



Fairmont Neighborhood Plan: Implementation Status Update May 22, 2014

The Fairmont Neighborhood Plan was completed in April 2012 through a partnership between the Will County Land Use Department and CMAP. As part of this plan, CMAP committed to remain involved for a period of two years to assist with the implementation of the plan's recommendations. Over the last two years, CMAP has held quarterly meetings with the Will County Land Use Department to discuss implementation activities, assisted with grant application, and continued its involvement with the community.

Implementation Status

The Fairmont Plan identified a number of key activities that were expected to occur within the first two years of adoption. The following summarizes each key recommendation, discusses the activities that were completed or are underway, and identifies actions that should continue to be worked on.

1. Create a faith-based community development corporation.

One of the more complex elements of the Fairmont plan was the creation of a faith-based community development corporation (CDC) to lead redevelopment efforts, particularly the creation of a new Neighborhood Center. Before jumping into forming a new organization, the plan recommended conducting a feasibility study and coordinating among the Fairmont churches to ensure the CDC's viability.

Steps Completed

The County has pursued several potential philanthropic funding sources, including the Chicago Community Trust and the Will County Community Foundation. Unfortunately, these applications have been unsuccessful, meaning that no real progress has been made on this recommendation.

Moving Forward

The investigation of a faith-based CDC remains an important element of the Fairmont plan, as the community's churches own much of the land that is planned to become the new Neighborhood Center, and a CDC may be the most effective way to bring about this development. Due to limited interest from philanthropic groups, CMAP recommends that the County adjust its tactics and consider working with a local institution or a university or college, such as the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC), to conduct the investigation through a graduate-level class project or thesis. If the CDC appears feasible based on this initial analysis, the County should pursue it more aggressively.

2. Update Will County's land use regulations.

During the creation of the Plan, the County updated its zoning ordinance. The Plan recommended changes to Will County's zoning ordinance because many of the recommended development types would not be permitted under the regulations that were in place at that time.

Steps Completed

Throughout the creation of the Plan, CMAP staff met with Will County zoning officials to discuss its land use recommendations. Those meetings were meant to provide input to the County's zoning ordinance update that would allow the type of development recommended in the Plan.

The County has updated and adopted their new zoning ordinance. The ordinance includes language and zoning districts that would support the developments recommended in the Plan, but at this time no parcels in Fairmont have been rezoned.

Moving Forward

The County should work with local property owners to determine the most appropriate course of action regarding the future zoning of the Neighborhood Center. Possible options include: 1) a by-right development, which would require ensuring that zoning classifications permit a mixed-use neighborhood center development, 2) the creation of a new overlay district, or 3) as a Planned Unit Development (PUD), following the County's existing PUD process.

3. Invest in new and improved parks.

The Fairmont plan identified a need for new open space and improved connectivity to existing parks. County and neighborhood representatives were encouraged to work with the Lockport Township Park District as it updated its Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Because a representative of the Park District was a member of the Fairmont Plan steering committee, there is an increased likelihood that new parks and improved connections will be included in the District's Plan.

In addition, CMAP and the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Chicago assisted the City of Joliet in creating a reuse plan for the former Joliet prison. That reuse plan recommended converting the Joliet prison's east side property (east of IL Route 171) into public open space. Both CMAP plans include and support the conversion of this property to public open space. Both plans also recommend constructing an interconnected trail system between the Joliet prison's east side parcel and the Park District's existing A.F. Hill Park (located in Fairmont).

Steps Completed

Currently, Park District staff is working on completing their Master Plan. The Master Plan is being developed in-house and is expected for completion later this year.

The County and CMAP each have representatives on the Collins Street Task Force, which is addressing the reuse of the Joliet prison. The Task Force has met several times within the last year to work toward implementing Joliet's plan for

revitalizing the former prison. Currently, the Will County Forest Preserve District – also a member of the Task Force – is investigating if they are interested in acquiring the Joliet prison’s east side property to create public open space.

Moving Forward

The County should continue to communicate with David Herman, Recreation Director at the Park District, to stay involved with their process. In addition, the County should also work with the Park District to recommend ways that Fairmont residents should be kept informed about the process and when community outreach activities occur.

The County should continue to participate in the ongoing Collins Street Task Force meetings and to support the Forest Preserve District’s efforts in acquiring the Joliet prison’s east side property for open space.

4. Initiate a demonstration community garden.

The Plan recommended the creation of a community garden for Fairmont residents.

Steps Completed

A community garden opened in the spring of 2013. The community garden is located on Lockport Township Park property adjacent to the Fairmont Community Center. Lockport Township Park District staff created the garden by first tilling the soil and then their senior club – the Fairmont Silver and Gold Club – began to maintain the garden. The senior club plants, maintains, and harvests the garden each year. A number of local groups and business donate the materials and/ or money for the garden. Vegetables from the garden are donated to the local food pantry. From all accounts, the garden was a huge success and it is expected to expand this year with more plots and more gardeners.

Moving Forward

The County should continue to monitor the success of the community garden and provide assistance whenever necessary and feasible.

5. Develop a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

The Plan recommends that the County and the Township work together to create a CIP for the neighborhood. The infrastructure recommendations of the Fairmont Plan, while fairly specific, need further refinement before they will become buildable projects. The County and the Township should work together to develop a finite list of feasible projects based on the Plan’s infrastructure recommendations.

Steps Completed

Lockport Township replaced a drainage pipe in the neighborhood most heavily impacted by poor drainage. The new drainage pipe was installed along Barrett Street in an area that had very significant flooding issues that were raised during the development of the Fairmont Plan.

Will County staff (planning and engineering) and Lockport Township representatives have worked together to identify the key infrastructure improvements that are necessary in the Fairmont neighborhood. At this time,

minimizing flooding impacts was determined to be the key issue that should be addressed. As a result, the County has recently hired an engineering firm to create a stormwater management plan for the neighborhood. The County has involved the Township, local residents, and CMAP in this process.

Moving Forward

Based upon the results of the future stormwater management report, the County should work with the Township to implement its recommendations to minimize flooding impacts to residential structures. The County is considering use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to fund some of the infrastructure recommendations from the stormwater management report. The County should also continue to install sidewalks along streets identified in the Plan.

Significant progress in plan implementation is occurring even without the benefit of a single CIP that guides investment. County and Township staff should discuss whether a CIP would help to organize and schedule future investment or whether infrastructure investment is occurring efficiently enough even without a document of this sort.

6. Apply for federal and state funding.

The Plan recommended that Will County should lead efforts to secure outside funding to construct some of its more significant recommended improvements. Examples of significant improvements include roadway, water/sewer, off-street trails, and sidewalk projects.

Steps Completed

The County, through a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grant, constructed approximately 1,000 feet of sidewalk in the spring 2013. The County recently applied again for a SRTS grant to install more sidewalks in the neighborhood.

Moving Forward

In addition to applying for SRTS funds, the County should also apply for federal and state funding to complete other projects in the community, such as new trails. The County should also encourage and support the Park District and Will County Forest Preserve District to seek funding for park acquisition and/or park development. An example of a potential grant is the Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) program that is administered through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (<https://dnr.state.il.us/ocd/newoslad1.htm>).

7. Coordinate with state and regional agencies.

The Plan identified future projects that require external coordination with other agencies such as Pace, Lockport Township, and the Will County Forest Preserve District.

Steps Completed

The County and Lockport Township worked with Pace to install three new bus shelters along Green Garden Avenue. The new shelters, along with their informational signage, benches, and concrete pads, were installed in June 2012.

Moving Forward

The County should continue to look for further opportunities to coordinate with other agencies.

8. Promote community history.

The Plan recommended that the rich history of Fairmont be preserved, documented, and celebrated. A number of strategies were recommended, including the installation of community gateway signs, a written history of the community, and the preservation of important historical structures.

Steps Completed

During summer 2012, a County intern interviewed a number of long-time residents to create a written history of the community. The final product was completed in August 2012.

The County has also begun to work with Landmarks Illinois to seek Local Landmark Status for significant properties.

Moving Forward

The County's Local Landmark Status program is relevant to Fairmont but has never been used in the community. The County should develop a strategy for educating property owners of likely local landmarks about the benefits of the program. County staff should work in conjunction with representatives from Landmarks Illinois to determine which structures would be likely candidates for the program. After potential structures have been identified, the County, along with Landmarks Illinois and other trusted local institutions such as churches, should make contact with property owners to discuss their structures becoming part of the Local Landmark Status program.

9. Develop streetscaping and property improvement programs.

A number of streetscape improvements in the Fairmont community are possible and should be prioritized. The Plan included a variety of potential improvements that would enhance the appearance of the community along the IL Route 171 corridor, as well as along key streets within the neighborhood.

Steps Completed

At this time no streetscaping and property improvement programs have been completed.

Moving Forward

The County should work toward improving the appearance of key corridors and intersections within Fairmont and especially the businesses along IL Route 171. The County should work with the Township and property owners to install streetscape elements such as pedestrian crosswalks, street-lighting, and directional signage at key intersections in the community. Along IL Route 171, the County should work with IDOT to have streetscaping improvements included as part of any street resurfacing projects. In addition, the County should strengthen its code enforcement efforts for businesses along IL Route 171.

10. Address governance of Fairmont.

As an unincorporated area, Fairmont has significant governance challenges. The Plan recommends two strategies for addressing governance of Fairmont. First, Will County should create an advisory council of residents and business owners that will be facilitated by the Will County Land Use Department. Second, Will County should facilitate a process to engage the Fairmont community in addressing its future governance. The purpose of this process would be to conduct research and analysis to determine what future governance structure is most efficient and effective and then recommend clear steps to achieve this outcome.

Steps Completed

Will County and Fairmont residents have created an advisory council of residents and business owners (termed the “Fairmont Community Partnership”) that is facilitated by Steve Lazzara of the Will County Land Use Department. The Partnership meets on a monthly basis to discuss various issues and initiatives.

Moving Forward

The County should continue to encourage and participate in the Fairmont Community Partnership. As implementation continues, Fairmont residents should continue to be involved in decision-making that affects their community, and discussions of governance should be encouraged.

Conclusion

As CMAP’s two-year commitment comes to a close, we want to encourage Will County and the Fairmont community to continue to work towards implementing the plan. The County and the community should be commended for all that has been accomplished. CMAP will continue to touch base on an annual basis concerning project implementation and would appreciate updates on significant activities and progress. Thank you for your participation in the LTA program, and we look forward to working with you again in the future.