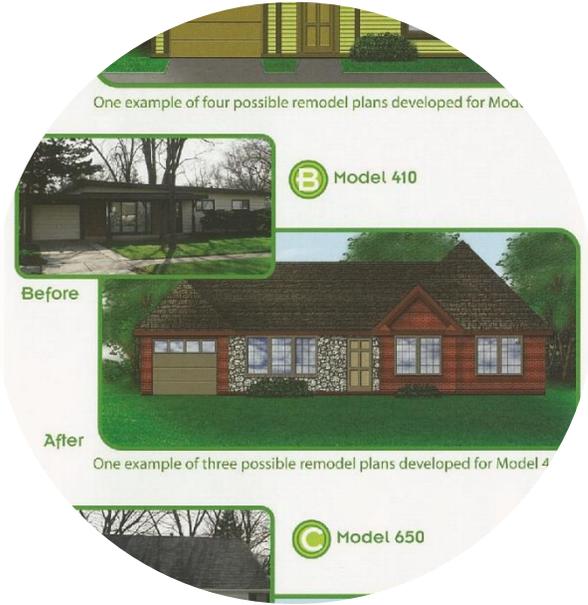


COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING PLAN



Adopted February 2018



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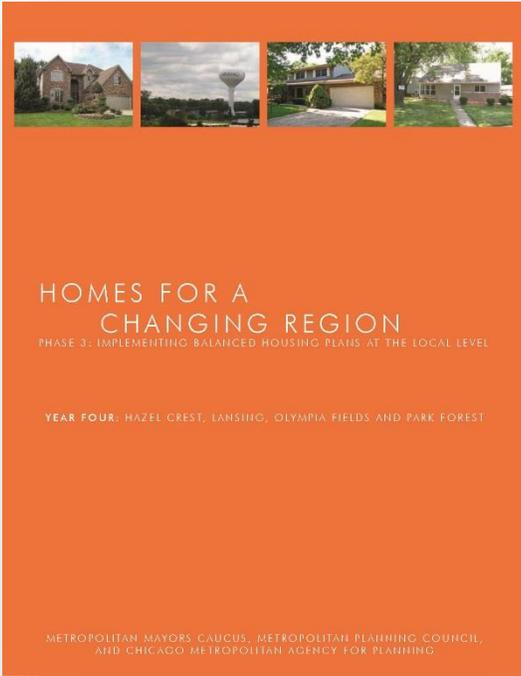
Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

Jonathan Burch

INTRODUCTION

Park Forest is one of the most interesting and historically significant communities in the Chicago metropolitan region. As the first fully planned World War II suburb, it was developed by American Community Builders to include a unique mix of housing types, schools, shopping, community institutions, and parks. Nearly 70 years after it was first developed, the community continues to offer housing that meets a variety of needs. However, the housing stock and neighborhoods also have some critical issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the high quality of life long enjoyed by Park Forest residents continues to exist.

The Village Board adopted the *Homes for a Changing Region Plan* in 2012. This comprehensive housing plan contains policy recommendations focused on mixed use housing, housing rehabilitation, energy efficiency, and continued work on housing efforts in the Eastgate neighborhood, DownTown Park Forest, and the 211th Street Transit Oriented Development area. A great deal of progress has been made in the past 10 years related to addressing housing issues in the Village (see *Background*). While the *Homes for a Changing Region Plan* was adopted only five years ago, it was developed with data from 2009, predating the housing foreclosure crisis. Therefore, it did not address head-on the issues related to housing foreclosures, vacancies and affordability that have been such a major concern to the community in the past seven years. Therefore, the Plan Commission decided that it was important to re-examine the data and the Strategies included in the *Homes for a Changing Region* plan to address the new set of issues prevalent in the community.



This updated *Comprehensive Housing Plan* will serve as the Village’s updated comprehensive plan for housing. Since 2009, the Village Board has adopted the *Strategic Plan for Land Use and Economic Development*, the *211th Street Metra Station Transit Oriented Development Plan*, the *Growing Green – Sustainability Plan*, and the *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*. Along with the *Comprehensive Housing Plan*, these Plans provide policy direction for Village staff and officials. As with any comprehensive plan, these Plans are intended to be living documents, and they should be revisited and updated from time to time to reflect changing market conditions, Village priorities, and emerging opportunities.

The following Goals are established by this Plan, and described in more detail in the Recommended Goals and Strategies section:

- Assimilate Park Forest renters into the community.
- Create a residential marketing program based on specific niche populations that already define Park Forest.
- Focus on revitalizing the Eastgate neighborhood.
- Encourage new development in the DownTown area.
- Continue moving forward with planning and development of the 211st Street Metra Station Transit Oriented Development Plan.
- Develop a residential rehabilitation program.
- Promote energy efficiency programs.
- Continue playing a leadership role in sub-regional housing planning.

Planning Process

The *Comprehensive Housing Plan* (Plan) was developed under the guidance of the Village's Planning and Zoning Commission, with staff assistance from the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, and Village Staff. The Planning and Zoning Commission started the process of creating this Plan in the fall of 2016 by undertaking a detailed review of the data that describes the Village's demographic trends and housing market (see chapter on Data Analysis). This data led the Commission to begin to identify issues that needed to be addressed in the Plan.



Public input was received through a series of focus group meetings held in March 2017 that included 40 residents, housing professionals, and Village Staff. These focus groups provided the Plan Commission with a wealth of new ideas, as well as confirmation of some of the issues and concerns that were raised by the Commission through their review of the data. Based on this input, the Commission developed the Goals and Strategies that are described in detail in this Plan.

Background

Since adoption of the 2012 *Homes for a Changing Region Plan* the Village has made significant progress on several of the policy recommendations contained in the Plan. Notably, the Village has amended its zoning ordinance to permit a wider range of housing types. New development in DownTown Park Forest and development proposed in the 211th Street transit oriented development area change the amount of housing that is likely to occur in those locations. Also, a significant number of the vacant, blighted houses have been removed from the Eastgate

neighborhood. Further, the Village has been proactive about addressing vacant housing issues, working with public and private partners to rehabilitate vacant homes and get them sold to new owners, and demolishing the worst of the blight from all areas of the community.

In December 2017, the Village adopted a major revision to its zoning and subdivision ordinances. Among the changes included in the new [Unified Development Ordinance](#), the following will have an impact on the type of housing that can be built in the Village:

- Accessory dwelling units are permitted within single family houses to provide living quarters for family members, students, home helpers, and others.
- Live/work dwelling units are permitted in the Traditional Multifamily and Urban Multifamily zoning districts as a Use by Right, and the Neighborhood Commercial and Mixed Use Commercial zoning districts with a Special Use Permit.
- Dwelling units above the ground floor are permitted as a Use by Right in all commercial zoning districts.
- The Urban Multifamily zoning district accommodates a mix of housing types, such as moderate-intensity multi-family units, row houses, live/work units, and small-lot single-family and two-family dwellings.
- The Mixed-Use zoning district accommodates moderate-intensity mixed-use and pedestrian-oriented development in the Village’s DownTown and transit-oriented development areas, as well as within other limited commercial nodes. This district allows a range of retail, service, office, multi-family, and institutional uses.



*Legacy Square Development
Live/Work Dwelling Unit*

The 2012 Plan called for a mixed use development on Main Street, north of the Victory Center senior apartments. This mixed use development was proposed to include both commercial and multifamily housing uses. In 2014, the Village approved the construction of the Dollar General retail store on a portion of this property, leaving less land for a mixed use development. Additional multifamily development in the DownTown area should also be focused on the vacant parking area at the northeast corner of Indianwood Boulevard and Orchard Drive.

In the Eastgate neighborhood, the Village has received grant funds that have allowed for the demolition of a large number of the vacant, blighted houses in the neighborhood. By the end of 2017, 80 houses have been demolished/deconstructed in Eastgate. A total of 53 vacant lots in the neighborhood are owned by the Village or the [South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority](#) (SSLBDA), with another 14 likely to be publicly owned by the end of 2017. In June 2015, the Village conducted a neighborhood workshop in Eastgate to get the residents’ thoughts about interim uses for the growing number of vacant lots.



The two most popular uses suggested were additional park space and community gardens. To that end, a small tot lot was installed on Village-owned parcels at 257-259 Arrowhead Street in August 2017. The park installation was accomplished with the assistance of Village Recreation and Parks and other Village Staff, an AmeriCorps National Civilian Conservation Corps team, and neighborhood residents. The park is centrally located in the neighborhood and easily accessible to Allegheny

Street from Antioch Place, and to Arcadia Street from two adjacent vacant lots that may also be improved to enhance access to the park. Village Staff is also promoting community gardening in the neighborhood.

Over the course of the eight year period from 2009-2017, work has also been underway to remove blighted single family structures and rehabilitate other vacant houses elsewhere in the Village. This work includes:

- Using Cook County, State of Illinois, and Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) grants, the Village has demolished 27 vacant, blighted houses. The Village owns 15 of these vacant lots.
- The Village is a founding member of the SSLBDA. To date, the SSLBDA has sold six single family homes in Park Forest, all of which were rehabilitated after the sale. The SSLBDA has also taken ownership of a vacant commercial property and is marketing that property for sale.
- Approximately 40 homes have been purchased, rehabilitated, and sold to owner occupants, using Cook County and IHDA grant funds.



234 Arcadia Before

Other actions the Village has taken to stabilize residential neighborhoods include adoption of a Vacant Property Registration program and a Crime Free Housing program. The Vacant Property Registry requires that all vacant property be registered with the Village's Community Development Department. With registration, the owner must indicate how the property will be maintained and how to contact a responsible person in case of a problem with the property. This program has enabled the Code Enforcement Division to better monitor the status of properties throughout



234 Arcadia After

the Village and to hold owners accountable when they do not fulfill their responsibility to maintain a vacant property.

The Crime Free Housing program requires that all rental property owners register information with the Village about each of their rental homes, both multifamily and single family. Each lease is required to include a provision that states that the tenants understand the lease will be terminated if any tenant, household member, or guest engages in any criminal behavior anywhere in the Village. The result of these two new programs is that the Village is better able to hold property owners and tenants accountable for the condition of their properties and the behavior of rental occupants. The Police Department, in particular, has noted a marked decrease in Police calls for service based on the requirements of the Crime Free Housing program.

Data Analysis

As noted above, one of the primary reasons the Plan Commission decided to update the Village’s housing plan is the major changes in the housing market that resulted from the mortgage crisis of 2009-2010. The data used for the 2012 *Homes for a Changing Region Plan* largely derived from the U.S. Census 2005-2009 American Community Survey. This data pre-dated the mortgage crisis and the ensuing increase in foreclosures and vacant homes, as well as the decrease in household income as many people were left without jobs.

The *Comprehensive Housing Plan* still references the 2005-2009 American Community Survey data, but compares it to the same source data from 2010-2014. In addition, local data collected by the Village’s Community Development Department and the Park Forest Housing Authority was also analyzed. In this way, the Goals and Strategies established by the *Comprehensive Housing Plan* are more reflective of the current housing needs.

Park Forest Dwelling Unit Types by Tenure

Percentage of Total Units, 2009 & 2014²

Park Forest Dwelling Unit Types and Current Figures ¹	Park Forest		CMAP Region	
	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied
5,680 Single Family Units	52% 2009	7% 2009	48% 2009	4% 2009
	42% 2014	14% 2014	48% 2014	5% 2014
1,995 Cooperative Units	14% 2009	6% 2009	6% 2009	1% 2009
700 Condominium Units	16% 2014	7% 2014	6% 2014	1% 2014
1,500 Multifamily Units	4% 2009	17% 2009	12% 2009	27% 2009
420 Senior Citizen MF Units	5% 2014	16% 2014	12% 2014	28% 2014

Source: Village of Park Forest, 2017

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2005-2009, 2010-2014

NOTE: The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, and new figures are released annually. ACS data is self-reported, and some responders may classify their housing unit type differently than how the Village would classify it. Because of this, ACS numbers are not always consistent with data collected by the Village. CMAP = Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

As documented in the table above, the percentage of single family rental houses in Park Forest doubled in the period from 2009 to 2014. By comparison, the percentage of single family rental houses in the [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning](#) (CMAP) region remained virtually unchanged. This is a result of the number of Park Forest single family dwelling units that ended up vacant and/or in foreclosure, and were subsequently purchased by investors. The Planning and Zoning Commission’s reflections on this data included:

- Are these residents renters by choice or by necessity?
- How can the Village help aspiring homeowners overcome barriers to homeownership?
- What can be done to assimilate renters into the fabric of the community, regardless of whether they remain renters or ultimately purchase a home?
- How can the Village ensure that the increasing number of single family rentals units do not negatively future investment in the Village, or the image of the Village.

The table below demonstrates the scale of the problem the Village has had to address since the Great Recession started in 2008. The number of houses in foreclosure hit a peak in 2013, with 14 percent of all single family homes in foreclosure, and 10 percent of all homes vacant. These housing issues manifested in an increase in code enforcement concerns and calls for Police service as criminal activity is often centered on vacant houses. The proactive steps taken by the Village to address these issues were described in the [Background](#) section.

Park Forest Vacant and Foreclosed Homes

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 ¹
# vacant houses	203	223	241	342	423	554	587	554	501	508
# houses in foreclosure	208	313	384	477	540	780	732	638	568	519
# foreclosed/occupied	95	194	258	282	338	484	414	373	378	358
# foreclosed/vacant	113	119	126	195	202	296	318	265	190	161
All data are annual averages										

Source: Park Forest Department of Community Development

NOTE: This data through June 2017.

The Planning and Zoning Commission interpreted the data on vacant and foreclosed homes as indicative of the need for:

- The promotion of resources to assist homeowners with housing and foreclosure prevention counseling.
- The need to develop and maintain partnerships with other organizations and funding sources that can purchase and rehabilitate vacant and foreclosed homes.
- Continued, proactive code enforcement to prevent neighborhood deterioration.

The Housing Authority of Park Forest is a division of the Department of Community Development within the Village’s organizational structure. The Housing Authority administers the Housing Choice Voucher program (formerly called “Section 8”), a federally funded program to assist income eligible families and elderly individuals find safe, sanitary, and decent housing. Park Forest is allocated 177 vouchers, but always has additional, “portable” vouchers from residents who were assigned vouchers from a different housing authority and are using those vouchers to live in Park Forest. As a result, in September 2017 there were 583 households using the Housing Choice Voucher program in Park Forest, a number that has increased significantly over the past five years.

Park Forest Housing Authority Voucher Program

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 ¹
Park Forest Vouchers	154	148	148	121	159	144
Portable Vouchers	306	320	406	475	484	439

Source: Housing Authority of Park Forest

NOTE: Through September 2017

A household is considered “housing cost burdened” if they pay more than 30% of household income on housing costs, including mortgage or rent, insurance, and utilities. Both owner and renter households who were severely housing cost burdened, paying more than 50% of household income on housing costs, increased from 2009 to 2014. This may be due to decreasing household income, or increasing housing costs. It is likely what led to the high number of foreclosures and vacancies in the Village.

Housing Cost Burden

	Percentage of Owner Occupied Households with Owner Costs Exceeding 30%				Percentage of Renter Occupied Households with Gross Rent Costs Exceeding 30%			
	Park Forest		CMAP Region		Park Forest		CMAP Region	
	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014
30% - 50% of income	21%	19%	23%	22%	26%	26%	24%	25%
50%+ of income	11%	14%	15%	16%	31%	36%	27%	28%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2005-2009, 2010-2014

The Planning and Zoning Commission is concerned about any households that are housing cost burdened. The increase in the number of households that are severely burdened in this manner is of particular concern. While some strategies may be beyond the scope of this Plan (creation of more local jobs), others are directly related to the cost of housing. To address these concerns, the Village should implement measures to lower housing costs by promoting more energy efficient homes, addressing the high cost of property taxes, and other means addressed in the Recommended Goals and Strategies.

RECOMMENDED GOALS AND STRATEGIES

After carefully analyzing Park Forest’s housing challenges and opportunities, reaching out to residents and housing experts for ideas, and examining best practices from other communities in the CMAP area, a number of practical and achievable housing Goals and Strategies have emerged. These Goals and Strategies will lead Park Forest to a stronger housing market, a more stable residential population, and high quality neighborhoods.

GOAL

ASSIMILATE PARK FOREST RENTERS INTO THE COMMUNITY.

Strategies

Get to know the needs and goals of renters.

Renters in the Village of Park Forest, as anywhere else, have different housing needs and goals. For some, living in a maintenance-free, multifamily housing development addresses their desire to avoid outdoor maintenance and to be able to move when a job or family situation changes. Other renters choose to live in a single family home for the additional space it provides, both inside and outside. Renters may also like the flexibility of being able to move that an annual lease provides them.



Autumn Ridge Apartments

The Village has a variety of housing options to fit the needs and goals of these renters. Developments like Autumn Ridge, Pangea Park Townhomes, and Central Park Townhomes provide multifamily, maintenance-free housing for renters in both a high-rise and a townhome setting. Approximately one-third of the single family homes in Park Forest are renter occupied. So, those households looking for a single family home environment, but who want to rent, can also find many options in the Village.



Pangea Park Townhomes

People also rent because they do not have the financial resources to purchase a home. Either they have insufficient funds for a down payment, or their credit history is not good enough to qualify for a mortgage. These renters may need assistance, either financial or credit counseling, to be in a position to purchase a home. To the extent that the Village assists these residents with finding the resources they need, they are

more likely to choose to stay in Park Forest when they are in a position to purchase a home.

The Village should consider creating a tax credit for first time homebuyers to incentivize them to purchase a home in Park Forest, and for investors who sell to renters. This could be backed by a second mortgage that requires the homebuyer to stay in the home for a specified period of time. Once that time is expired, the second mortgage would expire.

Provide educational resources targeted specifically to renters.

Park Forest has both multifamily and single family rental opportunities, and each provides its own unique set of living conditions for tenants. Renters have both rights and responsibilities in order to ensure that their living conditions are of the highest quality. Many renters, however, do not know their rights, nor do they know how to fulfill their responsibilities. It is in the Village's best interest to provide resources to renters to ensure that Park Forest homes and apartments are well-maintained and that all residents behave in a neighborly manner. In this way, renters are more likely to become long term, active residents of the Village, regardless of whether they continue to rent or if they choose to eventually purchase a home in the Village.

Possible educational resources that the Village could consider include workshops on landlord/tenant rights, how to maintain property, credit repair, financial literacy, the true financial cost of homeownership, and homeownership classes. The Village should partner with organizations in the Chicago South Suburbs and Park Forest businesses to provide these resources.

Encourage all residents, including renters, to get involved in Village activities. These include



recreational and social activities, as well as programs such as the Civic Leadership Academy and as members of Village boards and commissions, non-profit organizations, and other civic leadership positions. The more a resident gets involved in his/her community, the more likely that resident is to stay in the community for the long term, regardless of whether they own or rent their home.

2015/2016 Civic Leadership Academy

Create a tool lending facility for renters who do not have access to yard equipment and other tools necessary for home maintenance.

Approximately one-third of the single family homes in Park Forest are renter occupied. The arrangement between the landlord and renter varies from property to property. But, in many cases, the renter is responsible for lawn maintenance, and may want to be capable of handling

small house repairs as well. Because of the often transient nature of renters, however, many may not have lawn mowers, rakes, shovels, drills, and other equipment needed to properly maintain a home. If the Village created a tool lending facility, or worked with a local business to create such a facility, then renters would have the resources needed to maintain their property and many code enforcement issues at single family rental properties could be reduced.

The Village could also partner with local home improvement stores or the [University of Illinois Extension Service](#) to provide training on how to operate tools and maintain landscaping and homes. This service would be of benefit to renters and homeowners alike.

Consider creating a beautification program specifically geared towards renters in single family homes.

Work with landlords to develop a good relationship with the Village.

The Village should continue to conduct bi-annual meetings with Park Forest residential landlords to develop and maintain a good relationship with them. These meetings should address a variety of topics of importance to both the Village and the landlords, such as updates on Crime Free Housing, Fair Housing, and Housing Voucher programs, programs to support renters such as the tool lending facility, opportunities to acquire and rehabilitate vacant properties in the Village, and others. Landlords should be provided the opportunity to address issues of most concern to them.

The Village should consider working with single family landlords who have the resources and a good track record to address the continuing issue of vacant and foreclosed homes in the community. In 2016, the annual average of vacant homes was 500, nearly 200 of which were also foreclosures. The Village spends a significant amount of money on property maintenance at these homes. If responsible landlords were in a position to purchase these homes, rehabilitate them, and get them occupied with good tenants, everyone in the Village would benefit. Properties that are at least two years in tax arrears or two years delinquent on their water bills qualify for the abandonment process. In this process, the municipality can seek a declaration of abandonment and obtain a Judicial Deed for the property. This process should be used either to obtain houses that the SSLBDA can sell for rehabilitation and occupancy, that can be sold to responsible investors for rehabilitation and rental, or can be demolished if they are blighted.

GOAL

CREATE A RESIDENTIAL MARKETING PROGRAM BASED ON SPECIFIC NICHE POPULATIONS THAT ALREADY DEFINE PARK FOREST.

Strategies

Attract young adults who cannot afford to purchase a home and want a low maintenance lifestyle.

The Pew Research Center reported in early 2017 that the Millennial generation, those born after 1980 and the first generation to come of age after the year 2000, are significantly less likely to

buy a home than earlier generations of 25 to 35 year old adults. This may be due to the fact that Millennials are having children later than their counterparts from earlier generations, or that student debt has made it harder for them to qualify for a home mortgage. Whatever the reason, the Millennial generation's lack of interest in owning a home may make them prime candidates for one of Park Forest's best housing options – the housing cooperatives. Acquisition of stock in a housing cooperative requires good credit, but a relatively low cash outlay. Further, it is a low maintenance lifestyle that could be marketed easily to these young adults who are predominately employed, but single and childless.



Area J Cooperative

Promote Park Forest to a new generation of Veterans.

Park Forest was built to provide homes for Veterans who had served in World War II, and several generations later there continues to be Veterans in need of housing for themselves and their families. Park Forest has a renewed focus on providing services to Veterans, with a very active Veterans' Commission. The Village should create a new promotional campaign designed to attract a new generation of Veterans to living in Park Forest and becoming active members of the community.

Promote the variety of housing types in the Village.

Most people know that Park Forest is a good place to purchase an affordable starter home, and it is one of the only Chicago metropolitan suburbs that has housing cooperatives. The housing cooperatives are an affordable, low maintenance way for individuals and families to own a home. But, the Thorn Creek Estates neighborhood, where architect-designed homes sit adjacent to a Forest Preserve, is a well-kept secret. The upscale homes built along Tamarack Street, or the single family attached homes located in the Legacy Square neighborhood in DownTown Park Forest are also unique offerings that deserve better promotion. Park Forest is also a rich repository of mid-century modern homes. The Village should actively promote all of these housing types.

Similarly, the variety of rental options in the Village should be promoted. These include high rise living, town home style living, and housing geared to a senior population. The Village also has four condominium associations, all within town home developments.

The [Unified Development Ordinance](#) has created options for new housing types, including accessory dwelling units, live/work housing, and small-lot single family homes. These housing options should be promoted for existing and new neighborhoods.



Thorn Creek Estates

In addition, the possibility of buildings tiny homes, as a temporary or permanent housing type should also be explored. If changes to the building codes are needed to allow for tiny homes, these should also be considered. These new housing options are all geared to people who want to live more sustainably, and should be promoted as such, as they provide new avenues for attracting and maintaining residents in the community.

Address the strengths of living in an open and welcoming community.

Park Forest is one of the few communities in the Chicago metropolitan area that has never had restrictive covenants that dictate who can live in the community. Early residents represented religious but not racial diversity. However, within ten years of incorporation the Village began a Human Relations Commission, adopted a Fair Housing ordinance, and actively sought racial diversity. Further, the Village did not follow the pattern of white flight and racial re-segregation so prevalent in Chicago's neighborhoods and suburbs. Today, Park Forest's minority population (African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics) represents 69% of the total. With more than 15 churches and synagogues, and a 40 year commitment to fair housing, all ages, races, and religious groups call Park Forest home. This should be a cornerstone of Park Forest's housing marketing.

In addition, Park Forest has a host of high quality amenities and activities that provide a level of service that cannot be found in neighboring communities. The art galleries, Aqua Center, Tennis and Health Center, Park Forest Public Library, over 2,000 acres of parks and open space, and activities such as Main Street Nights, 4th of July Parade and Fireworks, and Tall Grass Art Show all should be highlighted in the Village's residential marketing efforts.

The quality and variety of Park Forest's schools should also be promoted. This could be done with a link to the schools on the Village's website, as well as space for students, teachers and alumnae to comment on the quality of the education they received at one of Park Forest's many schools.

Educate real estate agents about the benefits of living in Park Forest.

Village Staff should continue to meet with Park Forest area real estate agents on a bi-annual basis to share information about new home buying assistance programs, housing financing tools and housing grants available to assist with the sale of homes. These events should also be used to educate real estate agents about the benefits of living in Park Forest, including its programs, facilities and other amenities. Real estate agents should have access to marketing material produced by the Village, such as Freedom Hall programs, community calendars, and the Discover Magazine.

On occasion, the meetings with real estate agents could take the form of a tour of the Village to show off the diversity of housing types available in the community (small, sustainable homes, mid-century modern homes, Lincolnwood neighborhoods, Thorn Creek Estates, Tamarack Street, condominiums, townhomes in School House Manor and Forest Brook). The issue of Park Forest property taxes should also be addressed directly and on a regular basis, in order to provide real estate agents with facts that they can use to discuss the issue with their clients.

Other means of assisting Park Forest area real estate agents with their job of selling Park Forest should be instituted. This would include developing marketing material to promote the Village's focus on sustainability, including the benefits of smaller homes and a walkable and bikeable community.

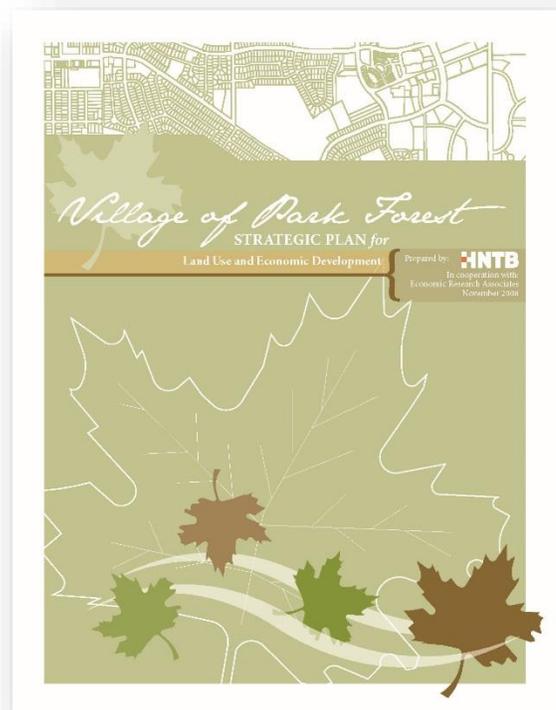
GOAL

FOCUS ON REVITALIZING THE EASTGATE NEIGHBORHOOD.

Strategies

Be proactive about seeking grants to advance redevelopment goals for the Eastgate neighborhood.

In the period from 2009-2017, the Village has received grants from Cook County, the State of Illinois, and the Illinois Housing Development Authority that have enabled the elimination of 63 blighted houses in the Eastgate neighborhood. Grant funds remain (as of mid-2017) for the demolition of at least 15 additional blighted houses. In total, there are 80 vacant lots in the neighborhood, where vacant, blighted houses have been removed. These efforts are in direct support of the redevelopment plans first established by the [Strategic Plan for Land Use in Economic Development](#), adopted as an element of the comprehensive plan in 2009. As long as blighted houses remain in the neighborhood, these efforts should continue.



Grants should also be sought to implement elements of the redevelopment plan for the Eastgate neighborhood, as that plan is developed. These elements might include, for example, installation of a multi-use path along 26th Street to safely connect the neighborhood to Western Avenue, and upgrade of sidewalks and installation of bikeways within the neighborhood.

Develop a plan for redevelopment of the Eastgate neighborhood.

Both the *Strategic Plan for Land Use and Economic Development* and the 2012 *Homes for a Changing Region Plan* contain concept plans for future redevelopment of the Eastgate neighborhood. These plans rely heavily on housing types that are permitted by the old Zoning Ordinance. With the adoption of the *Unified Development Ordinance*, new housing types and zoning districts have been created that may be viable options for incorporation into a new vision for the future of the Eastgate neighborhood. By 2022, the Village should have control of at least 25 percent of the parcels in the neighborhood. This will constitute a “critical mass”, and an optimal time to start seeking a development partner to redevelop the neighborhood. Prior to that time, however, the Village should continue to address the disproportionately high crime rate in the neighborhood, and work with the neighborhood residents to develop an updated redevelopment plan for the neighborhood.

Police calls for service in the Eastgate neighborhood have tended to be disproportionately high, when compared to other neighborhoods in the Village. The efforts documented in this Plan to remove vacant, blighted houses have had a positive impact on Police calls for services. From 2014 through 2016, calls for Police service in Eastgate dropped to 1,756 from 1,990 calls in the two year period from 2012 through 2014, a reduction of almost 12%. Burglaries to vacant properties dropped from 51 (2012-2014) to just 4 (2014-2016). These statistics provide strong evidence that removing vacant properties, either by rehabilitation and re-occupancy, or by demolition when necessary, work to improve the quality of life for residents. A concerted effort involving all Village Departments should be developed to continue this positive trend before work to initiate redevelopment in the neighborhood can begin.

When developing a plan for redevelopment of Eastgate, its proximity to the Sauk Woods Forest Preserve should be incorporated. Working closely with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, the Village should ensure that the neighborhood and the Forest Preserve complement one another, instead of turning their backs on one another as is currently the case. The plan should also address ways to better connect the neighborhood to the rest of the Village. This might include creating a multi-use path along 26th Street so walking and biking to shopping and services in the Village is easier. It might also include working with the Pace Bus system to improve bus access to the neighborhood. Finally, the intersection of Algonquin Street and Western Avenue forces residents to drive north on Western Avenue, away from the heart of the Village. Reconfiguring this intersection could enable more Eastgate residents to more easily and naturally access the businesses, services, and amenities in the Village rather than going outside the community for these resources.

Engage the neighborhood residents in the future redevelopment of the neighborhood.

The Village should continue its efforts to engage Eastgate residents in the life of their neighborhood. This includes such activities as block parties, community gardening, and

neighborhood clean-up efforts. In this way, the residents will get to know one another and develop a stronger commitment to improving the conditions throughout the neighborhood. Involved, engaged residents will attract new residents with the same interests in their community.



When it comes time to develop an updated plan for redevelopment of the neighborhood, residents should be a vital element in the planning effort. The plan should address their needs for new housing and rehabilitation programs, safety, transportation, park amenities, and other issues. It should also be sensitive to the financial situation of existing residents, in order to avoid an outcome where existing residents can no longer afford to live in their own neighborhood. As new housing is built in Eastgate, the Village should incorporate programs to assist existing property owners to upgrade their homes. This is important to help market the new housing, and to give existing residents a continued commitment to the area.

GOAL

ENCOURAGE NEW DEVELOPMENT IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA.

Strategies

Seek a multifamily housing developer for the former Marshall Field parking area.

When the former Marshall Field building was demolished in 2010, the four acre parking area for the store became obsolete. In 2003, the [Urban Land Institute Chicago](#) (ULI Chicago) conducted a Technical Assistance Panel on the Village's efforts to create DownTown Park Forest. One of their primary recommendations was to seek a developer to build a multifamily housing development on this property. Their recommendation specifically noted that "the Village should investigate the market for residences with 10 to 15 dwelling units per acre, assuming two- to four-story buildings, with a mix of multi-family mid-rises and townhouses". The newly adopted [Unified Development Ordinance](#) actually permits even denser multifamily development in the Mixed Use zoning district. Village Staff should pursue dense multifamily development on this property in order to strengthen the commercial development in DownTown Park Forest.

Seek a mixed use development for the remaining vacant land on Main Street.

The ULI Chicago report referenced above made a similar recommendation for multifamily housing on the vacant parcel at the northeast corner of Forest Boulevard and Main Street. In 2017, this parcel is 2.25 acres in size, after development of the Dollar General store in 2013. Both the [Strategic Plan for Land Use and Economic Development](#) and the 2012 [Homes for a](#)



Changing Region plan identified this parcel as the “DownTown Gateway”. The recommendation from those plans is to develop this parcel as a mixed use, commercial and multifamily residential project. A development of this nature would bring more residents into the DownTown area and serve to draw additional customers off Western Avenue and into DownTown Park Forest.

Invest in public infrastructure improvements necessary to attract new development and business to the DownTown.

The Village has invested a significant amount of resources into the creation of DownTown Park Forest, the most recent of which is the expansion of the Village Green in the area that was the footprint of the Marshall Field building. Continued investment into public infrastructure will demonstrate the Village’s willingness to be an active partner in the development of the former Marshall Field parking area and the remaining vacant land on Main Street. It will also help to attract more businesses to the existing commercial buildings in DownTown Park Forest.

Appropriate improvements might include additional landscaping and lighting projects to extend the DownTown environment to the perimeter streets, construction of a major sign at Western Avenue to draw traffic onto Main Street, upgrade of Cunningham Drive from Liberty Drive to Lakewood Boulevard to a true street design, additional parking lot resurfacing, and possible build-out of second floor raw spaces in Buildings #5 and #6A to make them marketable for dwelling units or commercial spaces.

GOAL

CONTINUE MOVING FORWARD WITH PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE 211TH STREET METRA STATION TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

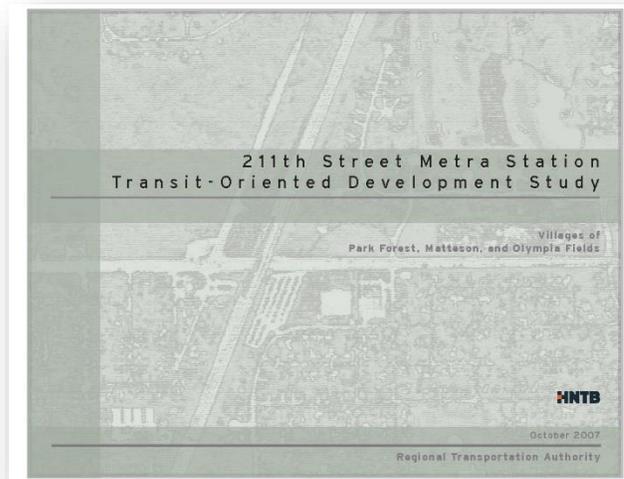
Strategies

Seek approval from appropriate agencies to develop a portion of the commuter parking lot.

The Village-owned commuter parking lot at the 211th Street Metra Station was originally acquired with federal funding and built in the mid-1970s. It was resurfaced with a grant from the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) in 1985. That grant agreement required a 20 year “use period”, during which the lot would continue to be used as a commuter parking lot. Village Staff will seek confirmation from RTA Staff that the use period has expired and all or a portion of the parking lot can now be used for development purposes.

Seek a multifamily residential developer for a portion of the TOD area.

Since adoption of the [211th Street Metra Station Transit Oriented Development \(TOD\) Plan](#) in 2007, a number of significant actions have taken place to move this Plan forward. The Village acquired the property at 3200 Lincoln Highway and demolished the blighted commercial structure. This property has been identified as a location for a restaurant and other commercial uses. A new buyer (2017) owns the building at 3250 Lincoln Highway and is marketing it for use. It has been determined that demolition of this building is not in the best interests of the community, primarily because it is still in usable condition and to demolish it would significantly increase occupancy costs and property taxes.



As a result of the actions noted above, the best location for multifamily residential development is likely to be on a portion of what is now Commuter Lot 1, as described in the first Strategy above. In order to take the most advantage of this location, and to support all commercial development that will occur on the two existing parcels in the TOD area, a multifamily residential development should be sought for a portion of this parcel.

GOAL

DEVELOP A RESIDENTIAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM.

Strategies

Work with the high school district to create and expand a construction trades program for students and community members.

Rich Township High School District 227 is developing a construction trades training program for its students, and potentially for other residents of the District communities. The Village is currently working with the District to create this program and has received a grant (Abandoned Property Program grant in 2017) from the [Illinois Housing Development Authority](#) to fund the rehabilitation of up to three houses.

The Village should continue to support this program so it can expand to assist with the rehabilitation of additional vacant homes. Similar programs that may already be in place, or may be planned, at Prairie State College and South Suburban College should also be invited to work in Park Forest. These programs have multiple benefits for the Village and its residents as houses are rehabilitated and reoccupied, and residents gain skills that can provide them with long term, sustainable employment.

These housing rehabilitation programs could be expanded to provide assistance to senior citizens and lower income homeowners who are still in their homes, but cannot afford to make repairs.

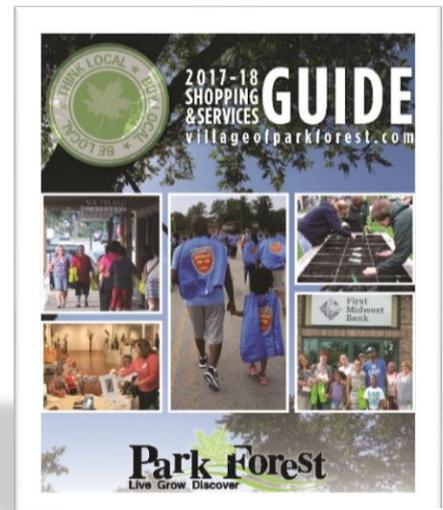
Work with local financial institutions to develop financial mechanisms that make housing rehabilitation affordable.

There are a number of potential financial mechanisms to assist Park Forest home owners with rehabilitation of their homes. Home equity loans are available for existing homeowners. Loan products are also available that bundle the home purchase and rehabilitation costs into one mortgage, either through local financial institutions or through the [Illinois Housing Development Authority](#). One community-wide advantage of these loans is that they establish a home value, and therefore a neighborhood comparable sales price, at the after-renovation value. These financial products should be more viable as property values in Park Forest began to increase in 2017.

The Village should work with local financial institutions to promote these opportunities, and others that may exist, to Park Forest residents and homebuyers.

Develop and maintain a resource inventory for homeowners and buyers interested in rehabilitating their homes.

Homeowners and buyers should know about Park Forest businesses that provide home improvement services. This information is readily available in the annual [Park Forest Shopping and Services Guide](#). Home tours could be conducted to highlight especially innovative or cost effective renovations undertaken by Park Forest homeowners and investors. The Village could partner with home improvement stores to conduct workshops about easy, do-it-yourself renovation projects (i.e., maximize your closet space, landscaping, etc.). Programs such as these will demonstrate that Park Forest homes have value and with a minor investment and effort, wonderful improvements can be made.



2017/2018 Shopping Guide

Promote the [Architectural Design Program](#), and expand the program to focus on sustainable rehabilitation.

There is a negative perception that Park Forest has a significant number of small houses (two bedrooms/one bathroom). To combat this problem, and to stimulate remodeling of the existing housing, the Village launched the [Architectural Design Program](#) in 2007 to stimulate remodeling of existing homes. An architect was hired to create variations on the original five basic house models built in the Village. These plans create options for master bedroom/bathroom suites, family rooms, and expanded kitchens. These plans are available for only the cost to copy plans. They should be promoted as a means of enabling Park Forest homeowners to continue living in their existing home, and to create modern amenities to meet a family's changing needs.

The Village should also consider launching an updated [Architectural Design Program](#) that incorporates sustainable rehabilitation. The Village should partner with local banks to create special financial mechanisms for residents to use the Program. The banks should be partners in the Program marketing as well because they can reach potential home buyers from outside the community.

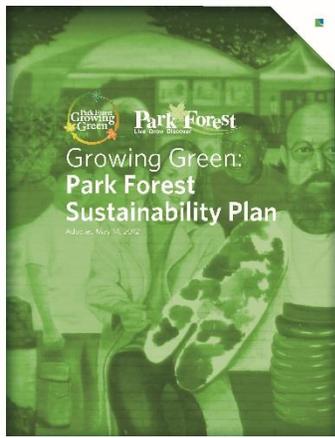
GOAL

PROMOTE ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS.



Strategies

Promote housing upgrades that result in greater energy efficiency.



Household energy consumption is impacted by many factors, including house size, age, and the residents' behavior. The Park Forest Sustainability Analysis (2011) showed that average household energy consumption in Park Forest is lower than Cook County and the region's household averages. However, nearly three-fourths of the Village's homes were built before 1970, and therefore, did not benefit from the building technologies and energy codes that new homes utilize. On the positive side, the moderate size of Park Forest homes helps reduce energy consumption, and the common building layout provides a unique opportunity for developing universal plans for capturing energy efficiency. The [Growing Green: Park Forest Sustainability Plan](#) outlines 11 Strategies that should be followed to create greater energy efficiency in the homes in the Village.

The Village should ensure that it has adopted the most up-to-date building and energy codes in order to ensure that new home construction incorporates sustainable systems and appliances.

Ensure that Village codes remain consistent with State Statues, model codes and other best practices.

One of the Strategies in the [Park Forest Sustainability Plan](#) is to "develop incentives for new building and developments to be built to established green building standards". The Village should ensure that its codes reflect the newest standards in energy efficiency, and offer incentives, such as fast tracked permitting, property tax credits, or fee waivers, to construction and development projects that establish standards for green building.

GOAL

CONTINUE PLAYING A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN SUB-REGIONAL HOUSING PLANNING.

Strategies

Maintain an active role in the Chicago Southland Housing and Community Development Collaborative.

The Chicago Southland Housing and Community Development Collaborative (the Collaborative) was created by the [South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association](#) in 2009 as a response to the increasing number of housing foreclosures and vacancies. The Village was an early participant in the Collaborative, and continues to be an active member. The Collaborative has been an important source of networking with other communities involved in similar housing issues, and with regional organizations working to provide solutions to the housing issues that confront the South Suburbs. The Village has also been able to access grants to address these housing issues. The Village should continue to be active in the Collaborative to learn from others and to be a resource to other communities that are looking for solutions to issues that the Village of Park Forest is already addressing.

Maintain an active role in the South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority.

In 2012, the Village was a founding member of the [South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority](#) (SSLBDA), along with the Cities of Blue Island and Oak Forest. The SSLBDA was created in response to the large number of vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties that resulted from the economic downturn that started in 2008. The SSLBDA works with municipal members, of which there are 21 in mid-2017, to convert these properties into productive, property tax generating use. The SSLBDA's work in Park Forest has focused on both residential and commercial properties, resulting in a number of properties now being renovated and occupied by owner occupants and renters. With more than 500 properties still vacant and/or in foreclosure, the SSLBDA continues to be an important partner in the Village's efforts to get these properties into productive use.

Maintain an active role in the South Suburban Housing Center and the Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance, and other such groups to promote fair housing strategies and goals.

[The South Suburban Housing Center](#) (SSHC) and the [Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance](#) (CAFHA) are both committed to affirmatively furthering fair housing through housing counseling, fair housing enforcement programs, education and advocacy. The SSHC works closely with the South Suburban Housing and Community Development Collaborative and the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association to address fair housing issues in the South Suburbs. In order to continue to be a community that is open and inclusive of all people, the Village should maintain its active participation in these and similar organizations.

Consider other opportunities to take a leadership role.

This Strategy supports one of the Village's five year goals, which is to "sustain the Village's role as a catalyst for innovation change in the region". Village Staff and elected and appointed officials are involved in leadership roles in a number of regional and State-wide organizations. These affiliations further the expertise of staff, enable the continuation of highly professional operations, attract grant funding opportunities, protect and enhance the quality of life in Park Forest, and develop new leaders.