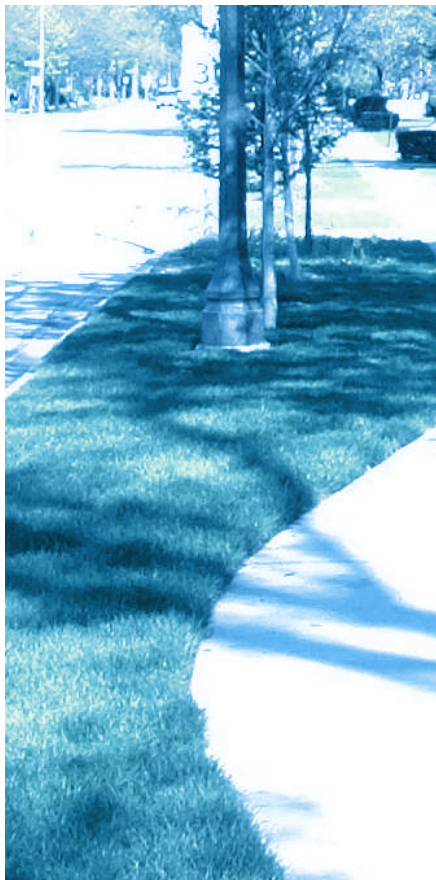


# RIVER FOREST FORWARD

— A VISION FOR OUR FUTURE —



Village of River Forest

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Adopted May 13, 2019



# Acknowledgments

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A special thank you to everyone who participated in the planning process for the River Forest Forward Comprehensive Plan. This Plan was made possible by the contributions and insights of the residents, business persons, property owners, the Village's many boards and commissions, representatives from various groups and organizations, and other community stakeholders.

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# Table of Contents

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<b>1 Introduction . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8 Parks, Open Space &amp; the Environment . . . . .</b>	<b>79</b>
Built Upon Our Core Community Principles . . . . .	2	Core Objectives . . . . .	80
Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan . . . . .	2	River Forest Park District . . . . .	81
Planning Process . . . . .	3	Forest Preserve of Cook County . . . . .	84
Community Outreach . . . . .	4	Other Recreational Facilities . . . . .	86
<b>2 River Forest Today . . . . .</b>	<b>5</b>	Tree Canopy . . . . .	87
Regional Context . . . . .	5	Environmental Sustainability . . . . .	87
Past Plans, Studies & Reports . . . . .	6	<b>9 Community Facilities . . . . .</b>	<b>89</b>
Market Analysis . . . . .	7	Core Objectives . . . . .	90
Existing Land Use . . . . .	10	Schools (PK-12) . . . . .	92
Current Zoning . . . . .	12	Universities . . . . .	93
<b>3 Land Use &amp; Development . . . . .</b>	<b>15</b>	River Forest Public Library . . . . .	94
Land Use Classification . . . . .	17	Village Hall . . . . .	94
Historic/Architectural Heritage . . . . .	20	Public Safety (Police & Fire Departments) . . . . .	94
<b>4 Residential Neighborhoods . . . . .</b>	<b>23</b>	Public Works . . . . .	95
<b>5 Commercial Areas . . . . .</b>	<b>29</b>	Stormwater Management . . . . .	96
<b>6 Corridor Framework Plans . . . . .</b>	<b>43</b>	Water . . . . .	96
Madison Street Corridor . . . . .	45	Refuse, Recycling & Composting . . . . .	97
North Avenue Corridor . . . . .	48	Religious Institutions . . . . .	97
Lake Street Corridor . . . . .	52	<b>10 Implementation . . . . .</b>	<b>99</b>
Harlem Avenue Corridor . . . . .	58	Use the Plan on a Day-to-Day Basis . . . . .	100
<b>7 Transportation &amp; Mobility . . . . .</b>	<b>63</b>	Action Plan . . . . .	100
Complete Streets . . . . .	65	Regulatory Strategy Framework . . . . .	102
Roadway Network . . . . .	65	Regional Cooperation . . . . .	104
Parking . . . . .	70	Potential Funding Sources . . . . .	104
Public Transit . . . . .	70	Action Matrix . . . . .	109
Bicycle & Pedestrian Mobility . . . . .	74		
Freight Rail . . . . .	77		





# 1 Introduction

The Village of River Forest is a beautiful, historic community at the heart of the Chicago Metropolitan Region. The Village offers architecturally and historically rich neighborhoods, tree-lined streets, excellent schools, attractive and well-appointed parks, and proximity to environmental features such as the Forest Preserves of Cook County and the Des Plaines River. Most of the Village's commercial uses exist along its perimeter corridors, complimented by 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 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, enhanced commercial and residential options for residents, and to maintain the community's high-quality facilities and services. Balancing these factors requires a plan that can serve to inform and guide decisions and direct the community's resources and efforts moving forward.

Authorized by Illinois State Law (ILCS 5/11-12-5), a comprehensive plan is intended to inform decision-making related to land use and development, infrastructure, transportation, parks and recreation, environment and natural resources, and community services and facilities. The Village's previous Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2003.

## Built Upon Our Core Community Principles

Throughout the development of the River Forest Forward comprehensive plan, the context of the community and its values were continuously kept in mind. Our comprehensive plan cannot simply be a reflection of what other communities have done, but must be a reflection of the priorities that will help shape our future decision-making. Our Core Principles are:

- 1. ENSURING WE HAVE A SAFE COMMUNITY.**
- 2. STRENGTHENING OUR PROPERTY VALUES AND ENHANCING OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.**
- 3. MINIMIZING AND STABILIZING OUR PROPERTY TAX BURDEN.**

To support our Core Principles, this plan is built upon the following community values:

- Strengthening our community character, identity, and unique sense of place.
- Fostering welcoming and desirable neighborhoods. Promoting economic development and vitality and encouraging thriving commercial areas.
- Providing safe and efficient multi-modal access and mobility.
- Continuing to provide high quality and responsive community facilities and services.
- Embracing our role as stewards of the environment.
- Striving for a safe and healthy community.

## Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

River Forest Forward is a detailed policy document that guides land use, development, capital improvements, community investment, growth, and overall quality of life for 15 to 20 years. The Plan is comprehensive both in breadth and scope, with recommendations for areas that encompass the use of land; the movement of vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians; the protection of open spaces and environmental resources; the revitalization of the Village's key commercial areas; the provision of parks and public facilities; and the Village's overall community character. The comprehensive plan promotes the community's vision; establishes a process for orderly growth and development; addresses both current and long-term needs; and provides for a balance between the natural and built environment. It is designed to serve as a foundation for decision-making for the Village, developers, residents, and other stakeholders.

The plan serves the following key functions:

**TELLING RIVER FOREST'S STORY AND SHARING ITS VISION** - At its core, the plan should serve as a powerful statement of the community's vision for the future.

**EVALUATE AND INFORM DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS** - The plan should guide and assist in the evaluation of public and private development proposals and help ensure that proposed developments support the Village's long-term objectives.

**REGULATORY FRAMEWORK** - The plan should serve as a foundation for zoning regulations and the official zoning map, with amendments made to these regulations as needed to support the long-term objectives of the plan.

**COORDINATE LOCAL AND REGIONAL INITIATIVES** - The plan should inform and coordinate local and regional planning initiatives at the Village, county and regional levels. The plan may aid and inform efforts related to housing, transportation, transit, trails, water and natural resources, economic development, and more.

**CIP AND BUDGETING** - The plan should inform the development of the Village's capital improvement program and budgeting process and help establish priority expenditures and the sequence of capital improvement programming.

**IDENTIFY FUTURE STUDIES** - The plan establishes a path forward but cannot address every issue in sufficient detail. It should help identify additional studies and future action steps to address specific needs.

**INFORM AND EDUCATE** - The plan is a valuable source of information for policy makers, local boards and commissions, organizations, businesses, and residents. This broad spectrum of interests should use the plan to inform members and stakeholders and provide important information that can assist with future initiatives.

## Plan Goals

*The River Forest Forward Comprehensive Plan includes dedicated goals for each chapter. These are intended to provide overarching direction and unify separate objectives and recommendations within each chapter of the Plan. The goals of River Forest Forward are prominently marked throughout the document, contained within the colored call-out boxes. Together, the goals establish a vision for what River Forest strives to be in the future.*

## Planning Process

River Forest Forward is the product of a community-driven, multi-phased process that involved residents, business owners, property owners, local officials, Village staff, and other community stakeholders. The following steps were undertaken to develop the comprehensive plan:

- **STEP 1: PROJECT INITIATION** – Included kick-off meetings with Village staff, the Village Board, the Plan Commission, and various 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** – Included 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 identification of issues across the community.
- **STEP 3: EXISTING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS** – Included 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. This analysis, along with findings from the first two steps, were summarized in the Issues and Opportunities Memorandum.
- **STEP 4: VISION, GOALS & OBJECTIVES** – Included 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: CORRIDORS AND VILLAGE CENTER AREA PLANS** – Included 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, Central Avenue, Lathrop Avenue, and Park Avenue.
- **STEP 6: VILLAGE-WIDE PLANS & POLICIES** – Included 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** – Included 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

The River Forest Forward 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, Village officials, Village staff, and more. A combination of traditional, face-to-face events and online engagement tools was used to collect feedback regarding issues, concern, opportunities, priority projects, strengths, and assets within the Village. Engaging the community informed the planning process, helped to identify a vision, and guided recommendations and strategies within the Plan, ensuring the document is directly responsive to the needs and desires of River Forest.

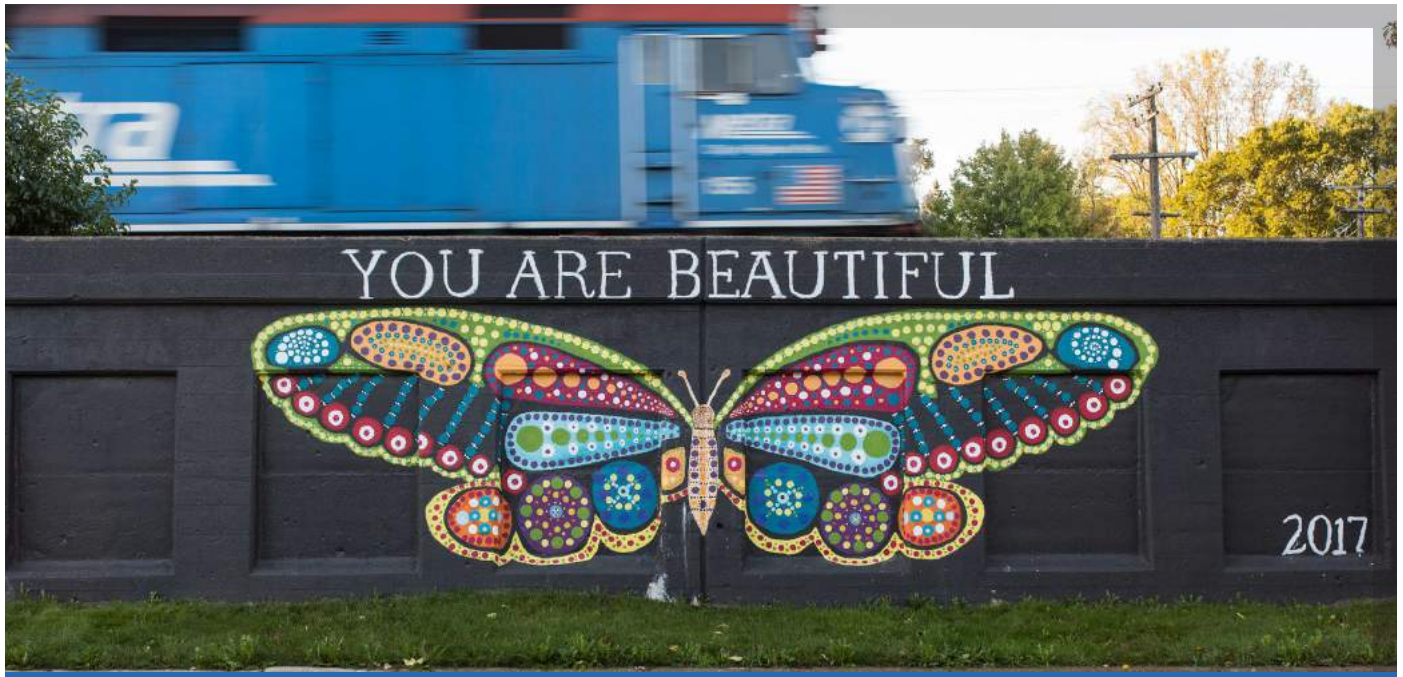
Over the course of the planning process, the following outreach events and tools were utilized to engage the River Forest community.

- Plan Commission Initiation Workshop
- Food Truck Rally Tent & Questionnaire
- Online Resident Questionnaire
- Online Business Questionnaire
- Online Youth Questionnaire
- Online issues mapping & identification
- Village Board Roundtable Discussion
- Joint Boards & Commissions Workshop
- Business Workshop
- Community Workshop
- Stakeholder Interviews
- Community Vision Charrette
- Corridors Working Session
- Plan Commission Public Hearing

Feedback and input from the various outreach events and activities served as a foundation for the development of the plan. Community input was utilized to identify priorities and aspirations, develop plan vision and direction, and refine recommendations and strategies for River Forest Forward. Key issues and opportunities cited by residents during the outreach phase of the process included the following:

- Limited development opportunity
- Need for housing diversification
- Historic preservation
- Neighborhood character
- Strengthening the Village Center Area
- Incompatible uses
- Residential tax burden
- Need for economic development
- Improving the commercial corridors
- Regional connectivity
- Traffic congestion and safety
- Pedestrian safety and mobility
- Bicycle mobility
- Improving transit facilities
- Forest preserve connectivity
- Promoting environmental sustainability
- Stormwater management
- Maintaining quality schools
- Regional cooperation
- Public safety





## 2 River Forest Today

Long-range visioning and planning are founded upon an understanding of where the community is today, and where it wants to go in the future. This chapter provides a snapshot of River Forest today, reviewing important background information about the community, including the community's regional position, relevant past plans and studies, 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 the plan recommendations of River Forest Forward.

### 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, and adjacent to the south in Forest Park is a CTA Blue Line station. Interstate 290, just south of River Forest, provides convenient automobile access to Downtown Chicago and the greater Chicago and Midwest region. The Village is also within close proximity to two regional trails, the Illinois Prairie Path and the Des Plaines River Trail. Both Midway and O'Hare airports are less than a 30-minute drive from the Village.



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.

## 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. It is important to note that this comprehensive plan, River Forest Forward, supersedes the 2003 Comprehensive Plan and the 2010 Corridors Plan.

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 (2018-2021)
- River Forest Park District 2017 Community Survey Results, Summary, & Analysis
- North Avenue and Madison Street Market Analysis (2015)
- CMAP's ON TO 2050 (2018) – Regional Comprehensive Plan
- PlanItGreen (2011) – Oak Park River Forest Sustainability Plan

## Market Analysis

To support the Comprehensive Plan, 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. Sources for the analysis include Esri Business Analyst, the American Community Survey, and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP).

## Demographics

The Village's population has remained stable for decades, although data indicates that the Village population has declined slightly since the 2010 and is projected to continue to decline very slightly through 2022, primarily due to the decrease in household size. Both the overall population and the number of households has, and is, projected to remain very stable.

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. There is, however, a small increase in the number of households ages 25 to 34. This bodes well for future reinvestment as it is an indication that as older residents leave their larger single-family homes, there are younger householders and 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.

## Housing

The majority of housing in the Village consists of owner occupied single-family detached structures. Nearly one quarter of total units in River Forest are contained in multi-family buildings, which are primarily located along the Village's perimeter corridors and along certain sections of Lake Street and the Village Center Area. 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.

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 overall historic neighborhood character. Despite the teardown phenomena of the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, only two percent of the Village's total housing stock was built during this period.

## Implications

River Forest remains a highly desirable residential destination within the region. The Village is a stable, affluent community with a strong historic character, excellent schools, and easy access to the region's transit and transportation systems. Housing stock, while aging, is of high value and appreciating. Collectively, these assets put River Forest in an excellent position to attract future commercial and residential investment and development.







## Implications

River Forest essentially has four primary corridors for accommodating retail/commercial potential; Harlem, Lake, North, and Madison. 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.

While other competing communities are well located, the Village should promote and leverage its assets including being a stable, older, highly educated, affluent community with a robust housing stock, direct access to public transit, and a pro-business environment. Infill development can be challenging, especially when incumbered by a relatively small amount of commercial land, limited development opportunity sites, shallow lot depths and small parcel size, and close proximity/adjacency to established residential areas. While an attractive community for development, creative approaches and managed flexibility will likely be required as appropriate development is accommodated.

## 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. Understanding existing land use is important for development of the Plan so that future land use recommendations are made within the context of the Village's existing conditions, rather than void of actual influences that exist as a result of established development patterns. The existing land use classifications are as follows:

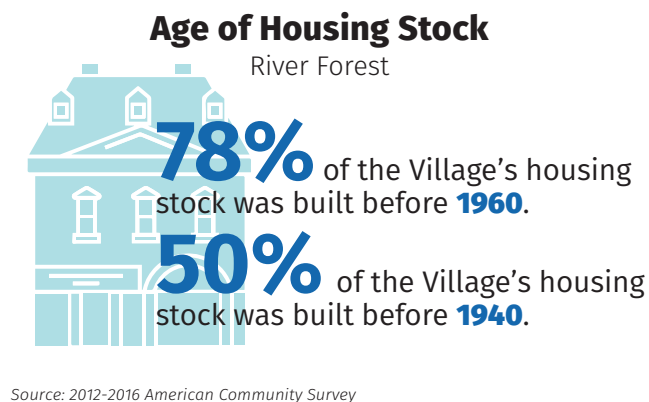
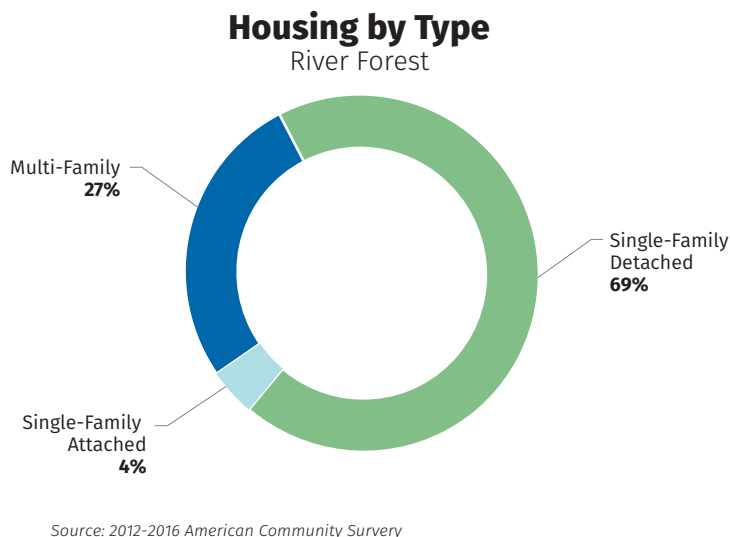
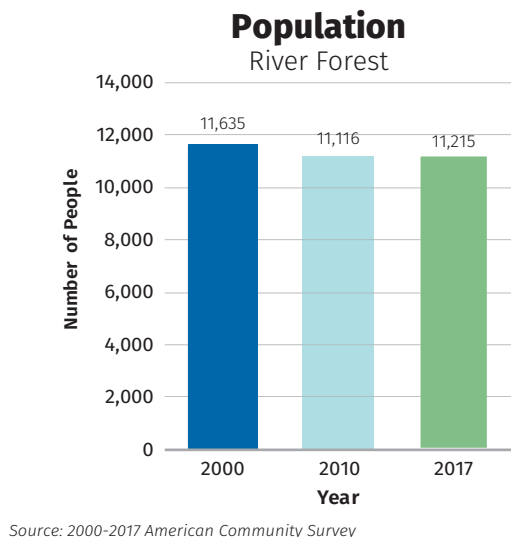
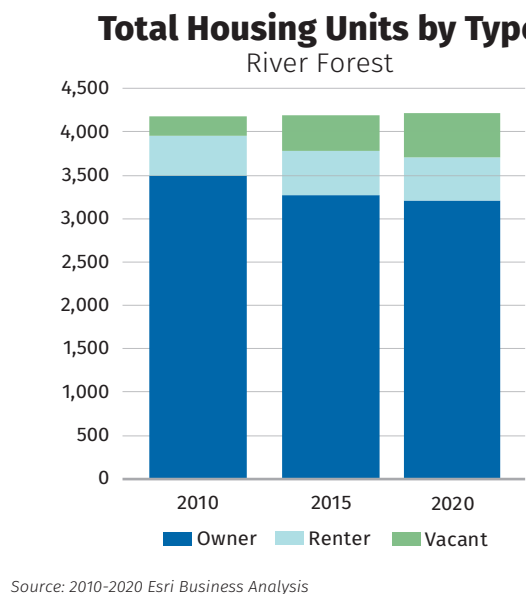
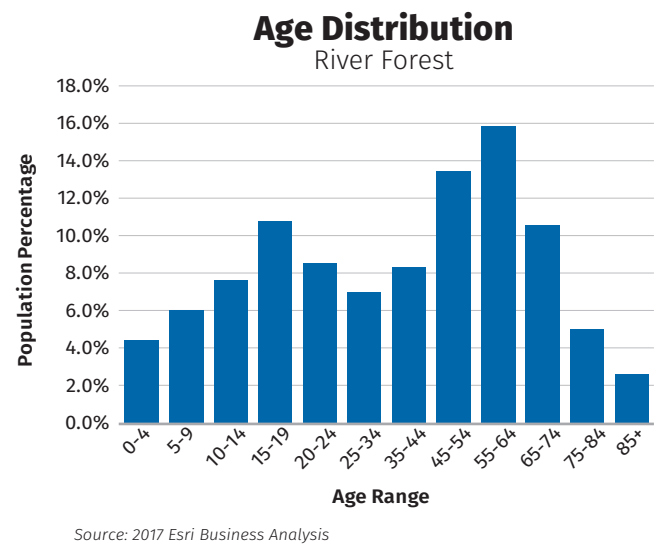
**SINGLE-FAMILY DETACHED** - This designation consists of single-family detached homes. This may include accessory structures and properties that act as private yards for single-family homes.

**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.

# Community “Snapshot”



**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.

**PRIVATE RECREATION** - This designation consists of properties occupied by private tennis, swim, or other recreation or social club. In River Forest these include the River Forest Tennis Club and the Oak Park Tennis Center.

**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.

## Current Zoning

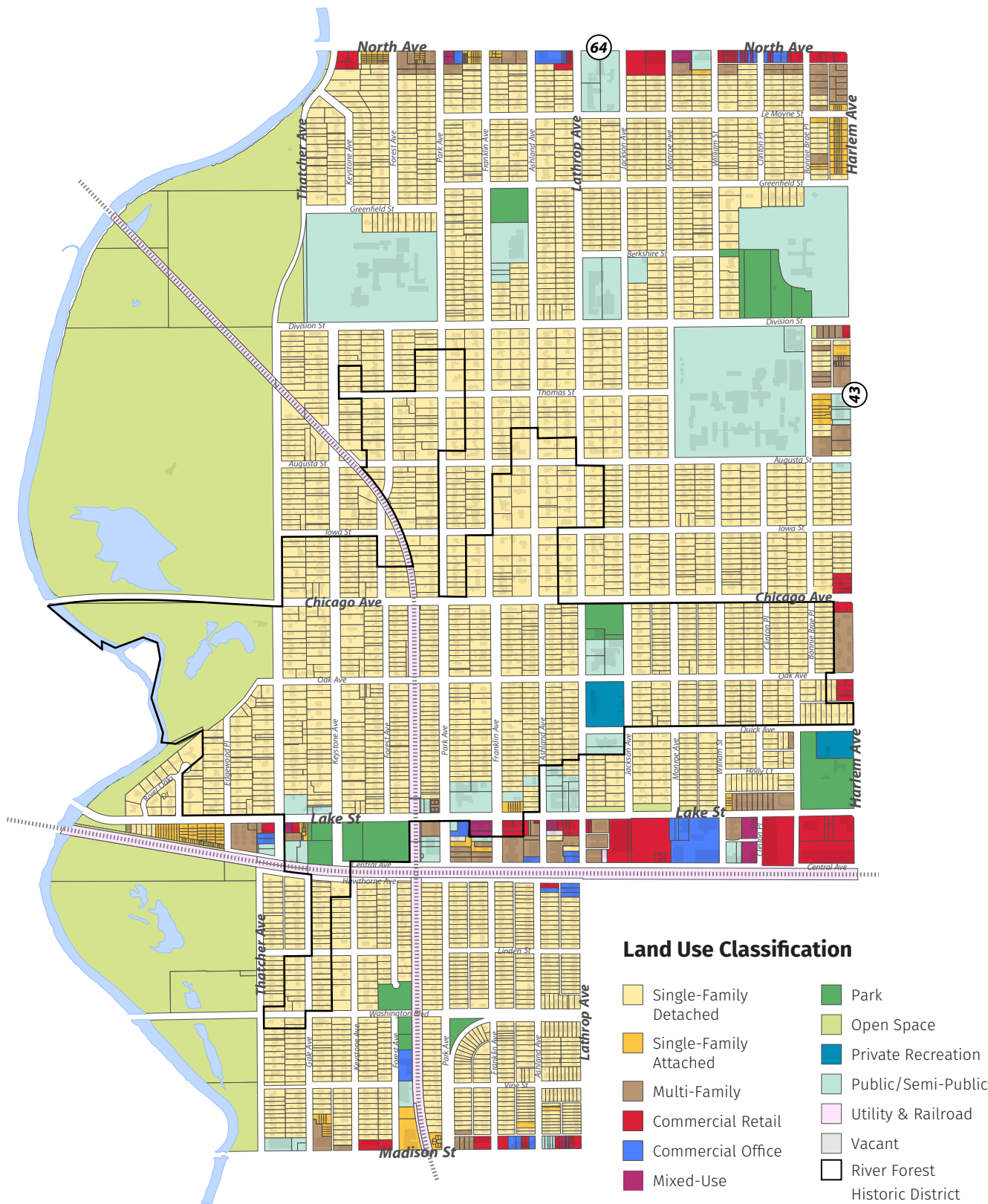
Development regulations within River Forest are outlined in Chapter 10 of the Village Code. Last revised in December of 2017, the code regulates how land can be used and defines standards for development. While essential to the comprehensive planning process, the zoning code is also a valuable resource for property owners and developers seeking to invest within the community. Based on current market conditions and local, regional, and national development trends, the Village's commercial and mixed-use districts will likely need amending to better accommodate high quality contemporary development that is market viable and compatible with the Village's overall character. The zoning code establishes the following nine districts:

**R1: WIDE LOT SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL** - This district is intended to provide for single-family detached housing specifically on large lots.

**R2: SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL** - This district is intended to provide for single-family detached housing. Compared to the R1 district, lots within R2 are generally smaller in size.



# Existing Land Use



**R3: ATTACHED SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL** - This district is intended to provide a mixture of single-family attached residences, such as duplexes, rowhouses, and townhomes.

**R4: MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL** - This district is intended to provide for multi-family residential development, such as condominiums and apartments.

**C1: COMMERCIAL** - This district is intended to provide for a combination of specialty retail stores, office, and service uses, and is primarily located along North Avenue.

**C2: COMMERCIAL** - This district is intended to provide for a combination of retail, office, service uses, and multi-family housing, and is primarily located along Madison Street, but also on a couple of properties along Lake Street and Harlem Avenue.

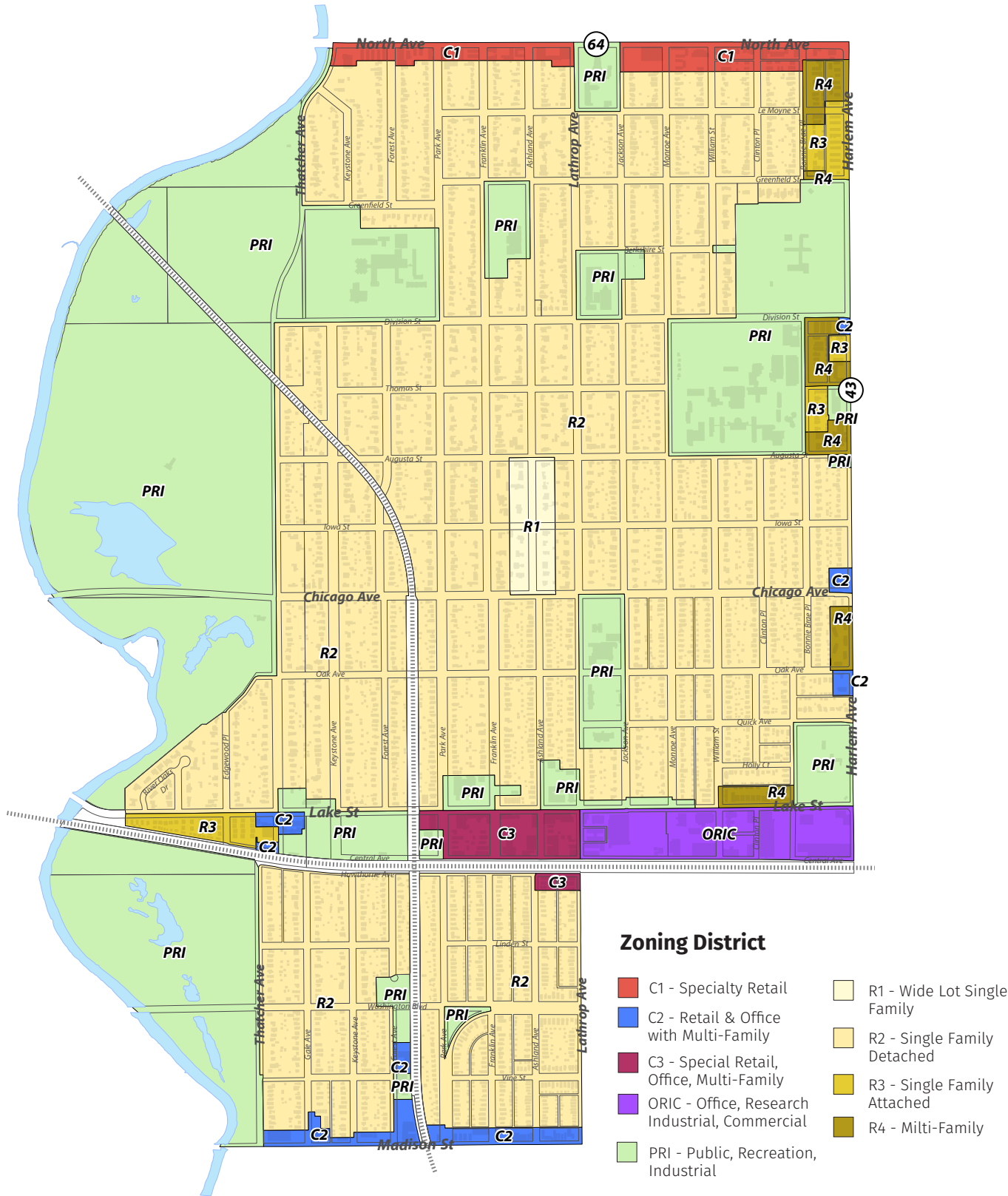
**C3: CENTRAL COMMERCIAL** - This district is intended to provide for a combination of specialty retail stores, office, service uses, and multi-family housing, with a focus on creating a pedestrian-oriented central retail area for the Village.

**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.

**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 zoning districts, the Village also considers planned developments that provide greater flexibility in addressing specific projects and their impacts on the community. Planned developments allow the possible deviation from strict adherence to the underlying zoning regulations, subject to a review and permitting process with the Village that ensures the proposed development is responsive to Village needs, is a desirable development, is consistent with the comprehensive plan, and does not cause adverse effects to the community.

# Current Zoning







## 3 Land Use & Development

The Land Use Plan is a guide for indicating the type, intensity, and location of future land use and development in the Village of River Forest. It strives to maintain and enhance the traditional form, character and distinguishing features of River Forest while accommodating high-quality, contextual and compatible improvements and new development in selected locations. The Land Use Plan builds upon the existing land uses and development patterns within the Village and seeks to provide a sustainable, compatible, and desirable mix and distribution of uses to meet the needs of current and future residents.

It should be emphasized that the Land Use Plan is a guide for growth and development within the Village and provides a foundation for further decision-making. While it is a detailed document that provides specific guidance on land use decisions, it is also intended to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate unique or compelling circumstances and the consideration of creative approaches to development that are consistent with the overall recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan.





## Land Use & Development

*To provide a sustainable and comprehensive approach to growth and development that protects and enhances residential neighborhoods; strengthens commercial areas and the Village’s economic base; provides for the Village’s network of parks, open space, and environmental resources; and reinforces the continued provision of high-quality community facilities and services.*

### Core Objectives

1. Ensure the quality, stability, and attractiveness of residential neighborhoods.
2. Promote economic development of the Village’s commercial corridors and mixed-use areas.
3. Appropriately balance the need to safeguard residential neighborhoods and the need for commercial area development and improvement.
4. Protect open space and environmental areas from development encroachment.
5. Encourage sustainable best practices for all development.
6. Provide for public/quasi-public uses to continue the high quality of facilities and services within the community.
7. Minimize the impacts of incompatible land use arrangements.
8. Protect and enhance the historic and architectural heritage and significance of the Village’s built environment.





## Land Use Classification

The land-use designation/classification system depicted in the Land Use Plan is intended to help organize and arrange future land use areas in the Village. Together with the Residential Areas Framework and the Commercial Areas Framework, the Land Use Plan is intended to accurately reflect the Village's intentions for the type, intensity, and location of future land uses and development anticipated under the Comprehensive Plan.

The land use classification consists of ten (10) land use designations, as identified below:

- Single-family Residential
- Multi-family Residential
- General Commercial
- Corridor Commercial
- Village Center Commercial
- Public/Semi-Public
- School
- Park
- Forest Preserve
- Private Recreation

## Residential Uses

The Land Use Plan classifies residential areas into two (2) residential categories: (1) Single-family Residential and (2) Multi-family Residential. In addition to these two residential land use designations, residential units are also permitted uses on the upper floors of development in the Village Center Commercial areas, and as dormitories or residence halls on the campuses of Dominican University and Concordia University in the Public/Semi-Public land use designations. An expanded discussion of the Village's residential areas provided in Section 4: Residential Areas Plan.

### Single-Family Detached Residential

Single-family residential areas consist of land occupied primarily by single-family detached structures on properties with front and rear yards, and which may or may not include detached accessory structures such as garages. These areas of the Village may also contain a small number of "grandfathered in" duplexes, which have the appearance and characteristics similar to that of single-family detached structures.

### Multi-Family Residential

Multi-family residential areas consist of more than one unit or household per lot, and generally consists of townhomes, rowhomes, condominiums and apartments, but may also include specialized senior housing. Multi-family residential is also an allowed use on the upper floors of land designated as Village Center Commercial. Multi-family residential uses are primarily located along or near the Village's primary perimeter corridors (Madison Street, North Avenue, and Harlem Avenue) and Lake Street.



## Commercial Uses

The Land Use Plan identifies three (3) categories of commercial land uses: General Commercial, Corridor Commercial, and Village Center Commercial. Section 6: Commercial Areas Plan provides an expanded discussion of these uses along with detailed policies for development and improvement. In general, the areas designated for commercial land use are located along the Village's primary corridors, including Madison Street, Lake Street, North Avenue, and Harlem Avenue.

### General Commercial

This land use area comprises commercial uses that provide goods and services that draw patrons from within, and beyond, the Village. This land use category accommodates a wide range of retail, restaurant, service, and office uses and is generally characterized by larger development sites that can accommodate larger/national retailers and planned shopping centers. The General Commercial areas are located between Lake Street and Central Avenue, east of Lathrop Avenue.

### Corridor Commercial

Corridor commercial areas are designated primarily for commercial, retail, restaurant, and service uses, catering to the day-to-day needs of the local population, as well as drawing from regional arterial traffic. These areas exist along the Village's perimeter corridors and are generally characterized by shallow lot depths, frontage on busy streets, and adjacency to residential properties. Given appropriate development design and adequate parcel depth and size, residential uses may be provided on the upper floors above ground floor commercial. Commercial/retail uses are the priority and any residential component should be accessory/secondary to commercial development.

### Village Center Commercial

Village Center Commercial is a commercial/mixed-use area that provides products and services to meet daily living needs of residents, drawing customers from neighboring communities and beyond. Ground floor uses are primarily retail, restaurant, and personal service, with office and residential uses located on the upper floors. Development character, sense of place, and an attractive and comfortable pedestrian-oriented environment are essential. The area is generally located along the south side of Lake Street, between Lathrop Avenue and Park Avenue, and at the intersection of Lake Street and Thatcher Avenue.





## Community Facilities, Institutions, and Open Space

Community Facilities/Institutional land uses include public and semi-public areas occupied by government facilities, community service providers, schools, private recreation, and other institutional users. These land uses also contain areas used by both private and public utility providers. Community facilities and institutions are a defining part of River Forest's overall community character and an important component of the Land Use Plan. The Land Use Plan anticipates that these uses will remain largely as they currently exist in the Village. Section 8: Community Facilities Plan provides an expanded discussion of these areas along with more detailed policies and recommendations.

### Public/Semi-public

Public/semi-public designated areas contain community facilities or public buildings such as religious institutions, municipal buildings, Township facilities, cultural facilities, and Metra/commuter facilities.

### School/University

These areas include properties designated for a public or private school, including elementary, middle school, high school, college, or university.

### Private Recreation

These two areas include properties occupied by private tennis, swim, or other recreation or social club. In River Forest these include the River Forest Tennis Club (bound by Oak, Lathrop, Quick, and Jackson) and the Oak Park Tennis Center (adjacent to the Cook County Forest Preserve Headquarters).

### Park/Open Space

These areas are intended to be maintained as a park, recreation site, or open space, and include the River Forest Park District parks. Playground and recreation areas on school grounds are designated as part of the school, and not shown as park/open space.

### Forest Preserve

These areas are properties owned and maintained by the Cook County Forest Preserve as forested areas, parks, open space, recreation sites, or other facilities. These areas generally include the large wooded areas adjacent to the Des Plaines River along the western edge of the Village, and the Cook County Forest Preserve Headquarters building, open space, and park area at the northwest corner of Lake Street and Harlem Avenue.



## Historic/ Architectural Heritage

When addressing land use and development in River Forest, it is essential to note the significance of the community's historic and architectural heritage. The abundance of architecturally significant buildings and structures in the Village has had and will continue to have a profound impact on the character, identity, and charm of the River Forest community.

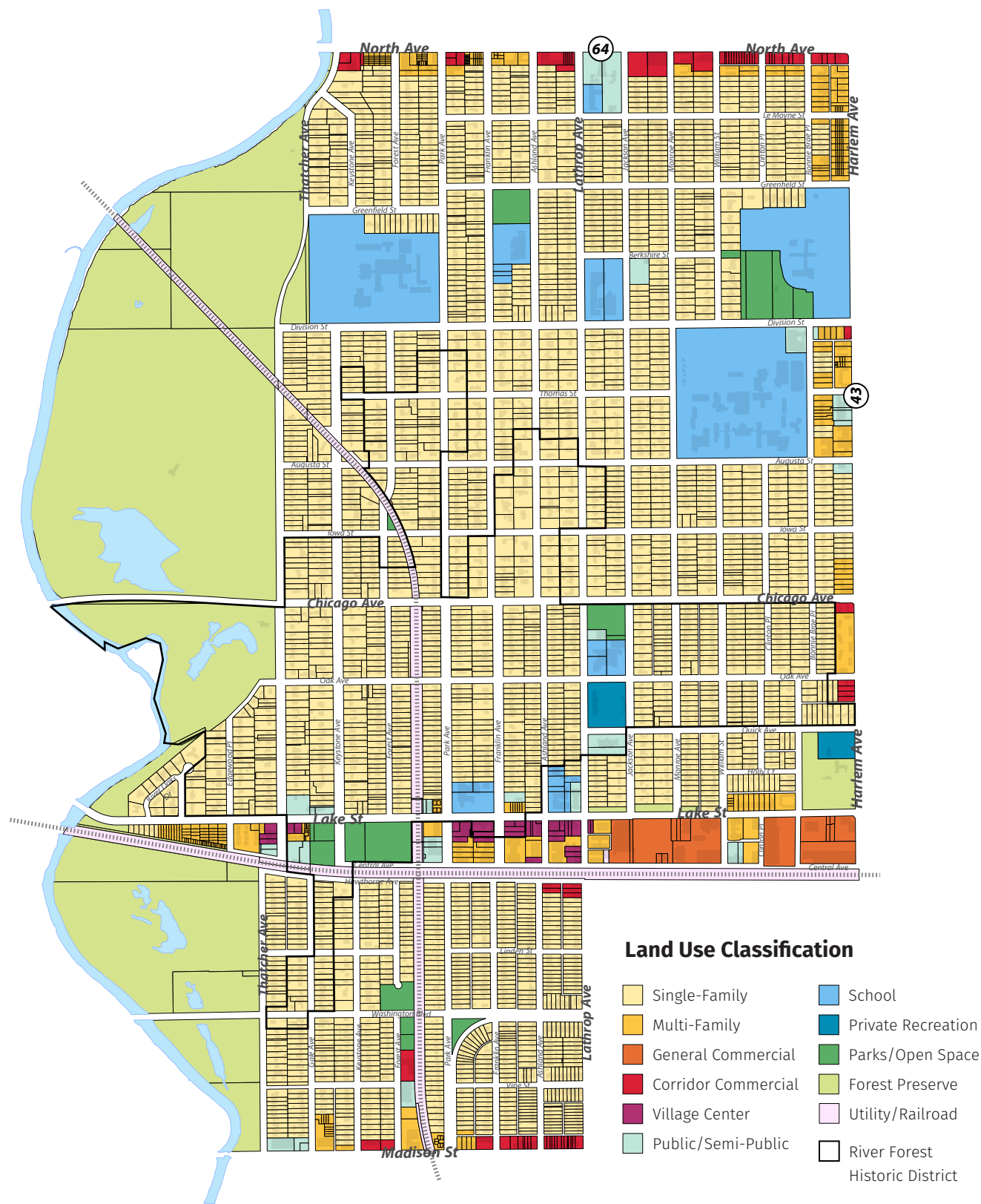
While most of its architectural/historic resources lie within the residential neighborhoods, there are also several commercial and institutional structures. In 1977, at the direction of the United States Department of the Interior, a National Historic Preservation District was established in River Forest. The nomination cited several structures and buildings as having architectural interest in the community. Among the known architects cited, they include: Frank Lloyd Wright, William Drummond, and Tallmadge and Watson. William Drummond made his home in River Forest in 1910 and he designed 14 structures in River Forest.

The boundary of the historic preservation district is illustrated on the Land Use Map. Approximately 830 structures are located within the Historic District, with 165 of the structures identified for having special architectural and/or historical significance. Some of these sites and structures of significance include: River Forest Woman's Club (now a private residence), Harlem School (now Lincoln School), River Forest Bank Building, River Forest Methodist Church, River Forest Tennis Club, River Forest Public Library, Abraham J. Hoffman House (now Trailside Museum), and several single-family residential homes.

All of these sites, institutions, buildings and homes are significant and contribute immeasurably to the Village's overall character, heritage, architectural diversity, identity and sense of place. These architectural and historic assets also strengthen local tourism, bringing visitors to our community from across the world. Any actions taken regarding land use and development in the future must take into consideration the significance of the Village's rich architectural history.



# Land Use Plan









## 4 Residential Neighborhoods

River Forest's neighborhoods are the pride of the community and are the most significant contributor to River Forest's overall image, identity, character, and charm. The neighborhoods are characterized by tree-lined streets, traditional grid block pattern, fully connected sidewalk system, and an architecturally diverse and historically significant housing stock. While single-family neighborhoods comprise most of the land area in the Village, multi-family and single-family attached residential, primarily located along the Village's corridors, play a key role in providing a full ranging of housing options for residents.

The mix of dwelling types accommodates the various housing needs for individuals and families at different stages of life – from renters and first-time home buyers to “empty nesters” and lifelong residents. It is also important to note that at the same time the Village recognizes the value and importance of historic preservation, it is essential to attract and accommodate new residential investment and infill development. It is this combination of well-maintained and valued older homes, together with high-quality new homes, that keeps the neighborhoods desirable, vibrant, and attractive within the region's housing market.

Going forward, the Village must continue to prioritize the character and quality of the neighborhoods. By supporting historic preservation and the maintenance and rehabilitation of older homes, ensuring desirable new infill single-family development, accommodating appropriate new multi-family development in select locations, and balancing the need for economic development along the primary corridors, the Village can maintain and enhance the desirability of the River Forest Neighborhoods.



## Residential Neighborhoods

*Maintain the Village as an exceptional residential community, retain its predominant single-family detached dwelling character and varied architectural styles, and provide the variety of housing options necessary to accommodate residents at all stages of life.*

### Core Objectives

1. Ensure that home improvements, additions and new housing construction are compatible with, complement, and enhance the existing scale and character of the neighborhoods.
2. Maintain the appropriate balance of housing types within the community to provide for the housing needs of residents at all stages of life.
3. Protect residential areas from the encroachment of incompatible land uses and the adverse impacts of adjacent activities, while appropriately accommodating economic development along the Village's primary corridors.
4. Support historic preservation efforts to protect and enhance architecturally and historically valued structures.
5. Promote the improvement, rehabilitation, or replacement of deteriorating or obsolete residential properties.
6. Encourage new residential development that provides for the needs of the Village's population.
7. Undertake public infrastructure improvements within residential areas as required.



## Residential Development Types

The Land Use Plan classifies residential uses into two categories - single-family residential and multi-family residential. Within these two categories, standalone residential development can include single-family detached homes, single-family attached (townhomes and row homes), and multi-family (condominiums and apartments). In addition to standalone residential development, housing can be provided as part of a mixed-use development, where multi-family units are located on the upper floors above ground floor commercial uses.

### Mixed-Use Residential

Mixed-use development, consisting of ground floor commercial with residential units on the upper floors, is designated in the plan as being preferred in the Village Center Area of Lake Street, but also appropriate at select locations along the Village's perimeter corridors. Mixed-use is designated as appropriate in the C1, C2, C3, and ORIC zoning districts, and must be approved as a planned development.

With the changing retail market, once traditional retail-only districts are needing to accommodate a wider range and mix of uses to remain successful. The market for mixed-use residential is very strong in the region, particularly when such development provides convenient access and proximity to transit, employment, shopping and dining, entertainment, and recreation. Many of River Forest's commercial areas fit these parameters and are ideal candidates for new mixed-use residential.

### Single-Family Detached Residential

River Forest is primarily a residential community and is well known for its established, historic, architecturally significant, and attractive neighborhoods, comprised of varied architectural styles and appearance. Much of the Village's special image and identity is due to the unique character of its neighborhoods, and these distinguishing features should be preserved and enhanced. Single-family residential areas comprise the single largest land use in the Village of River Forest, and include the R1 and R2 zoning districts.

Single-family residential areas consist of land occupied primarily by single-family detached structures, which may or may not include detached accessory structures such as garages. These areas of the Village may also contain a small number of "grandfathered in" duplexes, which have the appearance and characteristics similar to that of single-family detached structures.

While the replacement of some older/obsolete homes is both normal and desirable, the Village should continue to monitor new development, to ensure that changes are sensitive to and reflective of existing Village character and the architectural diversity, for which River Forest is known.

### Multi-Family Residential

Multi-family residential areas consist of more than one unit or household per lot, and generally consists of townhomes, rowhomes, condominiums and apartments, but may also include specialized senior housing. Multi-family residential uses are primarily located along or near Lake Street and the Village's perimeter corridors (Madison Street, North Avenue, and Harlem Avenue). Multi-family residential zoning districts include R3 and R4, but several existing multi-family developments exist within commercial zoning districts. All multi-family development must be approved as a planned development.

Multi-family residential units in River Forest range from smaller affordable older units to more recently constructed developments offering larger units with very high values. This range of multi-family price points provides housing across a broad spectrum of socio-economic levels. New multi-family developments are held to high standards for quality construction and building materials, architecture and appearance, and are required to provide adequate parking for residents and guests. Older multi-family developments often suffer from a lack of sufficient off-street parking and lack the amenities that newer development can provide.

New multi-family residential developments should be held to high standards and reflect the overall character of the community. Older developments should be improved with additional parking where appropriate and maintained.

## Housing Affordability

River Forest currently provides a range of housing options at varying levels of affordability. Both owner-occupied and rental housing is available in single-family detached and multiple-family dwellings. Some of the community's more affordable housing existing in the older multi-family development that exist along the perimeter corridors of Harlem and North Avenue. For the majority of these older multi-family properties, focus should be on maintaining the buildings as quality affordable housing in River Forest. Throughout the Village there are also smaller, older single-family homes that are relatively affordable. However, many of the more modest single-family homes are likely candidates for teardown and infill redevelopment.

River Forest values its mix of residential options and recognizes the importance of providing a range of housing price points, including at the more affordable end of the spectrum. To that end, the Village should prepare and adopt an Affordable Housing Plan that meets state requirements. Further, the Village should seek to improve the condition of the existing affordable housing in the community and appropriately consider affordable units as a component of future residential development.

## Buffering from Commercial Activity

The established development pattern in River Forest has several areas where residential properties abut commercial development. While providing appropriate buffering and screening between such uses can be a challenge in any situation, it is often an even bigger challenge in River Forest due to the shallow lot depths that plague many commercial properties.

The Village should identify where residential and commercial area adjacency is problematic and examine ways to facilitate the use of buffering and screening techniques. Such initiatives might include establishing a program to promote screening improvements. Alternatively, the Village's landscape ordinance could be revised to require enhanced screening and an amortization schedule to ensure compliance within a set time frame. Given limited commercial lot size and depth, effective screening and buffering will likely involve a combination of landscaping and fencing, possibly including a requirement for new commercial development to provide additional landscaping on adjacent residential properties. Native plants are recommended because of their durability, drought resistance, flood mitigation, and 4-season landscape.

## Connectivity & Walkability

River Forest neighborhoods were developed based on a traditional grid which provides a uniform layout (due to standard street and lot widths) as well as pedestrian and vehicular connectivity. Sidewalks are present on both sides of nearly every street segment and mature trees line the rights-of-way. This intact and fully connected sidewalk network provides excellent walkability in all of River Forest's neighborhoods. That said, key intersection and pedestrian crossing improvements should be made to further enhance the safety and walkability of the neighborhoods.

The Village should prioritize implementation of the recently completed Safe Walking Routes to School (SWRTS) study recommendations that identify several safety improvements focused on the areas around the community's schools. Collectively, these areas cover a large percentage of the Village neighborhoods. Many recommendations for improving the walkability and safety of the neighborhoods are provided in the Transportation chapter of the comprehensive plan.





## Historic Preservation

River Forest is an historic community committed to protecting, preserving, and promoting its rich heritage. Structures in River Forest include historical styles such as Gothic Revival, Victoria, Prairie School, Tudor Revival, Bungalows, Buurma Built, Art Deco, and Moderne. Some of these homes were designed by architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, William Drummond, Spencer and Powers, E.E. Roberts, and their contemporaries.

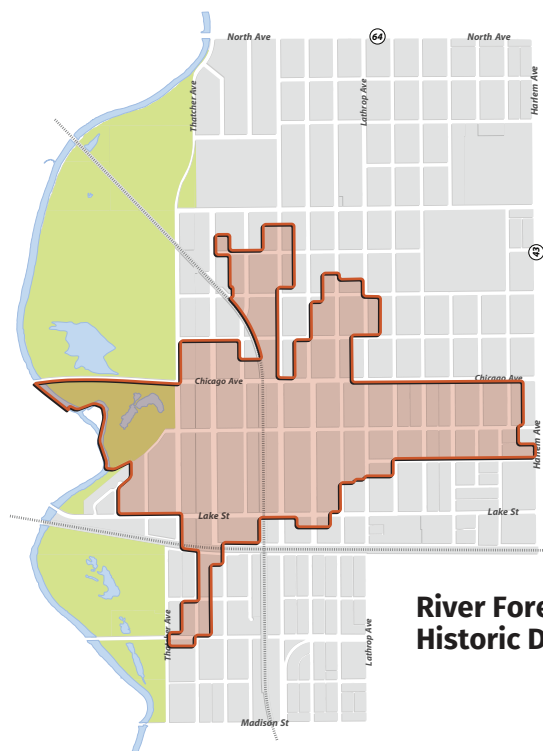
The Historic Preservation Commission identifies the landmark designation and certificate of appropriateness process, and requires the review of Significant Properties for which repair, rehab, reconstruction, restoration, or demolition is proposed prior to the approval of a permit. The Historic Preservation Commission also serves as a resource to the public providing education in the areas of historic and architectural preservation.

River Forest has a locally established historic district that stretches irregularly from the east at Harlem Avenue to the west at the Des Plaines River and from Division Street to the north to Washington Boulevard and comprises approximately 860 properties. The boundaries of the Historic District are shown on the Land Use Map.

The Historic Preservation Commission has designated 298 homes in River Forest as Significant Properties. These “significant” properties exist both within and outside of the Historic District. Any construction work on these properties must be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission. There are also a variety of federal, state, and local financial incentives available to property owners who renovate in a historically sensitive manner and the Commission can assist with navigating and pursuing available assistance.

## Lighting

Lighting in residential areas is an essential contributor to the overall character, ambiance, and safety of the neighborhood. As such, the Village should assess the current level of lighting provided in the neighborhoods and the location of light fixtures within the parkway/right-of-way and make adjustments as needed to ensure a safe and attractive environment for residents.



**River Forest  
Historic District**



## Aging in Place

The notion of aging in place refers to being able to live in the home and community of your choice as you age. As a core principle from a community perspective, it means providing the necessary housing to accommodate residents of all ages and stages of life; providing the physical environment that maximizes access and mobility throughout the community; and providing the resources, amenities, and facilities to meet the needs of aging residents.

River Forest already ranks high as an aging in place friendly community. The Village offers a wide range of housing options, provides nearby healthcare services and facilities, has a robust transportation/transit network that maximizes individual mobility, has a great mix of local shopping and dining and entertainment choices, and is home to several cultural and educational institutions and programs catering to all ages. Continued focus on all of the community components is essential.

The Village should consider working cooperatively with the Park District, Library, and Township in forming a joint Aging in Place Committee focused on ensuring River Forest remain at the forefront of providing a high quality of life for aging residents, for example but not limited to, through better transportation and housing options.

## Stormwater Management

Improved stormwater management is a near- and long-term priority for the Village and should continue to be addressed in a comprehensive manner within all residential areas. The Village has made significant investment in recent years in its stormwater system and it should encourage the utilization of green infrastructure systems to further mitigate flooding in the neighborhoods. Additionally, the Village zoning ordinance and building codes should be examined to identify changes that would accommodate and possibly incentivize the use of permeable surfaces and on-site stormwater mitigating installations.

## Parkway Trees

The streets within the Village's neighborhoods are lined with a canopy from mature parkway trees. These trees contribute significantly to the overall desirability and character of the neighborhoods and the Village as a whole. Parkway trees must be protected and preserved. Currently, the Village's parkway tree planting program plants new parkway trees where a tree has been removed due to disease or other damage. The Village should continue its parkway tree program to ensure existing parkway trees are replaced with a variety of species. The installation of new parkway trees will ensure a healthy and complete urban tree canopy and help to increase the attractiveness, desirability, and value of the neighborhoods.

### **Committed to making River Forest a Village for successful aging**

*In conjunction with the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging and the Best Cities for Successful Aging initiative, River Forest pledges the following:*

- Ensure that the well-being of our aging population is addressed by each department, agency, and division in our Village government.
- Make our Village safe, affordable, and comfortable for our older residents.
- Provide older adults access to resources promoting health and wellness
- Support employment, entrepreneurship, education, and other services to make our older residents more financially secure.
- Offer housing options that suit the varied needs of our older population.
- Improve access to transportation and mobility options for our older adults.
- Promote the engagement of older residents in volunteer and paid roles that serve the needs of our Village and its residents.
- Call upon higher education and workforce development programs to help older adults refresh their skills, train and transition to a new state of work focused on strengthening our Village.
- Recognize older residents as an asset for our Village and celebrate their contributions to improving lives for all generations.



## 5 Commercial Areas

River Forest Forward recognized the vital importance of economic development and is committed to ensuring that the Village's commercial areas are vibrant, thriving, economically viable, and attractive. It is essential that the commercial areas diversify and strengthen the Village's tax base as they serve as the economic engine that provides the revenue needed to maintain high quality public facilities and services.

Thriving commercial areas are essential to maintaining a strong tax base for the Village, providing the revenue to maintain the high level of public facilities and services, and reducing/minimizing the residential tax burden. It is also important that the commercial areas provide residents and visitors with access to goods and services and help create a desirable sense of place reflective of River Forest's overall community character.

Because of the historic development pattern of the community, most of the Village's commercial areas are located along its major corridors – Madison Street, North Avenue, Harlem Avenue, and Lake Street; and are adjacent to or near established residential neighborhoods. As a result of this existing land use arrangement, issues of compatibility and impact will surely arise. As commercial uses and new development are considered, efforts should be made to minimize conflicts between commercial areas and surrounding residential properties, while seeking to accommodate appropriate and desirable development, including possible commercial area expansion in select locations.



## Commercial Areas

*To improve the success of commercial areas by working cooperatively to support existing businesses, creating new opportunities for desirable development, and improving the character, appearance, and function of the areas.*

## Core Objectives

1. Accommodate and support appropriate new commercial/mixed-use development.
2. Promote contextual, high quality design, architecture, and site amenities as new development and improvements are considered.
3. Maintain high quality and attractive commercial areas reflective of the Village's character and desired sense of place, through cohesive streetscape and public realm improvements.
4. Improve the pedestrian and bicycle friendliness, access, mobility and safety of commercial areas.
5. Balance the need for thriving and robust commercial areas with the importance of mitigating impacts on the Village's residential neighborhoods.
6. Provide adequate off-street parking to accommodate the needs of existing businesses and future development.
7. Encourage sustainable best practices for new commercial development and other commercial area improvements.
8. Examine and amend the Village's zoning ordinance to better regulate the commercial districts in a manner reflective of market realities and the desired character for the areas.

## Commercial Development Types

The plans for the Village's commercial areas build on the Land Use Plan which identifies three (3) commercial land uses: General Commercial, Corridor Commercial, and Village Center Commercial.

### General Commercial

General Commercial areas are comprised of commercial uses that provide goods and services that draw patrons from within, and beyond, the Village. This land use category accommodates a wide range of retail, restaurant, service, and office uses and is generally characterized by larger development sites that can accommodate larger/national retailers and planned shopping centers. The General Commercial areas are located between Lake Street and Central Avenue, east of Lathrop Avenue.

### Corridor Commercial

Corridor Commercial areas are designated primarily for commercial, retail, restaurant, and service uses, catering to the day-to-day needs of the local population, as well as drawing from regional arterial traffic. These areas exist along the Village's perimeter corridors and are generally characterized by shallow lot depths, frontage on busy streets, and adjacency to residential properties. Given appropriate development design, adequate parcel depth and size, and ability to accommodate sufficient on-site parking, residential uses may be provided on the upper floors above ground floor commercial. Commercial/retail uses are prioritized for these areas, and any residential component should be accessory/secondary to commercial development.

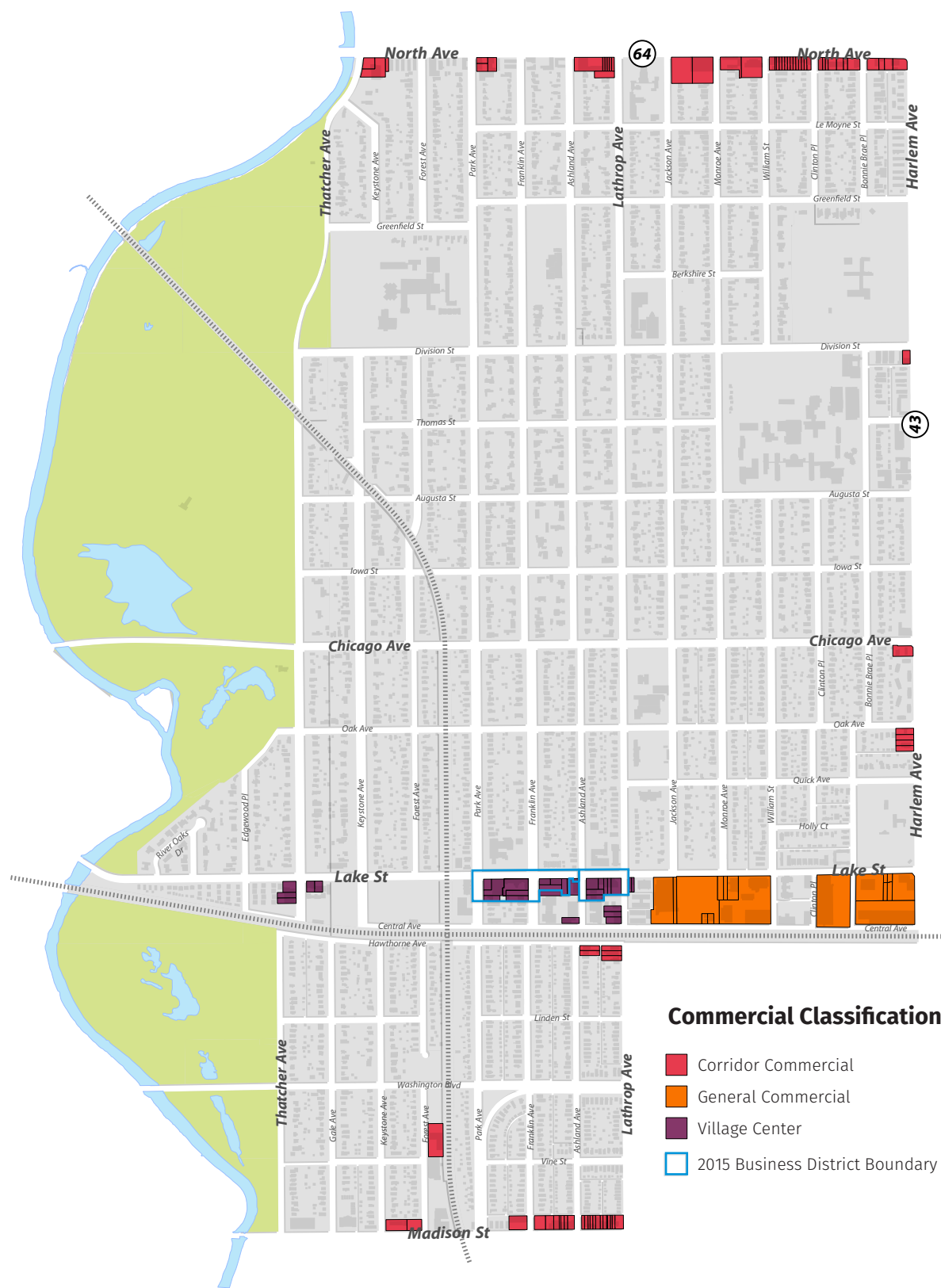
### Village Center Commercial

Village Center Commercial is a commercial/mixed-use area that provides products and services to meet daily living needs of residents, drawing customers from neighboring communities and beyond. Ground floor uses are primarily retail, restaurant, and personal service, with office and residential uses located on the upper floors. Development character, sense of place, and an attractive and comfortable pedestrian-oriented environment are essential. The area is generally located along the south side of Lake Street, between Lathrop Avenue and Park Avenue, and at the intersection of Lake Street and Thatcher Avenue.

This chapter of the comprehensive plan addresses several factors related to the provision of successful, viable, attractive commercial areas: creating "new space" for commercial development, streetscape improvements, zoning and development regulations, design considerations, emphasis on pedestrian mobility and safety, and strategic partnerships and coordination.



# Commercial Areas







**Existing Configuration:**  
Through Street



**Proposed Configuration:**  
Cul-De-Sac and Public Parking

## Creating “New Space” for Commercial Development

One of the biggest challenges facing the successful revitalization and redevelopment of the Village’s mixed-use corridors is the shallow lot depth and limited availability of parking. These challenges make it difficult for sites to be developed in a manner that provides contemporary building footprints and tenant space with adequate parking and site amenities. A variety of development strategies may need to be considered to appropriately accommodate commercial development in key locations.

This section of the plan presents a variety of different strategies for accommodating and possibly incentivizing redevelopment along the Village’s commercial/mixed-use corridors by creating “new space”, resulting in potentially larger development sites. The strategies presented in this section utilize existing Village assets such as streets and alleys as leverage for incentivizing desirable new development. This section also presents other development considerations such as commercial area expansion and the strategic relocation of certain existing businesses. Although these strategies may not be applicable or even desirable at all locations, they do represent a viable approach to accommodating new development and supporting the Village’s goal of attracting desirable economic development. These approaches to creating additional development opportunities are identified in the corridor plans at the end of the section.

The possible approaches for creating “new space” for commercial development include:

**CREATING CUL-DE-SACS** – By selectively “cul-de-sac”-ing certain intersecting side streets, Village right-of-way can be used to develop public parking areas for adjacent and nearby commercial development. Using cul-de-sacs in select locations may allow adjacent or nearby sites to utilize a greater percentage of the lot area for building footprint and less for surface parking, resulting in a larger, more viable, and possibly more flexible building design with a greater leasable and usable floor area. Cul-de-sacs should be considered on a case-by-case basis as a potential way of accommodating desirable development.

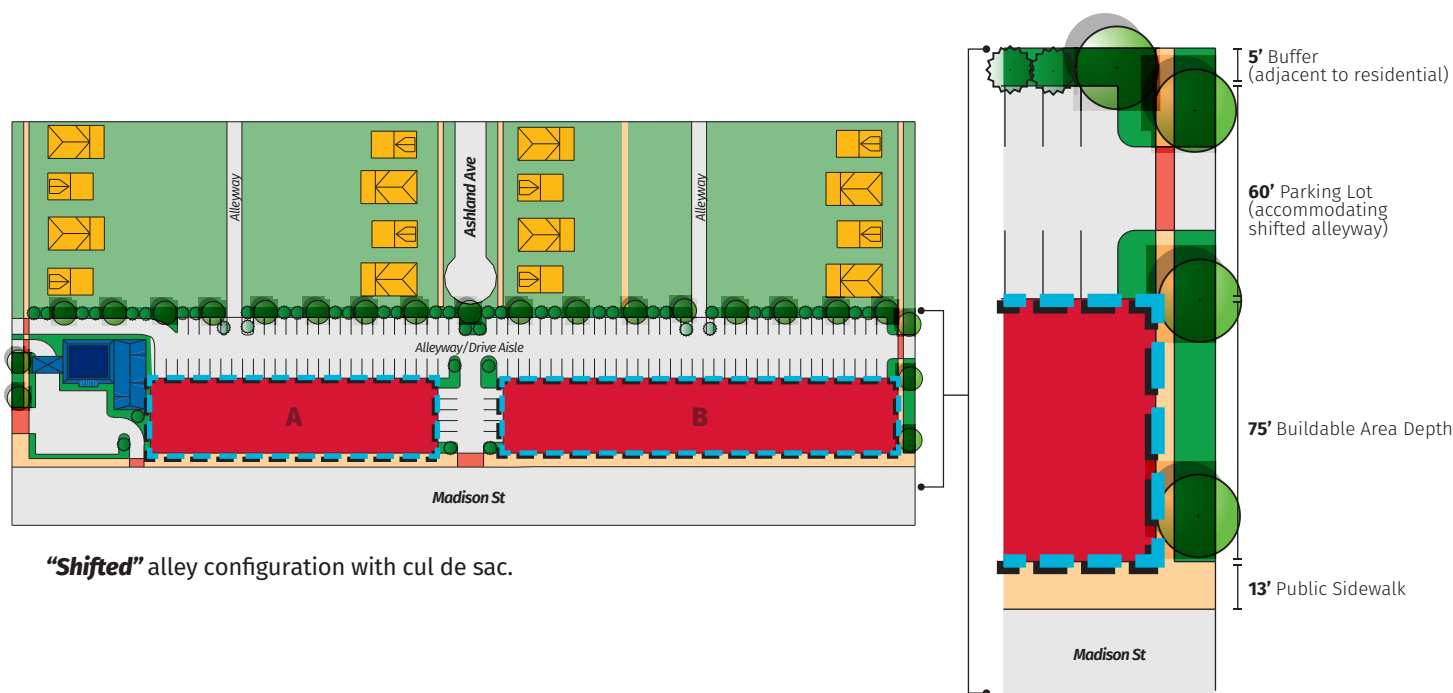
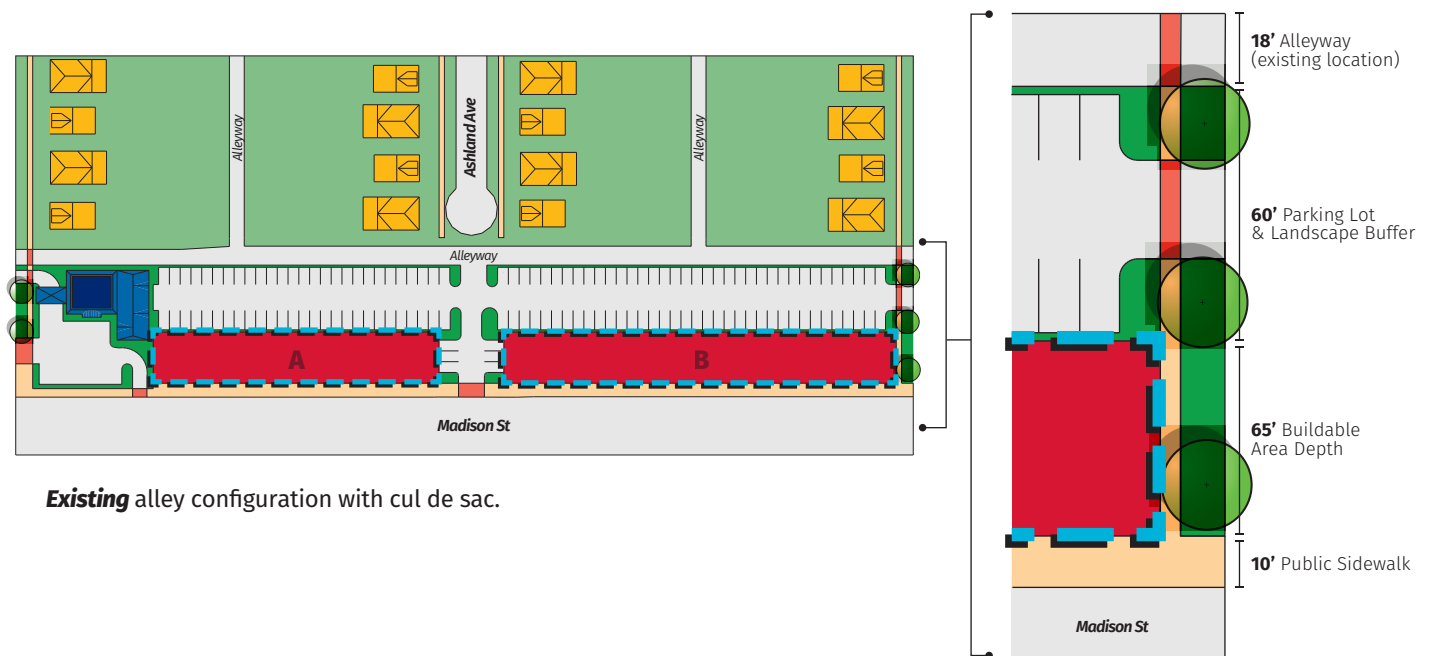
**PUBLIC PARKING LOTS** – In areas where parking shortages may be inhibiting economic development success, public parking lots can provide the parking necessary for businesses to thrive. This is a likely strategy to meet the needs of parking in the Village Center Commercial area. The Village of River Forest should identify properties within the Village Center Commercial area for the development of public parking to serve the existing businesses and future development of the area.

**USE RELOCATION** – By relocating specific existing uses, local businesses could stay in the Village and key sites could be developed with more appropriate/desirable uses. Successful relocation of existing uses requires that a suitable site is found that will accommodate and hopefully improve conditions for the business. Such a relocation often requires some dedication and allocation of public funds (including TIF) and/or must be made part of a larger redevelopment effort. Use of relocation is an effective tool for both private businesses as well as public facilities.

**COMMERCIAL EXPANSION** – By permitting residential properties to be assembled into adjacent commercial properties via market forces and transactions with willing sellers, larger/more contemporary developments could be accommodated. Any such development must be of the highest quality and provide appropriate buffering and screening from the adjacent residential properties. Site and building design must be attractive when viewed from all sides and directions. The Village should carefully consider such proposals on a case-by-case basis and on the specific merits of the individual development being proposed.

**ALLEY “SHIFTING”** – By “shifting” alleys away from the adjacent residential properties and utilizing the alley as a parking lot driving aisle, larger building footprints, additional parking, perimeter landscaping and buffering could be provided. Additionally, attractive landscaping could further buffer and separate adjacent neighborhoods from commercial development and parking areas. This development strategy could be applied along both Madison Street and North Avenue, where applicable, but would be most effective where an entire block front was assembled for redevelopment.

# Alley “Shifting” Scenario





## Streetscaping

The Village has designed and implemented a very attractive streetscape improvement program along the Lake Street Corridor. The streetscape improvements include street trees, planters, street furniture, bicycle racks, gateway features, wayfinding signage, decorative fencing, and more. The streetscape improvements provide a distinct enhancement to the corridor that make it unique to River Forest, distinguishing the corridor from surrounding communities. The gateway elements welcome visitors as they enter the Village and wayfinding signage helps visitors find their destination and key points of interest in the community.

The Village should implement the same streetscape enhancement program in all of its commercial areas in order to establish a unique and defining aesthetic for River Forest. Although the level of application will likely differ in different commercial areas due to opportunity for placement, roadway jurisdiction, and funding availability, the Village should nevertheless strive for the same streetscape aesthetic, as appropriate and achievable, in all commercial areas and along all perimeter corridors. The location and application of key streetscape elements is provided in the individual corridor plans later in this chapter.



## Commercial Zoning & Development Regulations

It has been decades since the Village's zoning ordinance has undergone a comprehensive assessment and rewrite. While some residential standards and sign code elements have been amended over the past 20 years, the commercial districts have gone largely unchanged, both in terms of the uses permitted and the standards that regulate the height, size, setbacks, density, parking, and overall character of development.

Based on an assessment of the commercial/mixed-use development proposed and approved over the past 20 years in River Forest, there appears to be a need to update the zoning ordinance to possibly accommodate taller buildings. A revised/updated zoning ordinance should better reflect the desired character for the different commercial areas, provide greater certainty for residents and property owners, better reflect contemporary development practices, and provide better guidance for the Village's planned development approval process.

### Suggested Building Height Considerations Subject to Approval at a Public Hearing

Commercial Area	Existing Max. Height	Suggested New Max. Stories/Bldg Height
Madison Street	30 ft	50 ft/4 stories
North Avenue	50 ft	60 ft/5 stories
Harlem Avenue	30 ft	60 ft/5 stories
Lake Street (east of Lathrop)	50 ft	70 ft/6 stories
Village Center Area	50 ft	70 ft/6 stories

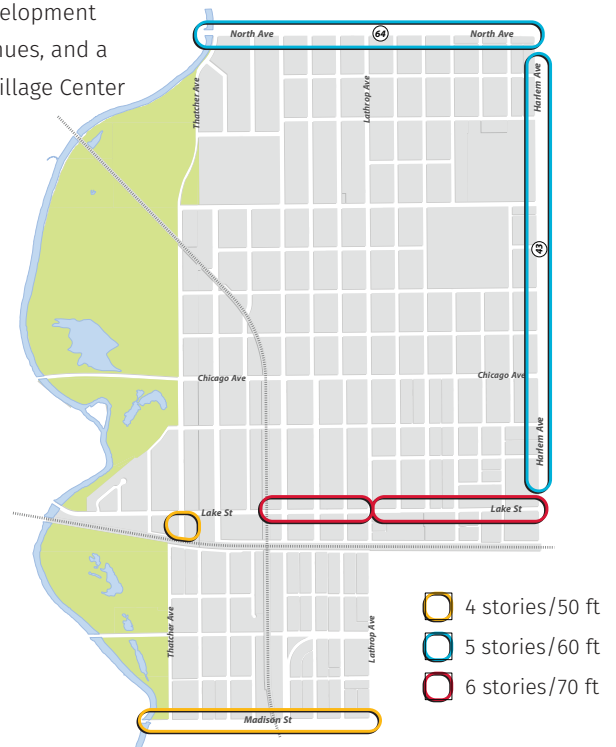
NOTE: Context is a key consideration to the height of new development. Larger/deeper development sites may be able to more appropriately accommodate building heights greater than the heights indicated on the table above.

Given the fact that each commercial/mixed-use corridor/area has existing buildings taller than the maximum commercial height currently permitted, and given that the maximum height of adjacent residential areas is sometimes taller than height permitted in the adjacent commercial district, at a minimum, the maximum building heights of each commercial district should be assessed to determine if maximum building heights should be increased. It is important to note that any change to the zoning regulations regarding building height or any other standard would require a separate public hearing process separate from this Comprehensive Plan. Adoption of this plan does not change zoning.

Given high quality, contextual design, and an adequately sized and located site, it is reasonable to assume a 4-story mixed-use development could be appropriate along Madison Street, a 5-story development along Harlem and North Avenues, and a 6-story development in the Village Center Area.

Assuming a 12' first floor, 10' upper floors, and a 5' parapet, and given the number of floors as indicated above, consideration should be given to possibly amending the zoning ordinance to reflect the table at the bottom of this page.

Variables such as ceiling height of ground floor commercial space, ceiling height of upper floor office or residential, internalized structured parking, and proposed architecture will significantly impact building height. However, if new height and development standards are set, the Village should strictly adhere to the standards, only deviating in rare and truly compelling situations.







## Parking

Parking will remain an important element of the urban development pattern in the commercial areas. Both automobile and bicycle parking impact the overall character of the commercial areas and both should be adequately accommodated and provided for. Commercial areas must accommodate the automobile while at the same time providing a safe and attractive pedestrian and bicycle environment. Buildings should be situated and located to be the primary feature of a commercial development, rather than prominent parking areas. Parking areas should be seen as places of human activity not just a place to store automobiles; and, as a result be attractive and even inviting spaces. The Village should monitor mobility and parking trends over time, including ride sharing, autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles, and more, and adjust parking standards accordingly to best accommodate the needs of the Village.

**BICYCLE PARKING.** All commercial areas should provide a sufficient number of well-designed and appropriately located bicycle racks in order to accommodate and support cyclists and bicycle traffic generated by residents, shoppers, employees, and visitors. Use of bicycle racks should be monitored on a regular basis to ensure an appropriate number is being provided.

**LOCATION AND LANDSCAPING.** In general, parking areas should be provided at the sides or rear of new development where possible, and large lots adjacent to areas of high pedestrian activity should be avoided. A combination of perimeter landscaping, low masonry walls, and/or decorative wrought iron fencing can be used to effectively screen surface parking lots along public sidewalks. Parking areas of significant size should also be improved with interior landscaped islands, ground cover, shade trees, and other landscape elements.







**SHARED PARKING.** In order to reduce the percent of land area devoted to surface parking, the Village should encourage shared parking arrangements wherever possible. Neighboring businesses with differing peak demand times for parking or businesses with a low volume of customers are best suited to enter into a shared parking agreement. This can reduce the number of access points along a corridor and can create opportunities for additional green space or development.

**PUBLIC PARKING.** As noted earlier in this section, in the Village Center Area, the Village should provide public parking to better accommodate business owners, employees, customers, and commuters. The Village should also assess the current parking requirements in the zoning ordinance and amend standards as appropriate. The Village should also provide bicycle racks in the Village Center Area, appropriately located in the right-of-way or as part of public parking lots.

**PERMEABLE SURFACE AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE.** Whenever possible, commercial parking lots should utilize appropriate permeable surface materials and green infrastructure and stormwater management practices, like permeable pavers, bioswales, rain gardens, and depressed vegetated areas. With parking areas accounting for a high percentage of the commercial areas' impervious surfaces, permeable surfaces and green infrastructure can significantly reduce stormwater runoff, thus decreasing the burden on the Village's combined storm/sewer system.







## Commercial Design Guidelines

Although the Village does not have an established set of design and development guidelines, every development in the Village should be held to a high standard of design quality to ensure attractive commercial areas that reflect the desired character and sense of place for River Forest. The Village's residential neighborhoods are known for their rich and beautiful architecture and community defining character and charm. Commercial development should follow suit, in that commercial buildings should strengthen the architectural and visual appeal of the community. Consideration of the following should be applied to all commercial development in the Village.

**ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN.** Commercial buildings will reflect a detailed and high-quality design vernacular that provides visual interest and appeal when viewed from all sides.

**BUILDING MATERIALS.** High quality building materials will be used to ensure building values remain high over time and that the building's appearance "ages" well.

**SUSTAINABILITY.** Sustainable best practices should be followed or considered in building demolition, construction, design, and material selection.

**BUILDING ORIENTATION.** The entrance and overall orientation of commercial buildings should be oriented toward the primary street on which they are located.

**PEDESTRIAN ORIENTATION.** All commercial development must provide an engaging, attractive, and safe pedestrian and bicycle-friendly environment.

**PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE CONNECTIVITY.** In addition to accommodating the automobile, all commercial development must provide efficient, safe, and convenient access and mobility with strong connectivity to the Village's sidewalk network and appropriate pedestrian and bicycle amenities on-site.

**SCREENING AND BUFFERING.** All commercial development and activity should be buffered and screened, to the extent possible and appropriate, from all adjacent residential areas. This can be challenging due to the adjacency of residential and commercial areas and the shallow lot depth and small lot size of several commercial properties.

### LANDSCAPING AND SITE AMENITIES.

On-site landscaping should include foundation, parking lot perimeter, parking lot interior, and other landscape areas designed and installed to provide year-round beauty and appeal. Landscaping improvements should reflect sustainable best practices with an emphasis on perennial native plantings that are drought-resistant, require less water, less chemicals, and are more cost-effective.

**ACCESS AND CIRCULATION.** Commercial sites must provide well designed and safe access and circulation to ensure efficient traffic movement of cars, pedestrians, and cyclists both on-site and off-site. The number of curb cuts along major corridors should be kept to a minimum.

**AUTOMOBILE PARKING.** Adequate parking for commercial uses must be provided to ensure parking demand does not spill over into adjacent residential areas, with all commercial parking being attractively landscaped and easily accessed.

**BICYCLE PARKING.** Commercial sites should provide an adequate number of well designed and located bicycle racks on site.



**LIGHTING.** Commercial lighting, whether building mounted or freestanding, shall be provided via fixtures appropriate to the design of the building and site, and in a manner that minimizes spillover lighting, glare, and illumination of adjacent residential areas.

## Partnerships and Focused Economic Development Efforts

The Village should continue to work with local economic development partners, including the Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce, Visit Oak Park, and other area economic focused organizations to attract, retain and expand business success in the River Forest area, as well as areas organizations that could help leverage tourism, including the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, OPRF Historical Society, and others. The Village should also fully leverage the River Forest Economic Development Commission (EDC) as part of its focused effort to attract desirable business and new development to the Village.

Among other initiatives, the EDC should further explore creative ways to brand and market the Village's commercial areas, possibly including the naming of the different districts to strengthen marketing effectiveness. The EDC should also explore the potential for retail/restaurant/coffee shop/food truck uses at the Metra station, and explore the potential for establishing a River Forest Economic Development Corporation.

As part of the effort by the EDC, the Village should continue to identify opportunities in the Village, seek out potential "partners" who might be interested in River Forest development, and provide information and support in a manner that continues to make the Village a business-friendly community. The Village should utilize the expertise of the EDC to develop and implement a strategic marketing and recruitment plan for targeted business areas of the Village, as well as develop strategies to reduce the cost of doing business in River Forest and enhance the Village's position within the competitive landscape.

## Business Districts

In 2015 the Village established two business districts along Lake Street as a tool to assist with economic development efforts. The business districts were created to improve economic conditions in the area, encourage private investment, address blighted conditions, and attract business and commercial growth in a manner that creates sustained economic success. The business districts essentially cover the area along the south side of Lake Street between Lathrop Avenue and Park Avenue - East Lake Street Business District No. 1 (Lathrop to Ashland) and West Lake Street Business District No. 2. (Ashland to Park). Where appropriate, the Village should also consider the establishment of additional business districts for other areas of the Village.







## 6 Corridor Framework Plans

The Village's primary corridors present a tremendous opportunity for the Village to improve its tax base, improve the overall appearance and image of the community, and create a more attractive and viable commercial/multi-family residential/mixed-use environment. With limited commercial areas available for development, the Village must prioritize commercial development along its corridors, including the possible expansion of commercial areas into adjacent residential areas to accommodate desirable development.

The Village will need to work creatively and cooperatively with residents, property owners and developers to realize desirable and viable redevelopment. Many uses along the corridor will remain, but other properties are candidates for redevelopment. To overcome challenges of small lot size and shallow lot depth, parcel assembly, commercial area expansion, cul-de-sacs, and other approaches may need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. As creative solutions to economic development are considered, the overall character of the area and the impact on the adjacent residential areas must be considered to ensure the overall integrity of adjacent neighborhoods.

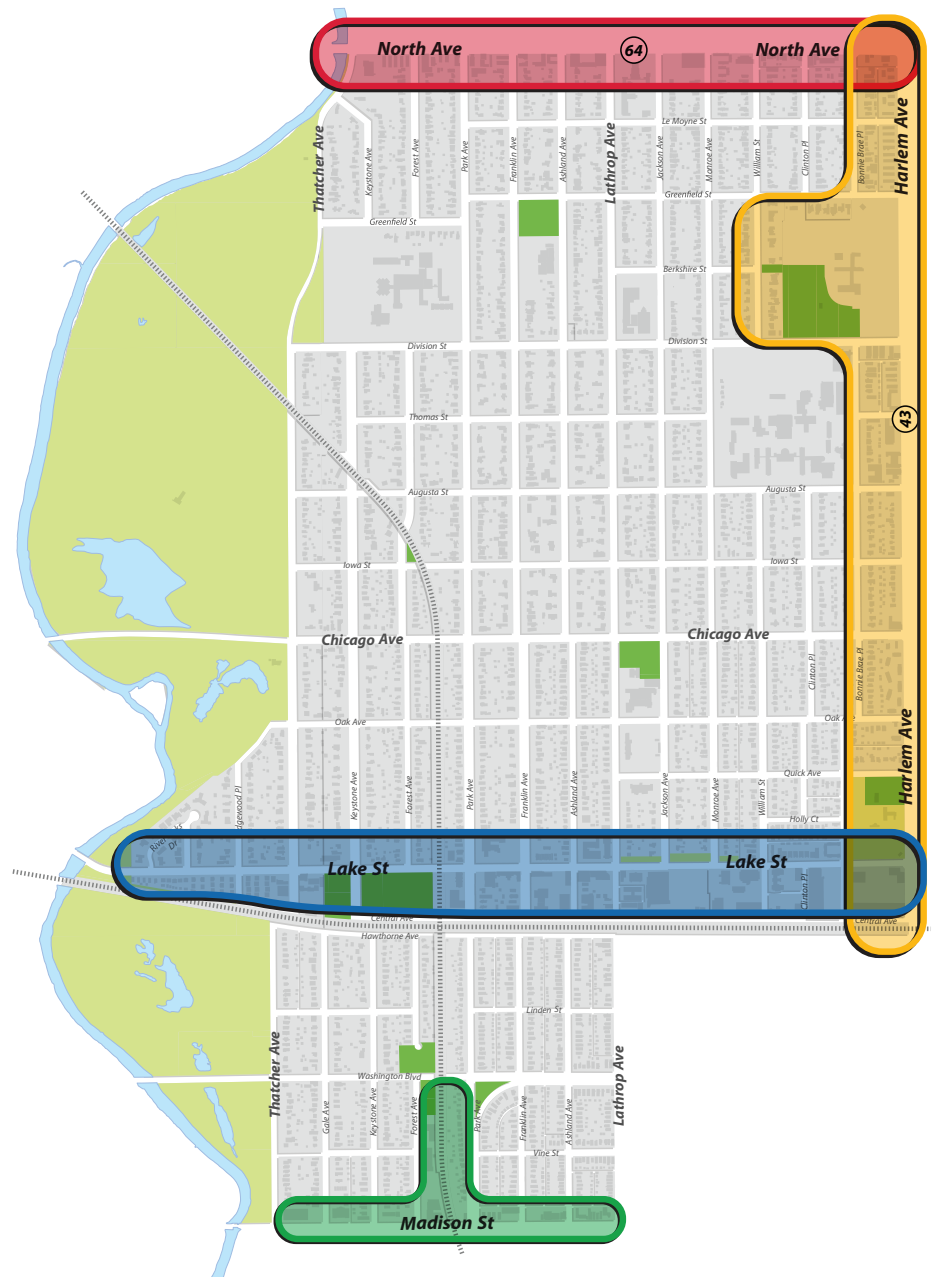
The corridor framework plans seek to enhance the economic vitality and strength of the corridors as the Village's primary economic development opportunity and as key areas for a variety of residential dwelling types to meet the needs of current and future residents. The framework plans seek to ensure that the corridors are attractive, pedestrian and bicycle friendly, well designed, reflective of the desired character of the Village, and accommodate the necessary mix of uses, including commercial and residential.

The framework plans address land use, development/redevelopment, urban design, transportation, parking, and more. The corridor plans reflect the goals and objectives from various chapters throughout the comprehensive plan and are intended to be used together with other plan components to guide and inform public and private sector decision-making.

In addition to the corridor specific recommendations contained on the following pages, the Village should explore the establishment of a façade improvement program, additional business districts, branding and marketing campaigns, and other initiatives to improve the appearance and overall economic vibrancy and success of the corridors.

## Coordination with Adjacent Communities

Three of River Forest's primary corridors are located on its perimeter and are shared by adjacent communities. To the extent possible, River Forest should coordinate with Elmwood Park, Oak Park, and Forest Park on initiatives to improve the appearance, functionality, economic vibrancy, and overall success of the North Avenue, Harlem Avenue, and Madison Street corridors.



## Madison Street Corridor

Madison Street serves as the southern boundary of River Forest, extending from Lathrop Avenue on the east to the Des Plaines River on the west. The south side of the corridor is in the Village of Forest Park and is developed with a variety of commercial and institutional uses, including a cemetery.

The Madison Street Corridor is characterized by a mix of retail, rental and owner-occupied multi-family residential, service uses, and institutional/civic uses. Properties along the corridor have a relatively shallow lot depth and are bordered to the north by established residential neighborhoods. Madison Street has recently been improved with landscaped medians, streetscaping elements, parking and travel lane reconfiguration, and bump-outs at key locations. A TIF District was established in 2016 for the Madison Street area and could serve as a powerful mechanism to foster and support economic development and improvement along the corridor.

The focus for the Madison Street Corridor is to promote economic development and accommodate the redevelopment and improvement of key properties along the corridor. Through appropriate redevelopment, the corridor can increase its economic strength and overall contribution to the Village's tax base, improve its overall image and appearance to better reflect the desired character of the Village, and provide a more desirable and viable mix of commercial and residential uses to meet the needs of the community.

## Thatcher to Gale

The River Forest Civic Center Authority (RFCCA) Building at 8020 Madison is anticipated to remain, as is the River Forest Community Center, the private, not-for-profit organization which currently occupies most of the RFCCA Building. Given the desire for additional high-quality recreational facilities to meet the needs of the community, it is reasonable to plan for the possible expansion and/or improvement of the RFCCA Building over time. Although the RFCCA Building is currently under the jurisdiction of the non-taxing River Forest Civic Center Authority, a cooperative arrangement with the Township, Park District, RFCCA, River Forest Community Center, and Village in the future could lead to an expanded facility.

## Gale to Keystone

The existing owner-occupied condominiums and townhomes are anticipated to remain.

## Keystone to Forest

The commercial designation is to remain for the block and the possible expansion of the commercial site should be considered given an appropriate and desirable development proposal.

## Forest to Park

The area between Forest Avenue and the railroad, as it extends north to Washington Boulevard, is improved with a variety of uses, including multi-family, the public works facility, a medical office, and a park.

1. The existing townhome development fronting Madison Street was built in 2016 is anticipated to remain.
2. The public works facility should be considered for relocation and the site redeveloped, provided an appropriate location for the public works facility could be identified and the facility moved. Redevelopment of the property could accommodate a variety of residential or public uses, with townhomes/multi-family likely being the most appropriate.
3. The office use north of the public works facility is an anomaly as it is a commercial use in the middle of a neighborhood and not fronting a major corridor. The office use is anticipated to remain but if it vacates the property, the building is a prime candidate for adaptive reuse for office, institutional, or residential use. If the building is removed, redevelopment should be for institutional or residential use.

4. The Washington Commons Park on Washington is anticipated to remain. Should the office building to the south become available, use of the site and/or building by the Park District could accommodate an expanded recreational facility.

5. The townhome development on the east side of the railroad tracks is anticipated to remain.

## Park to Franklin

The existing apartment buildings offer relatively affordable housing and will likely remain. Any redevelopment should consider multi-family uses as a component. The existing commercial strip center should be enhanced with façade, signage, and landscaping improvements (including landscaping along the sidewalk) or redeveloped. Possible expansion of commercial and multi-family areas for commercial development should be considered given an appropriate and desirable development proposal.

## Franklin to Ashland

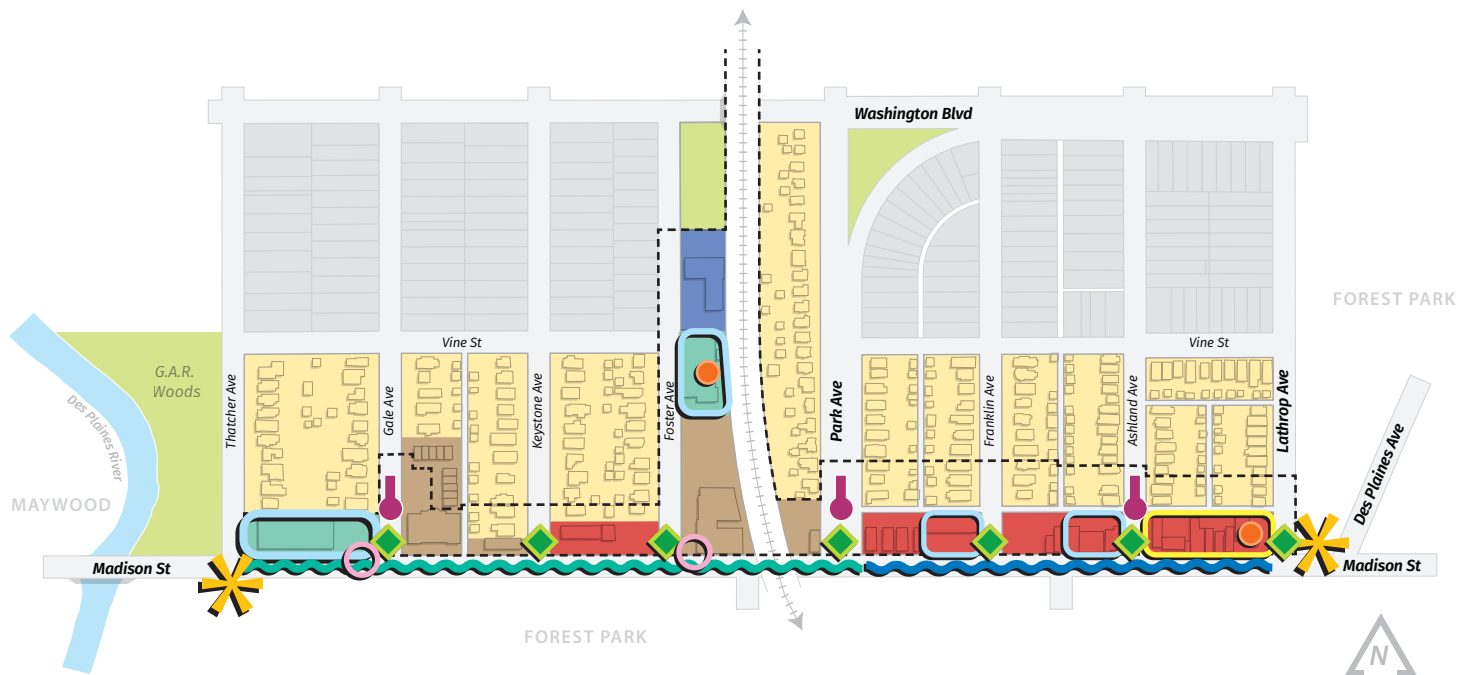
This block contains several one-story buildings with retail, office and service uses. Limited redevelopment potential exists, and any redevelopment would likely require parcel assembly and expansion of the commercial area should be considered.

## Ashland to Lathrop

This block serves as a gateway into River Forest and is a prime candidate for redevelopment. Several sites, including the former Lutheran Family Services properties, are likely and desirable candidates for redevelopment. The automotive repair use at the corner of Lathrop, although a successful business, is in need of enhancement – façade and signage improvements, and outdoor storage screening and landscaping. The site is an appropriate candidate for possible relocation and redevelopment. Possible expansion of the commercial areas for commercial development should be considered given an appropriate and desirable development proposal.



# Madison Street Corridor Framework Plan



## Land Use & Development

- Commercial/Retail/Mixed-Use
- Office/Multi-Family Residential/Public
- Public/Semi-Public
- Multi-Family Residential
- Single-Family Residential
- Park/Forest Preserve
- Existing TIF District

## Transportation & Urban Design

- Primary Redevelopment Opportunity
- Secondary Redevelopment/Improvement Opportunity
- Maintain Streetwall with Buildings
- Maintain Streetwall with Combination of Buildings, Perimeter Fencing, and Landscaping
- ✱ Gateway Feature
- Wayfinding Signage
- ◆ Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement
- ⌵ Potential Cul-de-sac
- Relocation Candidate

## North Avenue Corridor

North Avenue runs the length of River Forest's northern border, between Harlem Avenue on the east and the Des Plaines River on the west. It adjoins the community of Elmwood Park to the north. North Avenue is a heavily trafficked Strategic Regional Arterial (SRA) under IDOT jurisdiction and experiences an average of 35,000 vehicles trips per day making it the most heavily trafficked corridor in River Forest.

The North Avenue Corridor is characterized by a mix of retail, office, rental and owner-occupied multi-family residential, service uses, and institutional uses. Properties along the corridor vary considerably in terms of lot depth (115'-235' deep) and lot size, providing a range of development patterns and challenges along the corridor. Fronting properties directly abut single-family or multi-family residential to the south, with the exception of the three eastern most blocks which are separated from adjacent residential by a public alley that runs behind the commercial properties.

A TIF District was established in 2018 for the North Avenue corridor, which will be helpful in funding improvements to the area. A gateway feature like those on Lake Street is located on the southeast corner of Thatcher and North Avenue, but no other streetscape enhancements consistent with the Lake Street menu of improvements has been installed. North Avenue traffic volume and speed can create challenges for safe and efficient site access and intersection movements.

Generally, the eastern half of the corridor is developed with commercial use and the western half of the corridor has several blocks of existing residential uses fronting the roadway. The focus for the North Avenue Corridor is to promote economic development, accommodate the redevelopment and improvement of key properties, strengthen and improve the residential blocks, and improve the overall appearance and character of the corridor.

### Harlem to William

The properties fronting North Avenue in this three-block area have the shallowest commercial lots in the Village at just 115' deep. This is a significant challenge that inhibits the range of viable uses in this area. Unless this area undergoes lot consolidation and/or expansion south of the alley, which could be desirable depending on the proposal, major redevelopment is unlikely. Small retail, restaurant, and service uses are appropriate and the focus should be on appearance, character, parking, circulation, and overall safety of the area.

### William to Monroe

This block is home to Keystone Montessori at the William corner and a 4-story mixed-use development at the Monroe corner. Efforts should be made to relocate Keystone Montessori to a more appropriate location within the Village or surrounding communities and the site developed for commercial use, taking advantage of the prime North Avenue location. The mixed-use building to the west will likely remain, but if redeveloped, retail/commercial on the ground floor should be the priority, with residential units on the upper floors.

### **Monroe to Jackson**

This block is a prime retail location and the existing food store is anticipated to remain. If the site is redeveloped, priority should be on large-scale retail with possible office or residential uses on the upper floors, with consideration given to possible commercial area expansion.

### **Jackson to Lathrop**

This block includes Saint Vincent church and school. Saint Vincent contributes significantly to the Village's and North Avenue Corridor's character, image, and architectural integrity. Saint Vincent is a strong asset to the community and corridor and will remain.

### **Lathrop to Ashland**

This block is designated for commercial/retail/mixed-use. This block includes the Loyola Center for Health and a commercial use on the Lathrop corner. Any future use or redevelopment on the block should prioritize retail uses but could also accommodate a commercial/mixed-use development.

### **Ashland to Thatcher**

These blocks are primarily developed with multi-family residential uses. Residential uses vary in size and type of dwelling and include both rental and owner-occupied units. This four-block area significantly contributes to the diversity of housing availability in the Village, including some of the Village's more affordable units. This area should remain predominantly residential and continue to provide a range of housing options. If redevelopment occurs, the area should be reinforced as a mixed-residential area, with consideration also given to appropriate and desirable commercial development. Consideration should be given to exploring establishment of a homeowner's association(s) (HOA) to assist with property maintenance and appearance of some of the older multifamily development within this area.

The existing town-home buildings on the east half of the block between Forest and Thatcher are inconsistent with the character of the Village, largely due to the design of the buildings as well as the congestion of parking along North Avenue. An improved parking configuration should be explored to improve the safety and appearance of the area.

Commercial uses exist on the southeast corner of Park Avenue and North Avenue and on the southeast corner of Thatcher Avenue and North Avenue. The CVS development on the corner of Thatcher Avenue and North Avenue should serve as an example for use of quality building materials, commercial area expansion, and use of landscaping and buffering to screen commercial activity from adjacent residential neighborhoods. If the existing commercial uses at Park Avenue are to remain, the quality and appearance of the buildings and grounds must be maintained. If redevelopment occurs, quality commercial, mixed-use, or multi-family residential should be considered.



# North Avenue Corridor West Framework Plan



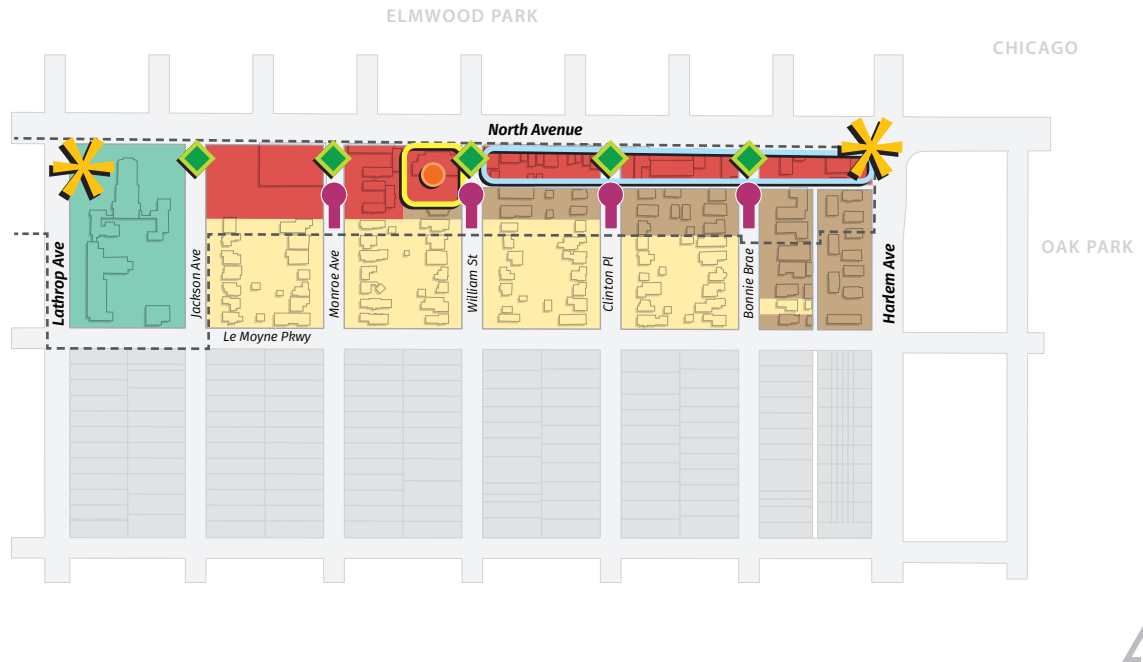
## Land Use & Development

- Commercial/Retail/Mixed-Use
- Multi-Family/Commercial
- Single-Family Residential
- Public/Semi-Public
- Medical
- Forest Preserve/Open Space
- Existing TIF District

## Transportation & Urban Design

- Secondary Redevelopment/Improvement Opportunity
- Gateway Feature
- Wayfinding Signage
- Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement
- Potential Cul-de-sac
- Parking Reconfiguration

# North Avenue Corridor East Framework Plan



## Land Use & Development

- Commercial/Retail/Mixed-Use
- Multi-Family Residential
- Single-Family Residential
- Public/Semi-Public
- Existing TIF District

## Transportation & Urban Design

- Primary Redevelopment Opportunity
- Secondary Redevelopment/Improvement Opportunity
- Gateway Feature
- Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement
- Potential Cul-de-sac
- Relocations Candidate

# Lake Street Corridor

Lake Street runs east/west through the Village from Harlem Avenue on the east to the Des Plaines River on the west. Lake Street provides direct access to Downtown Oak Park across Harlem Avenue and Maywood to the west across the Des Plaines River. In addition to containing the Villages primary “large-scale” shopping/retail areas, it also includes the Village Center Area, a mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented area at the heart of the Village; the Park District’s largest park, Keystone Park; and the River Forest Metra Station.

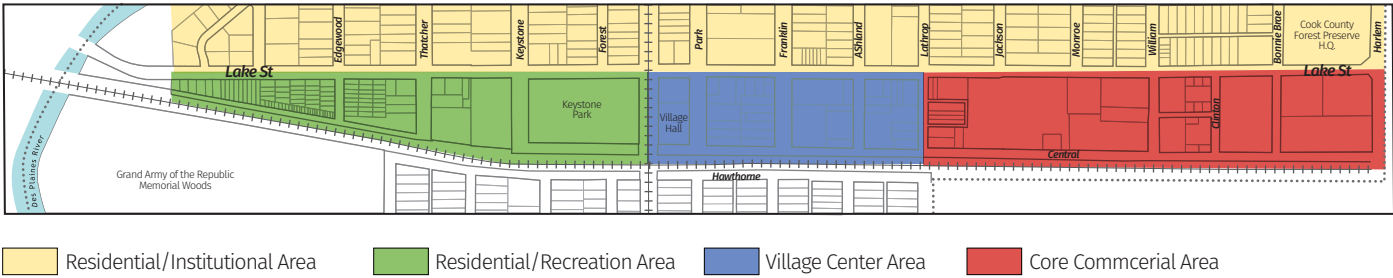
The Lake Street Corridor is essentially a one-sided commercial corridor, with residential and institutional uses on the north side of the street and commercial, retail, mixed-use, public, park, and residential development on the south side of the street. The corridor framework plan focuses primarily on the area between Lake Street and Central Avenue and breaks the area into “functional subareas” as the corridor’s characteristics vary considerably from one end of the corridor to the other. The functional subareas include the Core Commercial Area, the Village Center Area, and the Residential/Recreation Area.

Properties along the corridor vary greatly in size and depth, with the eastern portion of the corridor containing the Village’s largest commercial properties and the Village Center Area and western portions of the corridor containing smaller commercial properties more reflective of other Village corridors. Lake Street has been improved with a comprehensive

streetscape enhancement treatment that should serve as a template for the other corridors in the Village.

The focus for the Lake Street Corridor is to increase its economic strength and overall contribution to the Village’s tax base, improve its overall sense of place, image and appearance to better reflect the desired character of the Village, and provide a more desirable and viable mix of commercial and residential uses to meet the needs of the community. In addressing each of these components, it is important to recognize the distinct character of each of the different functional subareas.

## Fuctional Subareas



## Harlem to Lathrop (Core Commercial Area)

The Core Commercial Area between Harlem Avenue and just east of Lathrop Avenue represents the most significant and intense commercial area of the Village. The Town Center shopping center and Jewel/Osco are two of the Village's most successful commercial developments. Going forward, this area must continue to be prioritized as an intensely developed retail/mixed commercial district.

**TOWN CENTER SHOPPING CENTER.** The center's mix of uses may change over time, but the overall character as a retail center should be maintained. New development/redevelopment of the center should take place as needed to accommodate the needs of existing and future tenants and to maintain the center's desirability as a retail destination. In the future, multi-story mixed-use development (possibly including residential on the upper floors), should be considered. The center must maintain and enhance its pedestrian orientation and overall appearance and sense of place.

**CLINTON TO WILLIAM.** This block should remain multi-family. If the post office site is redeveloped, it should be for multi-family residential.

**MEDICAL CAMPUS.** The area east of William is improved with the West Suburban Medical Center and the Kirk Eye Center. These uses create an attractive medical campus on Lake Street that should remain.

**JEWEL/OSCO.** The food store (and the outlot uses) will remain and continue to serve as a key commercial retail use in the Village.

## Lathrop to Railroad (Village Center Area)

This area along Lake Street is referred to as the Village Center Area, and is intended to be a charming, pedestrian-oriented, retail/mixed-use environment that serves in some ways as the symbolic heart of the Village. Retail/commercial/mixed-use buildings are to be located along Lake Street at or near the sidewalk, with multi-story multi-family development located along Central Avenue and the southern portions of the blocks. Parking is limited in the area and on-street parking is maximized to support area businesses. The Village should further augment area parking by providing public parking lots in appropriate locations in the areas between the Lake Street fronting businesses and the multi-family development to the south. Bicycle racks should be installed at key locations to accommodate cyclists and promote a bike-friendly environment.



Redevelopment in the 5-6 story range is appropriate and should be targeted for key sites, such as the southeast corner of Lake Street and Park Avenue and other sites that may become available. Parcel assembly is likely needed to accommodate significant development. For new buildings fronting Lake Street, portions of the building above the third or fourth floor should be set back from the lower floor frontage to create a more pedestrian scale for the area. Any new development must also take into consideration the architectural and historic value of existing buildings and strong consideration should be given to adaptive reuse where possible and appropriate.

The Village Hall, Police, and Fire facility on the west side of Park will remain and no expansion plans are anticipated.

## **Railroad to Des Plaines River (Residential and Recreation Area)**

**KEYSTONE PARK.** This section of Lake Street shifts away from a commercial/mixed-use focus and instead is characterized by residential and park/recreation uses. Little is anticipated to significantly change in this area. Keystone Park, both east and west of Keystone Avenue is the Village's most significant public park. Owned and operated by the River Forest Park District, this park provides tennis, platform tennis, soccer fields, baseball/softball fields, a playground, administrative office, sledding hill, and more. The park is also host to several community festivals and events. The park should continue to be utilized and programmed in an appropriate manner that best serves River Forest residents.

**MIXED RESIDENTIAL.** The residential area west of Thatcher Avenue contains a mix of single-family attached and detached structures. This area provides relatively affordable housing for the Village and the multi-family residential designation should remain. Parking, circulation, and overall maintenance of the area should be the focus going forward. Any new development in the area should be single-family attached or multi-family.

## **LAKE AND THATCHER COMMERCIAL.**

This small pocket of commercial should remain a neighborhood node/small scale commercial area. Small office and convenience retail and service is appropriate, and any new development should be similar in scale. Upper floor residential would also be appropriate provided parking could be accommodated.

**METRA STATION.** Station access and safety needs improving. Clearly marked pedestrian crosswalks need to be provided along Hawthorne Avenue and the overall condition of the platform, staircases, and tunnel are in need of improvement.

# Lake Street Corridor West Framework Plan



## Land Use & Development

- Mixed Residential
- Multi-Family Residential
- Commercial/Office/Mixed-Use
- Parks
- Forest Preserve/Open Space
- Railroad

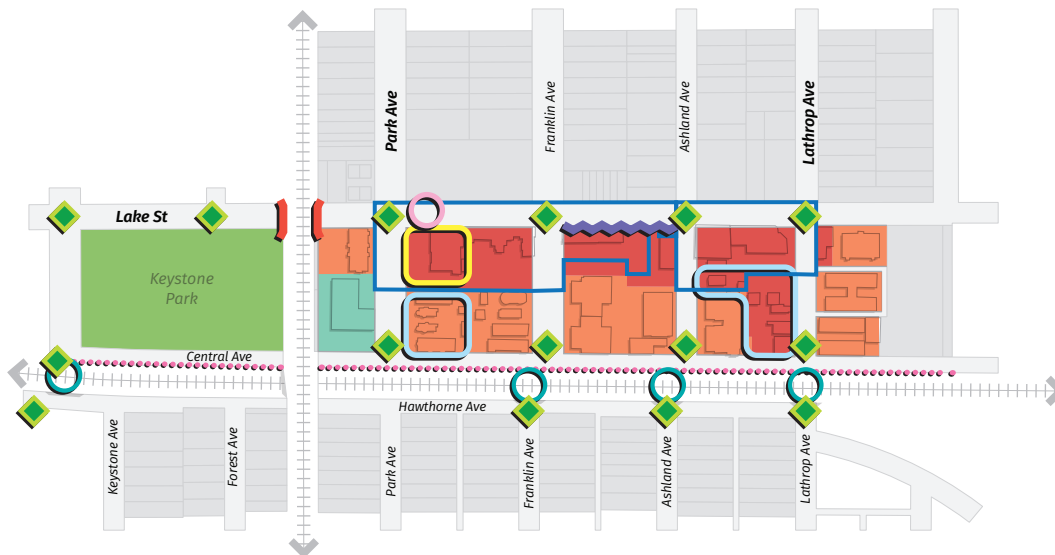
## Transportation & Urban Design

- Secondary Redevelopment/Improvement Opportunity
- Residential Infill/Improvement Area
- P Potential Future Parking Deck
- Public Art/Mural Opportunity
- Improve Railroad Bridge Appearance

- Viaduct Improvement
- Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement
- Gateway Feature



# Lake Street Corridor Village Center Framework Plan



## Land Use & Development

- Public/Semi-Public
- Commercial/Mixed-Use
- Mixed-Residential/Commercial/Office
- Parks
- 2015 Business District Boundary

## Transportation & Urban Design

- Primary Redevelopment Opportunity
- Secondary Redevelopment/Improvement Opportunity
- Public Art/Mural Opportunity
- Improve Railroad Bridge Appearance
- Viaduct Improvement
- Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement
- Minimize/Eliminate Curb Cuts
- Wayfinding Signage







# Lake Street Corridor East Framework Plan



## Land Use & Development

-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Medical
-  Commercial/Retail/Mixed-Use
-  Commercial
-  Public/Semi-Public
-  Parks
-  Forest Preserve/Open Space

## Transportation & Urban Design

-  Possible Mixed-Use  
(Including Residential)
-  Gateway Feature
-  Viaduct Improvement
-  Public Art/Mural Opportunity
-  Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement
-  Improved Transit Access



## Harlem Avenue Corridor

Harlem Avenue is a heavily trafficked Strategic Regional Arterial (SRA) under IDOT jurisdiction. As it passes adjacent to River Forest, Harlem Avenue serves as the Village's 1.35-mile-long eastern edge, separating River Forest from neighboring Oak Park. Harlem Avenue carries 30,000+ vehicle trips per day.

With the exception of the Town Center shopping center south of Lake Street, commercial areas along the corridor are small and consist of neighborhood convenience type uses, such as gas stations, convenience stores, fast food, and a bank. On the other hand, the residential areas are quite large and consist of single-family detached homes, apartment and condominium buildings, townhomes, and a recently approved senior care facility. Public/Institutional uses also comprise a significant component of Harlem Avenue frontage with a portion of the Dominican University/Priory campus taking up a quarter-mile stretch just north of Division Street. Across Harlem Avenue to the west at Lake Street is Downtown Oak Park.

Redevelopment along the corridor is challenging due to the relatively small size of commercial properties and the extent of existing residential development fronting the corridor. Traffic improvements are also challenging to implement because of Harlem Avenue's strategic regional arterial (SRA) designation and the heavy traffic volumes and high speeds.

The focus of the corridor is to strengthen economic development by supporting appropriate redevelopment efforts and improvements, including commercial and residential development; continue to provide a balanced mix of uses and development types; improve the corridor as a mixed-residential area, including the importance of existing affordable residential units and developments; mitigate negative impacts of incompatible land use arrangement; and work to improve the appearance, safety, and character of the corridor.

## Central to Quick

These two blocks include the Town Center shopping center and the Cook County Forest Preserve headquarters and surrounding lands (including the Oak Park Tennis Center). The designated land uses remain, with improvement and redevelopment of Town Center occurring over time to continually position the center for success. The Forest Preserve property is anticipated to change little, but with additional cooperation with the Village and Park District, the park/open space may be better leveraged to meet the recreational needs of the community.

### Quick to Augusta

This four-block stretch of Harlem Avenue contains a variety of residential uses including single family, multi-family, and a senior care facility, and a few small commercial uses including a fast food restaurant with drive-thru, drive-up bank facility, gas station/convenience mart, and a meditation center. Any significant redevelopment along these blocks would likely involve the inclusion of residential property and must therefore be very carefully considered. While significant commercial redevelopment and expansion is unlikely, multi-family development is a prime candidate for this location. Such development can serve as an appropriate transition from the traffic noise and activity of Harlem Avenue and the adjacent residential areas to the west and increase the variety of residential housing options for residents. Consideration of any redevelopment must consider the impact on adjacent neighbors, insist on high-quality design, demonstrate a substantial benefit to the greater River Forest Community, provide a welcoming environment for pedestrians and cyclists along the sidewalk, and take into consideration the overall safety of automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic.

### Augusta to North Avenue

This area along Harlem Avenue is almost entirely multi-family residential and institution uses but does include two small commercial uses and two single-family dwellings. This section of Harlem is anticipated to change very little. The institutional uses, the Dominican Priory and the Temple Har Zion are expected to remain. The two corner commercial uses, a gas station and a convenience store, are adjacent to established multi-family residential development and redevelopment/expansion is unlikely. The remaining balance of the area is a variety of multi-family residential apartments, condominiums, and townhomes, and two single-family homes. If redevelopment were to occur, it should reflect the existing land use pattern.

# Harlem Avenue Corridor North Framework Plan



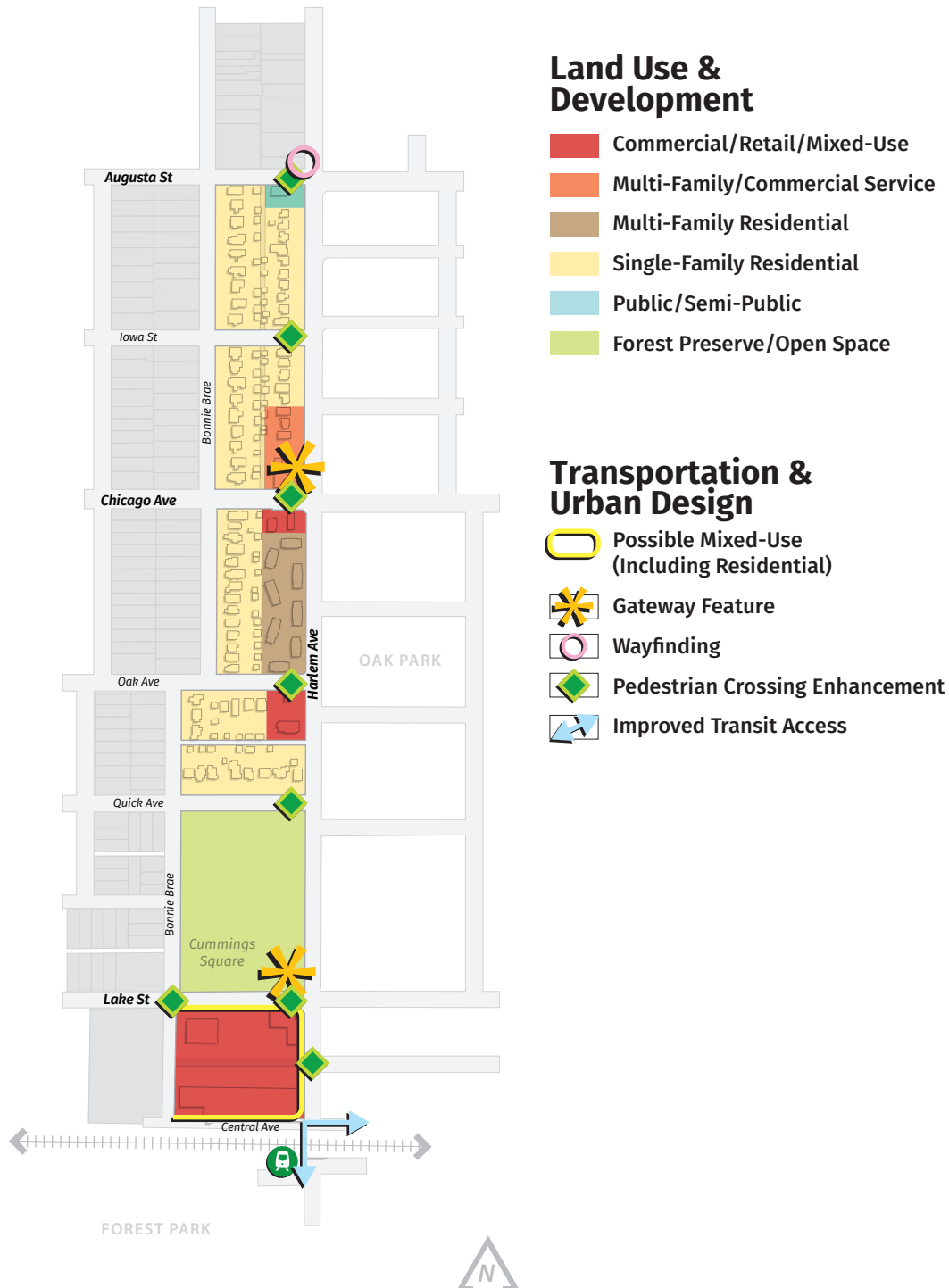
## Land Use & Development

- Commercial
- Multi-Family Residential
- Single-Family Residential
- Public/Semi-Public
- Parks
- Existing TIF District

## Transportation & Urban Design

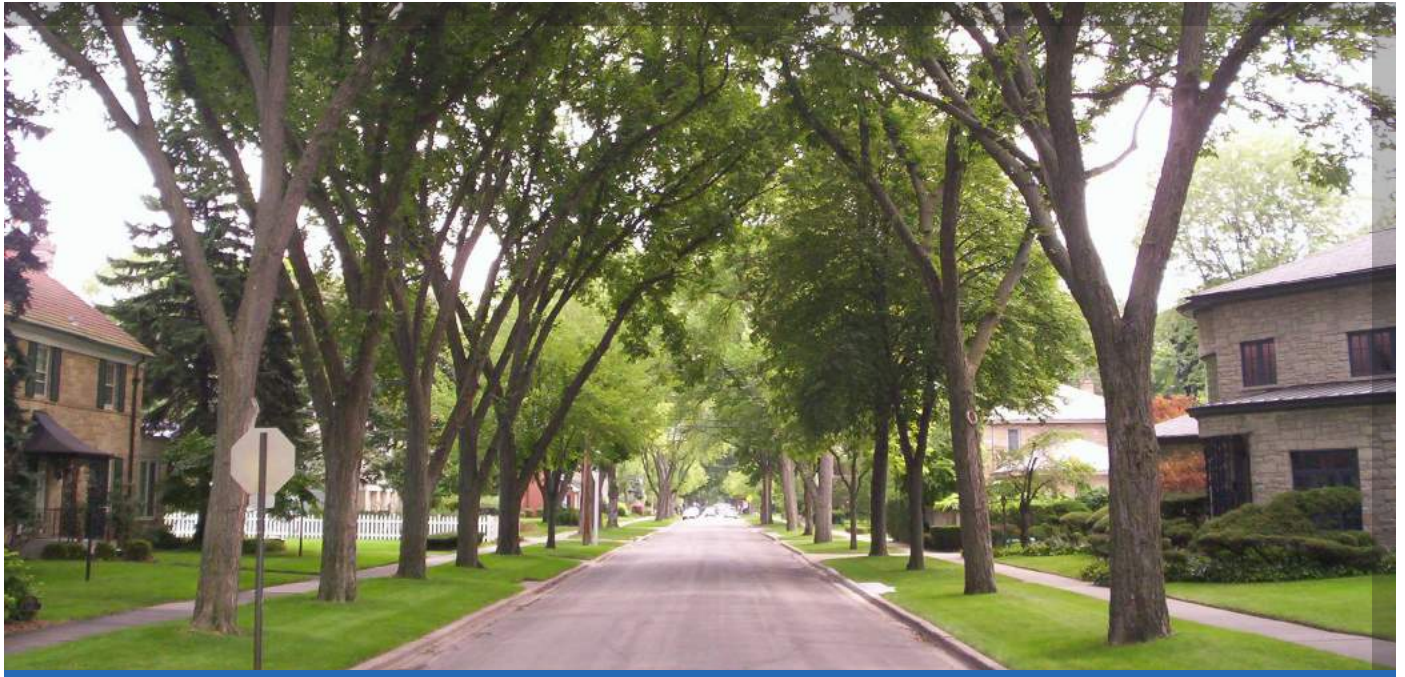
- Gateway Feature
- Wayfinding
- Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement

# Harlem Avenue Corridor South Framework Plan









## 7 Transportation & Mobility

Transportation in River Forest is supported by a multimodal network of streets, transit services, and pedestrian infrastructure. These support mobility throughout the Village and connections to the larger region, a central component of what makes River Forest highly desirable. In the future, efforts to maintain and enhance transportation will further improve connectivity, supported by greater diversification of automobile alternatives.

The Village should strive to accommodate the needs of all users of the system by balancing efficient traffic flow with safe pedestrian movement, comfortable transit access, and a bicycle network that connects individuals to major destinations throughout the Village and region.



## Transportation & Mobility

*To provide an expanded multimodal network that is safe for all users, increases travel options, supports the Village's commercial corridors, protects the integrity of the residential neighborhoods, and embraces new and sustainable technologies.*

### Core Objectives

1. Develop and adopt a Complete Streets Policy.
2. Coordinate with IDOT to monitor roadway capacity and identify necessary improvement projects to ensure efficient traffic flow.
3. Improve uncontrolled intersections to ensure pedestrian and cyclist safety.
4. Continue to monitor parking to ensure existing infrastructure supports residential, commercial, and institutional users.
5. Encourage increased transit use and options in cooperation with all local transit service providers.
6. Develop and support a local bicycle network that connects with the transportation hubs, community facilities, and regional trails.
7. Implement and support sustainable alternative transportation options such as carsharing, bike sharing, and electric car charging stations.
8. Seek improvements to the railroad viaduct to reduce safety concerns for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists.

## Complete Streets

A “complete street” is a roadway that is designed to accommodate and be safe for all users of the transportation network, including motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Designing streets that encourage walking, biking, and public transit use is an effective strategy for increasing traffic safety, mitigating congestion and air pollution, and promoting a healthy, active lifestyle. In addition, these street design projects have been shown to improve property values, boost local business, attract new home buyers, and allow families and individuals to save on transportation costs.

In 2007, the State of Illinois adopted a Complete Streets law, directing IDOT to implement Complete Streets policies as part of future roadway projects. As a result, any reconstruction or widening of IDOT jurisdiction roadways within River Forest will incorporate bicycle and pedestrian facilities in their design.

The Village of River Forest should develop and adopt a local Complete Streets Policy ordinance, establishing a clear emphasis and dedication to designing streets for all users. The Village should review similar policies adopted by other municipalities in the area, as well as Illinois’ 2007 Complete Streets law, to develop a local policy that is thorough and incorporates regional best practices. This policy should address all components of the transportation system and be reflected in the implementation of policies, programs, and projects for automobiles, pedestrians, and cyclists. Further, the policy should formalize the Village’s intent to plan, design, operate, and maintain streets that are safe and accessible for all users of all ages and abilities.

## Roadway Network

Mobility in River Forest is served by a complete and connective roadway network. Given the Village’s proximity to Chicago, local roads are organized in a grid pattern consistent with the surrounding area, with some variation due to the Des Plaines River and forest preserve. Due to the built out nature of the Village, the roadway network is unlikely to significantly change in the future. This places a greater emphasis on maintenance and upkeep of existing roadways and efforts to ensure adequate flow of traffic within the Village.



## Jurisdiction

While the majority of streets within River Forest are under the Village's jurisdiction, many of the major streets are controlled by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), including Harlem Avenue, North Avenue, Lake Street, Madison Street, and sections of Thatcher Avenue and Chicago Avenue. These represent the highest traffic roadways within River Forest that are essential routes to and through the community. The Village is responsible for general maintenance of these roadways but must coordinate with IDOT for any larger projects that would alter or effect the flow of traffic.

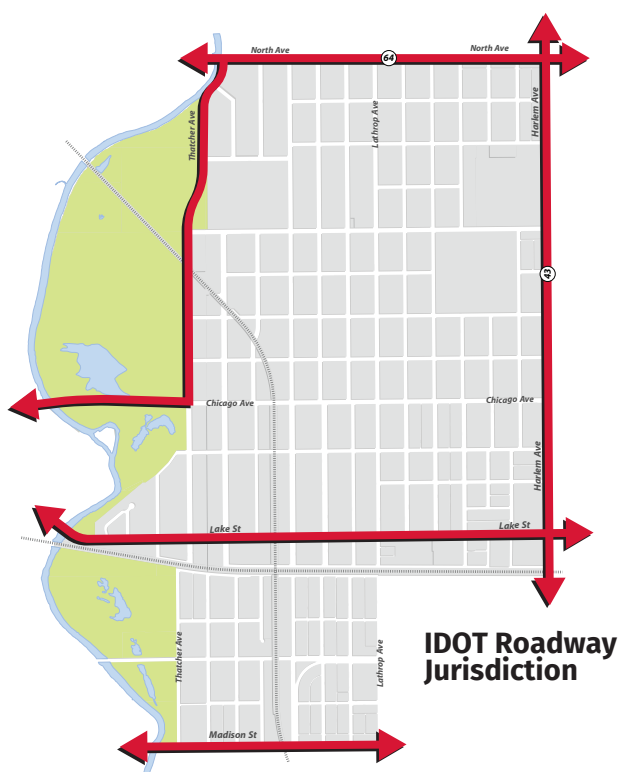
## Working with IDOT

Moving forward, the Village should continue to partner with IDOT and maintain close communication to ensure appropriate maintenance and improvement of their roadways. This should include efforts to address traffic flow concerns and organize larger roadway projects as necessary. Coordination with adjacent municipalities that also rely on roadways under IDOT jurisdiction could help ensure the quality of these roadways. It is important that every appropriate effort be taken to work cooperatively with IDOT to improve the pedestrian and bicycle mobility and safety along these corridors as they run through and adjacent to River Forest.

## Functional Classification

The Village's roadway network is classified within a hierarchical structure by function to define the role of individual streets in the transportation system. This hierarchy also indicates eligibility for certain types of federal transportation funds. The functional classification includes the following designations:

- Expressways – provide the highest degree of mobility, with access limited to grade-separated interchanges to preserve capacity for high volumes of traffic and high travel speeds. The nearest expressways to the Village are the Eisenhower Expressway (I-290) to the south and the Tri-State Tollway (I-294) to the west.
- Major Arterial Streets – provide a high degree of mobility, serve the broader region, and provide connections to the expressway system. These arterials carry high volumes of traffic and require more stringent access controls and traffic signal spacing. There are two major arterials in the Village, North Avenue and Harlem Avenue, both of which are part of IDOT's Strategic Regional Arterial (SRA) system.



# Roadway Network





- Minor Arterial Streets – augment major arterials by accommodating somewhat shorter trips to and from residential neighborhoods and commercial areas at the community level. As such, operating speeds and street capacity may be less than that of major arterials, with less stringent controls on property access.
- Collector Street – move traffic between the arterials and local streets. They are designed to operate at lower speeds than arterials and provide direct land access to key community facilities such as the Metra station, schools, universities, and public parks.
- Local Streets – provide direct access to residential areas and other private property. These roadways carry low traffic volumes at low speeds, connecting to higher-capacity collector and arterial streets. This classification includes all streets not otherwise designated.

## Roadway Capacity

Overall, the roadway network adequately manages capacity and provides for smooth flow of traffic through the Village. Arterial and collector streets convey the highest volumes of traffic through the community and are well-spaced at one fourth-mile to half-mile intervals. This allows for an efficient distribution of traffic across the Village without overloading any particular street.

Congestion largely occurs along the Village's arterial roadways. Both North Avenue and Harlem Avenue are congested during peak periods and carry traffic volumes nearing the capacity of a four-lane roadway. IDOT has targeted these roads for resurfacing and ADA improvements in the near term, as well as longer-term SRA plans including widening and turn lane improvements to reduce congestion. Madison Street also gets congested during peak times due to the two-lane cross-section, parking lanes, commercial business activity, and grade crossing of the UP Railway.

On a regional scale, planned reconstruction projects for I-290 and I-294 could impact local traffic and distribution of automobiles through the Village's roadway system. Harlem Avenue and North Avenue are designated truck routes by IDOT; however, the Village has no locally designated truck routes. Trucks are prohibited by ordinance on specific streets within the community.

Based upon current roadway capacity and concerns, the village should pursue the following recommendations:

- Work with IDOT on alternatives to widening North Avenue to preserve the parking lane for commercial businesses.
- Work with IDOT to best manage and schedule short- and long-term projects along North Avenue and Harlem Avenue in a manner that reduce impacts to local roadway capacity.





- Support consolidation of driveways and cross access to assist in reducing congestion along arterial roadways, particularly North Avenue.
- Coordinate with CMAP, IDOT, and other regional partners to consider the short- and long-term impacts of expressway projects in the area and identify potential projects to address capacity issues in the Village.
- Regularly review roadway capacity along collector and local roadways to identify problem areas and address shifts in how drivers move through the community over time.
- Continue to monitor truck traffic within the Village and direct truck movement away from residential areas, with a particular focus on commercial uses along Lake Street.

## Traffic Controls

There are 16 traffic signal-controlled intersections in the Village, all along arterial and collector streets, with all remaining intersections under stop control, yield control, or lacking traffic controls. Traffic signals are generally well placed, with the exception of the traffic signals on Lake Street at Harlem Avenue and Bonnie Brae. While separated by only 575 feet, the intersections are part of an IDOT coordinated traffic signal system for Harlem Avenue. The other Lake Street signalized intersections, at Lathrop Avenue and Thatcher Avenue, operate independently of each other but are only a half-mile apart. The Village should interconnect these signals to allow for progressive traffic flow along Lake Street. Based upon roadway capacity, the following intersections should be monitored to determine traffic signal control is warranted:

- Thatcher Avenue/Madison Street
- Thatcher Avenue/Washington Boulevard
- Thatcher Avenue/Division Street
- Division Street/Lathrop Avenue

There are three intersections under Yield control in the Village and 36 uncontrolled intersections. The recently completed Safe Walking Routes to School study includes traffic control modifications that eliminate all but one of the Yield-controlled intersections and all of the uncontrolled intersections, putting in place stop controls. Expanding on the focus of school safety, the Village should replace all yield control and uncontrolled intersections with all-way stop control, including the yield control at Thatcher Avenue and Hawthorne Avenue.



# Parking

Parking within River Forest is carefully managed by the Village to ensure adequate capacity and reduce conflicts between residential, commercial, and institutional uses. Public parking is provided in designated parking lots on Thatcher Avenue, Central Avenue, and Hawthorne Avenue as well as on-street parking. A variety of regulations are in place to ensure parking is appropriately available to adjacent uses and ensure turn-over for commercial areas. This includes on-street parking regulations such as schedules and time limits as well as permits and permit parking zones. While parking is well managed, capacity within the Village is limited, which impacts commercial investment and viability.

The Village should continue to monitor parking conditions and make adjustments to the street parking regulations as best serves the residents, businesses, and institutions of the Village. A more detailed parking study of the commercial corridors should be considered to document the utilization of the street parking spaces during weekdays and weekends, determine the users of the spaces and the needs of commercial patrons and employees, identify residential areas where commercial parking intrusions occur, and evaluate the time duration that cars are parked.

# Sustainable Vehicles

Modern innovations are leading to more sustainable practices for both the way vehicles are constructed and how they are used. Common examples include electric cars and car charging stations as well as car-sharing services such as Uber or ZipCar. These help to reduce automobile use, parking needs, and both public and private transportation costs. The Village should work with the Sustainability Commission to research and consider incorporation of these services and technologies in River Forest.

# Public Transit

River Forest is supported by a robust transit network that provides residents with a variety of options in accessing adjacent communities and the City of Chicago. Existing transit service are provided by the following organizations.

## Metra Commuter Rail

River Forest is located along Metra’s Union Pacific West Line (UP-W), which offers daily service between the Village of Elburn and Ogilvie Transportation Center in Chicago. The UP-W Line operates along the Union Pacific Railway, running east-west through the Village. The River Forest Metra Station is located at Thatcher Avenue and Central Avenue on the west side of the Village. In addition, the Oak Park Metra Station is located at Harlem Avenue and Central Avenue and provides service to the east side of River Forest.

Future upgrades to the UP-W Line are identified in CMAP’s On To 2050 Plan, including the addition of a third track east of Elmhurst, signal system upgrades, crossovers, and pedestrian safety improvements, which together will increase passenger service and better coordinate with freight traffic.

Metra Station	River Forest	Oak Park
Weekday Boardings	438	905
Weekday Alightings	532	1,148
Parking Capacity	211	143
Parking Occupancy	159	90
Parking Utilization	75%	63%

Source: Metra Commuter Rail System Station Boarding/Alighting Count, Fall 2016, and Metra Systemwide Parking Data (2015).



Ridership levels at the River Forest station have been increasing over the past 25 years and are currently at their highest levels. Approximately 23% of working-age adults that live within a half-mile of the station use public transportation to commute to work, and population and employment levels within this half-mile transit zone are projected to increase over the next 20 years. Ridership levels at the Oak Park station peaked in 1995 and are currently around 53 percent of peak levels; however, recent and ongoing large-scale mixed-use development within Downtown Oak Park could result in increased ridership in the future.

Moving forward, the Village should coordinate with Metra to ensure quality of UP-W Line service within River Forest. This should include considerations for long-term impacts based on ridership increases, such as parking capacity and nuisances to adjacent neighborhoods. Additionally, pedestrian safety at the River Forest Metra station should be improved. Highly visible pedestrian crosswalks should be installed along Hawthorne Avenue at Thatcher, the “tunnel” entrance, and at Keystone, to safely accommodate the high volume of commuters accessing the station on foot.

## Chicago Transit Authority

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) provides two transit services within the Village:

- CTA Rapid Transit – known colloquially as the ‘L’ system, provides elevated-track train services within the City of Chicago and connecting to adjacent communities. The Harlem/Lake Green Line station is located just east of River Forest in Downtown Oak Park. This is the western terminus of the Green Line, which offers daily services between Oak Park, the Loop, and Chicago’s south side. In addition, the Forest Park Transit Center is located less than a half-mile south of the Village, which is the western terminus of the Blue Line.

- CTA Bus System – Route 90 operates along Harlem Avenue, between the Harlem CTA Blue line station in the north and the Harlem CTA Green Line Station in the south. This route helps to connect Concordia University to Downtown Oak Park and other CTA and Metra transit services.

Both transit services provide greater regional access, connecting residents to the City of Chicago in particular. While expansion of CTA services into River Forest is unlikely, the Village should coordinate with CTA as appropriate to maintain these services and support future expansion projects should opportunities arise. The Village should also work with CTA to identify potential barriers to ridership and methods to better leverage these services to support economic development in River Forest.



## Pace Suburban Bus

Pace Suburban Bus provides transit services throughout the Chicago region, intended to complement CTA bus routes with options for suburban communities. Located directly on the edge where Pace and CTA services meet, River Forest is served by eight pace bus fixed routes:

- Route 303 (Forest Park – Rosemont): Operates along Madison Street between Forest Park Transit Center and CTA Blue Line Rosemont Station.
- Route 307 (Harlem): Operates along Harlem Avenue between the Village of Summit and the Village of Elmwood Park.
- Route 309 (Lake Street): Operates along Lake Street between the Austin CTA Green Line station and Elmhurst Metra Station.
- Route 310 (Madison Street): Operates along Madison Street between the Forest Park Transit Center and the Village of Hillside.
- Route 313 (St. Charles Road): Operates along Lake Street between the Austin CTA Green Line station and the Village of Downers Grove.
- Route 317 (Westchester): Operates along Madison Street between the Forest Park Transit Center and the Village of Westchester.

- Route 318 (West North Avenue): Operates along Harlem Avenue and North Avenue between the Forest Park Transit Center and the City of Northlake.
- Route 320 (Madison Street): Operates along Madison Street between the Forest Park Transit Center and the City of Chicago.

Pace bus routes help to provide a greater level of accessibility between key destinations within and adjacent to the Village. For example, Route 318 provides a link between the CTA Green line, Metra, and both Concordia and Dominican Universities. Pace also operates the ride sharing and carpooling programs within the region. Infrastructure for Pace bus routes is minimal, with only two bus shelters in the community. The Village should coordinate with Pace to explore additional infrastructure improvements that will improve the rider experience and encourage ridership. Further, the Village should work cooperatively with Pace to explore the establishment of a local circulator van/shuttle service to better meet the mobility needs of Village residents.

### PULSE Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Service

PULSE Bus Rapid Transit is a long-term project currently under development by Pace, which will feature limited-stop express bus services operating on specific improved routes. The PULSE network is

planned to include 36 designated routes, with seven routes identified for near-term construction. The first PULSE route is currently under construction and scheduled to launch in 2019.

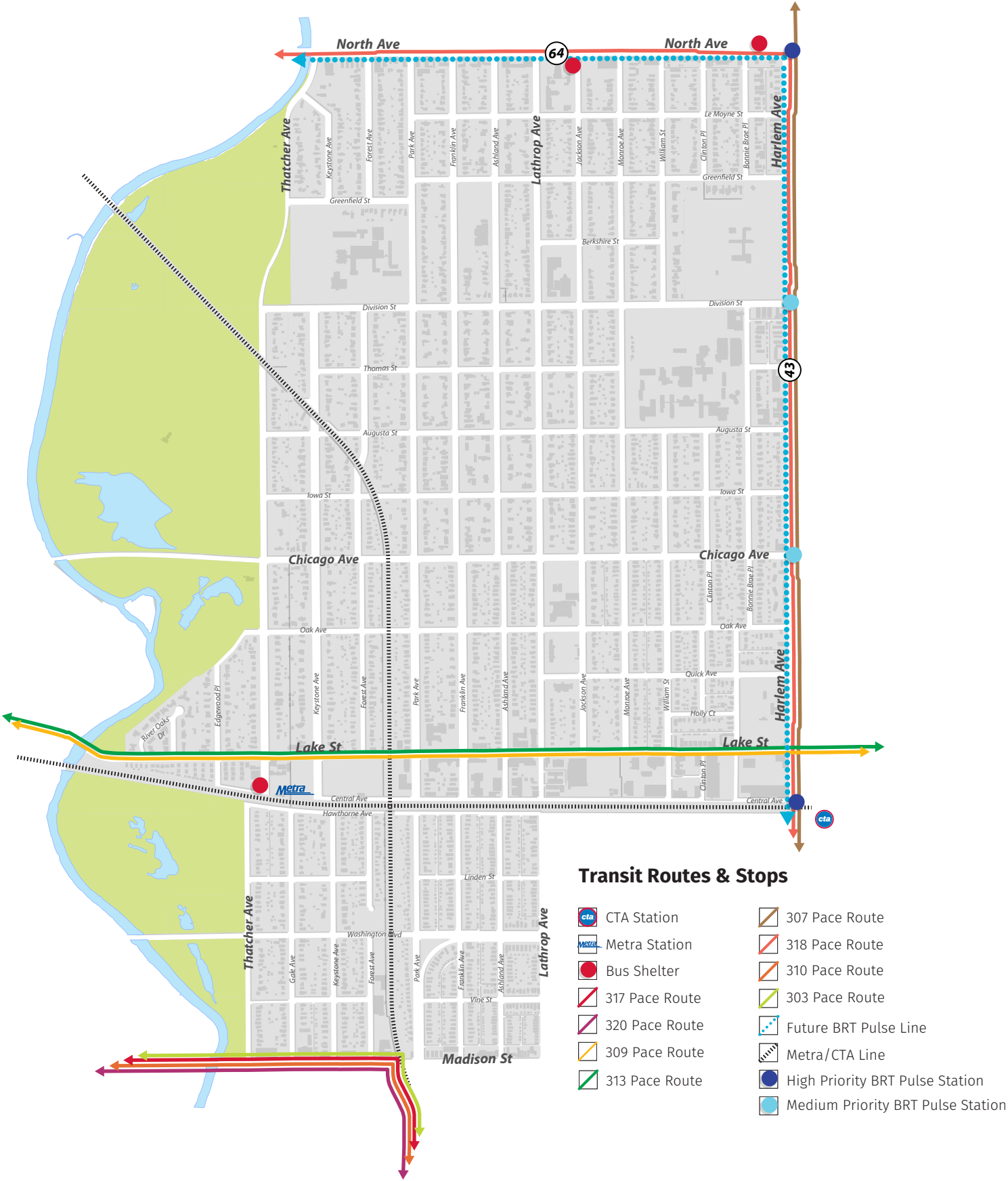
One of the seven near-term projects is the Central Harlem Avenue Route, which will run from North Avenue in the north to 71st Street in the south. The planning study for the route was completed in November 2018 and identifies four station locations along Harlem Avenue at North Avenue, Division Street, Chicago Avenue, and Circle Avenue/South Boulevard. These stations will require infrastructure improvements, including pedestrian refuge islands, high-visibility crosswalks, driveway consolidation, and curb extensions. A route along North Avenue, running from Harlem Avenue to Randall Road, is designated as a long-term PULSE project. Given the potential benefit of this project, the Village should remain actively involved in planning and implementation of the PULSE BRT service.

## Township Senior Services

Senior Services of Oak Park and River Forest Townships offers a curb-to-curb bus service to seniors and residents with disabilities through a Dial-A-Ride program. Service is available for various types of trips throughout Oak Park, River Forest and near surrounding areas.



# Public Transit







## Bicycle & Pedestrian Mobility

River Forest strives to develop a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian system to promote mobility that does not rely on the automobile and encourages an active, healthy lifestyle. River Forest benefits from an extensive sidewalk network that spans the entire Village. This ensures a high level of walkability and provides all residents, from students to seniors, with easy options to get around. By comparison, the Village's bicycle network is not as well developed, with little infrastructure dedicated to bicycle mobility. Efforts to improve both systems and expand bicycle infrastructure will contribute to quality of life in River Forest and encourage alternatives to automobile transportation.

## Sidewalk Network

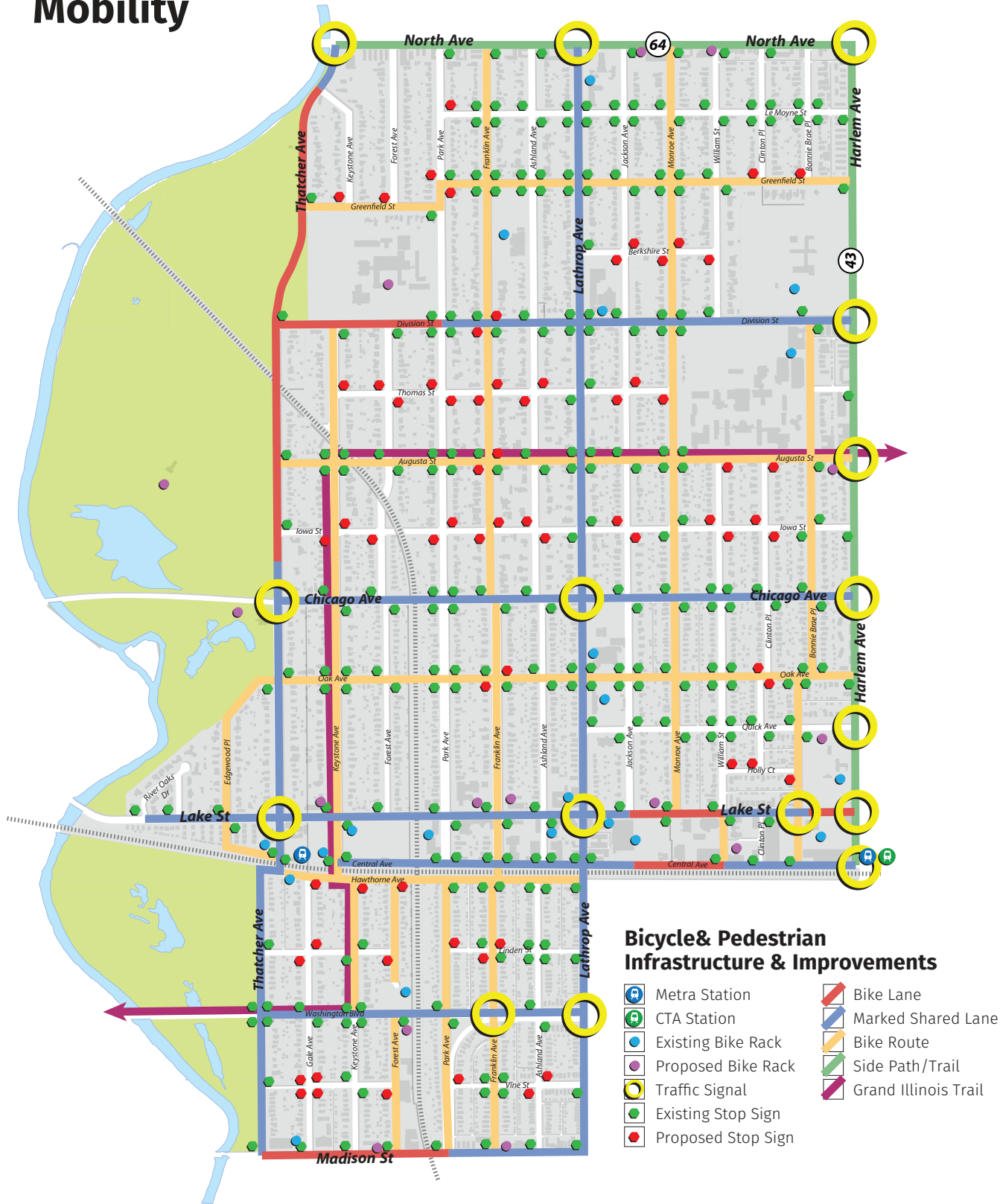
River Forest's sidewalk network is expansive, including sidewalks on both sides of all residential and commercial streets, the only exception being streets that front to the Forest Preserve. The network provides comprehensive access to the most significant destinations in the Village, including schools, parks, public facilities, and other transit services. Given that the pedestrian system is entirely complete, the Village should concentrate efforts on maintaining the quality and upkeep of sidewalks. This should include regularly identifying necessary sidewalk repairs and upgrades, particularly as part of larger roadway capital improvement projects.

## Pedestrian Crossings

Signalized intersections are the safest locations for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross the arterial and collector streets in the Village. All signal-controlled intersections in the Village have crosswalks, countdown pedestrian signals and curb ramps. The Village should work with IDOT to upgrade the parallel-line markings at these crosswalks to high-visibility "ladder-style" markings.

At unsignalized intersections, the safest locations for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross the street are where stop signs are posted. As discussed in the Village's Safe Walking Routes to School study, all uncontrolled and yield-controlled intersections should be improved with stop controls and ladder-style crosswalks.

# Bicycle & Pedestrian Mobility



## Regional Trails

The Village is proximate to two major regional trails but has no direct connections to the larger regional systems that surround it. Directly north of the Village is the Des Plaines River Trail, which extends north through Cook and Lake Counties to the Wisconsin border. The trail includes both paved and unpaved segments; however, there is no improved connection south of North Avenue. The Forest Preserves of Cook County have identified Thatcher Woods and the Hal Tyrrell Trailside Museum as one of their 13 priority gateway sites, and plans have been prepared to develop a nature trail loop through the woods surrounding the museum, with an overlook of the Des Plaines River.

In addition, directly south of the Village is the Illinois Prairie Path, which extends 61 miles through Cook, DuPage, and Kane Counties to the Forest Park Transit Center. Built in the 1960's on the former right-of-way of the Chicago Aurora & Elgin electric railroad, this path was the first rail-to-trail project in the nation.

The Village should actively seek connections to both regional trail systems, working cooperatively with the Forest Preserve of Cook County and other potential partners. This should include extension of the trails through the forest preserve along the Des Plaines River as well as necessary connections to designated streets, residential areas, and the Village's sidewalk network. In addition, the Village should partner with adjacent municipalities, particularly Oak Park, to consider related trail extension projects. This will help create a greater trail system in the area that fosters improved connectivity and access to wildlife areas and recreational amenities.

## River Forest Bicycle Network

The bicycle network in the Village is currently limited to the Grand Illinois Trail, which is a 500-mile bicycle route that loops through northern Illinois from Navy Pier in Chicago to East Moline, Mississippi Palisades State Park and Galena, and back to Navy Pier. The route passes through River Forest on Augusta Street, Keystone Avenue, Hawthorne Avenue and Washington Boulevard. The route is un-marked and no current infrastructure for on- or off-street bicycle routes exist.

According to IDOT's Official Bicycle Map, the major arterial streets of River Forest are not recommended for on-street cycling, based upon road design, travel speeds, traffic volumes, and other consideration. IDOT has published ride-with-caution advisories for the minor arterial streets and all collector streets in the Village, except for Lathrop Avenue. The local streets in the Village have calmer riding environments and carry lower volumes of traffic at lower speeds. These streets also provide connections to all schools, parks, religious centers, universities, shopping areas, and community facilities.

The Village's Bicycle Plan provides a more in-depth consideration of roadway infrastructure, bicycle capacity, and potential improvements to create dedicated bicycle routes in the community. The Village should actively seek full implementation of the Bicycle Plan to provide and support a comprehensive system for bicycle mobility in River Forest.

## Freight Rail

There are two freight-moving railroads in the Village of River Forest, one operated by the Union Pacific (UP) Railway and the other by the Canadian National (CN) Railway. Neither railway services any industries in the Village. The UP Railway carries approximately 40 freight trains per day along a three-track railroad that extends in an east-west direction with six grade-separated crossings via the railroad viaduct between Hawthorne Avenue and Central Avenue. The CN Railway carries approximately six trains per day along a single track that generally extends in a north-south direction with five at-grade crossings and six grade-separate crossings. The CN Railway also passes over the UP Railway between Park Avenue and Forest Avenue.

Generally, freight rail operations within the Village do not impact traffic flow or accessibility within the community, largely due to the amount of grade-separated crossings. Along the UP railway, the volume and frequency of train traffic has been noted as an issue due to light and sound nuisances. Stacking of trains along the line as well as delays to Metra services on the lines is also a concern. The Village should continue to coordinate with the UP Railway in reducing nuisances to adjacent residential areas. This could include designation as a train quiet zone, scheduling of preferred hours for train movement and stacking, and other efforts to reduce visual and auditory impacts.

## Railroad Viaduct

The railroad viaduct that extends east-west between Hawthorne Avenue and Central Avenue has often been a challenge for the Village. The general condition of the viaduct and its neglect over the years has become a visual detriment to the Village. The Harlem Avenue viaduct is a priority focus of concern, and has been for years. The Village must continue to work with Oak Park, Forest Park, IDOT, Union Pacific and others to improve the railroad/Harlem Avenue viaduct area, as the current situation is unacceptable. The narrow underpasses and poor sight lines create safety concerns for both vehicles as well as pedestrians and cyclists. Given the central location of the viaduct and its impact on mobility within the community, the Village should work with Metra and the UP railway to make necessary improvements. As identified in the Village's Safe Walking Routes to Schools study, this should include the following:

- Upgrade stop signs at all underpasses to feature flashing LED lighting around the frame and red retroreflective panels in the sign post.
- Improve the lighting under the viaducts, including appropriate pedestrian lighting.
- Post convex mirrors to improve sight lines from acute angles.
- Install high-visibility crosswalks across Central Avenue and Hawthorne Avenue at approaches to the underpasses.
- Add in-street school crossing signs for the crosswalks.

In addition to the safety concerns noted above, the appearance of the viaducts is also an issue. Many have crumbling walls, broken concrete, and deteriorating metal supports and downspouts. The overall condition and appearance of the viaducts should be improved. To further enhance the appearance of the viaducts, the Village should continue to support and foster the mural/public art enhancements for all the viaducts from Lathrop Avenue to Thatcher Avenue.







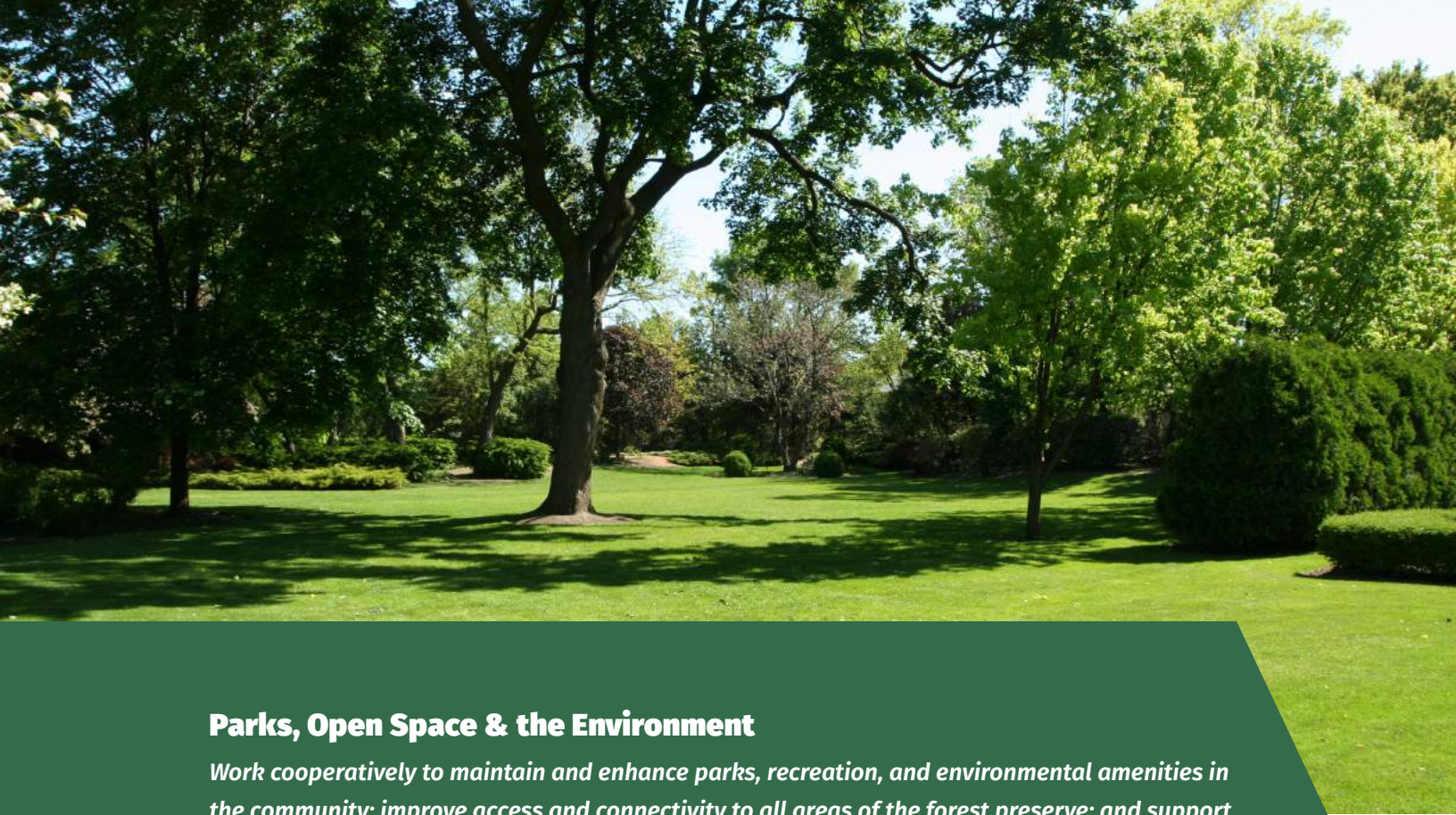
## 8 Parks, Open Space & the Environment

River Forest is a community of tree-lined streets, parks for passive and active recreation, beautiful open spaces, and environmental features such as the forest preserve and Des Plaines River. All these amenities contribute significantly to River Forest's overall quality of life, image, character, desirability, and aesthetics. These features represent both ecological assets, undisturbed natural areas, and parks and recreational amenities specifically designed to meet the recreational needs of community residents.

Most of these amenities are owned, operated, and maintained by the River Forest Park District or the Forest Preserves of Cook County. Parks provide opportunities for social activity, physical exercise, and interaction with nature. The presence of the river, forests, and extensive tree canopy strengthens biodiversity, beautifies the landscape, and supports healthy lifestyles. The cumulative impact of these features and open spaces also aids in the natural absorption of water back into the ground, rather than channeling it into the Village's combined storm/sewer system.

Given the high value of these amenities as contributing factors to the Village's overall quality of life, as well as the limited opportunity to expand parks and open space in the future, significant efforts should focus on maintaining and enhancing parks, recreational opportunities, open spaces, and environmental features, including improved access to and engagement of the forest preserve areas and the Des Plaines River.





## Parks, Open Space & the Environment

*Work cooperatively to maintain and enhance parks, recreation, and environmental amenities in the community; improve access and connectivity to all areas of the forest preserve; and support efforts to implement environmentally responsible/sustainable best practices throughout all areas of the Village.*

### Core Objectives

1. Promote continued cooperation between the Village, the Park and School Districts, Township, Community Center, the Universities, and the Forest Preserve in the provision of recreational programs and facilities.
2. Undertake pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements in the areas around parks to promote and provide safer access.
3. Coordinate with the Park District and Forest Preserve District to accommodate community events and festivals on parks and forest preserve lands.
4. Support the development of a multi-use trail system in the forest preserve to connect to regional trails and to better realize the forest preserve as a recreational amenity for residents.
5. Continue to work with the Park District and Forest Preserve District to address the Village's stormwater issues.
6. Leverage Village-owned property to install native landscapes that support increased biodiversity, decreases water consumption, decreases use of chemicals, and increases stormwater absorption.
7. Continue support of the River Forest Community Center in its efforts to provide recreation and leisure opportunities, services, facilities, and programs for Village residents.
8. Leverage the Sustainability Commission to identify and help implement sustainability initiatives throughout the Village.

## 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 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.

The Park District should remain a valuable partner for the Village in addressing community's needs and ensuring access to recreation and outdoor spaces. The Village should continue to foster collaboration with the Park District and partner in providing desired programming and improvements.

## Park Classification

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

- **Mini Parks:** These 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.
- **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.
- **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 Augusta 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>



## Park Supply Evaluation 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 Forest Preserve of Cook County. Using the NRPA standard, this suggests a deficiency of 66 acres of parkland. It should be noted that open space within the Cook County Forest Preserve on the west side of River Forest was not included within this analysis due to the lack of accessibility and minimal space for active recreation. This overall lack of available parkland for recreation underscores the need to creatively seek partnerships and programming to maximize the available resources and acreage within the Village.

## Park Service Areas

To provide a baseline understanding of park needs, standard service area distances were applied to each park classification as follows: 0.25 mile for Mini Parks, 0.5 mile for Neighborhood Parks, and two 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 0.5 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.

## Recommendations

As demonstrated by the park supply evaluation, the Village should work with the Park District to seek the development of additional parkland where opportunities arise. However, opportunities to create new park space in River Forest are extremely limited given that the Village is fully built-out. Any sites that become available for development are likely better positioned for residential or commercial uses in support of economic development or to meet the housing needs of the community. Thus, the possibility of developing additional parkland within the community is very limited.

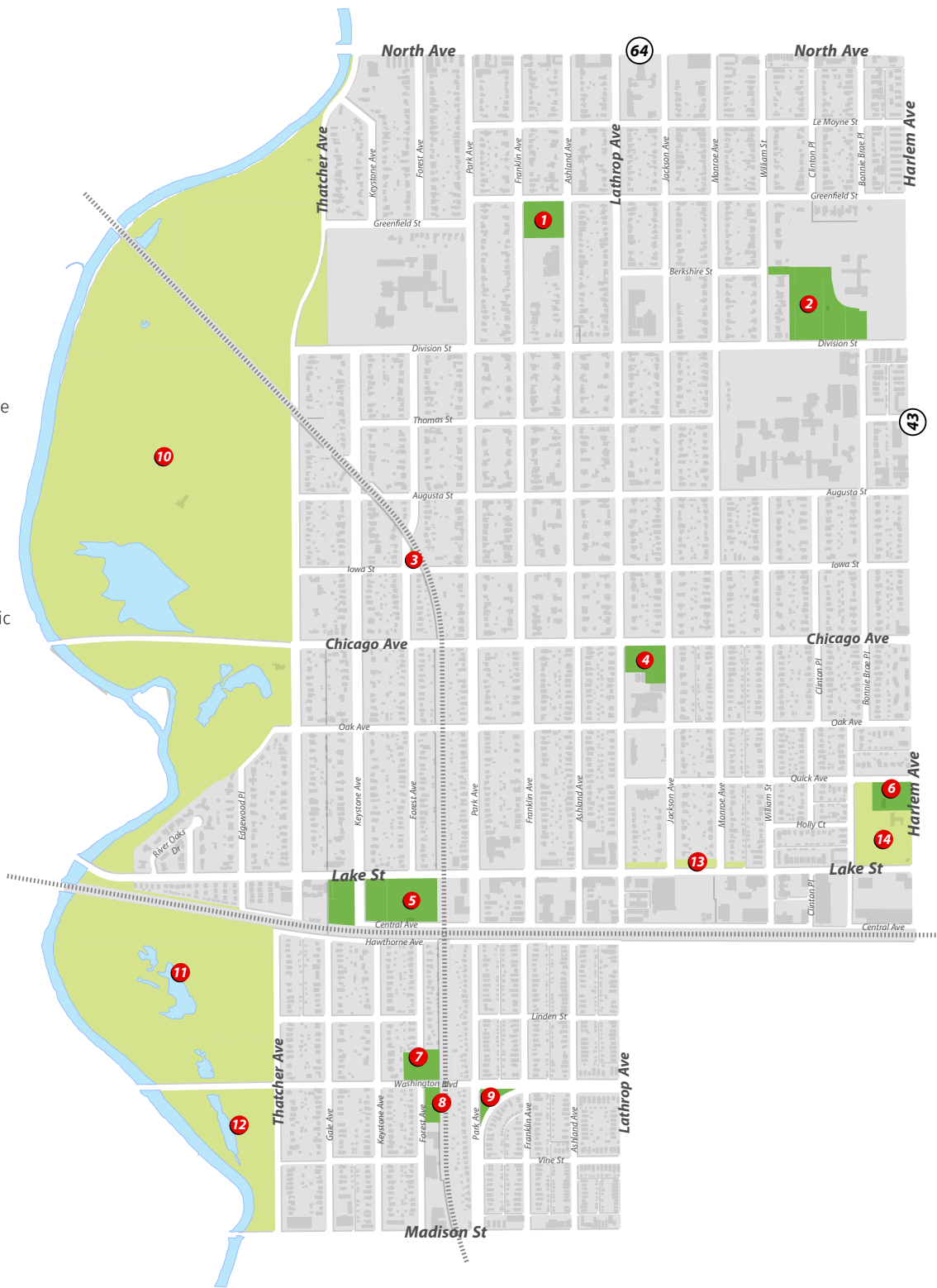
The Village should instead focus on improving and providing greater access to existing parks and open spaces. In particular, the Village should work with the Park District to coordinate with the Forest Preserve of Cook County to identify opportunities to better activate the forest preserves. This will help to offset the parkland deficit by creating greater connections to existing open space amenities in River Forest. Based upon this direction, the following recommendations should be considered in coordination with the Park District:

- Coordinate with the Park District and Forest Preserve to explore opportunities to develop additional active or passive recreational amenities in the forest preserves that are open to River Forest residents.
- Seize opportunities to develop new parks on sites where parkland is the best and most appropriate use of that property
- Partner with local schools, universities, and other public and private organizations to make their facilities available for use by River Forest residents.
- Consult the Park District as a partner in maintaining and pursuing sustainability initiatives and best practices.
- Explore potential partnerships with the Township and the River Forest Community Center to expand programming for Village residents and the possibility of an expanded joint Community center/Park District facility.

# Parks & Recreation

- Parks
- Preserve/Open Space

- 1 Constitution Park
- 2 Priory Park
- 3 Keyston & Augusta Triangle
- 4 Centennial Park
- 5 Keystone Park
- 6 Oak Patk Tennis Club
- 7 Washington Commons
- 8 Washington Square
- 9 Washington Triangle
- 10 Thatcher Woods
- 11 Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Woods
- 13 Thomas Jefferson Memorial Words
- 14 Memorial Parkway





## Park District Equipment Facility

The River Forest Park District currently maintains an equipment facility on the north side of Lake Street, just east of the Canadian National Railroad line. Conversion of the property from a public facility to a private development site would help contribute to the local tax base and support the Village's vision for enhancing the Village Center Area. The Village should work with the Park District to explore the feasibility and impact of relocating this facility to another location, including the potential of consolidating the equipment facility with the River Forest Public Works Garage facility or other Village-owned site. Potential new uses could include multi-family residential, commercial/office, or commercial mixed-use with upper floor residential or office space.

## Washington Square Park

As discussed within the Madison Street Corridor Plan (page 47), the potential for redevelopment of properties along Forest Avenue could support the expansion of Washington Square Park as a recreational amenity/facility. If combined with the property directly to the south, this site could be reconfigured to include a public recreation facility for residents by adaptively reusing and possibly expanding the existing office building. If the opportunity presents itself, the Village should work with the Park District to explore the potential and viability of this project and consider appropriate long-term steps. If Washington Square Park and the existing office building to the south were combined and redeveloped, it could accommodate a wide range of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities for the community.

## Forest Preserve of Cook County

The Forest Preserve of Cook County maintains multiple properties within River Forest, 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 tennis courts that comprise the Oak Park Tennis Center, and a park with two open fields for active and passive recreation. All other facilities are located within Forest Preserve lands along River Forest's west side, along the Des Plaines River. In general, the Forest Preserve headquarters and Forest Preserves were noted as important community assets. In particular, the headquarters grounds help to provide additional park space available to nearby residents and was included in the park supply evaluation.





However, access to the forest preserves lands adjacent to the Des Plaines River is limited and should be a top priority for River Forest. Much of the area is preserved as open space and does not contain trails or pathways for pedestrians and cyclists. While the Trailside Museum is connected to the Village's sidewalk system, the other facilities north of Chicago Avenue 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 Preserve, ends just north of North Avenue and does not connect to the Village.

Based upon these limitations and the potential of the Forest Preserve as a major asset to the community, the following recommendations should be considered:

- Coordinate with the Forest Preserve to explore potential sidewalk and trail connections between the Village's sidewalk system, designated streets, and the forest preserves.
- Coordinate with the Forest Preserve to seek extension of the Des Plaines River Trail through the Village and the potential for a looped trail system, including the development of trailheads at key locations.
- Coordinate with the Forest Preserve, Park District, and adjacent communities to explore trail connections to and through River Forest that would incorporate the Village as part of a larger regional trail system.
- Coordinate with the Forest Preserve and Park District to explore opportunities to develop additional active or passive recreational amenities in the forest preserves that are open to River Forest residents.
- Coordinate with the Forest Preserve to mitigate potential impacts on residential areas adjacent to the forest preserves, such as flooding or wildlife nuisances.
- Coordinate with the Forest Preserve to explore the possibility of programs and activities in the area that utilize the forest preserves as an educational opportunity.
- Assist the Forest Preserve with conservation and wildlife protection programs in the area.
- Consult the Forest Preserve as a partner in pursuing sustainability initiatives and best practices that could benefit the greater River Forest area.



## Other Recreational Facilities

In addition to amenities provided by the Park District and Forest Preserve, River Forest is also served by the following organizations that maintain recreational facilities within the Village:

- River Forest Tennis Club – The River Forest Tennis Club is a family-oriented private tennis and swimming club located along Lathrop Avenue between Oak and Quick. The club has 10 tennis courts, a pool and pool house, and a clubhouse designed by Frank Lloyd Wright that is considered architecturally significant.
- Oak Park Tennis Center – The Oak Park Tennis Center is a not-for-profit organization that provides public tennis programming. While originating in Oak Park, the Tennis Center is located in River Forest on the property of the Forest Preserves of Cook County Headquarters.
- River Forest Community Center – The River Forest Community Center is a not-for-profit organization that provides educational, recreational, and social programs, and is located in the River Forest Civic Center Authority (RFCCA) Building along Madison Street at the southwest corner of the Village. While the Community Center shares this facility with River Forest Township and other organizations, the Community Center is not part of the Township and does not tax residents, instead sustaining funding primarily through program fees.
- School District 90 – District 90's three schools (Lincoln and Willard Elementary Schools, and Roosevelt Middle School) provide playgrounds and other outdoor recreation space that is regularly used by residents during non-school hours.
- Concordia and Dominican Universities – Both universities have outdoor recreational facilities as well as indoor recreational facilities and to the extent possible, both institutions should make these amenities available to the residents of River Forest and coordinate with the Park District to accommodate programming and facility utilization.

These organizations, along with the Park District and Forest Preserve, are critical components of River Forest's recreational offerings. As such, the Village should work cooperatively with these groups to ensure they continue to provide high quality services and explore opportunities to improve upon and possibly expand their amenities, and improve access and utilization by residents. This should include the following recommendations:

- Coordinate with the River Forest Tennis Club to explore opportunities for events or programs that make the facility open to the public more frequently at certain times of the year.
- Partner with the Oak Park Tennis Center to explore programming and event opportunities at the Center that will promote recreation for residents of both River Forest and Oak Park.
- Host regular meetings with all recreational facilities and service providers in River Forest to ensure open communication about ongoing projects, long-term goals, and emerging issues.
- Coordinate with the River Forest Community Center to explore the potential for expansion or redevelopment of the Center as a larger joint facility.

## Tree Canopy

River Forest's lush tree canopy is a defining feature of the Village. The high volume of healthy, mature trees contributes significantly to the appearance and character of River Forest, particularly within the community's tree-lined neighborhoods. Currently, trees within the public right-of-way are maintained by the Village's Department of Public Works.

As an important asset, the Village should continue to actively preserve and maintain the existing tree canopy. This should include both continued maintenance of trees on public land as well as an effort to encourage preservation of trees on private property. In support of the tree canopy, the Village should consider the following recommendations:

- Continue to survey and map the location of trees that are maintained by the Village.
- Develop a dedicated tree replacement program that addresses trees in all areas of the Village, including all public and private property.
- Incentivize the preservation of existing trees and the planting of additional trees as part of new development projects.
- Work with the Sustainability Commission to educate residents on the importance of tree preservation and replacement.

## Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability is a multi-faceted principle that aims to reduce negative impacts on the environment and preserve natural resources to ensure quality of life for future generations. Often sought through dedicated initiatives, sustainability informs every component of a municipality by emphasizing that we are conscious of how we affect the world around us. This includes a diverse range of policies, programs, and best practices that seek to reduce energy consumption, protect natural resources, mitigate pollution, and make the Village a responsible steward of the environment.

While the notion of environmental sustainability became a more common and important topic in the mid-1900s, it has rapidly grown in global awareness over the past 20 years. Today, communities across the country are dedicated to sustainability, working to ensure existing programs and projects protect a wide range of resources and integrating environmentally-conscious initiatives.

River Forest has been an early proponent of sustainability planning and implementation. The Village was a founding member of the *PlanItGreen* initiative and Plan in 2011, formed an Intergovernmental Sustainability Committee in 2014, and created a Sustainability Commission in 2016. Together with the commission, the Village has developed a growing variety of sustainable programs and initiatives, demonstrating a renewed dedication to the environment.

This includes the following:

- Early adopter of the Greenest Region Compact agreement
- Early adopter of the Chicago Climate Charter from the Mayors' Caucus in 2017
- Green Block Parties.
- Promoting energy efficiency programs within local utility providers.
- Healthy Lawn, Healthy Family initiative.
- Tree City USA recognition and Arbor Day.
- Rain Barrel promotion and discounts.
- Recycling & Curbside Composting programs.
- Zero Waste Station Loaner Program

Moving forward, the Village should remain actively dedicated to sustainability and work with the Sustainability Commission to maintain and expand sustainability programs in River Forest. This should include efforts to explore and implement new programs in the community and remain informed of emerging issues, innovative technologies, and other trends in sustainability that may be applicable in River Forest.

## Sustainability Framework

To support sustainable efforts within the Village, the following sustainability framework has been developed in accordance with key strategies identified by the Sustainability Commission. Overall, environmental sustainability should be considered as part of all future projects, programs, and policies. However, the framework provides direction for specific initiatives and efforts that should be prioritized to support sustainability in River Forest.

## Education

**Increase awareness of opportunities to engage in sustainable practices.** This should include the development and distribution of information online and in print, utilizing social media and other opportunities to highlight sustainable practices for residents and businesses. In addition, programs available to residents should be emphasized, such as Green Block Parties and the Sort it Out Program.

**Provide opportunities within the Village to learn about sustainability.** This should include dedicated events, activities, and partnerships that offer residents ways to learn about sustainability and ongoing efforts in the community. The River Forest Sustainability Tour is a great example of an ongoing event that teaches individuals about sustainable practices.

## Energy

**Reduce overall energy consumption.** This should include establishment of baseline metrics for reduction of energy consumption and efforts to educate residents, businesses, and property owners about energy efficiency and retrofit programs. Knowledge and awareness of best practices and technologies related to energy conservation and renewable energy development should also be supported.

**Increase investment in Renewable Energy Procurement.** This should include the development and distribution of information regarding best practices to utilize alternative energy sources, with a focus on solar technology. The Village should improve all municipal facilities with energy efficient systems and encourage residents, businesses, and new construction projects to do the same.

## Open Spaces & Eco Systems

**Enhance and protect existing open spaces, green spaces, and eco systems.** This should include the improvement of schools, public buildings, and parks with native plant species and landscaping. In addition, these spaces and other underutilized areas should be improved to expand public access and create greater interaction with the environment within the Village.

**Reduce synthetic chemical usage in River Forest.** This should include continued efforts to promote natural lawn care and pest management and reduce the utilization of synthetic chemicals and harmful substances in outdoor spaces. The ongoing Keep ON the Grass program is a great example of an initiative that supports this strategy.

**Educate and encourage River Forest taxing bodies and institutions to use the healthiest, most sustainable, and safest methods for parks and open land.** This should include coordination with the Park District and educational institutions to provide comprehensive materials and information that will result in informed decisions regarding the use of parks and open land for Village residents.

## Waste

**Divert community-wide residential waste from landfills.** This should include establishment of waste benchmarks for reduction as well as education on best practices to help divert residential waste from landfills.

**Educate Village residents on recycling, landfill waste, and composting practices.**

This should include greater promotion, education, and enhancement to ongoing programs and systems for recycling, composting, and ways to reduce landfill waste.

## Water

**Assist Village staff in educating residents in reducing the consumption of potable water.** This should include efforts to educate residents on how to reduce consumption of potable water and promote methods like harvesting rain water, utilizing grey water systems, and the use of water efficient technologies.

**Improve and Maintain water quality.** This should include reduction of synthetic herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizer practices working with other taxing bodies, institutions, residents, and businesses. The ongoing Integrated Pest Management Policy and Healthy Lawn Happy Family Initiative are great examples of these efforts.



## 9 Community Facilities

As an established community, River Forest is well served by a variety of community facilities and service providers. The Village's high-quality schools, municipal services, public safety, library, parks and recreation facilities, healthcare facilities, environmental areas, and other public and private organizations all contribute significantly to the high quality of life in River Forest. The Community Facilities chapter provides an overview of the community facilities within the Village and identifies the current and future needs and long-range recommendations to improve this area of community life.

It is important to note that the Village has no jurisdiction or control over many of the community facilities within its municipal limits. While some are provided by the Village of River Forest, others are provided by other public and quasi-public agencies and organizations which provide desired, necessary and sometimes critical services to residents of the community. All these other organizations, many of which are separate taxing districts, have their own detailed plans, both strategic/short-term, long-term, and well as capital improvement plans, specific to the mission and charge of each organization.

Consequently, identifying and understanding the needs of each community service provider puts the Village in a better position to assist in meeting the needs of River Forest residents. It is essential that the Village maintain communication with these service providers regarding their existing needs and plans for expansion, in order to maximize coordination, cooperation, and potential partnerships. It is also important for the Village to leverage any public/quasi-public land that may become available in the Village in the future to provide additional opportunities for open space or new residential or commercial development.





## Community Facilities

*Maintain and enhance the high quality of River Forest's public facilities, services, and infrastructure and foster a collaborative environment that supports cooperation with local taxing bodies, regional partners, adjacent municipalities, and other organizations.*

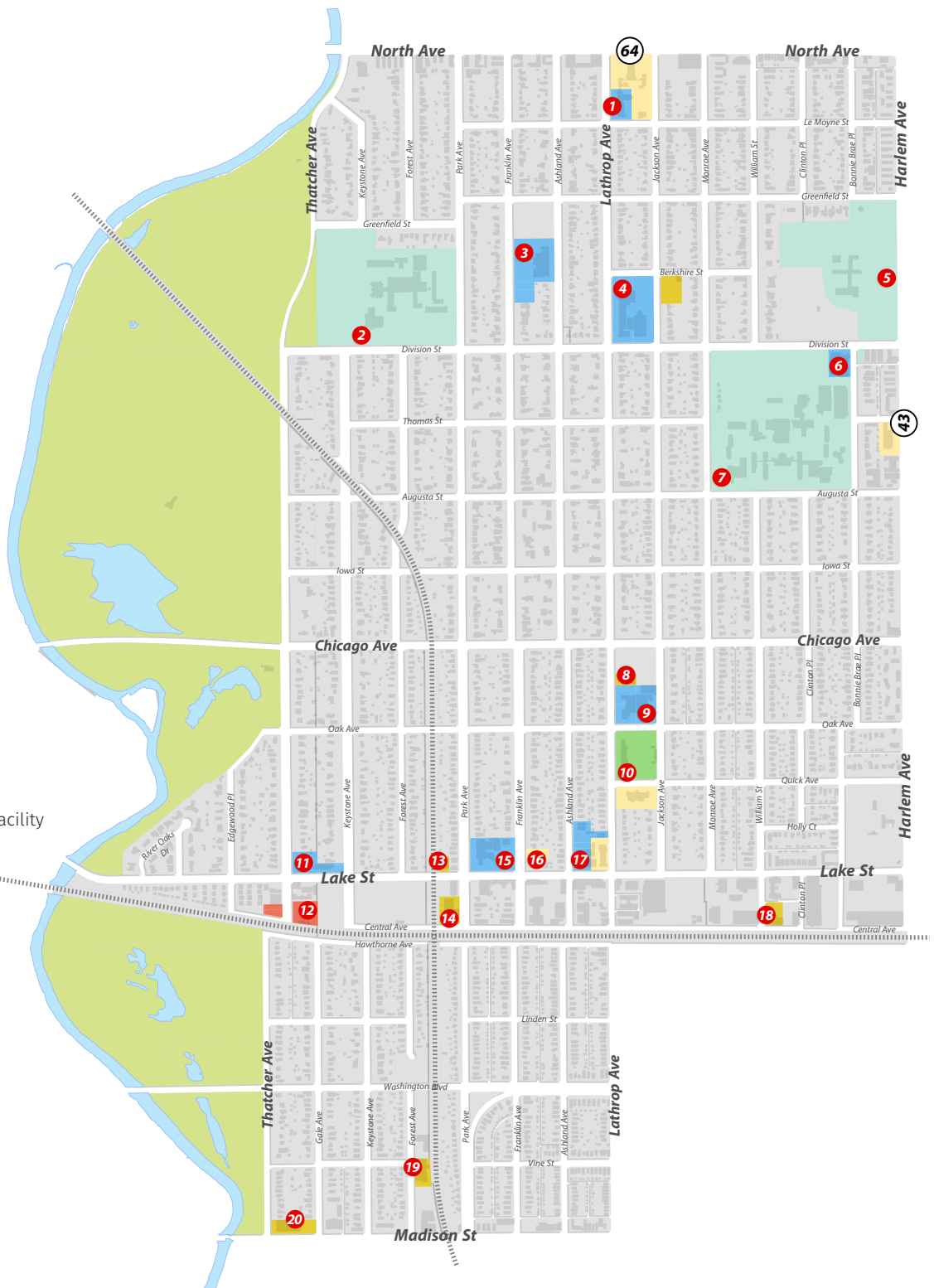
## Core Objectives

1. Regularly review Village facilities, infrastructure, and services to identify potential issues and prepare for necessary renovations, replacements, and improvement projects.
2. Continue to prioritize public safety through close coordination and planned allocation of resources for the Police Department and Fire Department.
3. Seek long-term relocation of the Public Works Facility to support economic development of the current site and explore other opportunities for collaboration and facilities and service sharing arrangements with other districts and municipalities while maintaining and improving the delivery of high-quality services to Village residents.
4. Identify and complete necessary improvements to ensure effective stormwater management and reduce flooding impacts.
5. Work collaboratively with education providers to maintain the high quality of public and private education in River Forest.
6. Leverage local universities and institutions as valuable resources for the community.
7. Create connections and partnerships with adjacent communities and interjurisdictional groups to address issues and opportunities from a regional perspective.
8. Work with neighboring communities to obtain federal and state funding and work with Union Pacific, Metra, and IDOT to improve the appearance, function, and safety of the railroad viaduct at Harlem Avenue.
9. Seek opportunities to implement sustainable best practices as part of community facilities and infrastructure, including alternative energy applications, green infrastructure utilization, water conservation, recycling and composting programs, native landscaping, and more.

# Community Facilities

- Religious
- Civic
- Metra
- Recreation
- School
- University

- 1 St. Vincent School
- 2 Dominican University
- 3 Francis Willard School
- 4 Trinity High School
- 5 Dominican University Priory Campus
- 6 Grace Lutheran School
- 7 Concordia University
- 8 River Forest Public Library
- 9 Roosevelt Middle School
- 10 River Forest Tennis Club
- 11 United Methodist School
- 12 River Forest Metra Station
- 13 Park District Maintenance Facility
- 14 Village Hall
- 15 Lincoln Elementary School
- 16 River Forest Women's Club
- 17 St. Luke School
- 18 United States Post Office
- 19 Public Works Yard
- 20 River Forest Community Center







## Schools (PK-12)

River Forest residents are served by outstanding public and private schools, regularly ranked among the best schools in the state. Schools are an essential community asset and are the primary reason why many residents chose to move to River Forest. In short, education is a distinguishing component of the River Forest community, and together with other high-quality community facilities, play a crucial role in building and maintaining home values and the overall desirability and quality of life experience by residents. It is anticipated that improvements to the school facilities will be made as needed over time to continue to meet the educational needs of the community.

Public education within the community is provided by two school districts that include two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school:

### River Forest Public School District 90

District 90 provides elementary and middle school education and operates the following schools in the Village:

- Willard Elementary School (K-4)
- Lincoln Elementary School (K-4)
- Roosevelt Middle School (5-8)

### Oak Park River Forest High School District 200

District 200 provides high school education to residents of River Forest and Oak Park. District 200 operates one school, Oak Park River Forest High School, located in Oak Park (9-12).

### Private Schools in River Forest

In addition to District 90 public schools, the Village is home to seven private schools serving more than 1,600 students):

- Concordia University Early Childhood Education Center (PK-K)
- Grace Lutheran School (PK-8)
- Keystone Montessori School
- Mosaic Montessori Academy (PK-K)
- St. Luke Parish School (PK-8)
- St. Vincent Ferrer Elementary School (NS-8)
- Trinity High School (9-12)

Maintaining the quality of schools within River Forest is of distinct importance and should always be a key focus of the community. The Village should support the continued operation and improvement of both public and private school facilities within the Village while ensuring that they do not negatively impact the residential neighborhoods in which they are located.

The recently prepared Safe Walking Routes to School (SWRTS) Study, undertaken jointly by the Village and District 90 is a perfect example of working cooperatively to ensure the very best experience and quality for students, in this case, ensuring all students can walk and bike safely to school.

While the Village does not directly provide educational services, the Village can be a key partner, working cooperatively with the schools to ensure the very best educational experience, schools sites, and facilities.





## Universities

River Forest is home to two institutions for higher education, both of which are valuable resources for River Forest:

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY** – Concordia University is a private, Lutheran liberal arts university located on a 40-acre campus bounded by Augusta, Division Street, Bonnie Brae, and Monroe. The University enrolls roughly 5,800 students annually; however, only 1,600 students attend classes on campus, with an additional 4,200 enrolled in online courses. The University has recently added a new dormitory to its campus along Bonnie Brae.

**DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY** – Dominican University is a private, Catholic liberal arts university with two campuses in the community: a main campus in northwest River Forest bounded by Division, Greenfield, Park, and Thatcher, and the Priory campus along Harlem Avenue north of Division Street. The University enrolls just under 3,000 students, including both undergraduate and graduate programs. Dominican's commitment to sustainability, including use of permeable pavers, integrate parking lot design in wooded areas, and green (LEED caliber) building design should serve as an example to the Village and other institutions.

Both universities are situated within established residential neighborhoods and have a history of being good neighbors and responsible and responsive institutions in that regard. Although student housing is provided, the universities are predominantly commuter campuses, placing a greater emphasis on accessibility and parking for those visiting the campus on a daily basis. Generally, it is uncommon for a community of River Forest's size to have two institutions for higher education, thus the Village should focus efforts on maintaining these facilities and leveraging the universities as valuable resources.

This should include the following recommendations.

- Host regular meetings with both universities to ensure open communication about ongoing projects, long-term goals, and emerging issues.
- Explore new opportunities for partnering on the delivery of programs, events, and services for the community.
- Work cooperatively with the Universities to expand the availability of university resources to residents, such as use of athletic and fitness facilities, making courses more readily available to residents, or hosting events that give residents the chance to learn more about the institutions.
- Encourage the localization of coursework to utilize River Forest as a focus for studies, projects, or events.
- Continually work to monitor and improve circulation and parking operations to minimize the institutions' impact on the neighborhoods in which they are located.



## River Forest Public Library

The River Forest Public Library provides valuable services, collections and programs to the community and it is important that it be maintained as a focal point and resource. The Library is open to all and is heavily used by Village residents and visitors of all ages. The Library is located along Lathrop Avenue, between Centennial Park and Roosevelt Middle School. The original building was constructed in 1929, with an addition built in 1992. The Library's location is centrally located in the Village, close to schools and other community facilities, but space for growth is limited.

In addition to its 21st century print and digital collections, the Library provides a wide range of programs, services, and resources to the community. It engages young children for early literacy, serves as a hub for middle school students, engages seniors at risk of social isolation (collaborating with River Forest Township and others), and facilitates lifelong learning. The Library provides meeting space to community groups and is frequently utilized for tutoring and one-on-one meetings. It actively engages in and supports Village and D90 initiatives with targeted services, collections and programs including dementia-friendly, sustainability, bike-friendly, and aging in place services.

To better serve the community, the Library would benefit from additional parking and a larger facility or offsite space, to accommodate expansion of its collection and services and to meet the growing demand for meeting and activity space. The Village should work cooperatively with the Library to find solutions to its space and parking problems, likely requiring coordination and cooperation with the Park District and District 90.

## Village Hall

The River Forest Village Hall is located at the intersection of Park Avenue and Central Avenue. The facility houses offices of the Village Administration, Finance, Public Works, Building and Zoning, and Fire and Police Departments. Although the facility adequately meets the need of the Village and no expansion plans are anticipated, parking for the facility is limited. Currently, the Village uses the vacant lot on the southeast corner of Park Avenue and Lake Street for overflow parking. The Village should continue to explore redevelopment opportunities to provide additional parking in the areas surrounding the Village Hall.

## Public Safety (Police & Fire Departments)

Public safety is a top priority for the Village of River Forest and the overall sense of safety and comfort are essential to the health and vitality of a community. The River Forest Police Department and Fire Department are responsible for emergency response and public safety in the Village. These departments are both well-functioning and ensure the highest quality public safety for all residents.

The River Forest Police Department operates from a single facility at the Village Hall, and the Fire Department provides fire protection and emergency medical care to the Village of River Forest from its fire station, located adjacent to the Village Hall. The Village's fire protection system is further enhanced by an agreement that provides emergency response from seven fire stations in River Forest, Oak Park, Forest Park, and Elmwood Park, in a coordinated manner, also participating in a joint 911 call center with Oak Park, and other communities.

Both the River Forest Police Department and Fire Department have indicated that their facilities, personnel, and equipment meet or exceed their standards (only scheduled equipment purchases, and maintenance are needed) and there are no future expansion plans. Fire service and police protection should continue to maintain a high level of protection for the residents and property owners of River Forest. Continued cooperation and coordination with surrounding communities further strengthens fire and police protection services to Village residents.

Moving forward, efforts to maintain and enhance public safety within the Village will be essential. This must include both identifying and addressing public safety concerns as they arise as well as efforts to foster a comfortable and welcoming environment that ensures residents feel safe in their community.

The Village should consider the following recommendations:

- Identify and install additional streetlights and other lighting as appropriate.
- Conduct regular outreach with residents to receive feedback regarding public safety concerns and educate residents about ongoing issues, improvement projects, and trends.
- Review existing information systems to ensure residents are properly educated on public safety and have access to quick information in the event of an emergency.
- Work with the business community and new development to provide coordinated/integrated surveillance and alerts systems to improve to the safety and response time for the Village's commercial and institutional areas.
- Continue fire and police personnel review of proposed new development to ensure best practices for all new development that will foster greater public safety.
- Continue to explore utilization of new technologies, cameras, and other means to reach, inform, and communicate with residents and businesses.

## Public Works

The River Forest Public Works Department performs and oversees various services for the improvement and maintenance of Village infrastructure and rights-of-way, and is comprised of construction and engineering, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The Operations Division oversees several important day-to-day functions related to forestry, streets and alleys, water and sewer, and refuse and recycling and composting. Each year the department budgets to infrastructure improvements throughout the community and identifies projects to be undertaken in the upcoming years. The department also provides helpful information to residents regarding flooding and flood prevention.

Currently, Public Works facilities, personnel, and equipment meet or exceed requirements (only scheduled equipment purchases and maintenance are needed) and there are no plans to expand. The administrative functions of the Public Works Department are housed in the Village Hall and the Public Works Garage Yard is located on Forest Avenue near the intersection of Vine Street.

As discussed elsewhere in this plan, the Village should consider the relocation of the Public Works Facility along Forest Avenue. This would allow redevelopment of the property as a new, tax-generating use and reduce impacts on the adjacent neighborhood. However, given the lack of available space and desire for economic development within River Forest, relocation would likely require a site outside the Village in a neighboring community. Understanding this limitation, the Village should actively seek an appropriate site for long-term relocation of the Public Works Facility. This should include communication with neighboring communities to identify potential sites or partnership opportunities for co-location of facilities.



## Stormwater Management

Located along the Des Plaines River, River Forest is prone to flooding, further exacerbated by the age and capacity of existing combined storm and sanitary sewers and related systems. Over the past several years, 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. In coordination with the Village's on-going capital improvements planning, the Village should continue to identify and make necessary improvements to mitigate stormwater impacts to properties in the community, including the following recommendations:

- Continue to review the age and condition of storm sewers and related infrastructure, with a focus on identifying priority improvements projects.
- Continue to identify problem areas that should be the focus of short-term improvements projects for stormwater management.

- Update regulations to incentivize stormwater mitigation best practices as part of new development, such as raingardens, native plantings, bioswales, permeable pavement, and more.
- Coordinate with the Forest Preserves of Cook County to address flooding issues within the forest preserves and potential impacts to adjacent properties.
- In coordination with Public Works and the Sustainability Commission, develop educational materials for residents to teach about and encourage stormwater mitigation practices on residential properties, such as raingardens, native plantings, permeable pavers for driveways and patios, and installing rain barrels.
- Promote chemical-free lawn and garden care throughout River Forest, to reduce algae blooms that impede water absorption and increase risk of flooding.

## Water

The River Forest Water Distribution System is in good working condition and generally has sufficient capacity to meet current and projected needs, for both daily consumption and for fighting fires. The Village purchases Lake Michigan water from the City of Chicago. Chicago water enters the Village's system under the North Avenue and Harlem Avenue intersection and flows to a pumping station at Jackson Avenue and Berkshire Street. At the station, the water is re-chlorinated, stored in two underground reservoirs and pumped under pressure into the water mains and the Village's water tower to create an additional reserve, equalize pressure throughout the day, and reduce the burden on the water pumps.

In an effort to reduce water consumption by the Village and its residents, businesses, and institutions, the Village should work with the Sustainability Commission to develop water conservation informational materials and potential projects/programming that can be undertaken in the Village.





## Refuse, Recycling & Composting

River Forest is one of the only municipalities in the state of Illinois to offer top of the drive garbage and recycling pick up. Residential landfill and recycling are collected from alleys and top of driveways rather than the front curb. Compost is collected, for residences that subscribe, at the curb or alley way. The Village currently contracts with a private firm to collect and dispose of landfill, recycling, and compost from residences.

The Village's commitment to sustainability is reflected in the existing recycling and composting programs. Going forward, the Village should work closely with the West Cook Solid Waste Agency, its waste hauler, and the Sustainability Commission to address ways to reduce the overall amount of solid waste being sent to landfills through increasing composting services, assisting residents in proper recycling/reuse methods, and providing programs for the disposal of electronics and hazardous waste materials.

## Religious Institutions

The River Forest Community is home to several religious institutions, including St. Luke Catholic Church, St. Vincent Catholic Church, First Presbyterian Church, West Suburban Temple Har Zion, First Methodist Church, Grace Lutheran Church, and Christ Episcopal Church. These institutions are an important component of the fabric of the River Forest Community and the neighborhoods in which they are located, many contributing to the architectural and historical heritage of the community and providing opportunity, activities, and location for Village residents to come together. The Village should continue to work with these institutions as they seek to improve, expand, and evolve to better serve the community, in a manner that minimizes any negative impact of parking, traffic, or other activity on the surrounding areas.







## 10 Implementation

River Forest Forward is a foundation for future decision-making related to land use, development, and community improvement, and is intended to direct action within River Forest that supports the established vision and core community principles. Implementation will be critical to this effort, ensuring that the goals, objectives, and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan foster positive momentum and continue to elevate River Forest as one of the best communities in the country.

This process will require the cooperation of a diverse range of organizations and stakeholders, including Village staff, elected and appointed officials, public agencies, the local business community, property owners, developers, and residents. Working cooperatively, these groups will be essential to realizing the Village's vision for its future.

## Use the Plan on a Day-to-Day Basis

The Comprehensive Plan should be used daily as the official policy guide for planning decisions made by Village staff, Plan Commission, Development Review Board, Economic Development Commission, Village Board, and other boards and commissions. It should be used as a primary resource to assist with policy formation, prospective projects, development proposals, and planning initiatives, ensuring that future decisions are in line with the Village's set goals. Further, service providers and partner organizations should be encouraged to use the Comprehensive Plan when considering new development, facilities, infrastructure updates, and programming within their parameters. The Plan should be used to:

- Evaluate and shape policies and regulations;
- Work with partner agencies and service providers;
- Review and evaluate development proposals;
- Prioritize public expenditures; and
- Encourage private sector investment; and
- Ensure new facilities, infrastructure and programming align with the Plan.

To promote regular utilization of the Plan, the Village should:

- Post the Comprehensive Plan document on the Village website and make it available in hardcopy at the River Forest Public Library for easy public access.
- Educate the public about how the Plan is connected to development projects and other proposals occurring within the Village.
- Provide guidance to the Village Board and other boards and commissions in the administration, interpretation, and continuous application of the Plan.
- Meet with key department heads and officials to explain the purpose, importance, and benefits of the Plan.
- Provide an 'orientation' for new staff, officials, and board members which highlights key takeaways and major goals of the Comprehensive Plan which are essential to local policy and initiatives.
- Maintain a list of possible amendments, issues, or needs which may be the subject of change, addition, or deletion from the Plan.
- Coordinate with and assist the Village Board in the Plan amendment process as necessary.
- Where appropriate, implement plan recommendations on a trial basis and solicit resident input and enhance resident participation throughout the implementation process.

## Action Plan

The Action Plan identifies critical next steps to assist the Village in implementing the River Forest Forward Comprehensive Plan. These steps focus on the incorporation of the Comprehensive Plan as a primary resource for planning efforts and policy decisions within River Forest. The Action Plan also establishes a foundation for implementation of the goals, objectives, and recommendations of River Forest Forward over the next 10-20 years.

## Integrate with Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

Long-term infrastructure needs should be mapped out, funded, and aligned with the Comprehensive Plan. The Village of River Forest's Capital Improvements Plan includes a variety of investments and planned projects and establishes schedules and priorities for all public improvement projects within the Village.

The CIP is typically used to schedule the implementation of specific projects related to the Comprehensive Plan, particularly the restoration and upgrading of existing infrastructure, utilities, and Village facilities. As planned projects are completed and funding sources emerge, the CIP should be revised to include new projects, cost estimates, and priorities.

As financial resources in River Forest will always be limited and public dollars must be spent wisely, the Village should continue to use the CIP to provide the most desirable public improvements and stay within budget constraints.

## Develop & Maintain Partnerships

Given River Forest's regional position, it is essential that the Village develops and maintains partnerships with a wide variety of groups and organizations. Facilitating regular communication and cooperation with partners will support implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and identify opportunities to work collaboratively toward mutual interests. Further, it will facilitate a greater regional perspective in how issues are addressed in the area.

River Forest already has a wide variety of partnerships which should be maintained in the future. Possibilities for new partnerships with organizations and agencies should be identified by the Village to aid in the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. This should include neighboring municipalities, regional and state agencies, school districts, neighborhood groups, the local business community, and other groups with a vested interest in River Forest.

The Village should continue to partner with or explore new opportunities with the following groups:

- River Forest Park District
- River Forest Public Library
- River Forest Township
- River Forest Community Center
- Cook County
- Forest Preserve of Cook County
- River Forest School District 90
- Oak Park River Forest High School District 200

- Dominican University
- Concordia University
- West Cook YMCA
- City of Chicago
- City of Oak Park
- Village of Elmwood Park
- Village of Forest Park
- Village of Maywood
- Village of Melrose Park
- Illinois Department of Transportation
- Metra
- Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)
- Pace
- Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce
- Visit Oak Park
- Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation
- OPRF Historical Society
- Oak Park River Forest Museum
- OPRF Community Foundation
- Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago
- Union Pacific Railroad

## Maintain Public Communication

River Forest Forward and the comprehensive planning process were directly guided by the input of residents. This included public workshops, visioning sessions, stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions, online questionnaires, an interactive mapping tool, and other methods to engage with residents, businesses, property owners, local officials, and community stakeholders. In addition to supporting the planning process, these outreach efforts helped to foster stewardship for the Comprehensive Plan and communicate the importance of planning within River Forest.

Moving forward, the Village should build upon this foundation by maintaining public communication to support implementation and future planning efforts. This should include regular correspondence with the public, such as online updates, announcements of major project achievements, and newsletters including information about planning and development efforts. In addition, the Village should maintain an avenue for residents and stakeholders to offer feedback and ask questions about planning initiatives and ongoing projects.



## Reviewing and Updating the Plan

It is important to emphasize that the Comprehensive Plan is not a static document. If community attitudes change or new issues arise that are beyond the scope of the current Plan, the Plan should be revised and updated accordingly.

The Village should regularly undertake a systematic review of the Plan every five years, and revise and update the Plan accordingly. The Village should also maintain a public list of potential amendments, issues, or needs. Ideally, this review should coincide with the preparation of the Village's budget and Capital Improvement Program and the preparation of an annual action agenda. In this manner, recommendations or changes relating to capital improvements or other programs can be considered as part of the commitments for the upcoming fiscal year. Routine examination of the Plan will help ensure that the planning program remains relevant to community needs and aspirations.

## Measure Progress

A key element of implementation will be measuring progress in achieving the goals and objectives set forth in the River Forest Forward Comprehensive Plan. This will assist with reviewing the success of planning initiatives and projects, inform additional implementation efforts, and provide a meaningful understanding of when core goals have been achieved. To assist with measuring progress, performance metrics have been developed that identify potential metrics, desired trends, and proposed data resources organized by the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. The metrics are not meant to signify when an objective has been achieved but rather direct preferred trends that demonstrate positive change while encouraging continued improvement over the life of the Plan.

## Regulatory Strategy Framework

The Comprehensive Plan sets forth policies regarding the use and development of land within the Village and establishes guidelines for the quality, intensity, and overall character of future development. The Comprehensive Plan's policies and guidelines should inform amendments and updating of the Village's zoning ordinance to ensure consistency. Zoning should be used as a tool by the Village to implement planning objectives.

The Comprehensive Plan should be used as a guide to amend zoning regulations with regard to use, height, setbacks, orientation, and overall development character. While the primarily single-family detached residential neighborhoods are anticipated to see little change, the Village's perimeter corridors and Lake Street Corridor are anticipated to face significant development pressure in the next 10-20 years. To that end, the Village's commercial and mixed-use zoning districts will likely need to be amended to better accommodate and direct appropriate and desirable redevelopment to strengthen the Village's tax base and provide the goods, services, amenities, and housing options to meet the needs of current and future residents.

## Commercial/Mixed-Use Corridors

Consideration should be given to increasing the maximum height allowed in the Village’s commercial districts because: 1) the Village desires reinvestment and targeted redevelopment along its primary corridors and contemporary development is difficult to accommodate with current standards; 2) each of the Village’s commercial/mixed-use areas has existing buildings taller than the maximum commercial height currently permitted; and 3) via the planned development process, for desirable development that meets the standards of the planned development process, the Village regularly approves building heights in excess of the underlying zoning regulations.

The building heights and number of stories identified below assumes a 12’ first floor, 10’ upper floors, and a 5’ parapet. The actual height of proposed buildings will vary based on intended use and building style/design. Consideration should be given to exploring amending appropriate building heights along the Village’s primary commercial/mixed-use corridors as followings:

### Suggested Building Height Considerations Subject to Approval at a Public Hearing

Commercial Area	Existing Max. Height	Suggested New Max. Stories/Bldg Height
Madison Street	30 ft	50 ft/4 stories
North Avenue	50 ft	60 ft/5 stories
Harlem Avenue	30 ft	60 ft/5 stories
Lake Street (east of Lathrop)	50 ft	70 ft/6 stories
Village Center Area	50 ft	70 ft/6 stories

NOTE: Context is a key consideration to the height of new development. Larger/deeper development sites may be able to more appropriately accommodate building heights greater than the heights indicated on the table above.

## Development Standards of General Applicability

Many standards in the zoning ordinance are considered “development standards of general applicability” and are not necessarily district specific. These standards are among the ones most in need of updating and include: upper floor setbacks, landscaping, screening and buffering, and parking. As development and market trends, and construction techniques have changed over time, so have the standards that effectively regulate such investment.

### Signage

Based on a relatively recent Supreme Court decisions (Reed v. Gilbert), the Village’s sign code is in need of updating. The overall character, size, placement, and type of sign in River Forest is addressed in an appropriate manner, but content-based regulation in the sign code must be eliminated. Although a relatively straight forward matter, it should be taken as an opportunity to revisit the sign code in its entirety.

## Emerging Technologies

The integration of sustainable best practices has caused a need to update zoning ordinances to better accommodate and regulate components such as solar and wind applications, bioswales and other green infrastructure design, permeable surface materials in lot coverage and stormwater calculation, and more. With River Forest’s commitment to environmental stewardship, the zoning ordinance is in need of updating to reflect national best practices.

### Uses

The River Forest zoning ordinance use table is in need of updating. Certain listed uses are not relevant in the Village, while other uses that should be defined and regulated are omitted from the ordinance. The use table should be amended to reflect appropriate permitted and special uses, and clarify uses that are or should not be permitted in the Village. In addition to uses, the standards to which certain uses must abide should also be updated.

## Planned Development Process

Although it has been used effectively as a means by which to accommodate, evaluate, improve, and approve of development in the Village, the Plan Development process should be reviewed and amended if necessary to ensure the fair certainty, clarity, efficiency, and effectiveness of the process from the perspective of the resident, developer, and the Village.

## Regional Cooperation

River Forest is located at the center of the Chicago region, providing residents with access to the benefits of a vast urban area. 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. However, many of these challenges 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, and other organizations in addressing shared issues. The Village should consider the following recommendations to establish potential partnerships and foster greater regional cooperation:

- Establish a schedule of reoccurring meetings with key partners to review emerging trends and issues, share long-term goals, and identify opportunities for partnership and cooperation. Key groups should include Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), Cook County, the Forest Preserves of Cook County, IDOT, the City of Oak Park, and other adjacent municipalities.
- Partake and have active involvement in regional projects that will affect the community.

- Partner with IDOT and adjacent municipalities to address the movement and distribution of traffic through the area, accounting for how roadways function from a larger regional perspective instead of as individual segments within specific municipalities. This should also include working cooperatively to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety along the primary corridors running through and adjacent to the Village.
- Partner with Forest Preserves of Cook County and adjacent municipalities to connect existing trails and bicycle routes and create a regional system that connects residents to key destinations. This should include extension of the Des Plaines River Trail to the area.
- Encourage greater participation in the Oak Park-River Forest Chamber of Commerce to strengthen River Forest's representation and ensure the Village's economic goals are prioritized.

## Potential Funding Sources

The following is a review of potential funding sources that the Village could pursue to support implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. It is important to note that funding sources are subject to change over time. As such, the Village should continue to research and monitor grants, funding agencies, and programs to identify deadlines, funding specifications, and new opportunities as they become available. These programs are organized by funding category, which include:

- General Economic Development
- Transportation & Infrastructure
- Parks, Trails & Open Spaces

## General Economic Development

### Tax Increment Finance (TIF)

The purpose of TIF funding is to incentivize and attract desired development within key commercial areas. TIF dollars are typically used for infrastructure, streetscaping, public improvements, land assemblage, and offsetting the cost of development. TIF utilizes future property tax revenues generated within a designated area or district to pay for improvements and further incentivize continued reinvestment.

The Village presently has two TIF districts: one along Madison Street, extending from Thatcher Avenue to Lathrop Avenue, and a second recently established along North Avenue, extending from Thatcher Avenue to Harlem Avenue.

## Special Service Area (SSA)

A Special Service Area (SSA) provides a means of funding improvements and programs within a designated area. In an SSA, a small percentage is added to the property tax of the properties within the defined service area. The revenue received from this targeted increase is channeled back into projects and programs benefiting those properties.

SSA funded projects can include district marketing and advertising assistance, promotional activities and special events, streetscape and signage improvements, and property maintenance services. SSA's can also be used to fund various incentives and tools such as small business loan funds or façade improvement programs.

## Business Development District (BDD)

Authorized by the State of Illinois, municipalities may establish Business Development District (BDD) in specific areas. These allow the municipality to levy up to an additional 1% retailers occupation tax, 1% hotel tax, and 1% sales tax on properties in the district. These funds are then utilized to support improvements within the district in accordance with a business district development or redevelopment plan.

## Incubators

Business incubators provide low-cost space and specialized support to small companies. Such services might include administrative consulting, access to office equipment and training, and assisting in accessing credit. Incubators are typically owned by public entities such as municipalities or economic development agencies who then subsidize rents and services with grants. In addition to job creation and generating activity, the goal is to facilitate growth and expansion of startup businesses within an area.

## Sales Tax Rebate

A sales tax rebate is a tool typically used by municipalities to incentivize business to locate to a site or area. The rebate is offered as a percentage of the annual sales tax revenue generated by the establishment and is often tied to benchmarks such that as sales volume increases, so too does the proportion of the rebate. Sales tax rebates have proven effective in attracting new businesses and encouraging redevelopment and renovation.

## Tax Abatement

A property tax abatement is a versatile tool that can be applied to address a wide range of community issues. Property tax abatements are typically used as an incentive to attract business and revitalize the local economy. In the State of Illinois, municipalities and other taxing districts can abate any portion of the tax that they individually levy on a property. The period of tax abatement on a given property can be no longer than 10 years and the total combined sum of abated taxes for all taxing districts cannot exceed \$4 million over that period. A taxing district can administer the abatement by one of two methods: 1) lowering the tax rate; or 2) initiating a property tax freeze where the property is taxed based on a pre-development assessed value.

In some circumstances municipalities can also petition the County to lower a property's assessment. For example, a commercial property could be assessed at a percentage equivalent to that of a residential property. This is an effective means of lowering a property tax bill; however, it should be noted that this method impacts all taxing districts and not just the district making the request.



## Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT)

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) is a tool similar to tax abatement. The Village can use PILOT to reduce the property tax burden of a desired business for a predetermined period. In this instance, the Village and property owners will agree to the annual payment of a set fee in place of property taxes. Payments are generally made in the form of a fixed sum, but they may also be paid as a percentage of the income generated by a property.

In addition, PILOT can be a means of reducing the fiscal impact on the Village of a nonprofit, institutional use, or other non-taxpaying entity location on a key site. While such uses can be desirable as activity generators, they can also negatively impact municipal services because they do not pay taxes. Provisions can be made to offset that negative impact by allowing the Village to be compensated for at least a portion of the revenue that would otherwise be collected in the form of property tax.

## On-Site & Façade Improvement Programs

The purpose of an On-Site Improvement Program would be to assist current property owners in upgrading their existing parking lots and installing onsite landscaping. The program would apply to such things as improvements to surface parking areas, privately owned open space, and other areas not directly related to façade features. This could function separately or in conjunction with a Façade Improvement Program.

The purpose of a Façade Improvement Program is to encourage projects that contribute to the economic revitalization and character of an area by providing financial and technical assistance for façade improvements. Building façades, both individually and collectively, create a strong first impression of an area. By implementing a Façade Improvement Program, current property owners are provided an opportunity to improve their outdated or failing structures without having to relocate.

## Historic Preservation Tax Credits

The U.S. government offers two federal income tax credits that can facilitate restoration and rehabilitation of historic and/or old buildings. The credits are:

- **20% Federal Tax Credit.** A 20% income tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of historic, income-producing buildings that are determined by the Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, to be “certified historic structures.” The State Historic Preservation Offices and the National Park Service review the rehabilitation work to ensure that it complies with the Secretary’s Standards for Rehabilitation. The Internal Revenue Service defines qualified rehabilitation expenses on which the credit may be taken. Owner-occupied residential properties do not qualify for the federal rehabilitation tax credit.
- **10% Federal Tax Credit.** The 10% tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of non-historic buildings placed in service before 1936. The building must be rehabilitated for non-residential use. In order to qualify for the tax credit, the rehabilitation must meet three criteria: at least 50% of the existing external walls must remain in place as external walls, at least 75% of the existing external walls must remain in place as either external or internal walls, and at least 75% of the internal structural framework must remain in place.

## Transportation & Infrastructure

### Fixing American's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act

The FAST Act, a five-year transportation reauthorization bill, was established in December 2015 as a replacement for the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act. The FAST Act, which is implemented and administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), aims to improve infrastructure, provide long-term certainty and increased flexibility for states and local governments, streamline project approval processes, and encourage innovation to make the surface transportation system safer and more efficient. It authorizes \$305 billion through 2020 for highways, vehicle safety, motor carrier safety, rail, public transportation, hazardous materials safety, and technology, research, and statistics programs.

### Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP)

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) administers ITEP and has funded projects including bicycle and pedestrian facilities, streetscaping, landscaping, historic preservation, and projects that control or remove outdoor advertising. In the past, federal reimbursement has been available for up to 50% of the costs of right-of-way and easement acquisition, and 80% of the costs for preliminary engineering, utility relocations, construction engineering, and construction costs.

### Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS)

SRTS program has provided funding for the planning, design, and construction of infrastructure related projects that will substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bike to school. SRTS projects are funded at 100% match with no local match required, with a funding limit of \$200,000 for infrastructure projects and \$50,000 for non-infrastructure projects. Eligible applications include:

- Sidewalk improvements;
- Traffic calming and speed reduction improvements;
- Pedestrian and bicycle-crossing improvements;
- On-street bicycle facilities;
- Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities;
- Secure bicycle parking system; and,
- Traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools.

### Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)

CMAQ is the administrator of CMAQ program funds for the northeastern Illinois region. CMAQ has supported a wide range of projects through the CMAQ program including improvements to bicycle facilities, transit facilities, intersections, sidewalk improvements, and signal timing. Funds have also been used to make transportation improvements to eliminate traffic bottlenecks, limit desired emissions, and to create promotional campaigns to enhance use of transit and bicycles. As a result of changes made to the program under the FAST Act adopted in 2015, vehicle-to-infrastructure technology projects are also eligible for CMAQ funding.

### Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP)

STBGP funds are allocated to coordinating regional councils to be used for roadway and roadway related items. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) delegates funds to regional councils and selects projects based on a ranking scale that takes into account the regional benefits provided by the project among other factors. STBGP funds may be used for a variety of project types including roadway rehabilitation, reconstruction and restoration, widening and adding lanes; intersection improvements, traffic signage improvements, and green infrastructure funding.

## **Surface Transportation Program (STP) Set-Aside**

STP Set-Aside is a sub-program of the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program which provides funding for non-motorized transportation projects. Projects range from on-street bike facilities to multi-use paths and sidewalk infill programs to Safe Routes to School projects. STP Set-Aside funds are administered by CMAP through a formal application process.

## **Parks, Trails & Open Spaces**

### **Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)**

IDNR administers several grants-in-aid programs to help municipalities and other local agencies provide a number of public outdoor recreational areas and facilities. The programs operate on a cost reimbursement basis to a government or non-for-profit organization. Local governments can receive one grant per program per year, with no restrictions on the number of local governments that can be funded for a given location. IDNR grants are organized into three major categories: Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD); Boat Access Area Development (BAAD); and the Illinois Trails Grant Program.

#### ***Illinois Trails Grants Program***

The Illinois Trail Grant Programs is composed of five grant programs that provide financial assistance for the acquisition, development, and occasional maintenance of trails for public recreation uses. These programs include the Bike Path Program, the Local Government Snowmobile Program, the Snowmobile Trail Establishment Fund, the Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Program, and the Federal Recreational Trails Program.

### ***Open Space Land Acquisition & Development (OSLAD)***

The OSLAD program awards up to 50% of project costs up to a maximum of \$750,000 for acquisition and \$400,000 for development/renovation of recreational facilities such as playgrounds, outdoor nature interpretive areas, campgrounds and fishing piers, park roads and paths, and beaches.

### **Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

The Illinois Land & Water Conservation Fund program (LWCF), similar to OSLAD, provides grants to municipalities, counties, and school districts to be used for outdoor recreation projects. Projects require a 50% match. All funded projects are taken under perpetuity by the National Park Service and must only be used for outdoor recreational purposes. LWCF expired as of October 2018; however, it is currently under discussion of being reinstated and could be a viable funding source in the future.

### **Illinois Bicycle Path Program**

The Illinois Bicycle Path Program is a grant program administered by IDNR that provides funding assistance up to 50% to acquire and develop land for public bicycle path purposes. Funded by a percentage of vehicle title fees, maximum grants awards are limited to \$200,000.

## Action Matrix

The Action Matrix presents a list of implementation strategies, policies and recommendations formulated within River Forest Forward. The matrix is intended to assist Village staff and elected and appointed officials with prioritizing implementation activities and projects over the life of the plan. In addition, the matrix allows the Village to approve specific, actionable items on an annual basis and evaluate progress based upon completed implementation strategies.

As such, the matrix is provided under separate cover as a compendium document that will be regularly reviewed and updated by Village staff as implementation occurs. The Action Matrix should not be considered a finite list of actions to be undertaken, as additional initiatives and projects will likely be identified over the life of the Plan. Rather, the Action Matrix should be used as a tool to assist the Village in better identifying and tracking implementation success over time.

**Note: The Action Matrix is provided under separate cover as a compendium document to River Forest Forward, and is on file with the Village of River Forest.**

The Action Matrix offers a brief description of each project and indicates the following:

## Potential Funding

Funding sources outlined in the Potential Funding Sources section of this Plan are allocated to actions that may qualify for each opportunity. The Village should continue to search for additional grants, funding agencies, and programs and keep track of deadlines and changes to requirement.

## Lead Boards/Commissions

The Action Matrix identifies the appropriate Board or Commission that should take a lead role in undertaking an identified action. Although it may be necessary to involve several boards and commissions, as well as Village departments and other community stakeholders, many implementation actions will require particular boards or commissions taking the lead. The undertaking of action by various boards and commissions is done at the direction of the Village Board. The following boards and commissions are identified as abbreviated within the matrix:

- VB=Village Board
- DRB=Development Review Board
- ZBA=Zoning Board of Appeals
- PC=Plan Commission
- EDC=Economic Development Commission
- TSC=Traffic & Safety Commission
- HPC=Historic Preservation Commission
- SC=Sustainability Commission

## Suggested Priority Level

Suggested priority is assigned with consideration for the cost, ease of implementation, and importance. Each strategy in the Action Matrix is indicated with one of the following:

- Priority 1: Near-term, low-cost, easier to implement, critical
- Priority 2: Mid-term, essential
- Priority 3: Long-term, desirable

## Ease of Implementation

The ease of implementation is indicated by a traditional grade scale from A to F, with A being easiest to implement and F being most difficult to implement. This category is a collective indicator of the anticipated level of effort by responsible parties, estimated cost, budget opportunities, and general stakeholder interest.