not preclude new development or uses from locating to a specific location. It does, however, mean that the Village needs to ensure that it maximizes its competitive position to ensure that commercial sites have good access and exposure and that efforts are focused on retention and attraction of uses that complement one another and serve as a draw for additional development. Equally, leakage does not immediately translate directly to development potential if the right sites are not available.

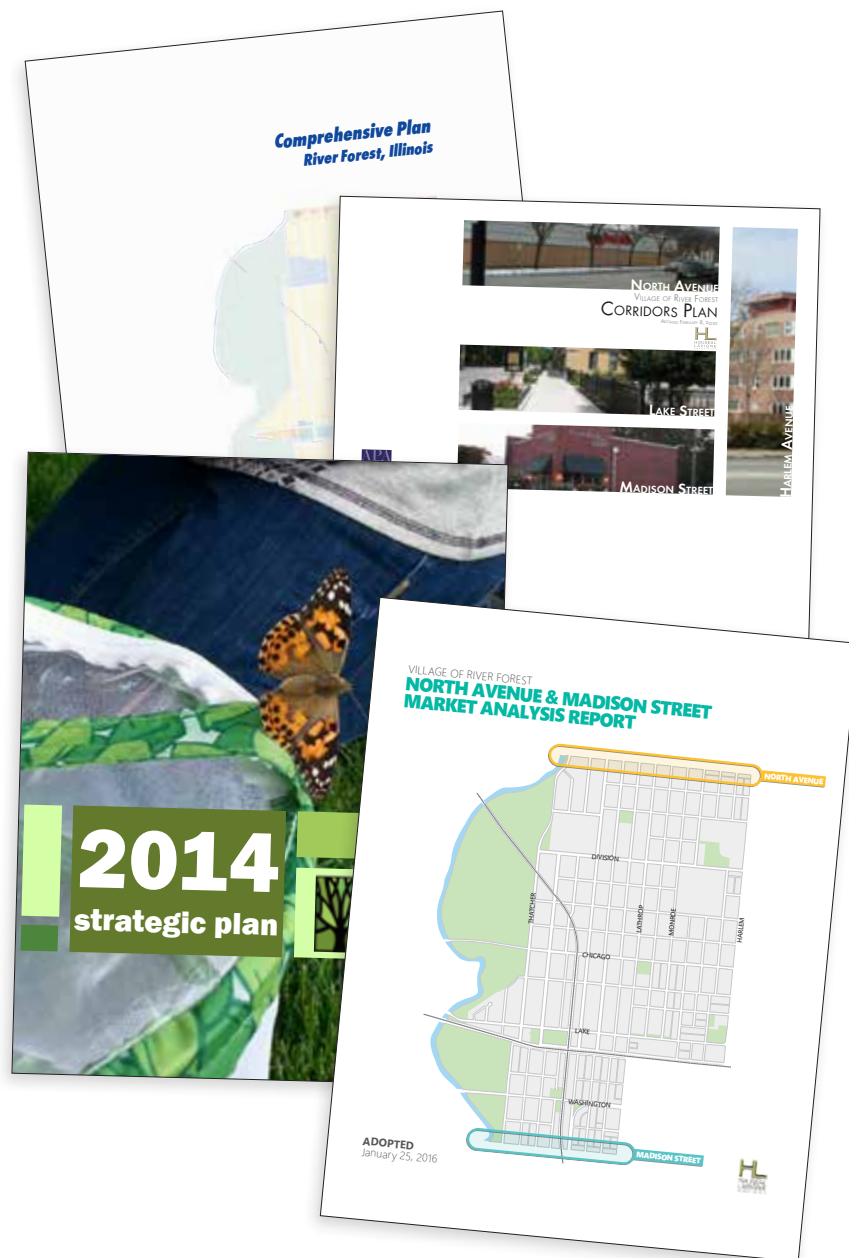
It is important to point out that the Harlem Avenue and Lake Street Corridors also compete within the same market. The Lake Street /Harlem Avenue development is well established and efforts should be focused on ensuring that future uses complement rather than compete with those businesses. In that North Avenue and Madison Street function differently, developers, investors and retailers interested in locating to the area should be provided options that do not place the Village's commercial areas in conflict or competition with one another.

While other competing communities are well located, the Village needs to promote and leverage its assets including being a stable, older, highly educated, affluent community with a tremendous housing stock, direct access to public transit, and a pro-business environment.

## Past Plans, Studies & Reports

As part of the planning process, past plans, studies, and reports that impact policy, planning, and development within River Forest were thoroughly reviewed. This analysis ensures that the objectives and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan respond to prior planning efforts and, where applicable, incorporate or address established policies and direction. The following past plans, studies, and reports have been reviewed:

- ♦ River Forest Comprehensive Plan (2003)
- ♦ River Forest Corridors Plan (2010)
- ♦ River Forest Park District Strategic Plan (2014)
- ♦ North Avenue and Madison Street Market Analysis (2015)







## ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

As a long-range planning effort, the River Forest Comprehensive Plan must be responsive to the specific issues and opportunities that the Village faces now and in the future. A wide range of issues were identified to be considered in the plan. These topics were determined through meaningful community outreach, market and demographic analysis, field reconnaissance, and extensive research by the consultant team. These topics were then organized into six primary categories, representing the broad themes that must be addressed and will serve as the basis for recommendations and policies within the Comprehensive Plan. The six primary topic categories include the following:

- ♦ Land Use & Real Estate Development
- ♦ Economic Development
- ♦ Transportation & Mobility
- ♦ Parks & Open Space
- ♦ Facilities, Infrastructure & Institutions
- ♦ Civic Government

# Land Use & Development

Land use and development are central to the comprehensive planning process, offering direction on how public and private properties are to be planned, designed, developed, and utilized within the Village. To inform the planning process, a complete review of existing land use and zoning regulations has been completed. The information from this review has been utilized to inform the identified issues and opportunities, providing a foundation for understanding land use and making recommendations for community character and future development within River Forest.

## Existing Land Use

An inventory of existing land use has been compiled, utilizing a combination of data provided by the Village as well as field reconnaissance in October of 2017. Each parcel within the Village has been carefully reviewed and classified into one of 13 land use designations. The classifications are as follows:

### *Single-family Detached*

This designation consists of single-family detached homes. This may include accessory structures and properties that act as private yards for single-family homes.

### *Single-family Attached*

This designation consists of residential structures that include dwelling units connected horizontally, with a dedicated entrance for each dwelling unit. This includes duplexes and townhomes.

### *Multi-family*

This designation consists of residential structures that contain multiple dwelling units stacked vertically, with shared entrances and hallways. This includes apartments and condominiums.

### *Commercial Retail*

This designation consists of commercial businesses, including commercial retail and service as well as restaurants and similar uses with ground-floor storefronts.

### *Commercial Office*

This designation consists of structures used for professional businesses and operations as well as medical practices and clinics that occupy commercial office spaces on one or more floors.

### *Mixed-Use*

This designation consists of mixed-use buildings where multiple, distinct uses are stacked vertically. Most commonly, this includes first floor commercial retail or restaurants with residential or office spaces occupying the upper floors.

### *Parks & Open Space*

This designation consists of parks and open spaces within the Village that provide active and passive recreational opportunities. This contains both Park District and Forest Preserve properties, as well as other intentional open space.

### *Public / Semi-Public*

This designation consists of state and local government uses, municipal facilities, community service providers, emergency services and religious institutions.

### *Schools*

This designation consists of schools that provide education to students from pre-school and kindergarten age through grade 12. This includes both public and private schools within the Village.

### *Universities*

This designation consists of institutions that provide higher education. This includes the campuses and associated facilities of Dominican University and Concordia University Chicago.

### *Parking*

This designation consists of properties specifically dedicated to parking automobiles, including surface lots and parking structures. This does not include parking as part of commercial or residential development.

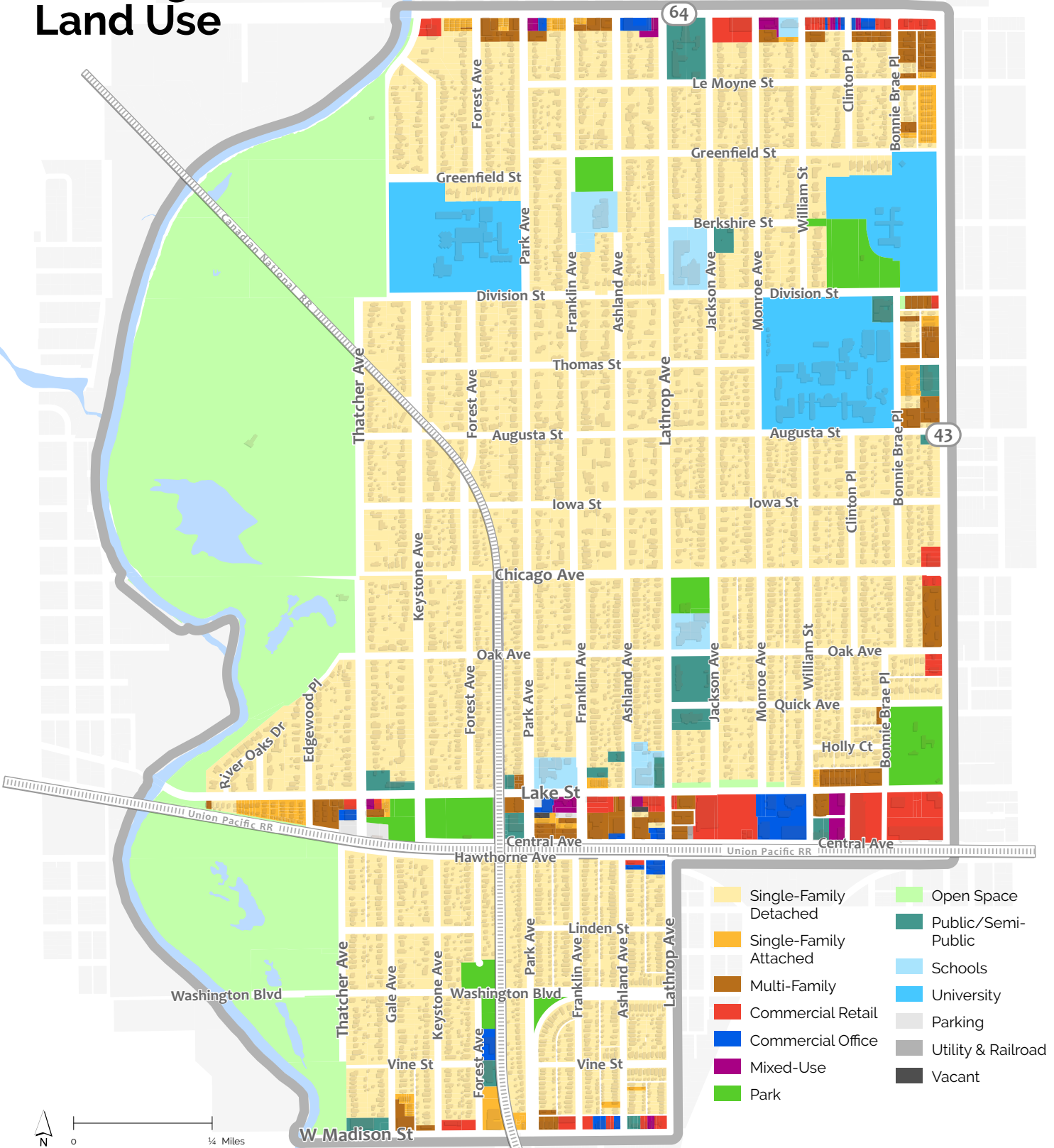
### *Utility & Railroad*

This designation consists of utilities, properties that support local infrastructure, and railroad rights-of-way for the transmission of gas, electric, telephone, train lines, etc.

### *Vacant*

This designation consists of vacant properties that are eligible for redevelopment but which currently contain no occupied physical structures or facilities.

# Existing Land Use



## Current Zoning

Development regulations within River Forest are outlined in Chapter 10 of the Village Code. Last revised in December of 2017, the code dictates how land can be used and defines standards for new development. While essential to the comprehensive planning process, the zoning code is also a valuable resource for property owners and developers seeking to invest within the community. The zoning code establishes the following nine (9) districts:

### *R1: Wide Lot Single-Family Residential*

This district is intended to provide for single-family detached housing specifically on large lots while preserving the existing physical character of the area.

### *R2: Single-Family Residential*

This district is intended to provide for single-family detached housing while preserving the existing physical character of the area. Compared to the R1 district, lots within R2 are generally smaller in size.

### *R3: Attached Single-Family Residential*

This district is intended to provide a mixture of single-family attached residences, such as duplexes and town-homes.

### *R4: Multi-Family Residential*

This district is intended to provide for low-density multi-family residential development.

### *C1: Commercial*

This district is intended to provide for a combination of specialty retail stores, office, and service uses.

### *C2: Commercial + Multi-Family Residential*

This district is intended to provide for a combination of retail, office, service uses, and multi-family housing.

### *C3: Village Center Commercial*

This district is intended to provide for a combination of specialty retail stores, office, service uses, and multi-family housing, with a focus on creating a central retail area for the Village as a traditional community downtown that is vibrant and easy to walk around.

### *ORIC: Office / Research / Industrial / Commercial*

This district is intended to provide for a combination of light industrial, research, commercial, and office uses in an environment that is attractive and consistent with the image and character of River Forest. This may be associated with corporations or academic institutions in the Village.

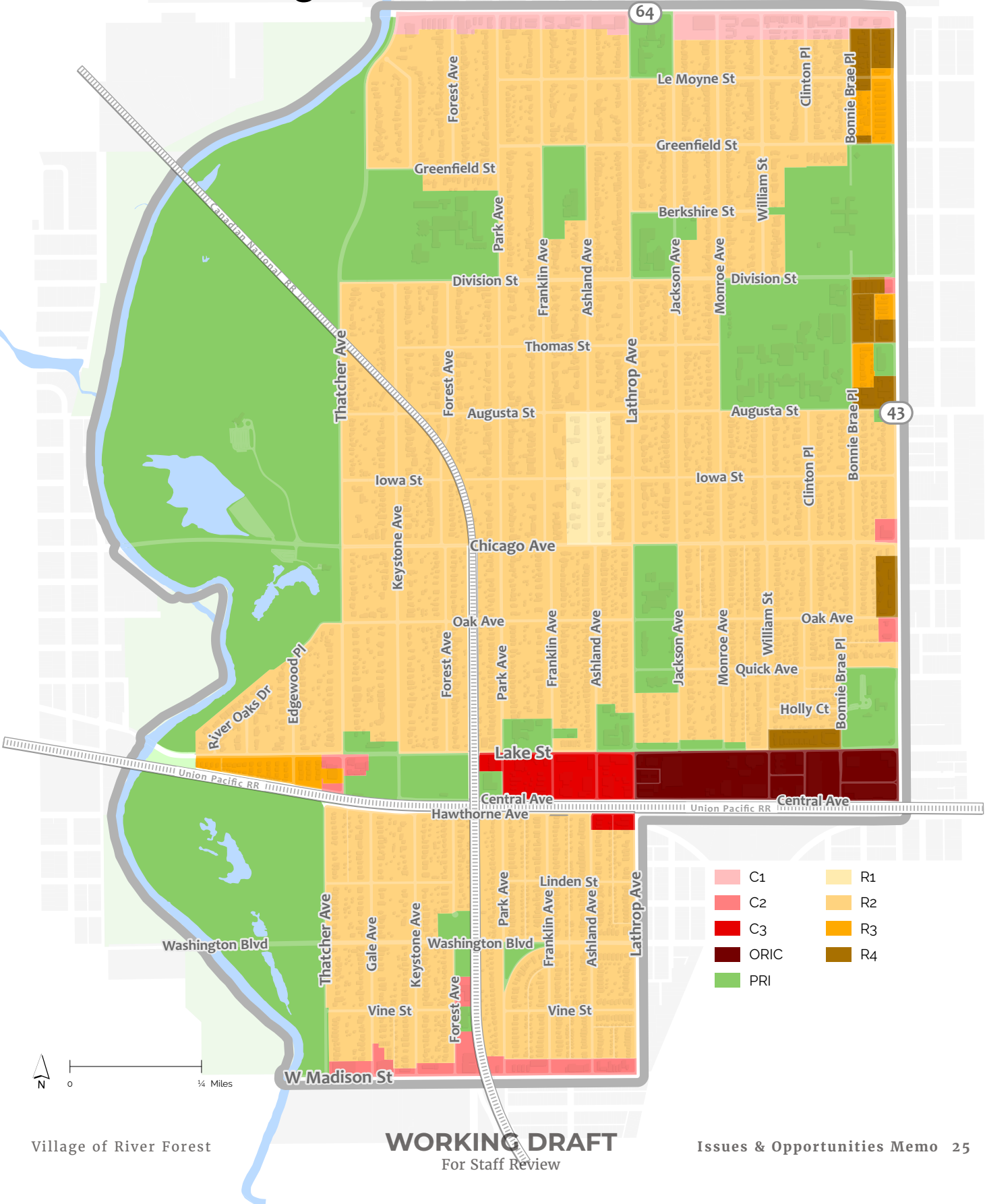
### *PRI: Public / Recreation / Institutional*

This district is intended to accommodate public, semi-public, and private land uses within the Village including buildings and open spaces to be used for recreation, education, community facilities or institutional uses.

## *Planned Developments*

In addition to the nine (9) zoning districts, the Village also considers planned developments that provide greater flexibility in addressing specific projects and their impacts on the community. Planned Developments are allowed to reinterpret elements of the underlying zoning, subject to a review and permitting process with the Village that ensure the development is responsive to Village needs and does not cause adverse effects to the community.

# Current Zoning





## Issues & Opportunities

The following issues and opportunities are related to land use and potential development that will be considered and addressed within the River Forest Comprehensive Plan.

### Limited Development Opportunity

Located in the heart of the Chicago metropolitan area, River Forest is effectively a built-out community and has no growth areas or significant undeveloped land. Where redevelopment opportunities do exist, they primarily consist of individual buildings or parcels. More significant opportunities generally require the assembly of multiple land parcels for larger projects.

This places a greater importance on development opportunities that do arise, since once a property has been redeveloped, it is unlikely to change again for a significant period of time. Thus, every opportunity for new investment will have a significant and long-term effect on the community. Careful review and prioritization of key opportunities and objectives is essential to ensure that new development and private investment will best meet the needs of the Village and strengthen the Village's overall character and quality.

### Residential Dominance

The composition of land use within River Forest is highly residential, dominated by traditional neighborhoods of single-family detached homes. Residential properties represent 56% of River Forest's total area, compared to 26% for preserved open space within the Forest Preserve and just 19% for all other active uses. Commercial areas are quite limited, comprising just 2% of the Village's total area. Over time, the profitability of residential redevelopment within the community has encroached into the commercial corridors, further limiting opportunities for non-residential or mixed-use development.

### Housing Diversification

The majority of housing stock within River Forest is single-family detached homes on small to medium sized land parcels. Higher-density residential, including single-family attached and multi-family units, represent only 11% of all residential properties. National trends show a growing preference for higher density residential that offers low maintenance and less expensive housing options.

Through community outreach, Village residents and stakeholders regularly discussed the need for greater housing diversification, including higher density and 'age-in-place' options that allow seniors to stay within the community while downsizing. Many participants felt the lack of housing options were driving older residents out of River Forest. Housing choice, diversity of residential product types, for sale and rental property and a variety of price points are important considerations moving forward.



## Historic Preservation & Neighborhood Character

River Forest is home to a wealth of beautiful, unique and historic properties, including architecturally significant structures designed by prominent American architects, most notably Frank Lloyd Wright, William Drummond, Spencer and Powers, E.E. Roberts, and their contemporaries. These contribute to River Forest's highly revered neighborhood character and identity. Residents regularly discussed the importance of historic homes within the neighborhoods as a critical community asset that must be preserved.

Over the years, some historic homes have been demolished to make way for redevelopment and new investment. While the Village does have a Historic Preservation Commission, stakeholders have voiced the concern that existing regulations do not provide enough protection for historic properties, which over time could threaten the character of the neighborhoods. Addressing this issue will require a careful balance between respecting property rights while ensuring that valuable historic structures are not lost and that neighborhood character is not compromised.

## Village Center

River Forest does not have a traditional village center or downtown. While various commercial corridors and mixed-use areas do exist, none provide the desired character or space to act as a community focal point or central gathering space for festivals, events and special occasions. As a result, residents often travel to adjacent communities that offer a greater variety of stores, restaurants, and entertainment in concentrated, high density commercial districts. In particular, many residents frequent Downtown Oak Park, directly east of the Village along Lake Street, and the shops and restaurants along Madison Street in Forest Park.

Beyond providing commercial uses, traditional downtowns and central business district's (CBD) also support community gathering and function as the social 'heart' of a community. They contribute to local identity, help to encourage social interaction and offer a place that residents can be proud of as a representation of their home town. Without a clearly identifiable village center, River Forest can at times feel decentralized and without a clearly defined urban destination to attract residents and visitors of the community.

## Incompatible Uses

Given the compact nature of development within River Forest, land use incompatibility can be an issue for adjacent properties. These can result in negative impacts to quality of life and property values where higher intensity uses negatively affect adjacent residential neighborhoods. However, unlike other communities, River Forest does not have the ability to relocate uses or avoid incompatibility given the Village's size and built-out footprint. Thus, efforts to minimize these impacts, such as site design, buffering and screening, will be important in order to address impacts related to incompatibility, both for existing properties and future infill development.

# Economic Development

Economic Development is a central focus for River Forest, consistently identified as a primary concern throughout the stakeholder and public engagement process. Given the community's size and fully built-out status, opportunities for new development and significant economic development projects are limited. As a result, the Comprehensive Plan must address these concerns while providing the Village with tools to capitalize on available opportunities as they arise, enabling healthy economic development within the context of the existing established urban environment.

## Issues & Opportunities

The following are issues and opportunities related to economic development that will be considered and addressed while developing the new River Forest Comprehensive Plan.

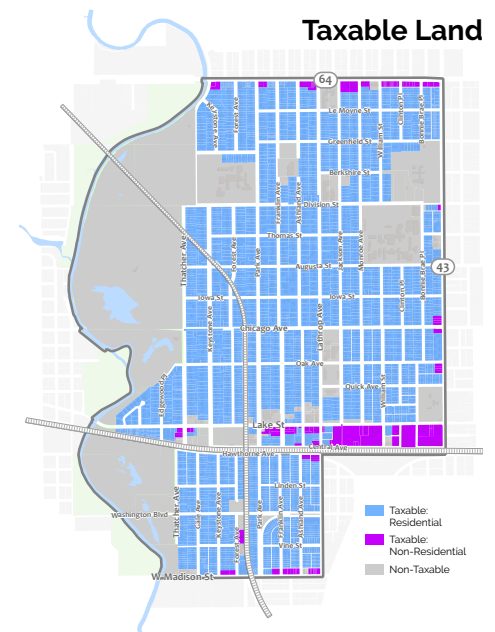
### Residential Tax Burden

The community's tax structure is significantly impacted by the proportion of the land use. As previously noted, the land in River Forest is primarily low-density residential, accounting for 56% of the Village's total area. However, non-taxable entities, including the Forest Preserve, universities, schools, religious uses, and other public facilities, also represent 41% or 957 acres of the community. As a result, only 74.4 acres, just 3.2% of River Forest is comprised of non-residential, taxable properties.

Without a significant source of taxes from commercial or industrial businesses, this places a greater tax burden on residential property owners. Residents regularly voiced a concern that property taxes are increasing, as they have in much of Cook County, and many indicated that increased business development would be important to mitigate the residential taxes.

Given the composition of the existing land uses within River Forest and the fact that the community is essentially fully built-out, there is limited opportunity for significant non-residential development. Most opportunity for commercial or mixed-use development exists along the Village's perimeter corridors, the Lake Street corridor, and the Village Center Area. With limited sites available for redevelopment, each potential site must be explored for its potential as a means of strengthening the Village's tax base, thus reducing the residential tax burden.

Taxable Land in River Forest			
	Number of Parcels	Total Area (Acres)	Percentage of Village's Total Area
Non Taxable Land	132	956.88	41.1%
Taxable Residential Land	3158	1298.46	55.7%
Taxable Non-Residential Land	119	74.4	3.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3409</b>	<b>2329.74</b>	



## Business Development

Closely related to the concerns regarding residential tax burden, business development is a key focus within River Forest. Residents discussed the lack of commercial retail and service within River Forest, particularly restaurants. As a result, individuals often leave the community to shop or eat. Business development, specifically more shops, personal and professional service, and restaurants, would provide convenience and a diversity of options for residents within River Forest. Further, this would help ensure that disposable income generated by residents is kept within the Village and continues to support the River Forest community.

## Targeted Development Projects – Village Center Area

River Forest has a few “targeted” redevelopment projects which have been on the radar for several years, including properties at Lake Street & Lathrop Avenue and Lake Street & Park. Both of these projects will likely include mixed-use developments consisting of ground floor commercial with residential and or office uses on the upper floors. Located in the Village Center Area, these developments, along with other possible targeted redevelopment efforts, have the potential to transform the area between Lathrop Avenue and Park Avenue into a more mixed-use pedestrian-friendly area.

An important part of the Comprehensive Plan will be to explore and identify other “targeted” or priority redevelopment opportunities and clearly identify the role the Village can play in successfully and appropriately seeing these sites developed. This redevelopment prioritization will include all areas of the Village and not just the Village Center Area.

## Commercial Corridors

With a few exceptions, the majority of commercial businesses within River Forest are located along prominent corridors, those being North Avenue, Lake Street, Harlem Avenue, and Madison Street. These roadways provide the necessary automobile traffic, viability and access to support commercial businesses. However, many areas along the corridors have well established, or in some cases new, residential development, which can increase the challenge of attracting and accommodating commercial development. In addition, many parcels along the corridors have a shallow lot depth, small area, and are adjacent to single-family homes, increasing the challenge for commercial development.

Given the importance of business development, the corridors should be a key focus within the Comprehensive Plan to explore opportunities for commercial investment and growth. New retail and service options along the corridor could serve adjacent neighborhoods. Further, streetscaping and physical improvements should help attract new investment and provide more walkable, urban spaces that appeal to River Forest residents and people from surrounding communities.

## Tax Increment Financing

Tax increment financing (TIF) is an economic development tool that allows municipalities to leverage increases in property value as a means to fund improvements to a specific district. In the past, River Forest utilized TIF for an area along Lake Street. This TIF district was very successful, resulting in major investment and creation of a thriving commercial area.

Recently, the Village established a TIF district along Madison Street, extending from Thatcher Avenue to Lathrop Avenue. In addition, the Village has begun the process of establishing a second TIF district along North Avenue. Given the success of TIF for the Lake Street district, the creation of a new TIF district(s) could help the Village attract commercial investment and improve the quality and desirability of the corridors. As a potential economic development tool that has already experienced success in River Forest, TIF should be examined as a continued means of spurring and accommodating commercial investment within the Village.

## Leveraging Resources

Members of the business community highlighted a need to better leverage resources available for economic development, particularly the Oak Park–River Forest Chamber of Commerce. There was specific concern that the Chamber disproportionately focuses on Oak Park and the net effect was that few River Forest businesses chose to be members of the Chamber. Overall, a greater focus on sharing of resources, fostering a more inclusive business community within River Forest, and collaboration with Oak Park could assist with future economic development and growth.

## Regional Position

While more often a major asset than a negative, River Forest's location within the Chicago area has an effect on business attraction. The community offers significant disposable income and exceeds many factors desired by commercial businesses when they are looking at communities for possible location; however, River Forest is also in direct competition with nearby regional partners. While proximity to Downtown Oak Park can be an asset, it can also be a challenge when competing for business location. In addition, proximity to major shopping destinations such as Downtown Chicago and the Oak Brook Mall, can limit the likelihood that businesses will choose to locate within River Forest. For example, Oak Brook Mall requires tenants sign contracts prohibiting them from opening a second store within a certain distance, which often includes River Forest.

# Transportation & Mobility

River Forest is well-served by a comprehensive transportation system, including a comprehensive network of streets and sidewalks as well as numerous public transit options. Together, these connect River Forest with the surrounding area in all directions, providing easy access to local and regional destinations. The Comprehensive Plan will build upon the existing system, identifying opportunities to enhance and capitalize on accessibility, safety for pedestrians and bicycles and addressing issues that could impact mobility in the future due to potential redevelopment.

## Issues & Opportunities

The following are issues and opportunities related to transportation that will be considered and addressed within the River Forest Comprehensive Plan.

### Regional Connectivity

River Forest's location offers direct access and connectivity to the Chicago region via private automobile and public transit. The Eisenhower expressway, arterial roadways, Metra, CTA and Pace provide quick access to central Chicago, metro area suburban communities and regional airports. Throughout the public engagement process, residents, business owners, and stakeholders alike emphasized River Forest's connectivity as an invaluable asset. As such, the Comprehensive Plan must preserve regional connectivity and identify opportunities to enhance and capitalize on it as a community strength.

### Traffic & Congestion

River Forest benefits from a traditional grid pattern for the alignment of the roadway network, providing efficient mobility and ease of navigation throughout the community. Roadways within the Village are also part of a larger regional network that is integrated with adjacent communities and connects to central Chicago. As such, many roads within River Forest accommodate both local and regional traffic.

Automobile congestion is common along major and minor arterial streets within River Forest, particularly around the intersections of Harlem Avenue / Lake Street and Harlem Avenue / North Avenue. This is often the result of both existing traffic patterns around key intersections as well as the combination of local drivers and regional traffic moving through the area. The benefit of the street grid is that it provides more than one option to move from one location to another.

The Village's highest traffic roadways are North Avenue, with over 38,000 daily trips, and Harlem Avenue, with over 30,000 daily trips, both of which are under IDOT jurisdiction. In addition, Madison Street, Lake Street, Chicago Avenue, and Randolph Street/Washington Boulevard are primary east-west connections. These roadways experience far less traffic than Harlem Avenue and North Avenue, but are still frequent routes through the community. The Comprehensive Plan will explore local improvements to reduce congestion as well as partnerships to address traffic from a regional perspective.



## Pedestrian Safety

River Forest is a highly walkable community, supported by a comprehensive sidewalk network that is part of the street grid block pattern. As such, pedestrian safety is a key focus for the Village. During the community outreach process, residents emphasized the importance of pedestrian safety around schools, parks, and transit stations. Streetscape enhancements in recent years have helped to address major concerns; however, opportunities remain to provide greater pedestrian safety.

Many residents identified North Avenue, Harlem Avenue, and Lake Street as areas they feel less safe given the speed and frequency of traffic. In particular, Harlem Avenue / North Avenue was identified as a dangerous intersection. Schools and safe routes for students were also a primary concern, as the majority of students within the Village walk to school. Attempts to address pedestrian safety could further support walkability within the Village, such as improved visibility and efforts to better alert drivers to pedestrians, pedestrian rights-of-way, and crosswalks.

The area surrounding the Metra station is also in need of enhanced pedestrian safety, particularly along Hawthorne Avenue. Currently, no designated pedestrian crosswalks exist along Hawthorne Avenue between Thatcher and Keystone Avenues, although the roadway is crossed by hundreds of commuters, students, and other residents as they walk and bike to school, the Metra station, Keystone Park, or other Village destinations.

A separate “safe routes to school” study is currently underway and will also be referenced in the Comprehensive Plan. Bicycle safety on and off streets is also a concern. The Comprehensive Plan will explore bike lanes, bike sharing, bike storage and conflict removal with pedestrians and automobiles.

## Bicycle/Non-Motorized Mobility and Transit

River Forest’s existing transportation network provides efficient mobility for drivers and pedestrians. However, residents argued for a greater emphasis on providing safe, efficient alternatives to automobile transportation. This includes the need for more bike lanes, clearly identified routes through the community, and highly visible crosswalks. Current infrastructure to support cyclists is minimal, with no designated bike routes, no bike lanes, and limited bike parking or storage.

In addition, residents encouraged better activation of public transit options within the community, with the hope of establishing a thorough system of interconnected transportation options. Efforts to support multi-mobility through both physical improvements and policy could help reduce automobile traffic and congestion in the urban environment. Exploring ways to provide direct and safe routes to and from the Metra station and neighboring transit facilities will be considered in the Comprehensive Plan.

# Transportation

## Road Classification



-  Major Arterial Street
-  Minor Arterial Street
-  Collector Street
-  Signalized Intersection

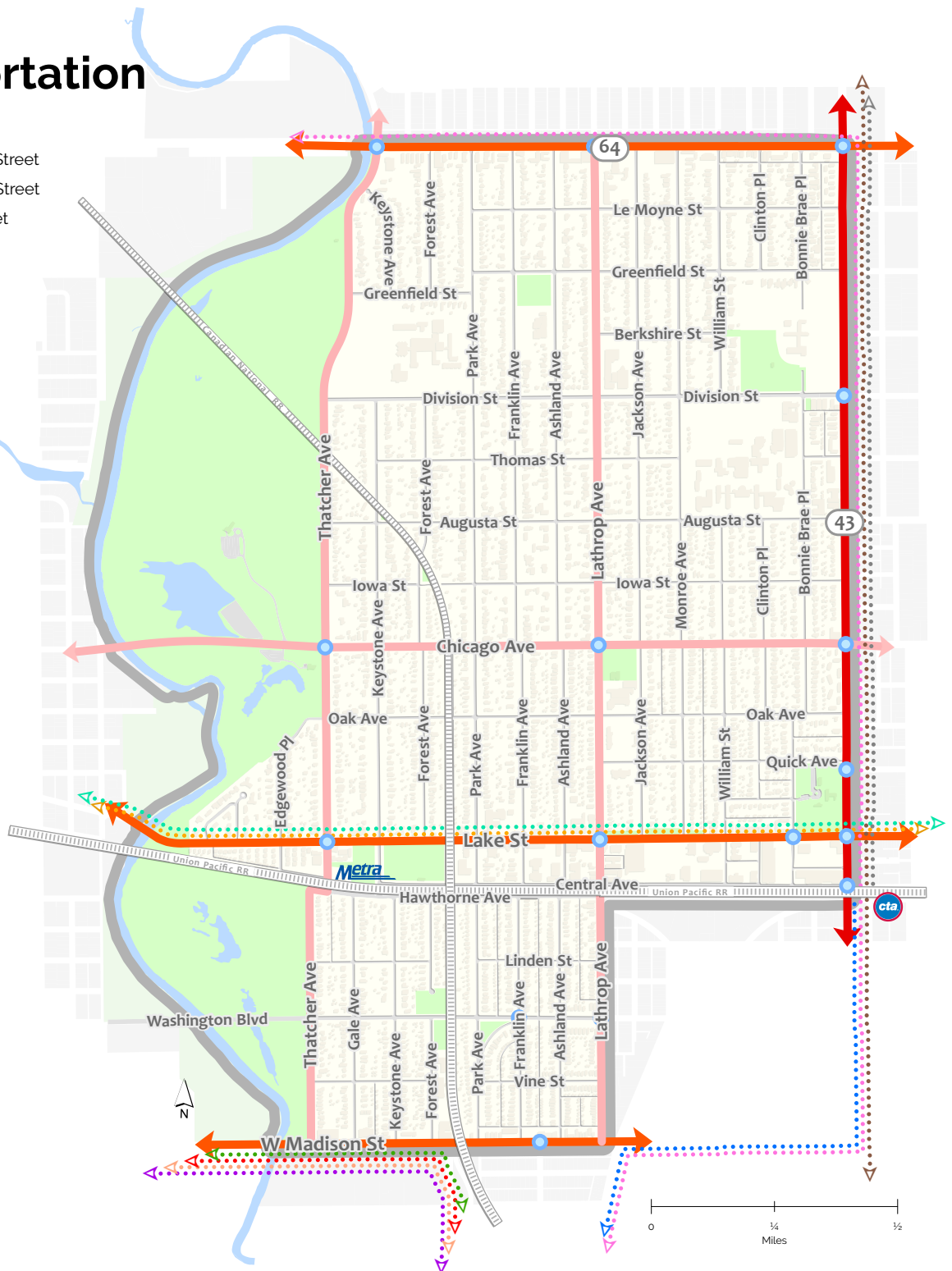
## Bus Routes

Pace

-  303
-  317
-  310
-  320
-  309
-  313
-  307
-  318
-  757
- CTA
-  90

## Transit Stations

-  Harlem/Lake (Green Line)
-  River Forest (UP-W)



# Parks & Open Space

Park and open space areas within River Forest are generally high-quality facilities that are well-maintained. These spaces support active and passive recreation and provide opportunities for residents to enjoy the natural environment. This includes facilities maintained by both the River Forest Park District as well as the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. While the community is well-served by existing parks, increased opportunities for additional outdoor spaces and amenities, indoor recreation facilities, and better access to and activation of the Forest Preserve areas should be explored. Additionally, greater environmental stewardship could be promoted throughout the community through adoption of sustainable best practices.

## River Forest Park District

The River Forest Park District operates and maintains 10 parks totaling 32.42 acres of land. The District provides a variety of programs and activities open to the public ranging from athletics and sports programs to passive and educational activities. These programs are generally well utilized by residents and are popular among households with families and children.

In 2014, the Park District developed a Strategic Plan that outlined a vision, goals, and objectives for the District and the services and amenities it provides. The District's vision was to be the "residents' place for fun and community!". The 11 goals of the Strategic Plan fall into four (4) categories: Programs and Services, Parks and Open Space, Facilities, and Team / Organizational Development. The goals and recommendations of the plan have been utilized by the Park District to effectively update and improve the parks and recreation system within River Forest.

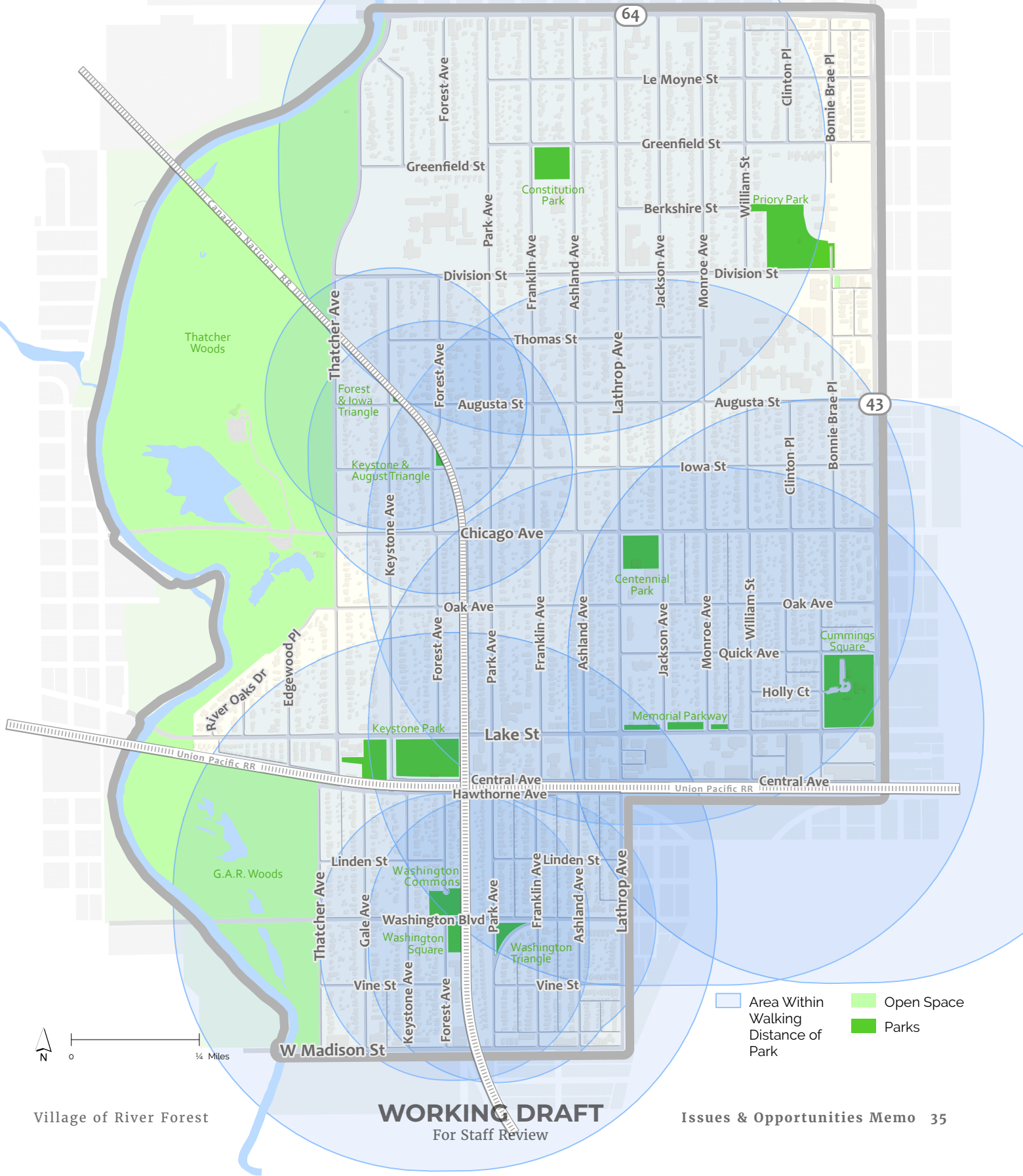
## Park Classification

Based on the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) classification system, the Village's parks have been organized into the following categories:

1. **Mini Parks:** Mini parks provide recreational opportunities within limited acreage, often less than 1.5 acres. They tend to have usage from a very localized area and are typically small plazas or turf areas with playground equipment.
2. **Neighborhood Parks:** These parks are generally one to five acres in size and serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhoods in which they are located.
3. **Community Parks:** Community parks serve a broad audience, drawing visitors from across the Village and are larger in scale with a size that generally exceeds five acres.

Parks by Classification	
Park Name	Acreage
<b>Mini Parks</b>	<b>2.68</b>
Keystone and August Triangle	.07
Forest and Iowa Triangle	.32
Washington Square	.83
Washington Triangle	1.46
<b>Neighborhood Parks</b>	<b>15.59</b>
Memorial Parkway	2.27
Washington Commons	3.4
Centennial Park	4.87
Constitution Park	4.95
<b>Community Parks</b>	<b>14.25</b>
Priory Park	6.97
Keystone Park	7.28
<b>Total</b>	<b>32.42</b>

## Parks & Recreation





## Park Standards

### *Level of Service*

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) recommends a level of service standard of 10 acres of parks and open space for every 1,000 residents as a best practice. Based on River Forest's 2017 population estimate, this would result in an "ideal" amount of park space in the Village to be 107 acres. Currently, the total park land within the community equals just over 41 acres, including 32 acres managed by the Park District and just under nine acres of park space at the headquarters of the Fort Preserve of Cook County. Using the NRPA standard, this suggests a deficiency of 66 acres of park and open space. However, opportunities to create new park space is extremely limited, and the access to nearby parks and recreation amenities offsets this parkland deficiency. The NRPA standards are a guideline and not necessarily applicable as to the true parkland acreage needs of the community. In addition, local school and university facilities add to the recreational amenities of the community.

It should be noted that open space within the Cook County Forest Preserve on the west side of River Forest were not included within this analysis due to their lack of accessibility and minimal space for active recreation. If improved to provide greater active and passive recreation to Village residents, these amenities could help to offset deficits in parkland.

### *Park Service Areas*

To provide a baseline understanding of park needs, standard service area distances were applied to each park classification as follows: ¼ mile for Mini Parks, ½ mile for Neighborhood Parks, and two (2) miles for Community Parks. This helps to define what areas are best served by existing parks and which parts of the community lack access to park facilities. Spatial analysis reveals that the entirety of the Village is within a ½-mile distance of a park facility. Overall, due to its relatively small size, compact development pattern, and distribution of existing parks, River Forest residents have easy and convenient access to parks and recreation.

## Issues & Opportunities

The following are issues and opportunities related to parks and open space that will be considered and addressed within the River Forest Comprehensive Plan.

### Forest Preserve

River Forest is home to a few facilities maintained and operated by the Forest Preserve of Cook County, including their general headquarters, Thatcher Woods, and G.A.R. Woods. The headquarters, located at the intersection of Harlem Avenue and Lake Street, includes an office building, nine (9) tennis courts that comprise the Oak Park Tennis Center, and a park with two (2) open fields for active and passive recreation. All other facilities are located within Forest Preserve lands along River Forest's west side. In general, the Forest Preserve headquarters and Forest Preserves were noted as important community assets. In particular, the headquarters helps to provide additional park space available to nearby residents.

However, access to the Forest Preserve lands could be improved. Much of the area is preserved as open space and does not contain trails or pathways for pedestrians and cyclists. The facilities that do exist are not connected to the Village's sidewalk network and are accessible only by car. The Des Plaines River Trail, a regional route running through the Forest Preserves, ends just north of North Avenue and does not connect to the Village. Efforts to better activate the Forest Preserves and develop increased connectivity to River Forest would help provide additional recreational opportunities to residents.

The Forest Preserves were also identified as the source of negative impacts to some of the community residents, including flood hazards and wildlife encroachment. In larger rain events, areas adjacent to the Forest Preserve are susceptible to flooding from the Des Plaines River. In addition, wildlife from the Forest Preserve, particularly deer and coyotes, often travel into adjacent residential neighborhoods, foraging on vegetation and causing damage to landscaped areas and presenting some safety concerns for children. The Comprehensive Plan should address these issues and identify opportunities for coordination with the Forest Preserves of Cook County to support improvements that will benefit the area.

## Environmental Sustainability

In 2017, the Village established a new Sustainability Commission, demonstrating a renewed dedication to sustainability and the environment. In addition, the village has initiated several sustainable practices and projects, most notably the curbside composting and recycling program. Throughout the public engagement process, the need for more sustainability and energy efficiency were consistently highlighted by residents, calling for greater efforts to make River Forest an environmentally conscious community. Suggested improvements included a climate resiliency plan, greater focus on the use of alternative and renewable energy such as solar and wind, and programs to incentivize recycling and composting. Given the level of emphasis, the Comprehensive Plan should identify best practices and potential improvements to promote environmental sustainability in all areas of the community.

# Facilities, Infrastructure & Institutions

Community facilities, civic infrastructure, and local academic / religious institutions act as part of the foundation and social fabric of the Village. This includes the physical structures and spaces that enable daily operations and services to be delivered within River Forest. Maintaining these amenities is essential to ensure the long-term health of the community, as well as contributing significantly to the Village's overall character. This will require both internal coordination and partnerships with other services providers within and outside the Village. The Comprehensive Plan will provide specific direction as to necessary capital improvements and policies that will best maintain and enhance public services, infrastructure and amenities within River Forest.

## Issues & Opportunities

The following are issues and opportunities related to facilities, infrastructure, and institutions that will be considered and addressed within the River Forest Comprehensive Plan.

### Railroad Viaduct

The railroad viaduct, which runs between Central Avenue and Hawthorne Avenue, was a key focus for residents given visible dilapidation to many parts of the structure. Since the railroad owns the viaduct, it is understood that the Village has limited ability to rebuild it or even enhance it. However, the Village should continue to do what it can to work with Union Pacific, Metra, and IDOT to improve the viaduct itself at key locations, as well as improve pedestrian safety, lighting and traffic circulation. Since this viaduct at Harlem Avenue is a gateway to the community, these improvements could have a significant impact on the appearance of River Forest and adjacent commercial areas along Lake Street and Harlem Avenue.

## Stormwater Management

Flooding and stormwater management is an important issue, relating both to flooding from the Des Plaines River and the capacity of the existing storm sewers. In the past year, considerable rain events have highlighted the need for greater stormwater management measures to ensure that the Village can accommodate greater precipitation events, time of concentration and higher water levels in lower lying areas. This may require a review of the stormwater system, including conventional pipes and detention ponds as well as green infrastructure tools, and related facilities to address the sustainable management of stormwater over time.

## Public Works

The River Forest Public Works facility, located along Forest Avenue, was a point of discussion throughout the public engagement sessions. Many residents called for relocation of the public works facility to make the current property available for redevelopment, specifically with the hope of attracting a new, tax-generating tenant to the Village. However, given the lack of available space for development within River Forest, finding another site to relocate this facility would likely target a site outside of the Village in a neighboring community. The Comprehensive Plan should explore opportunities for sharing resources with neighboring municipalities as well as the potential relocation of this facility inside and outside the Village.

## Education

River Forest is well revered for its schools, both public and private, which are often ranked amongst the top in the state. Schools were identified as an essential community asset during community outreach, with many residents indicating the quality of local schools as the primary reason they chose to move to River Forest. As such, maintaining the quality of schools within River Forest is distinctly important.

Public school students within the Village attend Oak Park-River Forest High School (OPRF), located within Oak Park. Residents noted concern for River Forest's lack of representation on the OPRF HS Board. While no major issues were identified, some concerns were raised regarding the long-term maintenance of the facilities, student safety in traveling to school, and the impact of TIF districts on school funding.

## Universities

Dominican University and Concordia University are both valuable resources for River Forest, supporting higher education within the community. Both universities are well integrated within the Village's residential neighborhoods and do not negatively impact adjacent homes. Although student housing is provided on campus, the universities are also commuter campuses, placing a greater emphasis on accessibility. As important assets for the Village, residents discussed the potential for greater interaction between the institutions and surrounding community. However, while contributing to the fabric of the community and adding to the day-time population, the institutions are non-tax paying entities that utilize Village services, but do not directly contribute to the local tax base. As such, the Comprehensive Plan should explore opportunities for partnerships between the Universities and the Village.

# Community Facilities

## School

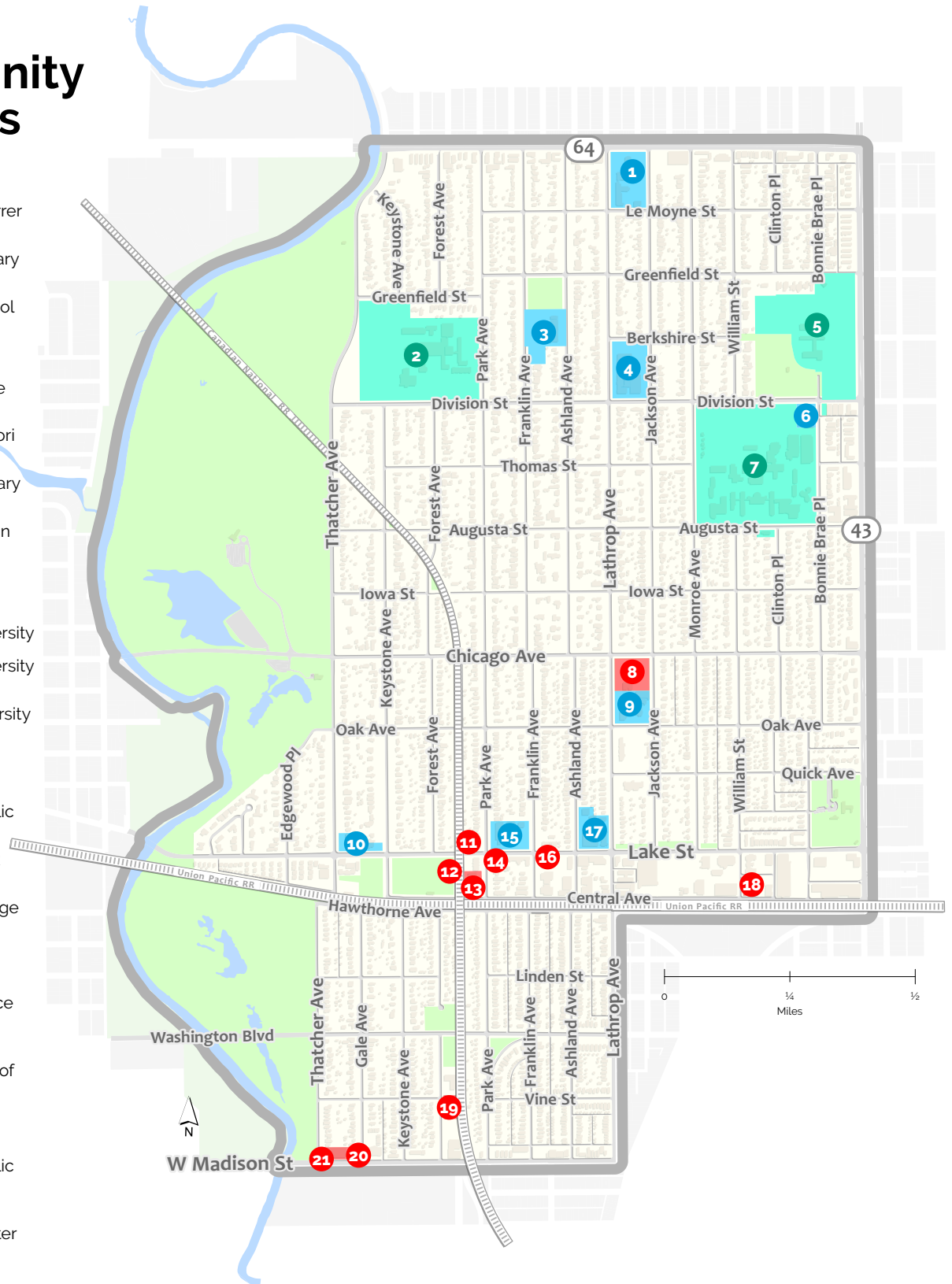
- 1 Saint Vincent Ferrer School
- 3 Willard Elementary School
- 4 Trinity High School
- 6 Grace Lutheran School
- 9 Roosevelt Middle School
- 10 Mosaic Montessori Academy
- 15 Lincoln Elementary School
- 17 Saint Luke Roman Catholic School

## University

- 2 Dominican University
- 5 Dominican University Priory Campus
- 7 Concordia University

## Civic

- 8 River Forest Public Library
- 11 River Forest Park District Building
- 12 River Forest Village Hall
- 13 River Forest Fire Department
- 14 River Forest Police Department
- 16 Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce
- 18 River Forest Post Office
- 19 River Forest Public Works
- 20 River Forest Community Center
- 21 River Forest Township Office



# Civic Government

The River Forest Civic Government is responsible for long-term planning and execution of Village policy as well as daily operations of the community. The Village maintains a variety of services and amenities that are valued by residents, contribute to the high quality of life and make River Forest an exceptionally desirable place to live.

## Issues & Opportunities

The following are issues and opportunities related to civic government that will be considered and addressed within the River Forest Comprehensive Plan.

### Regional Cooperation

River Forest is located at the center of the vast urban region of Chicago. While River Forest provides high quality services and amenities, the size and built-out footprint of the community limit the Village's ability to effectively address some issues and community needs. Many of the challenges that River Forest faces are shared regionally with other municipalities, including the Village's direct neighbors. This provides an opportunity for River Forest to partner with adjacent municipalities, interjurisdictional groups, Township, Cook County, Metra, CTA, IDOT and other organizations to address shared issues from a regional perspective. This could allow sharing of resources and data, coordinated projects, and other efforts that could benefit from regional cooperation.

For example, issues related to traffic on arterial roads within River Forest could also impact roadways in Oak Park. Working together with IDOT and other municipalities from a regional perspective may provide a more holistic approach that better addresses the issues at hand. The Comprehensive Plan should identify potential partnerships and regional resources that could help address issues and opportunities within the Village.

### Public Safety

River Forest provides a high level of safety and security for its residents and businesses, and while not identified as a high priority issue, public safety was identified as a concern for some residents. Some people discussed increases in crime and theft, as well as the perception that River Forest is becoming less safe. In addition, some residents believed their neighborhoods lack appropriate lighting to create an essential feeling of public safety. While building upon the image and reputation of being a safe and secure community with excellent public safety, the Comprehensive Plan should explore way to further enhance the Village as a safe community.