

## Appendix A:

### Elmwood Park Comprehensive Plan: Community Outreach

#### DEVELOPING A PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

A significant feature of CMAP's Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program is the commitment to broad-based public involvement. The local planning projects that result from the program's competitive application process are each strengthened by the engagement of residents, business owners, and other community members from each municipality or study area. In particular, the LTA program focuses on both reaching and involving those groups and populations that are traditionally underrepresented in planning processes, including low-income persons, minorities, non-English speaking persons, and persons with disabilities.

It is therefore essential to formulate an approach to public engagement that is tailored to each LTA community. In this way, both CMAP and municipal staff can set outreach goals for the project, and keep track of the effectiveness of various strategies to determine what is replicable for future public engagement. For the Elmwood Park Comprehensive Plan, this outreach strategy was supported by background research and initial conversations with the Village staff and other key stakeholders.

The first steps to developing the public engagement strategy for Elmwood Park: to find out what types of public participation had occurred in the Village prior to this project (see Figure 8 for a relevant worksheet); to learn more about the demographics of the community; and to begin building a comprehensive list of the key stakeholders to involve in the planning process (see Figure 9 for a relevant worksheet).

From this background research, the initial direction of the outreach strategy was devised, establishing an overarching goal that the project's public outreach would draw from a wide variety of populations each with different interests in Elmwood Park's future. The outreach strategy focused on giving every community stakeholder — spanning across different ages, races, and interests — a chance to understand and participate in the comprehensive planning process. This included but was not limited to students, senior citizens, local business owners, Latino residents, and Polish-speaking residents.

Each LTA project also has a steering committee that serves as a review body at each step of the project. In the case of Elmwood Park's Comprehensive Plan, the Village's Plan, Zoning, and Development Commission (PZD) acted as the project's Steering Committee. The PZD met regularly to discuss the project and worked as a sounding board to assist village and CMAP staff throughout the process.

#### Overall Lessons Learned

Given the outreach strategy determined from the outset of the project, the community engagement activities throughout the project were successful at reaching a diverse range of perspectives about Elmwood Park's future. Working directly with organizations that cater to specific target populations — like the Mont Clare - Elmwood Park Chamber of Commerce, the Elmwood Park Seniors Club, and Elmwood Park High School — was a highly effective way of including these various populations. In Elmwood Park, the municipal staff was helpful in disseminating information about public meetings through both print and online formats, and residents seemed to stay tuned to community resources like the Village Newsletter, the *Elm Leaves* and the public library community board.

Some targeted groups, such as non-native English speakers, were harder to reach and required a more focused form of outreach. For instance, CMAP staff attended a meeting of non-native English speaking parents at the Early Childhood Center, where Spanish and Polish translators and written materials were on hand to engage

with these parents and learn about their issues and vision for the village. These groups should continue to be the subject of targeted community engagement as the Village moves forward with implementation of the comprehensive plan.

## **OVERVIEW OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

The community engagement activities were carried out during the entire length of the comprehensive planning process, but a number of key community outreach meetings were facilitated, including: meeting with the Village's elected and appointed officials, conducting a community meeting to gain insight into issues and opportunities, holding a public visioning charrette, and holding a public open house.

### **First Phase: Education and Visioning**

For the first phase of public engagement, project staff set out to clearly outline the major topics of the comprehensive plan and raise awareness throughout the community about this planning process from the very outset. Community outreach efforts – designed to bring the project's targeted groups and populations into the process by inviting them to initial public meetings – included:

- Using traditional media outlets like the *Elm Leaves* (local Pioneer Press both in print and electronic), and local access cable;
- Working with community institutions and organizations like the Elmwood Park Public Library, the Mont Clare – Elmwood Park Chamber of Commerce, the Senior Club, Elmwood Park Community Unit School District 401, the Elmwood Park Neighborhood Civic Organization, and St. Celestine Church and Parish to disseminate printed materials;
- Working with local businesses around the area to disseminate printed information to staff and patrons/customers, including businesses that primarily serve the Polish-American community;
- Inviting previously identified stakeholders to spread information about the project to their family, friends, neighbors, and students.

The two main goals of overall community engagement were to familiarize both residents and community leaders with the process of planning for the Village's future, and to learn from the community members about which issues were most important to them. This visioning and goal-setting process started with speaking to the Village Board and the PZD to learn about their goals and priorities, as well as other stakeholder groups throughout the community.

### **Village Board of Trustees Meeting**

To kick off the comprehensive plan project with Elmwood Park, CMAP staff attended the Village Board's meeting on June 20, 2011. CMAP staff presented to the trustees, Village officials, and audience in attendance about CMAP's mission and the Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program. Explaining that Elmwood Park was one of the first projects to be selected in the LTA program, CMAP staff distributed the "4 Questions" worksheet and walked the board members through the planning process, learning from the trustees about the issues and opportunities for improvement in the Village.

### **Plan, Zoning, and Development Commission Meeting**

Members of the Village's Plan, Zoning, and Development Commission (PZD) serve as this comprehensive plan project's steering committee. On July 11, 2011, CMAP attended a PZD meeting to introduce the steering committee members to the project and receive their input about the Village's main issues and opportunities that exist today. In addition to the most common concerns that the PZD brought up, members also discussed

issues of aging housing stock, code enforcement for residential properties, and the need to promote the Village and its amenities throughout the region. PZD members suggested collaboration with neighboring municipalities on stormwater management challenges, and discussed the lack of outreach to retain and attract young professionals to Elmwood Park.

#### Mont Clare - Elmwood Park Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Meeting

On the morning of August 9, 2011, CMAP staff met with a dozen board and staff members from the Mont Clare - Elmwood Park Chamber of Commerce at the Chamber's regular meeting. While most of the discussion focused on addressing commercial vacancy and key areas for redevelopment, other issues like public safety were brought up as well. The Chamber Board identified the need for better communication across stakeholders in the Village, and in particular between the Village administration and the Chamber on matters of economic development. The board also shared the Village's strengths, including the loyal customer base of families across generations.

#### Elmwood Park High School Students

In order to hear the perspective of young people in the community, CMAP staff went to Elmwood Park High School on August 23, 2011 to speak with a group of student council representatives across different grades. First, CMAP staff described the comprehensive planning process to the students, with a particular emphasis on the importance of community members taking ownership of this long-range plan. Next, the group participated in a live polling exercise, with the real-time results displayed of responses to questions about where students and their families prefer to shop and to recreate, how students travel to school, and what their main concerns are for the Village. Students reported that their favorite aspects of Elmwood Park are the restaurant options, train service to Chicago, and the Village's strong services.

#### Elmwood Park Public Library Board Meeting

The Elmwood Park Library Board of Trustees is comprised of seven members and meets monthly. On September 15, 2011, the board discussed the issues and opportunities that should be addressed in the Village's Comprehensive Plan. The group praised the community's amenities and Village services, and suggested pursuing a satellite library on the south side of the railroad tracks as well as mid-range chain retail stores that are not already located in shopping malls in nearby municipalities.

#### Seniors Club Meeting

The Village of Elmwood Park runs a Seniors Club, which is dedicated to organizing gatherings and activities for senior citizens in the community. A CMAP staff member attended one of the group's semimonthly meetings on October 3, 2011 to speak to club members and learn about the main concerns that senior citizens hold in the Village. Meeting participants were particularly concerned with public and pedestrian safety, as well as the need for more frequent and reliable bus service options. The most common strengths that participants listed about Elmwood Park revolved around the community's amenities, from the quality of its senior services to its variety of churches.

#### Stakeholder Interviews

In order to gain further insight into the issues and opportunities that exist in Elmwood Park, CMAP staff conducted interviews between August 15 and August 24, 2011 with several key stakeholders throughout the community. These individuals represented a wide variety of interests and perspectives, and ranged from institutional and community leaders to business owners to elected officials. These stakeholders held many of the same concerns in common, and in general expressed the desire to preserve the strengths of Elmwood Park while adjusting to the changing economic and social conditions that exist today. Stakeholders interviewed included:

- Lisa McManus, Executive Director of MCEP Chamber of Commerce, President – Intensity All-Star Cheerleading, Corp.
- Gail Gailoto-Fang, John Mills Elementary School PTA member, Independent Representative – CAN
- Jonathan Zivojnovic, MCEP Chamber Board member, Broker/Owner – River Elm Properties
- Dr. Kevin Anderson, Superintendent, Elmwood Park Community Unit School District 401
- Jim Edwards, Assistant Principal, Elmwood Park High School
- Angela Stranges, Village Trustee
- Nick Samatas, Elmwood Park Neighborhood Civic Organization (EPNCO) President, Agent – Cortland Properties, Inc.
- Phillip Marcantelli, EPNCO Co-Founder and Board Director, Probation Officer
- Rich Mazzula, Jr., MCEP Chamber Board President, EPNCO Board Director, Owner – Baciarni Restaurant and Bar

### Initial Public “Kick-off” Meeting

In addition to meeting with particular groups of stakeholders in Elmwood Park, CMAP also held a community-wide meeting that was open to the general public. To ensure the meeting was inclusive of the wide range of residents in the Village, there were both Spanish- and Polish-language materials created to promote the public event, and both Spanish-speaking and Polish-speaking staff members were available to help facilitate discussion during the meeting. Over 100 residents, business owners, and community leaders attended this public meeting on the evening of September 15, 2011, in the Elmwood Park Recreation Center Gym to share their thoughts about what should be addressed in the Village’s Comprehensive Plan.

Participants first heard from CMAP staff about the overall planning process, and then worked in smaller groups to discuss their ideas about the issues and opportunities facing Elmwood Park. Each small group prioritized their major ideas with the help of a facilitator, and then one member of each group reported back to the entire room about the challenges and strengths of the community.

Many thoughtful ideas were shared by participants. Residents spoke of the need for better communication between the Village and residents (for instance on matters of public safety or educational programs for residents), as well as the general lack of citizen engagement and volunteerism in the Village. Participants were interested in discussing business attraction to critical vacant sites, and the redevelopment of the main commercial areas in the community. Ideas for new business types and amenities in those key locations ranged from boutique shops to light industry to a major retail anchor. From group to group, the meeting participants overwhelmingly agreed upon a couple of the Village’s greatest strengths: its neighborhood-friendly and family oriented character, and its location in the region.

### *Common Issues*

The various groups and stakeholders brought up a wide range of issues. However, there were several common issues that transcended across all groups. These common issues addressed through this comprehensive planning process are listed below:

- Railing crossing: The Milwaukee District – West railroad tracks bifurcate the Village and cause a physical division between the northern and southern areas of the community. The commuter train traffic from Metra service, as well as regular freight traffic, both cause delays for motorists trying to travel across the village. In addition to creating roadway congestion, many stakeholders expressed concerns about safety for pedestrians who need to traverse the train tracks.
- Business attraction and revitalization: A strong commercial corridor exists in the Village from Harlem Avenue up to Conti Parkway where many of the municipal services are clustered. In the economic downturn, some local businesses in this commercial area are struggling to keep running, and

stakeholders expressed a need for focusing on retaining and attracting new businesses to create a more inviting “downtown” area for visitors and residents alike.

- Stormwater management: Many stakeholders expressed concerns about flooding in their neighborhoods, both in private residences and in public areas. This is a common problem across much of the Chicago region, and it highlights the need for improved stormwater infrastructure and other mitigation practices like native plantings to assuage this problem for residents.
- Parking availability: Though public parking is available at many of the busiest destinations in the Village (most notably Conti Parkway and “Restaurant Row” on North Avenue), the issue of lack of consistently available parking was raised by various stakeholders. Concern was expressed that without readily available parking, potential patrons of local businesses might be deterred from shopping in Elmwood Park.
- Need for more open space and recreational facilities for youth: While the Village has made noteworthy efforts to acquire land and convert it to public parks whenever possible, this common issue emphasizes the need to continue such endeavors to increase open space. Additionally, many stakeholders expressed the need for more recreational facilities that cater to young people in the community, such that the youth have somewhere safe and constructive to socialize outside of school hours.
- General infrastructure improvements: This issue includes the need for general improvements to sidewalks, roadways, and utility infrastructure in certain areas of the community where the infrastructure may be aging more rapidly.
- Shift in character of single-family neighborhoods: The trend of single-family homes being converted to multi-family residences has occurred in various areas of the Village, and some stakeholders expressed concern over how this affects the character of these neighborhoods.

### *Common Strengths*

Although there were many different community strengths expressed by residents, Village officials, and local business owners, a core of commonly listed assets that the Village benefits from are described below:

- Community character: When asked about the strengths of Elmwood Park, every single stakeholder group discussed the neighborhood friendly, family-oriented character of the village. Many families have been residents of Elmwood Park for decades and generations, and people feel it is a tight-knit community.
- Location in region: Elmwood Park’s accesses to multiple forms of public transportation, as well as its proximity to the City of Chicago, O’Hare International Airport, and major arterial roadways in the region are beneficial strengths for the community. Residents recognize that this location provides them good access to jobs around the region and other amenities.
- Village services: A common strength expressed was the Village’s services and facilities such as the athletic facilities, fire and police protection, and the public library system.
- Walkability: Many stakeholders felt that the Village is a walkable community, in that the streets and sidewalks are safe and clean for the most part. Additionally there are many pedestrian options as far as amenities and services to access by foot.

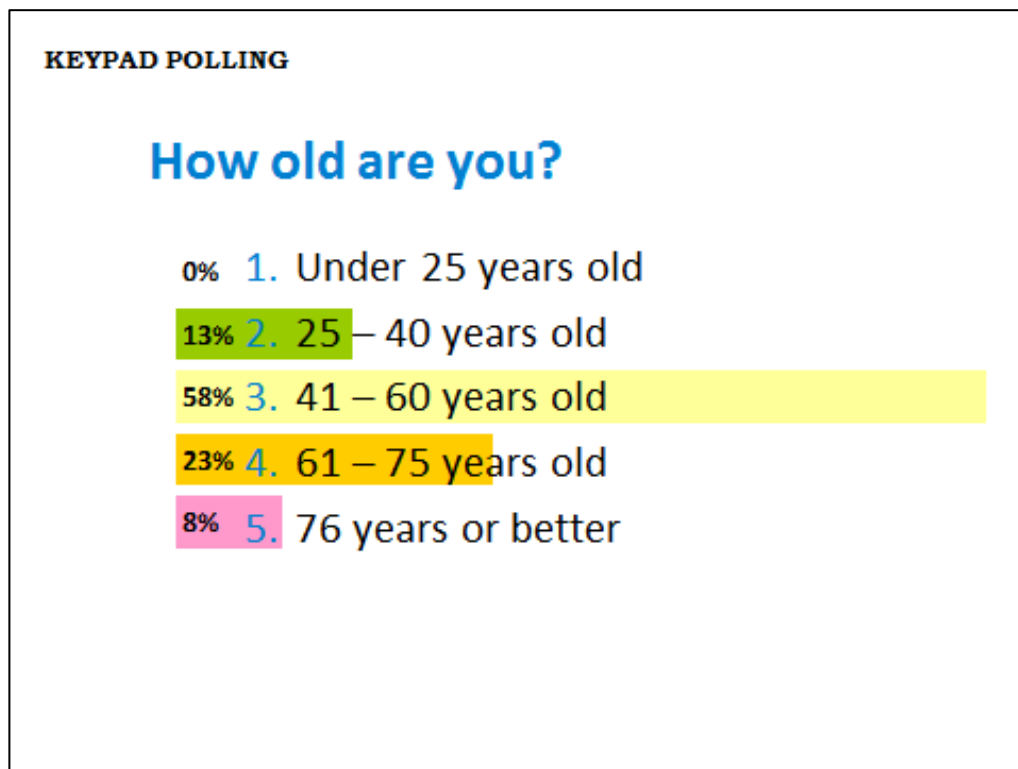
## Second Phase: Strategies for the Future

Building from the visioning that was expressed during the first phase of public engagement, the next step was to ask the community to help identify the strategies that could best achieve their goals for Elmwood Park's future prosperity. This summary includes: 1) a record of the ideas expressed by the community during the public visioning workshop; 2) approximate measures of which issues the Elmwood Park community would most like to prioritize in the comprehensive plan, as gathered from the project's MetroQuest engagement web tool.

### Public Visioning Workshop

This visioning phase was launched with a public visioning workshop on March 1, 2012, held at the Elmwood Park Recreation Center Gym. Approximately 50 residents, business owners, and other members of the community attended the workshop. See Figures 1-3 for a demographic overview of the workshop participants, as collected via real-time keypad polling technology at the meeting. Participants learned about the visioning process and participated in small group discussions about various "scenarios" for the future of the Village. Each of the three scenarios considered that evening are the product of a different combination of the priorities and goals that the Elmwood Park community previously expressed to CMAP during the kick-off phase of the planning process.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1**



<sup>1</sup> This process was not designed to select one single scenario to push forward through the comprehensive plan. Rather, the consideration of scenarios allows community members to measure their priorities against each other, discovering what they feel is most important to address and what tradeoffs they are willing to accept. The comprehensive plan ultimately addresses all of the issues that are contained in these scenarios, but the feedback from the public about which elements they prefer from which scenarios was vital to CMAP planning process.

Figure 2

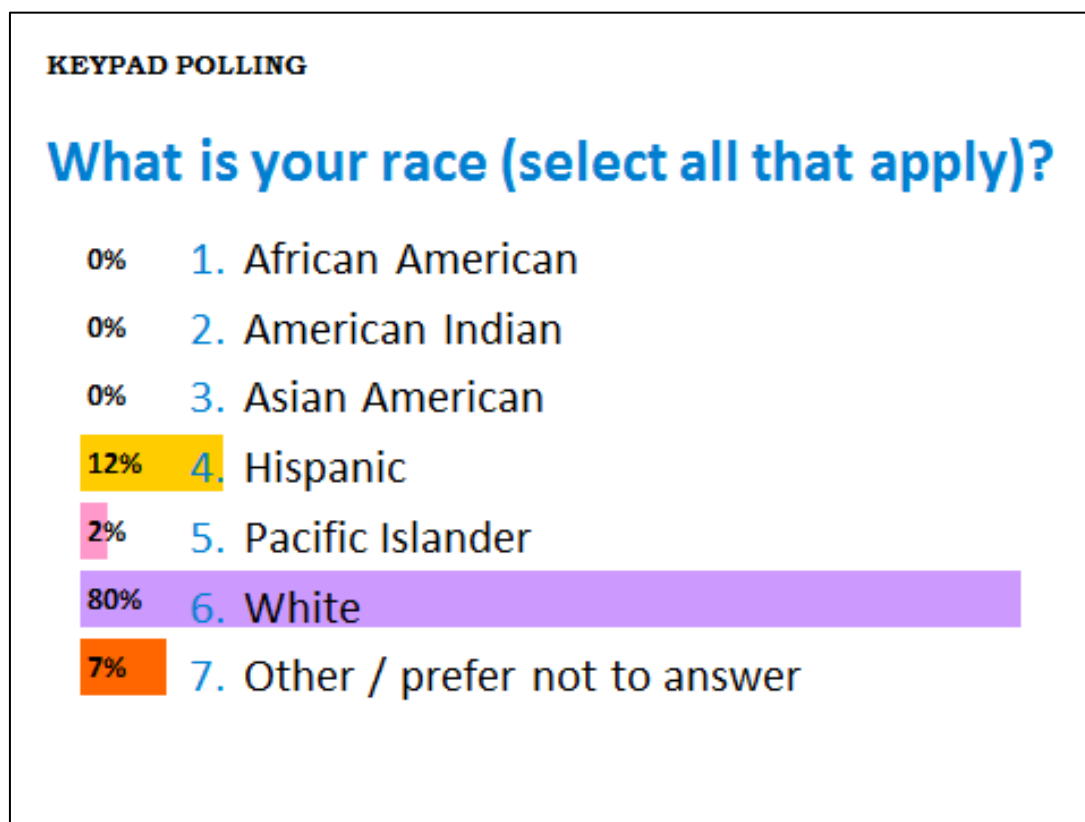


Figure 3



Below (in Tables 1 – 3) are the descriptions of the three scenarios and the resulting ideas and comments about each of them from the public visioning workshop. Each small group was asked to discuss both the limitations of each potential scenario, as well as their ideas for potential strategies to implement the goals of the proposed strategies. Commonly expressed ideas across the different scenario discussions included: improving sidewalks and crosswalk infrastructure in key areas like around schools; figuring out new incentives to attract businesses to Elmwood Park; and acquiring vacant parcels to create new parks, general open space that can be used for stormwater management.

**Table 1. PRESERVE Scenario**

Priorities of the Preserve Scenario: expand open space and implement stormwater management strategies

- Create new parks
- Improve current parks
- Support actions to reduce damage from stormwater run-off

<b>Limitations / Challenges of Scenario</b>	<b>Strategies for Implementation of Scenario</b>
Parks and open space are underutilized	Improve pedestrian and bike access to parks
Poor lighting/security and maintenance of parks	Dedicate more funds to safety/maintenance
Parks and open space are difficult for some to access	Acquire land / vacant lots with the purpose of creating more open space *
Community is too dense/overbuilt for current infrastructure	Improve infrastructure for older homes (“flood proofing”)
Combined sewer system	Continue to upgrade the sewer system
Lack of detention areas that serve the village	Build more retention structures and convert vacant land to detention areas for flooding run-off
	Green building standards / natural landscaping requirements for new developments *
	Expand rain barrel use in residential areas *
	Revisit zoning codes for open space *
* This strategy was a common choice amongst participants	



**Table 2. REINVEST Scenario**

Priorities of the Reinvest Scenario: focus on economic reinvestment in commercial areas of the village

- Attract retail and commercial businesses to vacant parcels
- Update some of the existing businesses' facades to make them more inviting for residents and visitors
- Focus on streetscape beautification strategies

<b>Limitations / Challenges of Scenario</b>	<b>Strategies for Implementation of Scenario</b>
No funding ability to attract major retailers	Create incentives to attract new businesses *
Not enough land/space for a major anchor to locate in EP	Limit new construction and invest in existing buildings
Cook County property taxes drive businesses away	Streetscaping and façade improvements *
High volume traffic on Harlem Ave. deters shoppers	Landscaping medians
Commercial corridors are not pedestrian friendly	Land banking in high vacancy areas
Road designations (e.g. for state routes) make it difficult to execute redesign with streetscape beautification	Parking solutions like a commercial parking permit
Limited parking options in commercial areas	Build a parking garage and/or surface lot on vacant and underutilized properties *
* This strategy was a common choice amongst participants	

**Table 3. CONNECT Scenario**

Priorities of Connect Scenario: strengthen linkages and improve safety

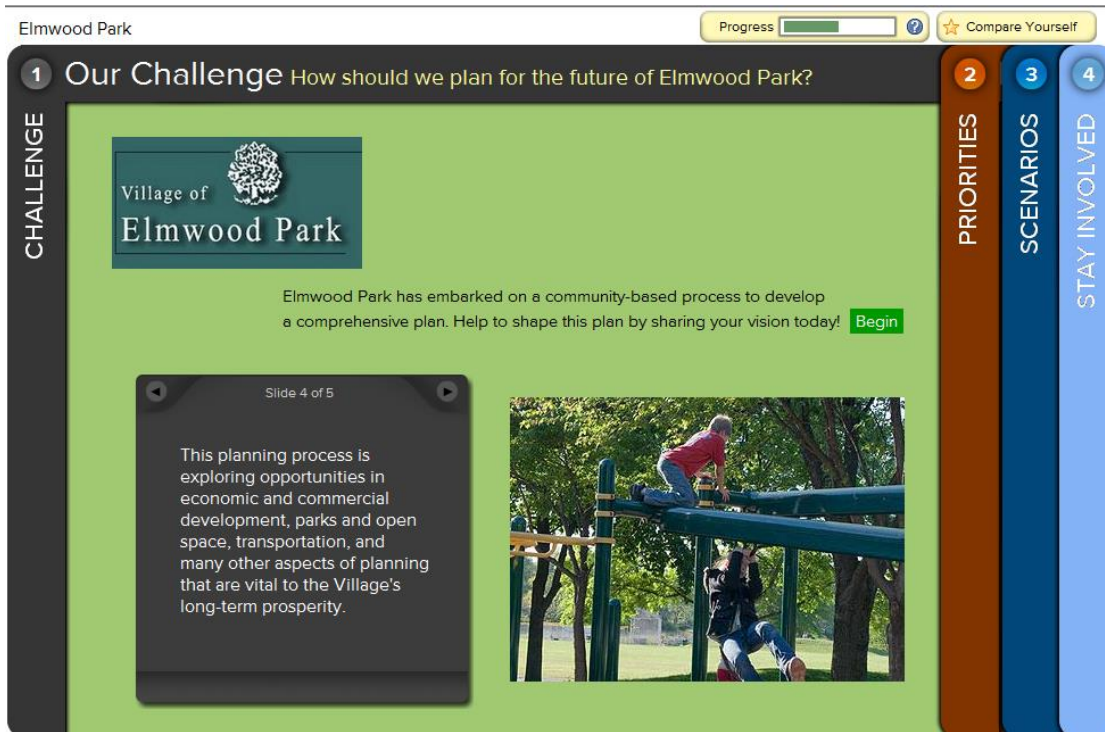
- Enhance pedestrian paths and bicycle routes to major destinations in Village
- Focus on safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists
- Emphasize streetscape beautification

<b>Limitations / Challenges in Scenario</b>	<b>Strategies for Implementation of Scenario</b>
Volume of car traffic on major streets is high	More speed bumps and stop signs along busy streets
Not enough signage for bike routes	More bike parking at popular locations in the Village
Motorists lack awareness of bike routes	Add bicycle signage for cyclists and motorists
Pedestrian crossing along major corridors is difficult	Improved pedestrian crossing measures (more crosswalks and crossing illumination, flashing stoplights near schools) *
Some residents don't respect the current traffic calming measures	Better signage about one-way streets
Sidewalks near EP high school need widening	Improve sidewalks and pedestrian pathways *
* This strategy was a common choice amongst participants	

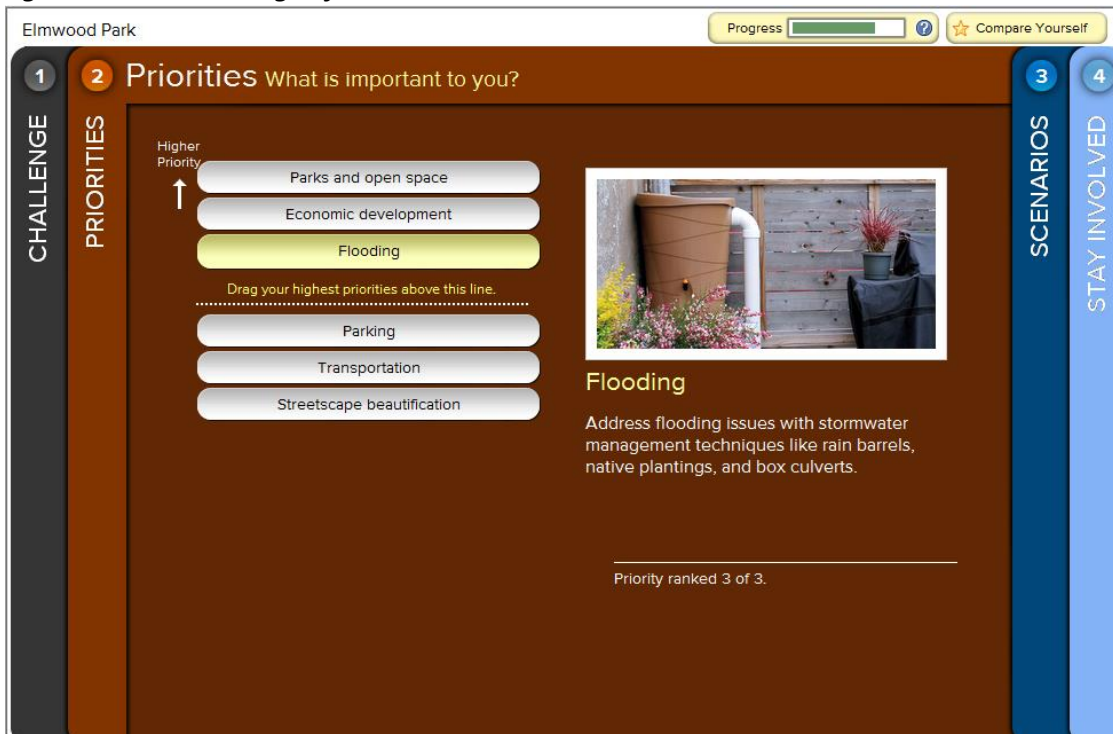
## MetroQuest: Community Engagement Web Tool

For members of the Elmwood Park community who were not able to attend the visioning workshop, CMAP developed an interactive tool (using a web-based community engagement service called MetroQuest) that allowed people with access to the internet to give their input about the comprehensive plan's priorities and scenarios for the community's future. This web tool, accessed at [www.elmwoodpark.metroquest.com](http://www.elmwoodpark.metroquest.com), was active between during the winter and spring of 2012. See Figures 4 – 6 for screen captured images of the sequential pages of the MetroQuest project website, which will provide a sense of what the online user experienced when providing input in this way.

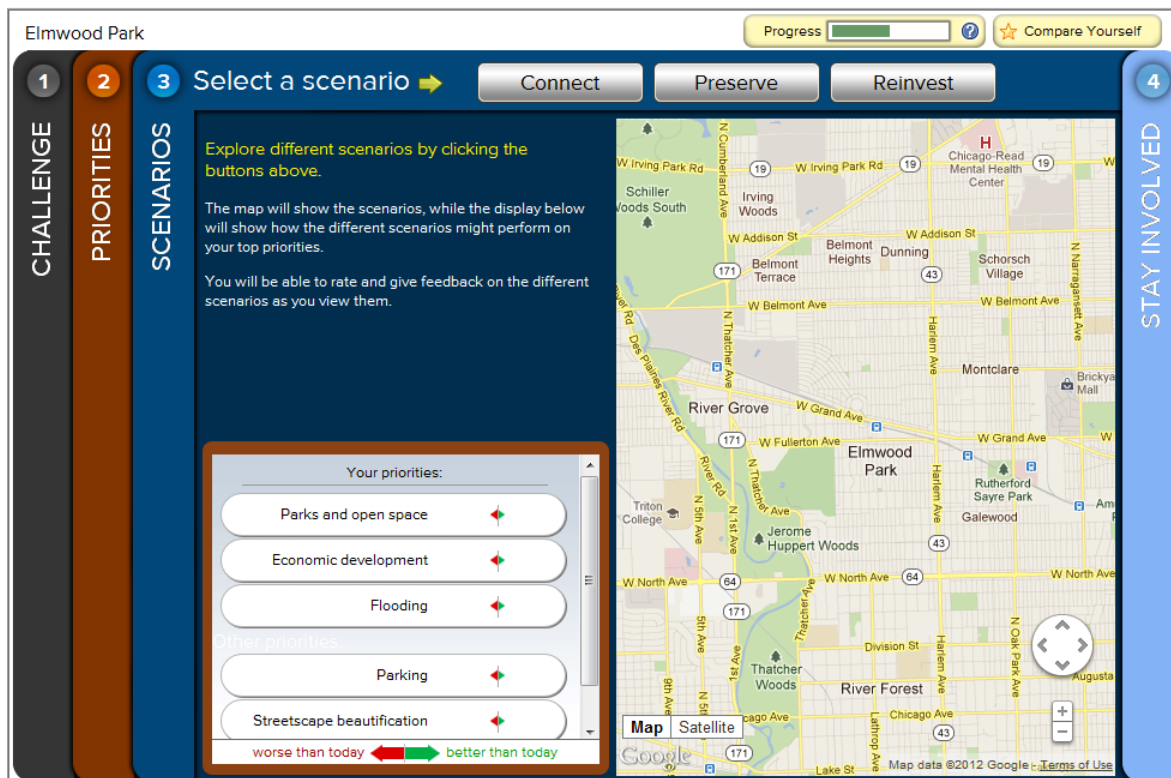
**Figure 4 – Introduction / Challenges Page of MetroQuest Web Tool**



**Figure 5 – Priorities Page of the MetroQuest Web Tool**



**Figure 6 – Potential Scenarios Page of the MetroQuest Web Tool**



The outreach strategy for making the public aware of this website included:

- Emailing every person who attended a public meeting for the comprehensive plan and left their email address with the link to the website
- Working with business and civic groups in the community, like the Mont Clare - Elmwood Park Chamber of Commerce and the Elmwood Park Neighborhood Civic Organization, to share the website information with their membership groups through electronic and social media methods
- Connecting with schools in Elmwood Park School District 401 by promoting the website on the district website
- Leaving flyer announcements about the website at community institutions like the Elmwood Park Public Library
- Announcing the website through the CMAP project page and the Village's "News & Events" webpage

The MetroQuest project site had 130 views total, with about fifty percent of those visitors leaving comments and ratings on the three different scenarios presented. Of the community priorities that MetroQuest users were asked to rank in order of importance, the issues of "Economic Development" and "Flooding" ranked the highest. In fact, of all MetroQuest users who ranked their priorities, 41% of them identified Flooding as their first priority, with 33% choosing Economic Development as their first priority. However while two thirds of users ranked Flooding among their top three priorities, over 84% of users ranked Economic Development among their top three priorities, demonstrating that economic development issues were the most common concerns among users. At the other end of the spectrum, 23% of users ranked Parking as their least important priority and 20% of users ranked Transportation as their last priority. Both the Parks & Open Space and Streetscape Beautification priorities sat squarely in the middle of the ranking, with average ratings of third or fourth in the list of possible priorities.

**Figure 7: Map of MetroQuest User Comments by Location in Elmwood Park**



### **Third Phase: Review of Draft Plan**

The final phase of the project's public outreach efforts involved allowing the public the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Comprehensive Plan, which they helped to shape with their input and ideas over the previous year.

#### Public Open House

On April 7, 2013, about 40 people attended the Public Open House, representing elected officials, municipal employees, community institutions, small businesses, and residents from across the Village. Some people in attendance had been involved in the comprehensive planning process since its outset in 2011, while for other attendees, the Open House was the first time they had voiced their ideas or concerns about the plan. This diversity of background and opinion led to robust discussions of the draft plan's main recommendations, ranging from the economic development strategies to the stormwater management recommendations.

The Open House meeting was held to garner feedback from the general public in Elmwood Park on the draft of the Village's comprehensive plan. Rather than having a formal presentation for attendees, this Open House was designed for members of the public to drop in whenever they were able to during the meeting's hours. Attendees were asked to review large maps, renderings, and images from the draft comprehensive plan, and then leave their written and verbal comments with the CMAP and Village staff members who were present. Attendees expressed support for the recommendations to increase parks and open space as well as nonmotorized travel options (like bike lanes), and many attendees were also keenly interested in the economic development strategies at the Grand and Harlem intersection and around the village's Metra station.

### **Additional Outreach Templates**

The following worksheet templates are used by CMAP outreach staff at the beginning of every LTA project, both to become better acquainted with the community and to ascertain what methods of public engagement will be most effective for the given project. The details gathered with this worksheet, along with additional research about the demographics and background of the community, form the basis of the project's outreach strategy.



Figure 8: Previous Public Participation Worksheet



Chicago Metropolitan  
Agency for Planning

233 South Wacker Drive  
Suite 800  
Chicago, Illinois 60606  
312 454 0400  
www.cmap.illinois.gov

## Public Participation Questionnaire

The following questions will assist the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) in understanding community dynamics and past public engagement efforts. This information will be used to develop a customized public participation strategy for this project. Ideally this form will be completed during a discussion with local staff to ensure staff has a complete understanding of each answer.

Community:

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Address:

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Primary contact  
(including title):

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Email:

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Phone:

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Website:

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### General Questions

1. What are some examples of community participation that have occurred to date and relate to this project (and how was such feedback incorporated into your planning activities)?
2. Please describe a typical public meeting in your community. Have there been any successful approaches or challenges to engaging community residents?
3. Please describe your priority audience and any specific goals when presenting community plans.
4. What tools do you currently use to engage your community (ex. paper survey, online survey)?
5. Are there any "hot button" topics that tend to galvanize residents and get people to events in your community?
6. Please describe your typical methods for advertising community meetings (ex. newsletters, water bill notices, library bulletin board, social media).
7. Do you have a media contact for press releases
8. Will we want to distribute materials in languages other than English?
9. Is your community tech-savvy and computer-literate?
10. Should we post event information on your municipal website; if so who is the IT contact person?

## Logistics

1. Please list three ideal community locations for public meetings:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
2. What are the A/V capabilities of these venues?
  - a. Computer
  - b. Projector
  - c. Screen or blank walls to project onto
3. When are the preferred days and times of day to hold a public meeting in your community?
  - a. Weekday evening (circle) – M T W Th F
  - b. Weekend (circle) – Sat / Sun
  - c. Time
    - ☐ Morning (9 a.m. – 11 a.m.)
    - ☐ Mid-day (11 a.m. – 1 p.m.)
    - ☐ Afternoon (1 p.m. – 5 p.m.)
    - ☐ Evening (6 p.m. – 9 p.m.)
    - ☐ Other (please specify)
4. Are there any scheduled community events in the coming months that we should know about to coordinate public participation efforts?

Figure 9: Stakeholder Analysis Worksheet



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Community Stakeholder Analysis Form

This form is to be used at the beginning of the public outreach strategy development process to identify key community stakeholders.

Community:

Project:

Identify stakeholders (individual or group)	Directly affected?	Position or what issues are most important?	Potential steering committee member?	Candidate for direct outreach (ex. membership org.)?	Notes about resources	Contact information