

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 Norridge 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 Norridge: to find out what types of public participation had occurred in the Village prior to this project (see Figure 5 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 6 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 Norridge's future. Since Norridge had not experienced many long-range planning processes like this one in nearly fifteen years, 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 the large population of senior citizens in the Village, as well as younger families and newer 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 Norridge's Comprehensive Plan, the Village's Plan Commission acted as the project's Steering Committee. The Plan Commission 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 relatively successful at reaching a diverse range of perspectives about Norridge's future. Working directly with organizations that cater to specific target populations — like the Seniors Assistance Center, the various school districts, and the Divine Savior Church — was a highly effective way of reaching both senior citizens and young families alike. In Norridge, the municipal staff was helpful in disseminating information about public meetings, and residents seemed to stay tuned into community resources like the *Norridge News* and the Eisenhower Library community board. Some targeted groups, like newer residents and non-native English speakers like Polish-American residents, were harder to reach specifically. These groups should continue to be the subject of targeted community engagement as the Village moves forward and updates its comprehensive plan.

OVERVIEW OF OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The community engagement activities carried on 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 *Norridge Harwood Heights News* (both in print and electronic), and local access cable;
- Working with community institutions like the Eisenhower Public Library, Divine Savior Church, Pennoyer School District, and the Seniors Assistance Center 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;
- Using Ridgewood High School's WRHS radio broadcast to share information about each public meeting;
- 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 Plan Commission to learn about their goals and priorities.

Village Board and Plan Commission Meeting

CMAF attended a Village Board meeting on May 25, 2011 in order to speak with the board's six trustees as well as the Mayor and the Village Clerk. Additionally, the meeting was attended by members of the Norridge Plan Commission. This meeting of combined elected and appointed officials gave CMAF staff the opportunity to introduce these officials to the comprehensive plan project, and to garner their input about what issues and opportunities should be addressed in the plan.

Issues

Village officials shared a range of issues that they believe the village faces today and that they hope the comprehensive plan will address. Economic development was a main concern, since the desire to augment the village's two commercial nodes (the HIP and Norridge Commons) with new development is difficult to achieve in a built-out community like Norridge. A similar issue was the need for a greater variety of stores, with more higher-end retail or sit-down restaurant options. The officials expressed a

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common sentiment that they would like to attract more people to Norridge — both new residents and visitors — perhaps through the creation of a central downtown or “town square” area that could create a central spot for socializing, gathering, living, working and shopping.

Other issues related to the physical environment and built environment of the village included addressing the vacant properties in the planned unit development (PUD) area and the need for redevelopment along Irving Park Road. Officials expressed concerns regarding the overall lack of parking available in the Irving Park Road corridor and the appearance of many of the existing, older, structures. Although Officials agreed that the municipal facilities were a tremendous asset of the community, one particular issue with municipal facilities that was raised by several participants was the need for a new police station. There was also some discussion regarding flooding problems that occur in the residential areas.

Opportunities

The opportunities for positive change that officials noted were directly related to the issues they discussed earlier in the meeting.

The group shared ideas for the creation of a village center that would have a cluster of commercial and civic amenities and would be safe and easy to walk around with families. The officials said that the community craves this type of downtown area, since there currently is not a central meeting place and many Norridge residents end up frequenting the town centers of nearby municipalities for socializing and entertainment.

Overall, the sentiment of village officials indicated excitement about the possibility of making Norridge into more of a destination in the region, since it already has such great proximity to the City of Chicago, O’Hare International Airport and many other communities.

Plan Commission Meeting

CMAP staff met with the Plan Commission on June 8, 2011. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the key project team members, the members of the Plan Commission, the proposed planning process, scope of work, and to obtain early feedback from the Commission regarding their issues and opportunities for the Village.

Issues

Plan Commission members discussed a number of issues within the community. One of the key issues cited was the need for a town center. Members discussed a number of topics related to this including where to locate a center, what uses should be situated there, and potential traffic concerns for adjacent properties. Members also discussed how the Village has appropriately addressed the teardown issue of the 2000’s and felt that newer homes, and additions, are attractive and maintain the character of the community. Members noted that the village was aging, and that there was a need to attract younger families. There were also concerns centered upon economic development and how the village should be proactive in attracting new businesses.

Opportunities

Opportunities for improvement included the current underutilized and/or vacant industrial and commercial properties that exist in the community. Members discussed how the industrial areas near the movie theatre (west side of Harlem Avenue), within the PUD area, could be the most ideal location

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for a new town center. The members also talked about how new residential and commercial developments in the Village have been of high-quality construction, materials, architecture and site design. The HIP and Norridge Commons were noted as being tremendous assets of the Village that also help bring tax revenue into the Village. The centers also add to the image and identity of Norridge.

Initial Public “Kick-off” Meeting

The general public in Norridge was invited to a community meeting to initiate the comprehensive planning process for the village at large, using the outreach methods previously described in this section. This meeting was held in the evening at the Estelle Sieb Community Center on June 15, 2011. The meeting was well-attended by community leaders and residents, with over 50 participants. Attendees were led through a workshop that was designed for them to share their main issues and strengths of the village with each other.

Since the village did not have an adopted comprehensive plan, this meeting allowed CMAP staff and village officials to briefly describe the comprehensive planning process to the general public and convey its importance as an instrument of decision-making for future growth and development in the community. Next, each participant had the chance to share his/her main issue in the village today with the entire group, which was followed by a small group discussion exercise. Participants were divided into groups of 10 to 15 people, and working with aerial maps of the village. CMAP, Plan Commission members, and village staff facilitated group discussions about their perceived opportunities for improvement around the community.

Issues

Similar to the village officials, the general public’s most common issues also revolved around the need for a greater focus on economic development. The issue that was raised most frequently was the lack of a downtown or “town center” area in Norridge. People shared their concerns that the stores throughout the village today are not unique and do not cater to the particular populations (like young families as well as senior citizens) who live in the community. Other people mentioned concerns about the vacant industrial properties and the need for attracting new industrial uses into those sites.

There were also several issues raised regarding the village’s infrastructure, from flooding and sewer problems, to roadway maintenance, to a lack of bicycle lanes and paths. Some participants mentioned the need for more public green space in the village, as well as added youth activities beyond the sports programming that currently exists. Lastly the issue of improving community identity (especially distinguishing it from Chicago) and retaining residents (like second generation families who might be moving away from the village) was raised by many participants.

Top Community Workshop Attendee Issues:

- The lack of a downtown area / town center
- Vacant industrial properties
- The need for improved stormwater management (flooding concerns)
- Heavy traffic patterns on major thoroughfares
- The need for an economic development plan for attracting high-quality unique stores

Opportunities

Overall, public meeting attendees felt that Norridge is a safe, friendly place to live with good services. The opportunities they identified for improvement mainly centered on different aspects of the village’s physical form and built environment — from underutilized land to streetscaping possibilities — to the

relocation of municipal facilities. Given the “built-out” nature of, and lack of, available land in Norridge, there were a lot of interesting ideas presented by the public for improving the village despite its physical limitations.

Several different suggestions were offered for the types of businesses to attract to the vacant industrial properties and theater building in the PUD: high-tech industries, light industrial companies, big box stores, or even smaller boutique retail as part of a new downtown area. In general, the public pointed to redevelopment opportunities throughout the village, from Irving Park Road to Montrose Avenue. The public also identified areas for new street lamps, decorative pavers, street trees and plantings, and other streetscaping that would improve the walkability and attraction of key corridors and intersections, such as around Lawrence and Cumberland Avenues. A similar idea surfaced to turn Montrose Avenue near the PUD into a boulevard, with wider streets and streetscaping.

Other ideas focused on municipal and civic facilities, such as relocating and rebuilding the police station, or improving maintenance of the sidewalks and grounds around certain schools.

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 Norridge’s future prosperity.

Public Visioning Charrette

On October 25, 2011, approximately 50 residents and Village officials gathered at the Estelle Sieb Community Center to partake in a visioning workshop, during which participants divided up into smaller groups to envision the Village’s future through a mapping exercise. The ideas and suggestions that were generated by this exercise are outlined in the following summary. During the visioning workshop, participants responded to a series of questions outlined in a discussion workbook. From these questions, residents developed ideas about topics including residential and commercial development, transportation, open space, and community infrastructure and identity. After this exercise, each smaller group of participants reported their top two important ideas to the larger group, and then all participants voted individually – using live, interactive polling technology – for the idea they thought is most important to address to plan the future of Norridge.

The “Big Ideas”

Each of the smaller groups was asked to provide two of their most important ideas from the mapping exercise. Although all of the ideas and comments will be taken into consideration, by forcing each group to choose only two ideas, a view of the attendees’ most pressing concerns and projects becomes more visible.

The top ten ideas expressed during the meeting and voted on by individuals (both at the workshop and later through an online survey open to the general public in Norridge) were:

- 1) Develop a defined “town center,” with a mix of desirable retail, housing options, and public space.
- 2) Upgrade the Village’s infrastructure, from roads to utilities
- 3) Create pedestrian and bicycle trails throughout the Village

- 4) Develop townhomes in key locations – on residential streets and on larger lots so that they are well-spaced
- 5) Build a new senior center
- 6) Prioritize new development on vacant property
- 7) Create more open space when possible
- 8) Retain the community’s character of smaller homes and a familiar, friendly place
- 9) Build a new police station in a different location
- 10) Conduct streetscaping and beautification of the Village’s gateways

Please see Figures 1-3 for the presentation slides that captured the demographic data of visioning charette participants, as well as Figure 4 to find the percentage results of Norridge community respondent’s priority issues for the comprehensive plan.

Figure 1

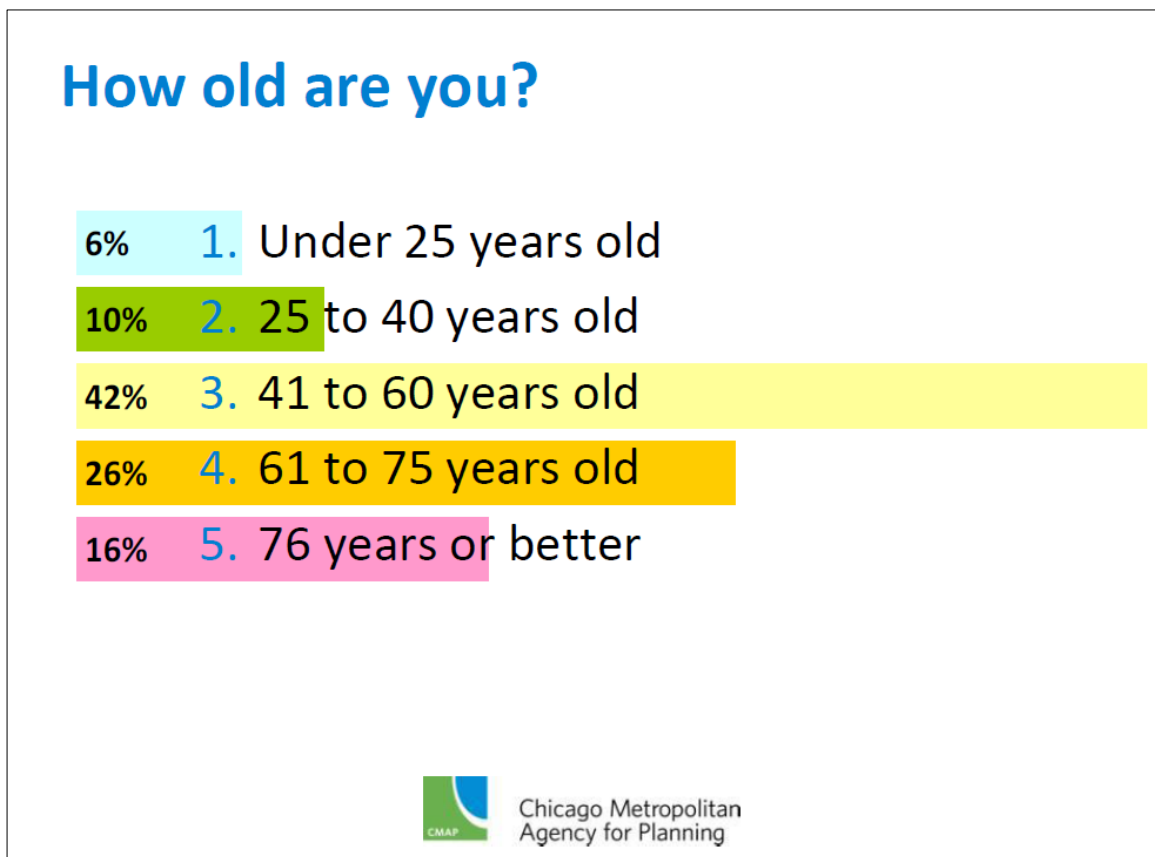


Figure 2

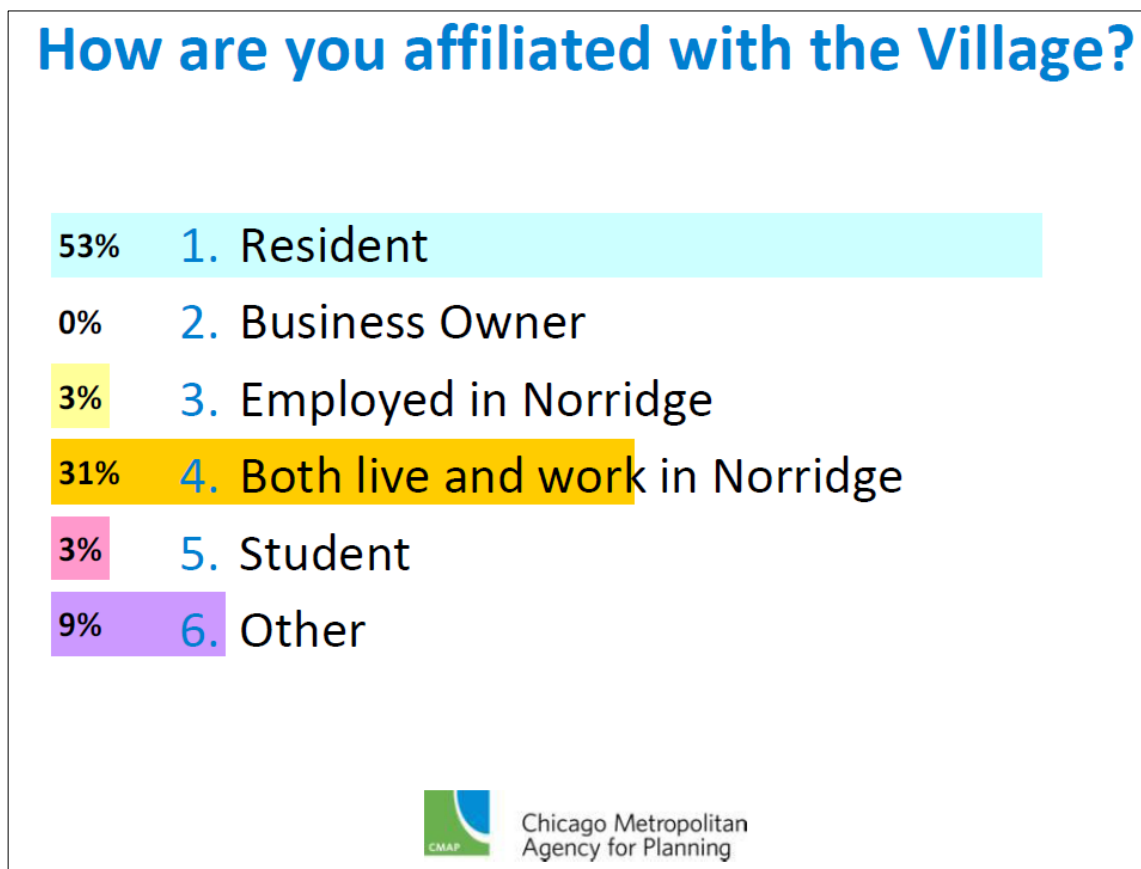


Figure 3

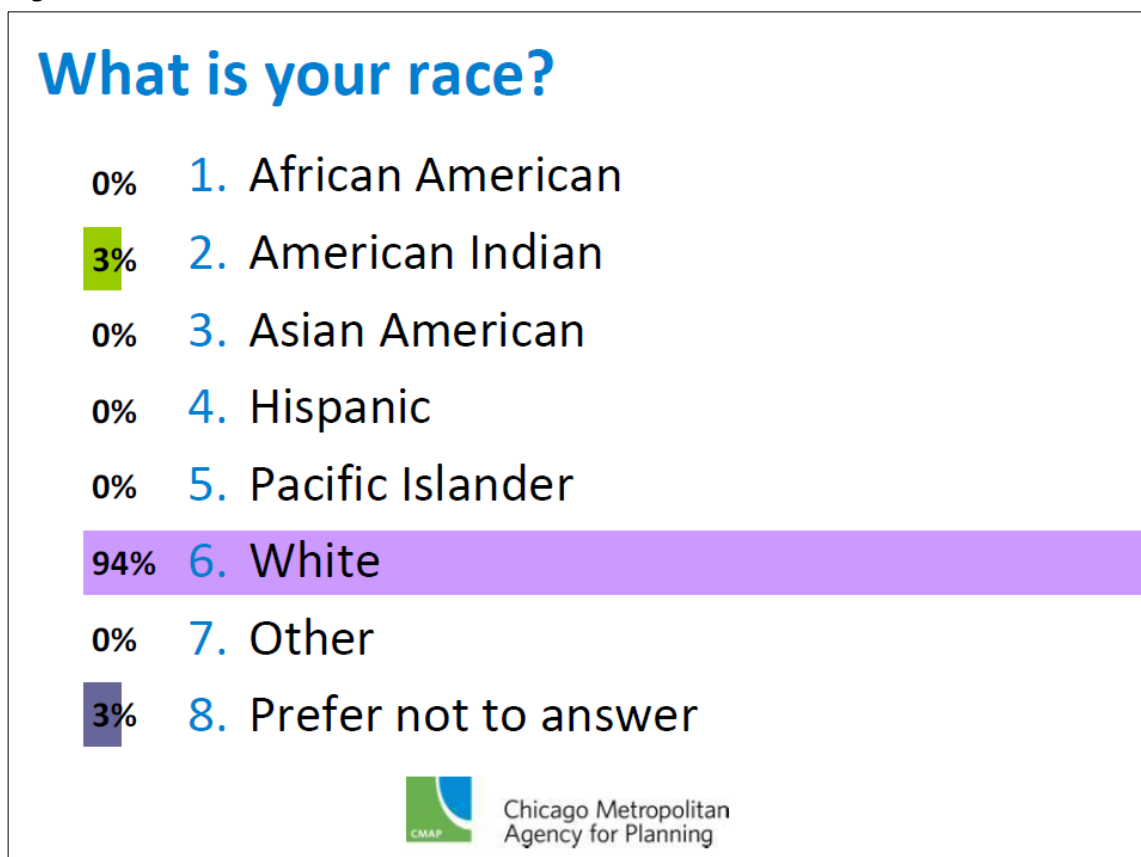
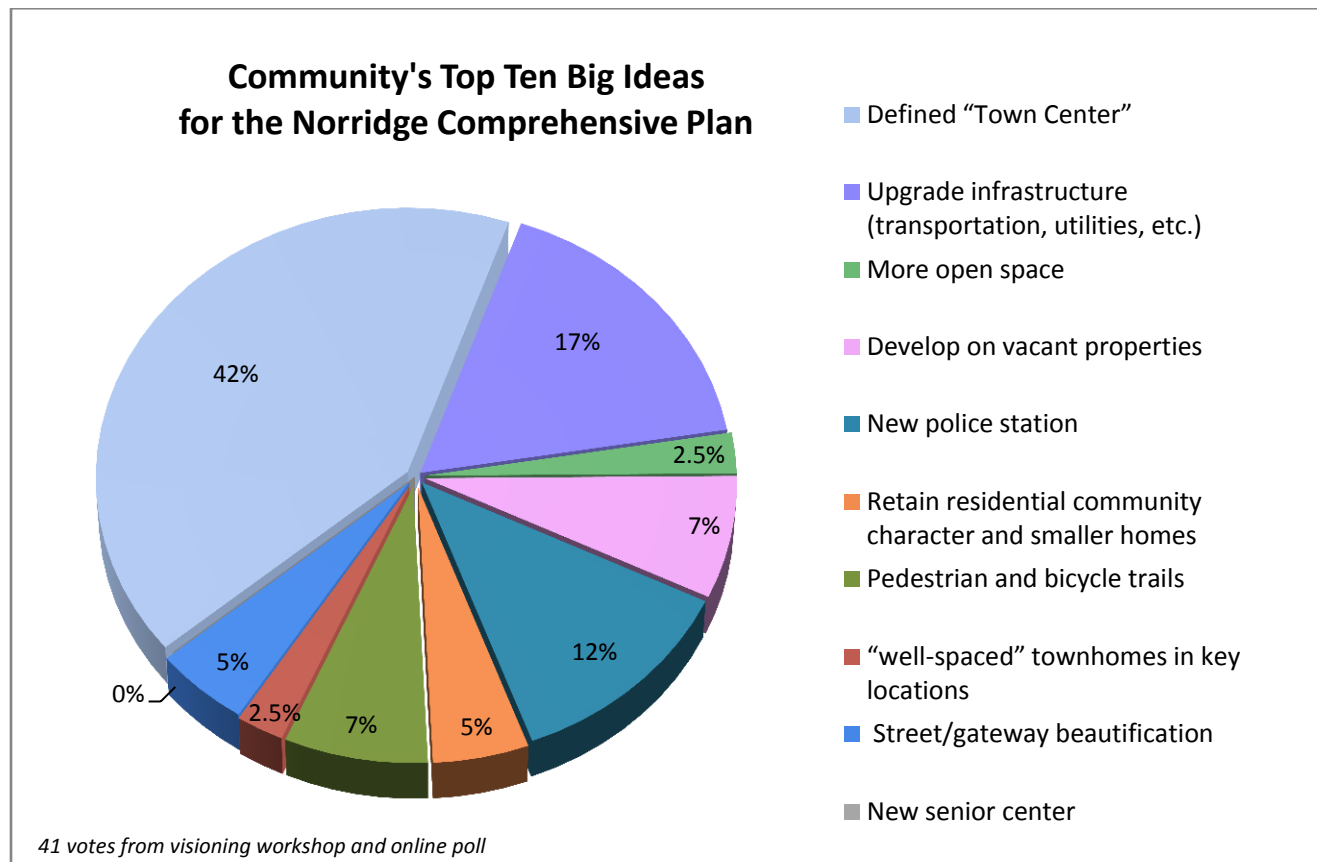


Figure 4



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 ten months.

Public Open House

On May 10, 2012, over 50 people attended the Open House, representing elected officials, community institutions like Eisenhower Library, 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 lead to robust discussions of the draft plan’s main recommendations, ranging from the Town Center conceptual site plans to proposed land use changes.

The Open House meeting was held to garner feedback from the general public in Norridge 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 of the “town center” concept, the increase of parks and open space, and the improvements to sidewalks and bike paths for nonmotorized travelers.

Additional Outreach Templates

The following worksheet template is 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.

What are the “hot button” topics that tend to galvanize the public and get people to events in your community?

Please describe your typical methods for advertising a community/public meeting:

Who is your media contact, and will we want to distribute in languages other than English?

Do the constituents in your community tend to be tech-savvy and computer-literate?

Should we post event information on your municipal website, and if so who is the IT contact person?

Please list three ideal community locations for public meetings:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

What are the AV capabilities – projector(s), screen(s) or blank walls, local access TV broadcasting?

When are the preferred days and times of day to hold a public meeting in your community?

Are there other community events scheduled in the coming months when we could partner?

Figure 6: Stakeholder Analysis Worksheet

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Identify potential stakeholder (individual or group)	Position regarding this plan (supportive, dissenting, etc.)	Potential Steering Committee member?	Candidate for other outreach?	Notes about resources	Contact person(s) & information
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____		
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Adapted from the University of Wisconsin - Center for Land Use Education's Public Participation Plan, 2004