



# Sugar Run Creek Area NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

DRAFT October 2016

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following groups, entities, residents, business owners, and elected officials who participated in the creation of this Plan:

## **Will County Board Speaker**

Jim Moustis, Frankfort

## **Will County Board**

Charles “Chuck” Maher,  
Republican Caucus Chair,  
Naperville

Herbert Brooks, Jr., Democratic  
Caucus Chair, Joliet

### **District 1**

Robert Howard, Beecher;  
Judy Ogalla, Monee

### **District 2**

Jim Moustis, Frankfort;  
Cory Singer, Frankfort

### **District 3**

Donald Moran, Romeoville; Beth  
Rice, Bolingbrook

### **District 4**

Kenneth Harris, Bolingbrook;  
Jacqueline Traynere, Bolingbrook

### **District 5**

Darren Bennefield, Aurora;  
Gretchen Fritz, Plainfield

### **District 6**

Don Gould, Shorewood;  
Ragan Freitag, Wilmington

### **District 7**

Steve Balich, Homer Glen;  
Mike Fricilone, Homer Glen

### **District 8**

Herbert Brooks, Jr., Joliet;  
Denise Winfrey, Joliet

### **District 9**

Annette Parker, Crest Hill;  
Lauren Staley-Ferry, Joliet

### **District 10**

Steve Wilhelmi, Joliet;  
Joseph Babich, Joliet

### **District 11**

Suzanne Hart, Naperville  
Charles “Chuck” Maher,  
Naperville

### **District 12**

Tom Weigel, New Lenox;  
Ray Tuminello, New Lenox

### **District 13**

Liz Collins, Plainfield;  
Mark Ferry, Plainfield

## **Will County Executive**

Lawrence M. Walsh

## **Will County Land Use and Development Committee**

Tom Weigel, Chairman

Judy Ogalla, Vice Chairman

Steve Balich

Robert Howard

Lauren Staley-Ferry

Ray Tuminello

Denise Winfrey

## **Funding Acknowledgement**

This project was supported through the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning’s (CMAP) Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program, which is funded by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), and the Chicago Community Trust. The Metropolitan Mayors Caucus (MMC) and CMAP would like to thank these funders for their support for this project.

### **Will County Planning and Zoning Commission**

Leonard Vallone, Chairman

Hugh E. Stipan, Vice-Chairman

Barbara Peterson, Secretary

Scott Lager

Michael Carruthers

Kimberly Mitchell

Thomas White

### **Will County Land Use Department**

Curt Paddock, Director

Brian Radner, Assistant Director

Steve Lazzara, Long Range Senior Planner

Colin Duesing, Long Range Planner

Lucía Zúñiga, Seasonal Intern

Jonathan Stytz, Seasonal Intern

### **Sugar Run Creek Plan Steering Committee**

Reverend Herbert Brooks, Jr. – County Board Member, District 8

Denise Winfrey – County Board Member, District 8

Kendall Jackson – Director of Planning, City of Joliet

Dr. Joe Salmieri – Superintendent, Laraway School District 70-C

Dan Vera – Township Supervisor, Joliet Township

Mike Klemens – Director of Transportation and Planning, Will County Governmental League

Mary Baskerville – Will County Environmental Network

Larry Burich – Superintendent of Planning, Joliet Park District

Kristin Erickson – Economic Development Coordinator, Will County Center for Economic Development

### **Project Partners**

Adrienne Wuellner – Pace Suburban Bus

Corinne Crawford – Forest Preserve District of Will County

### **About CMAP**

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is our region's official comprehensive planning organization. The agency and its partners are developing ON TO 2050, a new comprehensive regional plan to help the seven counties and 284 communities of northeastern Illinois implement strategies that address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality-of-life issues. See [www.cmap.illinois.gov](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov) for more information.







## Table of Contents

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is a Neighborhood Plan?	1
1.2 Where is the Study Area Located?	2
1.3 History & Context	4
1.5 Planning Process	6
1.6 Plan Organization	7

### CHAPTER 2: LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Key Themes	9
2.2 Land Use Plan	10

### Chapter 3: HOUSING

Vision	15
3.1 Existing Conditions	16
3.2 Infill Development & Alternative Uses	17
3.3 New Residential Development	25
3.4 Resident Access to Services	29

### CHAPTER 4: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vision	35
4.1 Existing Conditions	36
4.2 Commercial Areas	37
4.4 Industrial Areas	44
4.4 Implementation	49

### CHAPTER 5: TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY

Vision	51
5.1 Existing Conditions	52
5.2 Roadways	53
5.3 Pedestrian & Bicycle Network	62
5.5 Implementation	71

### CHAPTER 6: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Vision	73
6.1 Existing Conditions	74
6.2 Parks & Recreation	75
6.3 Regional Trail Network	83
6.4 Stormwater Management	87
6.5 Water Supply	92
6.6 Implementation	96





# Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 What is a Neighborhood Plan?

The Will County Land Use Department has contracted with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) to prepare a detailed neighborhood plan for the Sugar Run Creek Area, which includes a number of distinct neighborhoods separated by a network of heavily travelled roads and rail lines, and several quarries.

A neighborhood plan establishes a 10 to 15 year vision of a community's desired physical environment and outlines the process by which the community can realize that vision. In addition to serving as a framework for future reinvestment and redevelopment in the community, the plan seeks to explore and promote new opportunities that reflect changes in the community and the surrounding socioeconomic landscape.

This new plan is a long-term document that complements the County's Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP), which includes a long-range vision for the entire County, and should be used on a regular basis to assist in land use and development decisions. This plan serves as a guide for elected and appointed officials, County staff, community residents, local business owners, and potential investors, allowing each to make informed administrative and implementation choices regarding land use, transportation, infrastructure, and capital improvements throughout the Sugar Run Creek area.

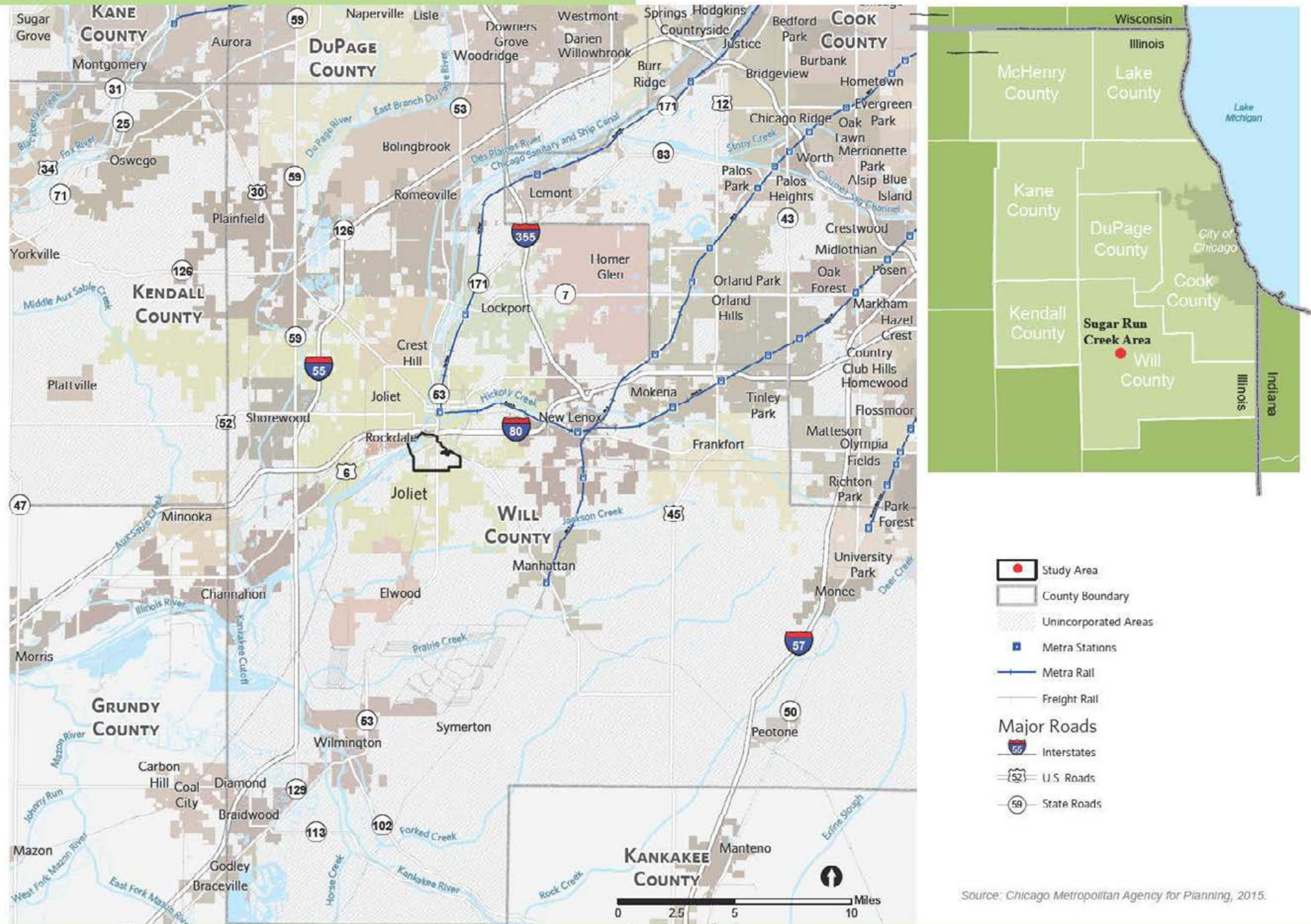
This plan should also be considered flexible and able to adapt with change. At any time, this plan can be updated to better match shifting local needs, interests, and opportunities. It is recommended that the plan be reviewed every 5 to 7 years to ensure the document remains relevant.

## 1.2 Where is the Study Area Located?

Will County includes numerous urbanized areas that have experienced development, but have never been annexed into a municipality. The Sugar Run Creek Area study area (**Figure 1.1**) primarily consists of land in unincorporated Will County including several neighborhoods, the largest in population being the Preston Heights neighborhood, which is a Census Designated Place (CDP) located directly south of downtown Joliet and Interstate 80. Incorporated portions of the City of Joliet also weave through the study area including a residential neighborhood located south of Interstate 80 and west of IL Route 53, two quarries, and a light industrial area.

The study area lies within Will County approximately 35 miles southwest of downtown Chicago. Interstate 80 runs east-west along the northern border of the study area and IL Route 53 provides a central and historic north-south corridor for the community. The Des Plaines River forms the western border of the study area and joins the Kankakee River near Channahon, forming the Illinois River and accommodating travel and freight movement between the greater Mississippi region and the Great Lakes. South of the designated study area is the Chicagoland Speedway, Route 66 Raceway, and two large intermodal facilities and their adjacent warehousing developments to comprise the CenterPoint Intermodal Center which have significant impacts within the study area.

Figure 1.1: Study Area Location







## 1.3 History & Context

The residential neighborhoods that predominantly make up the Sugar Run Creek Area were developed throughout the mid-twentieth century. During this time, the Patterson Road corridor was also home to numerous blues clubs. While none of these clubs remain, they attracted a number of famous musicians to the Sugar Run Creek Area throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s.

The famed US Route 66, commonly known as the “Mother Road,” also winds its way through the study area as IL Route 53. IL Route 53 is an active throughway through the study area connecting the Interstate 80 interchange with large intermodal facilities south of the community.

The area’s natural environment offers many opportunities for recreation and preservation. The portion of the Des Plaines River adjacent to the study area features the historic Brandon Road Lock & Dam as well as a segment of the Illinois & Michigan (I&M) Canal. The parallel I&M Canal Trail provides access to recreation and stewardship opportunity for Sugar Run Creek Area residents and visitors. Two national attractions, the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery are also within a 15-minute drive to the south.

Several portions of the IL Route 53 corridor within the study area have been highlighted for improvements in other plans, including placemaking improvements that welcome visitors to the area. The Sugar Run Creek Area is unique in its ties to blues music history and proximity to regional recreation assets could be leveraged in branding and gateway improvements in the area.

Photo Credit:  
Creative Commons licensed (NC) flickr photo by Hawthorn M.



## 1.4 Why Does the Sugar Run Creek Area Need a Plan?

The Sugar Run Creek Area developed incrementally throughout the 20th century, resulting in disconnected development that has limited the area's ability to establish a strong sense of community identity and created barriers between residential areas and community assets. The character of the area is also influenced by the presence of several active and inactive quarries. In recent years, the area's proximity to an expanding core of industrial and logistics businesses anchored by the CenterPoint Intermodal Center has impacted residents' quality of life through increased truck traffic and congestion along the IL Route 53 corridor that traverses through the community. Overall, poor accessibility and proximity to a growing industrial area has contributed to a fragmented sense of identity, physical isolation, and resulting disinvestment in the Sugar Run Creek Area.

Previous plans, particularly Will County's 2030 Transportation Plan (2009) and revised Land Resource Management Plan (2011) developed broad recommendations to address land use, transportation, and quality of life issues. While these issues will benefit from regional collaboration and coordination, solutions developed at the regional scale must be tailored to best fit the needs of the Sugar Run Creek Area community.

Although the Illinois Route 53 Corridor Study (2014) provided the groundwork for a more area-specific plan, the study provided recommendations for a corridor of regional importance and called for more neighborhood-based planning.

To answer these challenges, Will County has led the creation of a neighborhood plan that provides a unified vision for the Sugar Run Creek Area and identifies strategies to improve connectivity, encourage future investment, and engage local and regional partners in implementation efforts.

Will County and CMAP staff talk with Sugar Run Creek Area residents during the Neighborhood Vision Workshop conducted on March 22, 2016.

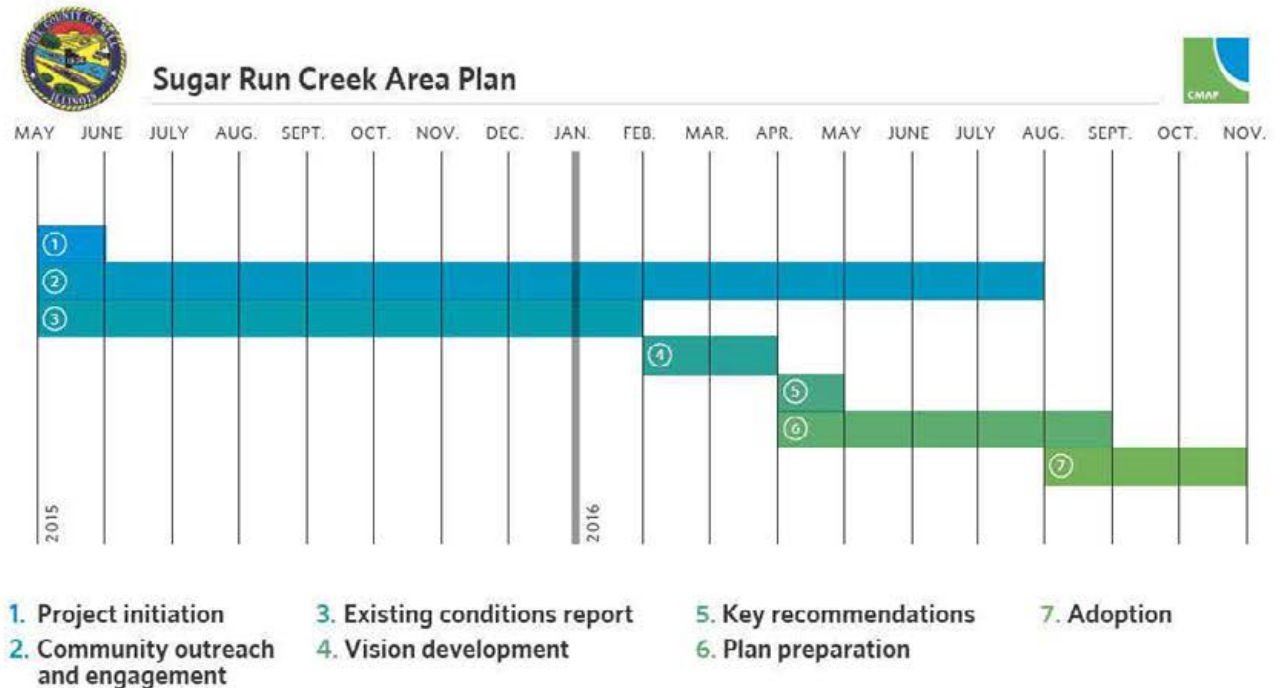


## 1.5 Planning Process

The Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan is the result of a multi-stage planning process comprising extensive community outreach, visioning, and drafting of plan recommendations. In May 2015, Will County Land Use Department staff, with the assistance of CMAP staff, developed a scope of work for the project. A work plan established project tasks, a timeline for the project, and recommended participation by a community steering committee to review the plan process and develop the final plan and recommendations.

The 14-month planning process included multiple opportunities for public review, including public visioning workshops, key person interviews, and a community information fair. The key steps in the planning process are illustrated in the adjacent figure.

**Figure 1.2: Planning Process**





## 1.6 Plan Organization

The Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan is organized into the following chapters:

1. *Introduction* describes the purpose of the neighborhood plan and the process utilized to create the plan.
2. *Land Use & Development* identifies future land use and desired character for all parts of the Sugar Run Creek Area. This chapter provides the physical foundation upon which all other plan recommendations are based.
3. *Housing* identifies recommendations to encourage preservation and reinvestment in established neighborhoods in the Sugar Run Creek Area, support new residential development in strategic locations, and promote a wider range of housing options.
4. *Economic Development* contains strategies to reposition existing commercial and industrial areas and expand employment opportunities within the Study Area.
5. *Transportation & Mobility* details roadway, transit, and non-motorized transportation strategies to increase safety, connectivity and ease of access, while detailing diverse mobility options which can support economic growth and improve community image in Sugar Run Creek.
6. *Green Infrastructure* identifies recommendations to expand Sugar Run Creek's trail network, improve access to local open space, and to expand recreational opportunities through new parks. This chapter also identifies stormwater management strategies to minimize impacts of future development on Sugar Run Creek and minimize flood damage in established neighborhoods, while encouraging responsible future development.

Each of the following chapters conclude with an Implementation section that summarizes actions to be undertaken by the County and its partners following adoption of the plan. Each action is accompanied by a level of priority and potential funding resources.

**[NOTE: Implementation sections will be developed following initial review by Will county staff and the Steering Committee]**



A photograph of a suburban street lined with large, mature trees. On the left, a white house is partially visible behind a chain-link fence. The street is paved and leads into the distance where more trees and houses are visible. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the top right of the image, containing the chapter title.

## Chapter 2 LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT



## 2.1 Key Themes

The recommendations of the Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan encompass a variety of topics and are organized under the four chapters of Housing, Economic Development, Transportation and Mobility, and Green Infrastructure. While each of those chapters contain recommendations that are unique in terms of their geography and application, this chapter examines the overarching themes that serve as common threads throughout the Neighborhood Plan.

The following key themes were developed as the result of an extensive public outreach and planning process. These statements form the foundation for recommendations outlined in the Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan.

### Stabilize existing neighborhoods by...

- o Facilitating the strategic reuse of vacant lots that enhance the overall appeal of the community and help increase property values.
- o Encouraging new single-family attached and multi-family development that provides attractive options for young professionals, new families, and existing residents seeking to age in place within the community.
- o Improving vehicular and pedestrian safety as well the appearance of development, particularly along major corridors like IL Route 53.

### Encourage new investment by...

- o Promoting a neighborhood scale, mixed use district at the intersection of Zarley Boulevard and IL Route 53 that includes a variety of new housing types and smaller scale, local serving retail.
- o Installing streetscaping, public art, and gateway features that foster a unique district identity and provide a pleasant experience for those walking to shops from the surrounding community, or visiting the area as they drive along the historic “Mother Road,” Route 66.

- o Facilitating a pedestrian-oriented, larger scale commercial development at Zurich Road and IL Route 53 that is accessible for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists alike.
- o Repositioning and expanding the Alessio Drive industrial area and promoting more intense use of other existing industrial properties within an urban design framework that minimizes impacts to surrounding neighborhoods.

### Improve mobility by...

- o Increasing use of local transit and access to regional transit that provide greater access to the regional job market.
- o Encouraging industrial expansion alongside needed investments in freight infrastructure that will limit future truck volumes passing through the community.
- o Supporting the relocation of the Laraway School from a heavily travelled truck freight corridor to an area that is more residential in character and strategically located to better serve future residents.

### Enhance quality of life by...

- o Improving access to existing parks and recreation assets and creating local links to the regional trail network.
- o Leveraging undeveloped natural areas, including inactive quarry sites, for publicly accessible open space and recreation where feasible.
- o Reducing flood risk and identifying a safe, sustainable water supply for long term needs of the local community.
- o Expanding of economic development tools and community services, including the Joliet Public Library, to the urbanized neighborhood which functions much like residential neighborhood within Joliet.
- o Promoting the establishment of a neighborhood group to advocate for community needs.

## 2.2 Land Use Plan

The Land Use Plan identifies future land use and desired character for all parcels within the Sugar Run Creek Area. The Land Use Plan represents the translation of the community's vision and County policy onto the neighborhood landscape and provides the foundation for all other recommendations in the Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan.

While many recommendations in the Land Use Plan build on the neighborhoods established pattern of development, new development, such as the introduction of new housing types and the expansion and repositioning of commercial and industrial areas, represents a new direction for previously undeveloped or underutilized sites within the community. The Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan, including the Land Use Plan, prioritize the rights of property owners, while communicating long-term policy intended to inform and support decisions by Will County staff and officials as redevelopment and reinvestment occurs over time.

### Residential

A primary goal of the Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan is to stabilize and improve established single-family neighborhoods, while improving housing options. To accomplish this, the Land Use Plan underscores the need for infill within existing detached, single-family areas and the expansion of attached, single-family and multi-family development along the IL Route 53 corridor. More detailed discussion of residential area policies is located in ***Chapter 3: Housing***.

#### Detached Single-family

Detached single-family homes should continue to be the predominant land use within the Sugar Run Creek Area. Lot sizes and block structure vary by subdivision and neighborhood, but quarter-acre lots organized in a modified grid are typical. Moving forward, infill development within established single-family neighborhoods should be of the same character and scale as adjacent residences. Single-family neighborhoods should also continue to be served by local institutions and park sites located in easily accessible locations within the neighborhood.

#### Attached Single-family

Attached single-family development comprises housing where multiple units occupy the same structure, but are accessed individually such as a townhome or rowhome. Existing attached single-family development is concentrated on the east side of IL Route 53 near the Zarley Boulevard intersection. Additional attached single-family development should be encouraged in nearby areas to the west of IL Route 53 surrounding existing detached single-family neighborhoods.

#### Multi-family

Multi-family housing includes development where multiple units are located within the same structure and are accessible via a shared entrance and common area. The Land Use Plan supports the development of both owner- and renter-occupied multi-family housing as long as it is of high quality and contributes positively to neighborhood image and appearance. New multi-family housing should be encouraged as a complement to desired future commercial development in the area to the west of the existing Pheasant Run Apartments multi-family complex.

## Commercial

Commercial development occupies a small portion of the Sugar Run Creek Area, but there is a strong desire among local residents to see retail opportunities expanded. Future commercial areas should include a mix of neighborhood serving retailers and service providers as well larger scale retail development along the IL Route 53 corridor and other major routes. More detailed discussion of commercial area policies is located in **Chapter 4: Economic Development**.

## Neighborhood Node

This land use comprises of retail uses and service providers arranged in a compact, pedestrian friendly district concentrated around the Zarley Boulevard and IL Route 53 intersection. Mixed development including residences above ground floor retail and office uses is strongly encouraged in this area. Streetscaping should be prioritized in this area to foster a strong sense of place and an inviting pedestrian environment.

## Corridor Commercial

Corridor commercial development consists of a mix of contain retail, office, and service-oriented commercial uses that cater to travelers as well as the day-to-day needs local households. Commercial structures should be encouraged to locate at or near the front property line with parking provided in the rear or to the side, thus prioritizing the pedestrian environment while allowing for convenient access for vehicles travelling along IL Route 53 and Manhattan Road.

## Light Industrial

The Sugar Run Creek Area is proximate to a growing industrial district of regional importance that is anchored by the CenterPoint Intermodal Center, however, limited job opportunities exist within the Study Area. The former Zurich Quarry site represents a new opportunity for light industrial development while the Alessio Drive corridor represents an opportunity to reposition existing development and better leverage vacant or underutilized light industrial land. As redevelopment occurs, light industrial uses should be appropriately buffered and screened from adjacent residential development and from view of public rights-of-way. Additional buffering along creek corridors should also be encouraged. Additional recommendations regarding light industrial land uses are provided in **Chapter 4: Economic Development**.

## Quarry

There are several quarries located within or adjacent to the Study Area, the majority of which are no longer in production. Appropriate future land use has been identified for one quarry, Zurich Quarry, which may potentially be completely refilled and redeveloped during the life of this plan. The other quarry properties within the Study Area are identified as quarry in the Land Use Plan due to the long-term nature of their potential reuse and lack of public ownership. Additional discussion of quarries and potential future reuse is located in **Chapter 6: Green Infrastructure**.

## Institutional

This land use includes a variety of institutions that provide services to Sugar Run Creek residents and the surrounding area. Institutional land uses include places of worship, community organizations, schools, and other public or quasi-public facilities such as the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District. Recreation or open space areas contained within these parcels are also classified as institutional uses.

## Open Space

Open space comprises all recreation areas under the management of the Joliet Park District or the Forest Preserve District of Will County, and private open space areas such as stormwater detention areas and utility corridors. This land use also includes natural features such as wooded areas and undeveloped greenways along local waterways. Additional discussion of open space is included in Chapter 6: Green Infrastructure.

## Agricultural

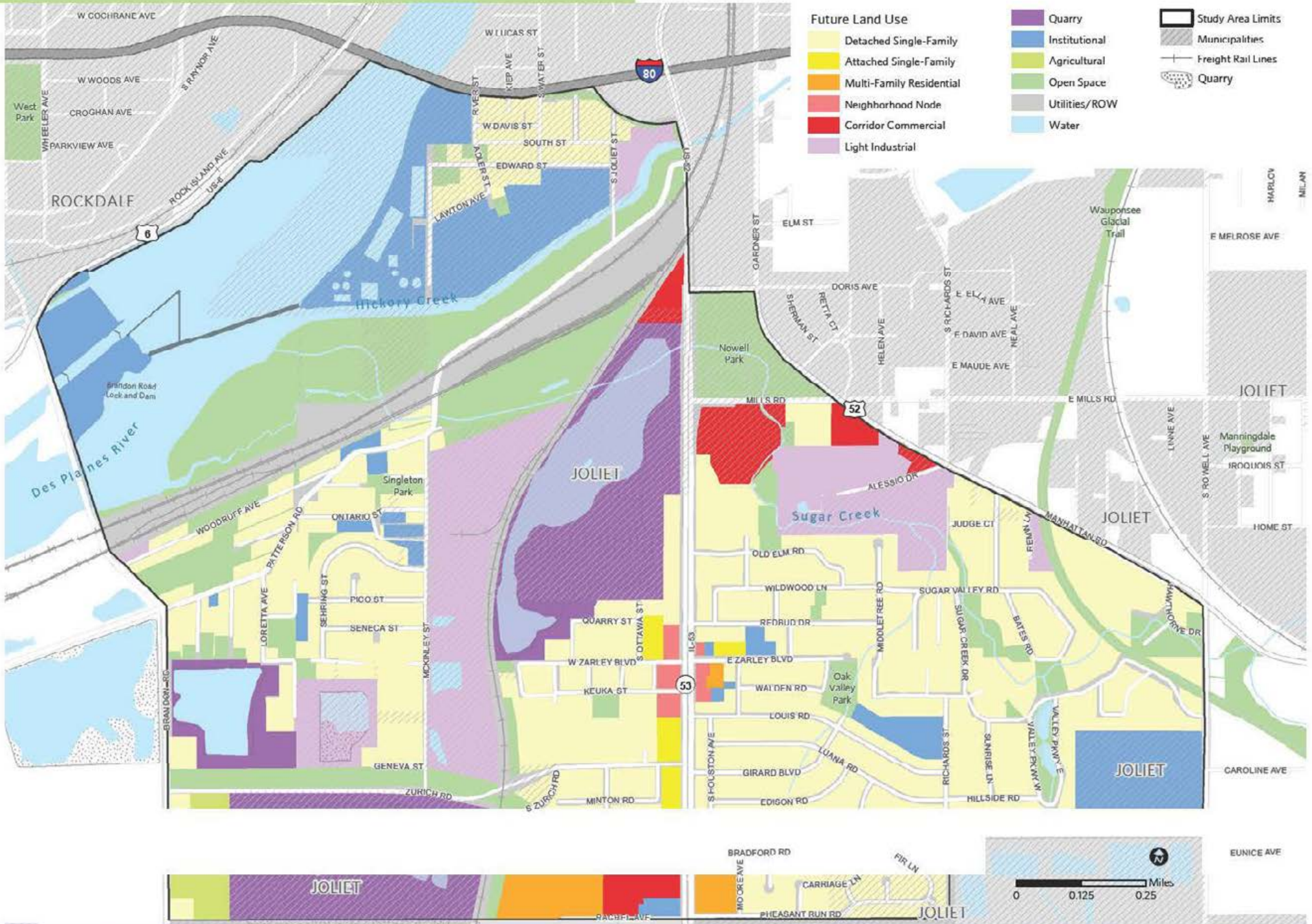
Several areas within the southern portion of the study area are actively farmed. Moving forward, the redevelopment of agricultural parcels located along the IL Route 53 corridor is recommended to accommodate single-family attached and multi-family housing and commercial development in areas where infrastructure and services can be extended efficiently. Agricultural land uses should be maintained in other locations within the study area.

## Utilities/Right-of-way

This land use comprises land dedicated to roadways, railroads, and energy distribution (electricity and gas). Discussion of improvements within these areas is located in ***Chapter 5: Transportation and Mobility***.



**Figure 2.1: Land Use Plan**





# Chapter 3

## HOUSING





## Vision

*In the year 2030, Will County is coordinating with partners to ensure that residents of the Sugar Run Creek Area have access to newly created home renovation and maintenance programs. Funding for neighborhood revitalization is also being used strategically to facilitate new investment including the development of new single-family attached and multi-family neighborhoods. The Sugar Run Creek Area's diverse housing stock has attracted a new generation of young families, given local workers the opportunity to live in the community, and provided opportunities for older residents to age in place and continue to live in the community.*



Pheasant Run is the only existing multi-family housing within the Sugar Run Creek Area.

## 3.1 Existing Conditions

A diverse and well-maintained housing stock is essential for community stability and quality of life. The typical housing within the Study Area is a single-family home with 3 bedrooms. Although housing is of similar age and unit mix, home values are lower in the study area than in the City of Joliet which borders the study area. Vacancies and upkeep are a growing concern among community members.

### Key Findings

- *The Sugar Run Creek Area is primarily owner-occupied, but the area has a higher proportion of vacant housing units and renter-occupied units than Joliet or Will County as a whole.* Approximately 1 in 3 housing units in the study area are rental properties, compared to 1 in 4 in Joliet and 1 in 5 in Will County. Approximately 1 in 8 housing units is vacant and in 2008 9% of owner-occupied units had begun the foreclosure process.
- *Despite being located in a growing part of the Chicago region, recent residential activity in the Study Area has been limited and the housing stock is older on average than Will County as a whole.* The study area's proportion of units built more than 50 years ago is much higher than in Will County. In Joliet and the Sugar Run Creek Area, approximately 1 in 3 housing units (34%) were built prior to 1960, but fewer than 1 in 5 Will County housing units (18%) are from this time period.
- *Median housing value is significantly lower than Joliet and Will County as a whole.* Nearly 60% of owner-occupied housing units in the Sugar Run Creek Area are valued at less than \$150,000, compared to 37% and 24% in Joliet and Will County respectively. The older age and smaller size of homes in the Study Area are contributing factors to the lower median housing value in comparison to the County.

## 3.2 Infill Development & Alternative Uses

The Sugar Run Creek Area's affordable housing stock presents a challenge to single-family home builders seeking to potentially invest in the community. Until the local housing market stabilizes, the County should work with partner organizations and community stakeholders to focus efforts on infill development and alternative uses for vacant land.

Will County updated its zoning ordinance in 2012 and the following strategies build on this recent update to make productive use of vacant land within the Sugar Run Creek community.

### Encourage infill development and reinvestment in single-family neighborhoods.

The redevelopment of vacant lots and reinvestment in existing homes can have a positive impact on surrounding property values and improve the overall vibrancy of a neighborhood. Lower home values in the Study Area appear to be limiting potential for redevelopment of individual lots within established neighborhoods. Will County and partner organizations should continue to use and evaluate existing programs and seek to identify alternative funding mechanisms to help address barriers to investment within established neighborhoods.

Infill development makes efficient use of existing infrastructure and leverages existing investments while minimizing impacts on the built environment and natural resources. Vacant or underutilized properties within areas already serviced by water and sewer and easily accessible from the existing road network should be prioritized for infill and redevelopment. Adjacent areas that could be readily serviced by the expansion of nearby existing infrastructure should also be prioritized.

### Target Sugar Run Creek Area residents for Foreclosure Stabilization Program.

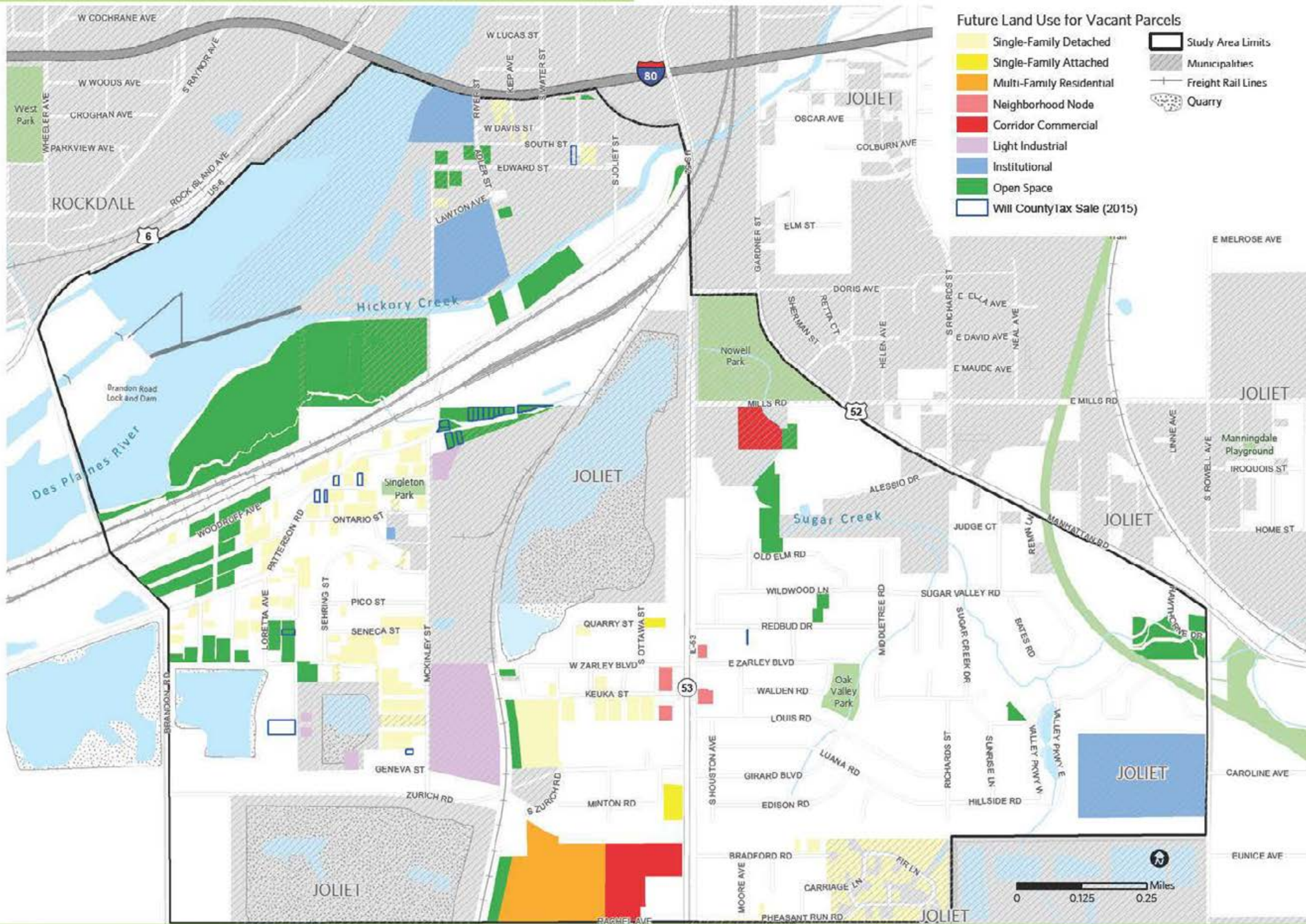
The Foreclosure Stabilization Program (FSP) was established after the National Foreclosure Settlement agreement of 2012. Its goal is to provide relief for homeowners and stabilize communities harmed by fraudulent foreclosure and mortgage servicing practices. FSP funding is used for foreclosure mitigation services, homebuyer counseling, the demolition of blighted properties, and increasing homeownership opportunities.

The Sugar Run Creek Area is one of Will County's target areas for FSP funds. FSP-eligible buyers are able to select their home from available inventory of foreclosed (or pre-foreclosed) homes and then, utilizing FSP funds, the County purchases, rehabilitates, and sells the home to the buyer. The FSP provides a seamless process for purchasing and rehabilitating distressed properties in established neighborhoods. New owners benefit from cost savings associated with working through the County's partners. In addition, buyers are also eligible for additional subsidies worth up to 17% of the sales price to assist with closing costs and reduce monthly mortgage payments. FSP funds will be exhausted in late 2017, however Community Development Division of the Will County Land Use Department can relaunch the program once new funding becomes available.

Input from County staff indicate that no eligible properties in the Study Area have been selected by FSP buyers since the program began, however this may be due to a lack of knowledge among area residents. Current residents represent the greatest opportunity to increase homeownership, as they have already chosen the community as their home. Engaging Sugar Run Creek Area renters to participate in the FSP program may help the community increase the number of owner-occupied units. The County should continue to market the program, ideally with local community organization and church collaboration to engage area residents.



Figure 3.1: Vacant Parcels



## Continue to utilize state and federal programs for targeted investment.

The County should also continue to utilize state and federal funds to support the implementation of projects identified in community and regional plans.

- o Will County is an annual recipient of **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** and **Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME)** funds. CDBG funds must be used to carry out activities that benefit low and moderate-income persons, aid in the prevention or elimination of slums or blight, or meet other urgent community development needs. For the next three fiscal years Will County will limit competitive proposals for CDBG funds to support the implementation of major projects, primarily in Lockport Township, Homer Township, and Joliet Township. Upon the completion of those major projects, the County should consider replicating this process by prioritizing projects in the Sugar Run Creek Area with guidance from the Neighborhood Plan.
- o In April 2016, \$151 million was allotted to the State of Illinois through the Hardest Hit Fund to continue the state's **Blight Reduction Program (BRP)** and the 1stHomeIllinois initiative. The City of Joliet partnered with the South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority and received grant funding from the BRP to assist with vacant property purchase and demolition. The BRP is administered by IHDA which also provides a similar Abandoned Property Program (APP). It is recommended that Will County further evaluate the BRP and APP to identify projects that could be facilitated through those programs.

- o For fiscal year 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allocated 4.3 million to the State of Illinois through the nation's **Housing Trust Fund**. Initiated by the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008, the Housing Trust Fund is a new affordable housing production program to increase and preserve the supply of decent, safe, and sanitary affordable housing for low-income households, including families experiencing homelessness. Funds can be used for real property acquisition, site improvements, demolition, financing costs, relocation assistance, and rental housing operating costs. IHDA maintains the Illinois Affordable Housing Trust Fund, but the status of this program is unknown as the State of Illinois continues to work through budget issues. Will County and its housing partners should continue to monitor the status of this program as well as other state-supported funds.

## Develop a Vacant Property Registry.

Stemming from the foreclosure crisis, there has been a major increase of local governments enacting vacant property registration ordinances (VPROs). VPROs require property owners to register vacant and foreclosed properties with their local government. Cook and Kane counties have both enacted vacant property registry ordinances. Adopting a VPRO would allow Will County to collect data to develop programs that mitigate the negative impact of vacant homes by tracking trends, identifying areas highly impacted by vacancy.

While VPRO databases often include a number of key indicators, three indicators that appear to be highly predictive of current or impending vacancy are property tax delinquencies, water shut-offs, and foreclosure initiations. Day-to-day operational needs may limit the capacity of Will County staff and impede staff from pursuing the development of a VPRO, however partnerships with local communities or service providers may enable the County to maintain a vacant property registry. For example, the City of Joliet maintains its own vacant property registry. Will County could coordinate with the City of Joliet to negotiate an agreement wherein the City receives a fee from the County or participating townships to maintain a vacant property registry that includes properties from the surrounding area. The County could then explore the feasibility of requiring registration fees and compliance fines to minimize County costs.

## Prioritize development in existing subdivisions.

In contrast to other areas within Will County, the Sugar Run Creek Area did not experience dramatic population growth between 2000 and 2010. Since 2010 the area's population has remained relatively constant. Consequently, the Sunset Point subdivision, for which construction began during the height of the housing market in the mid-2000s, has a significant number of unbuilt lots. As the County and City of Joliet work together to maintain the value of homes and support new and existing businesses and employers, the demand for housing may increase. As the housing market grows, new housing starts should be encouraged in existing, yet incomplete subdivisions such as Sunset Point.

## Encourage diverse housing types and lot consolidation for remaining parcels.

Effects of the foreclosure crisis and inevitable changes in market demand and household demographics have compelled local governments across the country to collaborate with vacant land owners. By allowing revisions to existing development agreements, local governments can enable developers to build products that better meet market demand while respecting neighborhood character.

Will County and City of Joliet staff and officials should continue to be amenable to requests to consider changes to previously approved development agreements that would enable single-family attached homes or larger lot single-family development within partially built single-family subdivisions. Infill development, regardless of product type, should only be approved if the development is of the same or higher quality as existing development and the scale and character of design matches that of existing development.

Will County currently allows for minor and major subdivision modifications, as well as subdivision plat vacations. Will County's Subdivision Ordinance does not explicitly state that lot consolidation is an option for subdivision owners, however the consolidation application does not exempt subdivision plats. In recent years, the City of Joliet has also allowed developers to build for-rent single-family homes within traditional owner-occupied single-family subdivisions and no issues have been reported.

The Sunset Point subdivision is located in the City of Joliet and is currently zoned R-1A, (Single Family Residential, with a minimum lot size 8,000 square feet). Larger lot sizes would be allowed as there is no maximum lot size specific, however facilitating townhome or rowhome development of complementary design would require a rezoning to either R-3 (One & Two Family Residential) or R-4 (Low Density Multi-Family Residential).

## Encourage parcel assembly to support new residential development projects.

Land assembly involves joining adjacent lots to make one larger parcel of developable land. Accommodating single-family attached and multi-family development may require assembly of vacant or underutilized parcels, including vacant areas previously platted for single-family detached development.

## Explore a partnership with South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority

Land banks exist as regional economic development tools that enable municipalities and counties to legally hold, manage, and develop tax or bank foreclosed properties and convert them to productive use. Land banks have the ability to clear titles and in many cases eliminate existing delinquent taxes on banked properties, decreasing the cost for buyers. The South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority (SSLBDA) was formed in 2012 with an intergovernmental agreement passed by the Village of Park Forest, City of Oak Forest and City of Blue Island and now serves 20 municipalities in Will County, including the City of Joliet.

The SSLBDA currently does not operate in unincorporated Will County. Permitting land banking in all or a portion of the county would require an intergovernmental agreement between Will County and the SSLBDA. Such an agreement could limit the SSLBDA to operating within specific target areas of the County, similar to the distressed census tract geographies targeted by the Will County FSP.

It is recommended that the County reach out to the SSLBDA to explore the feasibility and potential cost and benefits of utilizing land banking in the Sugar Run Creek Area and other similar urbanized unincorporated areas. As a relief to the County, blighted structures could be acquired and demolished if necessary, and the land bank could then manage the resulting vacant property. This would allow the County to strategically assemble land and align resulting projects with local priorities and regional objectives. The SSLBDA could help facilitate property redevelopment to stabilize the tax base and enhance economic activities in a manner consistent with County plans and priorities.



### Examples of Vacant Lot Reuse

Food truck community event in Tampa, FL (top right), vacant lot repurposed for biofiltration in New Orleans, LA (middle right), lot reused for a rain garden in Baltimore, MA (middle left), community garden in Greenville, SC (bottom)

Sources: Jay Corner Tampa Tribune, EPA, Baltimore City Scape, Gardening for Good



## Identify desirable alternative uses to activate vacant lots.

While infill housing should be encouraged, there may not be sufficient market support to facilitate development of all vacant lots within the Study Area. Alternative uses for vacant or underutilized properties should be encouraged to foster property maintenance, improve neighborhood image and identity, and stabilize property values.

### Consider potential alternative uses for vacant or underutilized sites.

Below are recommended alternative uses for vacant lots in the Sugar Run Creek Area.

- o **Community gardens.** Community gardens are permitted in all zoning districts, subject to regulations. Gardens can enhance neighborhood character and foster a sense of community. Gardens can also help improve access to fresh foods by providing more opportunities for residents to grow their own food. Per County ordinance, seasonal sales of farm produce may be allowed by temporary use permit six months per calendar year. Neighborhoods with community gardens typically have increased average property value compared to similar communities without gardens because gardens increase pride of ownership in neighboring properties.

To encourage active stewardship it is ideal to grow gardens near neighborhood schools, churches, and organizations that have the capacity to maintain them. Priority areas include: open space adjacent to the proposed Laraway Elementary School site, Refuge Mission United Holy Church, and St. John Missionary Baptist church, and in Singleton Park and Oak Valley Park adjacent to Oak Valley Earl Childhood Center. Institutions are also more likely to acquire and maintain vacant land for public use. Additional discussion of community gardening is located in **Chapter 6: Green Infrastructure**.



- o **Outdoor community events.** Per the County’s zoning ordinance, events of public interest and temporary sales (with appropriate permitting) are allowed in and/or near residential districts. Ideas for events include: movie showings, neighborhood yard sales, farmer’s markets, holiday material sales, concerts, sporting events, festivals, and rotating pop-up vendor sales. Similar to community gardens, outdoor community events can be held in close proximity to institutions or in areas designated as open space near residential uses.
- o **Temporary park and art installations.** Plants, seating, and temporary recreational infrastructure, can easily transform vacant space into a place for community members to gather and enjoy. The County’s zoning ordinance does not explicitly encourage temporary parks or art. If multiple vacant single-family zoned areas are converted to open space, as recommended in Chapter 6: Green Infrastructure, this would support the development of permanent parks, improving recreation access for residents in this area.
- o **Green Infrastructure.** Vacant lots can also be improved with rain gardens, bioswales, and plantings to naturally manage stormwater and reduce combined sewer overflow, minimize neighborhood flooding, and improve water quality. Green infrastructure would be of best use in flood prone areas with vacant lots; along Woodruff Avenue, north of Singleton Park, along Patterson Road near Hickory Creek, and adjacent to Sugar Run Creek. Further technical analysis would be required to determine whether green infrastructure would be an effective solution in a specific location. Additional discussion of green infrastructure on vacant lots is located in *Chapter 6: Green Infrastructure*.
- o **Large Lots.** In some instances, allowing adjacent property owners to assume control of vacant property can be effective means of enhancing neighborhood stability. For example, the City of Chicago offers “Large Lot Program” wherein the City transfers ownership of City-owned vacant lots to responsible homeowners or community institutions occupying nearby properties. Within the Sugar Run Creek Area, such a program could be effective where vacant residential properties are under ownership of the County, City of Joliet, or potentially the land bank. Benefits of a large lot program include improved maintenance of vacant lots, improved neighborhood image, reduced public costs associated with property maintenance, and a return of vacant properties to the tax rolls.

## Connect residents to existing renovation and home ownership resources.

The County should explore the use of proactive implementation strategies to increase existing home values and maintain the current housing stock in the Sugar Run Creek Area. Will County and its partners administer various programs that assist residents with home renovation and maintenance. The County can promote these resources by streamlining access to program information on its website and partnering with the Will County Center for Community Concerns (WCCCC) to market the programs to qualified homeowners and encourage them to apply. Listed below are rehabilitation and maintenance programs available to Sugar Run Creek Area residents.

- o Habitat for Humanity of Will County offers home maintenance programs for low-income and veteran residents. Habitat for Humanity helps residents age in place by installing home accessibility modifications. Already active in the Sugar Run Creek Area, volunteer groups work alongside able-bodied homeowners to assist in completing repairs and modifications.
- o The IHDA 1stHomeIllinois program provides up to \$7,500 in down payment assistance and access to a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage to homeowners in specific counties in Illinois including Will County. Individuals may apply to the program by contacting an IHDA participating lender (<https://www.ihda.org/my-home/buying-a-house/getting-an-ihda-loan/>).

## Promote resources for energy efficient homes.

Along with connecting residents to rehabilitation resources, the County can consider promoting resources for energy efficient homes. In addition to higher maintenance costs, the cost of energy use in older homes can become burdensome for homeowners and renters. Listed below are program to help residents reduce the cost of energy services.

- o The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), also provided by WCCCC, is designed to assist Will County low-income households pay for winter energy services. The LIHEAP program also includes an Emergency Furnace component that will repair or replace non-operational heating systems for low- income, homeowner-occupied homes. Residents can apply for assistance at the Will County Center for Community Concerns October through December of each year.
- o The Illinois Home Weatherization Assistance Program (IHWEAP) provides qualified households with energy conservation assistance. Retrofit programs make homes more energy efficient and financing options can spread costs over several years to allow the improvements to pay for themselves. County residents can submit applications to the Will County Center for Community Concerns. An assessor will conduct an energy audit on approved residences. Once the audit is complete, a contractor will be assigned to apply the appropriate measures.
- o Energy Impact Illinois is a collaborative program designed to help residents, businesses, and nonprofits reduce energy use in their buildings. All Sugar Run Creek Area residents, including renters, may be eligible for a variety of rebates and low-interest loans to renovate their homes and make them more energy efficient. The Energy Impact Illinois program is operated by Elevate Energy which has a call center that directs Illinois residents to energy programs based on where they live. Elevate Energy also connects residents with contractors to perform comprehensive energy assessments of their homes for \$99.

## Evaluate opportunities and resources for historic preservation.

Historic preservation districts are established to conserve historically significant buildings, objects, and landscapes. For income-producing properties on the National Register of Historic Places, the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program provides a 20% tax credit for rehabilitation. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency also offers a property tax assessment freeze program for owner-occupied residential buildings that are listed on a National or Local Register of Historic Places or are a contributing property within a National or Local Historic District. However, since the goal of designation is to protect historic resources, major exterior alterations, demolition, or infill new construction in historic districts could be subject to review by a local preservation commission or the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Based on preliminary research, Will County Historic Preservation staff indicated that there are homes and structures in the Sugar Creek Hills neighborhood, located in the eastern portion of the study area along Sugar Creek Drive, which would meet the criteria for local historic district designation. Will County should consider engaging local residents and neighborhood groups to educate the Sugar Run Creek community regarding historic preservation and identify local desire to further pursue historic preservation efforts.

The County does not require individual property owner consent for landmark designations, but 51% of property owners must agree to have an area designated as a historic district. To facilitate conversation, the County should explore conducting a preliminary historic resource survey to identify contributing structures to any potential future historic district and identify potential district boundaries to discuss with the community.

*Figure 3.3: Single-family attached housing in the Sugar Run Creek Area should reflect the scale and character of existing single-family development.*

*Source: Richmond Metropolitan Habitat for Humanity*



## 3.3 New Residential Development

### Diversify the housing stock to attract new residents.

A balanced housing supply helps to ensure that a diversity of householders can live and age in place in the Sugar Run Creek Area. Will County's Land Resource Management Plan states that a greater variety of housing types should be encouraged within single developments as part of well-designed site plans. The County should encourage residential development that builds upon the character of existing neighborhoods, but also provides a greater breadth of options in terms of amenities, size, and price.

As recommended in the Land Use Plan, undeveloped or underutilized properties along the IL Route 53 corridor should be targeted for single-family attached and multi-family development. The development of single-family attached or multi-family development will create an opportunity for existing single-family home owners to downsize to a more manageable home with common area maintenance while remaining within the community. Such development will also provide an opportunity for young professionals and young families to purchase new homes within the community. High quality rental property development should also be considered to provide workforce housing and attract young professionals that may not be ready to purchase a home.

### Encourage single-family attached development.

Based on existing conditions, single-family attached development (e.g. townhomes or rowhomes) may be the area's most viable option for market-rate housing development. Single-family attached is recommended in the center of the community, at the intersection of IL Route 53 and Zarley Boulevard. Townhomes at this location would support adjacent proposed commercial uses, see ***Chapter 4: Economic Development***. Development of single-family attached homes would require a rezoning from R-5 (Single-Family Residential, with mobile home special use permits) to R-6 (Multi-Family Residential).

### Promote multi-family development.

Multi-family residences are recommended between Minton Road and Rachel Ave, across from Pheasant Run Apartments. According to the County's Land Resource Management Plan, infill multi-family developments should respect the character of their surroundings and should be located near major employment uses with easy access to an arterial roadway. Proposed multi-family development would complement nearby existing multi-family buildings, increase the number of households to support desired retail, and would be in close proximity to IL-53 and warehousing jobs. Development of multi-family residential on these sites would require a rezoning from A-1 (Agricultural) to R-6 (Multi-Family Residential).

### Promote a better connection between nearby job opportunities and available housing in the Study Area.

Although the Study Area is located in proximity to several large logistics and warehousing companies, it is estimated fewer than 20 Sugar Run Creek Area residents work at one of these businesses. The affordability of existing housing in the Sugar Run Creek Area may present an opportunity to match warehouse workers with available housing in the community. Future single-family attached and multi-family housing recommended in the Land Use Plan could also serve as owner-occupied or rental housing for the nearby workforce.

An employer-assisted housing (EAH) program could provide a mechanism for incentivizing existing or future employees at nearby businesses to rent or buy a home in the Study Area. REACH Illinois Employer-Assisted Housing is group that designs incentive programs such as down payment assistance or rent subsidies that are funded by specific employers, subsidized through various tax incentives, and administered by local partners. The local partner organizations work directly with homebuyers and provide credit counseling and other assistance through the home buying process to save employers the administrative costs and burden. In addition, REACH partners are the approved intermediaries to access state tax credits, reducing the program costs for the employer.

Will County and partners such as the Will County Center for Economic Development and large employers in nearby area should evaluate the potential of establishing an EAH program targeting the County's built-out, but unincorporated neighborhoods. Such programs would enable the nearby labor pool to invest in and stabilize neighborhoods.



## Protect neighborhoods from intense development and traffic.

Within the Sugar Run Creek Area, industrial development, quarries, and heavily used truck routes (e.g. IL Route 53 and Brandon Road) exist in close proximity to residences. While a mix of land uses should be encouraged, non-residential development can have a negative impact on nearby residential property values and neighborhood character if not designed correctly.

### Promote appropriate buffering and screening

Where possible, existing non-residential uses and future development should be enhanced with buffer yards, landscaping, and screening to reduce impacts on adjacent residential by minimizing the visibility of non-residential uses from nearby residences and improving the overall appearance of such development. Given limited lot depth and proximity of buildings to property lines, accommodating a buffer yard to provide physical separation from residential development may not be feasible on many of the existing commercial properties within the Study Area. Improvements such as perimeter landscaping and opaque fencing should be encouraged on such properties to minimize visibility of service and loading areas from adjacent residences.

Landscaping and screening regulations within the County's Zoning Ordinance, which was updated in 2012, require an appropriate level of buffering and screening between uses. Existing development, however, need not comply with such regulations unless the gross floor area, number of dwelling units, impervious surface, or parking area is expanded by more than 50%. The County should consider reevaluating the thresholds at which existing development must be brought into compliance with the landscaping and screening requirements. For example, as part of an overall district that applies only to the Study Area, the County could require that existing development that expands or reconstructs more than 35% must comply with the updated regulations.

Buffer residential areas from IL Route 53 traffic and commercial activity.

As identified in the Land Use Plan, new single-family attached and multi-family development is also recommended for undeveloped and underutilized properties along the IL Route 53 corridor. Moving forward, future development should be buffered from highway related noise and air pollution. Commercial or mixed use development is recommended for parcels directly fronting IL Route 53 to provide physical separation between the heavily-travelled roadway and residences. The installation of a new road and perimeter landscaping at the rear of commercial properties can also be used to provide a buffer between commercial and residential properties along IL Route 53.



Figure 3.4: Single-family attached housing and infill single-family detached housing along the IL Route 53 corridor.

### Minimize impacts of railroad activity on future development.

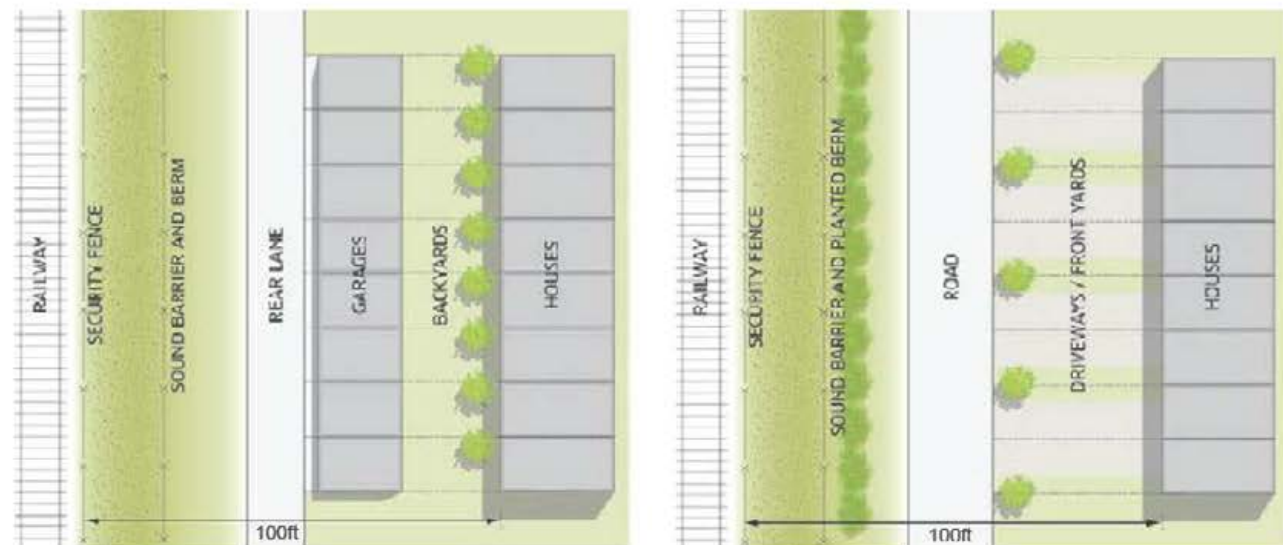
Future residential development in the Sugar Run Creek Area should be appropriately buffered from noise pollution and unsafe conditions from active rail. One of the most effective ways to minimize rail noise and vibrations is to physically buffer adjacent development from rail activity through the use of a setback and landscaping improvements. Rail lines within the Study Area travel through predominantly through industrial or natural areas where conflict with residential development is minimal.

There are approximately 6 residences within proximity of the UP Railroad located west of IL Route 53 near Zurich Road and Zarley Boulevard. As recommended in the Land Use Plan, this area is also a desired location for future development comprising a mix of single-family detached, attached, and multi-family housing as well as corridor commercial uses. While establishing physical separation between existing households and the rail line is not practical without redevelopment, new development should be appropriately buffered.

The large size of undeveloped parcels within proximity to the railroad permits greater flexibility in design that will protect new residential uses from the impacts of active rail lines without limiting development potential. A setback of at least 100 feet is recommended between the UP railroad and future residential and commercial future development. Within that setback, the installation of a landscaped berm and fencing should be encouraged to mitigate noise and block views of rail activity. An access road and detached garages could also be accommodated within the setback along with rear yards for nearby housing. No primary structures should be permitted within the desired railroad setback. **Figure 3.5** depicts the potential configuration of development within proximity of the UP Railroad.

**Figure 3.5: Setback Configuration Options for Optimum Site Design**

Source: Guidelines for New Development in Proximity to Railway Operations, Federation Of Canadian Municipalities/ Railway Association Of Canada Proximity Initiative, May 2013





## 3.4 Resident Access to Services

The Sugar Run Creek Area is one of a handful of unincorporated areas in Will County that is relatively built out, but for various reasons was never incorporated into an adjacent municipality. As a result, these unique areas function much like neighborhoods or extensions of the nearby municipality, but lack access to the same level of services afforded to the incorporated areas they adjoin.

### Consider Strategic Annexation into the City of Joliet.

Will County should partner with the City of Joliet to further evaluate the feasibility of annexing portions of the Sugar Run Creek Area. Annexation may substantially improve the quality of life of area residents by increasing property values and improving local government services and delivery responsiveness. Joliet would also have greater control over land use and development regulations, further decreasing the time necessary to implement priority plans and projects. Residents would gain local representation and have the opportunity to represent their community in local government. As discussed in Chapter 4: Economic Development, annexation would also allow for area tax incentives and rebate programs that are not available at the County level.

Neighborhoods known as Fairmont and Ingalls Park are unincorporated communities similar to Sugar Run Creek Area on the east side of Joliet and north of Interstate 80. In recent years, the City of Joliet has annexed parcels in these and similar neighboring unincorporated areas when land owners have approached the City and the properties could be readily served by the City's water and sewer services.

### Evaluate library service expansion.

The Sugar Run Creek Area is not located within the service area of any public library and residents have expressed a desire to see library services expanded to the community. The Joliet Public Library provides library services to City of Joliet residents which support the library district through their property taxes. Non-residents, including the majority of residents in the Sugar Run Creek Area, can access Joliet Public Library services by purchasing a non-resident library card for \$150 per person.

Currently, the Joliet Public Library cannot be expanded to areas outside of the City of Joliet without annexation. It is recommended that Will County coordinate with the Joliet Public Library to evaluate the potential of creating a referendum to expand the library service area to include target areas outside of the City of Joliet.

Alternatively, strategies for reducing the costs to non-member households should be evaluated. For example, the library could consider issuing non-resident library cards at discounted rates to neighborhood groups that can guarantee higher participation rates among residents in target unincorporated areas. Groups such as Unity CDC could then leverage their connections with the community to get a greater number of residents in the Sugar Run Creek Area to sign-up for a library card at a reduced rate with the goal of providing the library with higher total revenues than would typically be possible.



*Truck traffic along Laraway Road is impacting the learning environment within the existing Laraway School facility.*

## Evaluate Laraway School relocation.

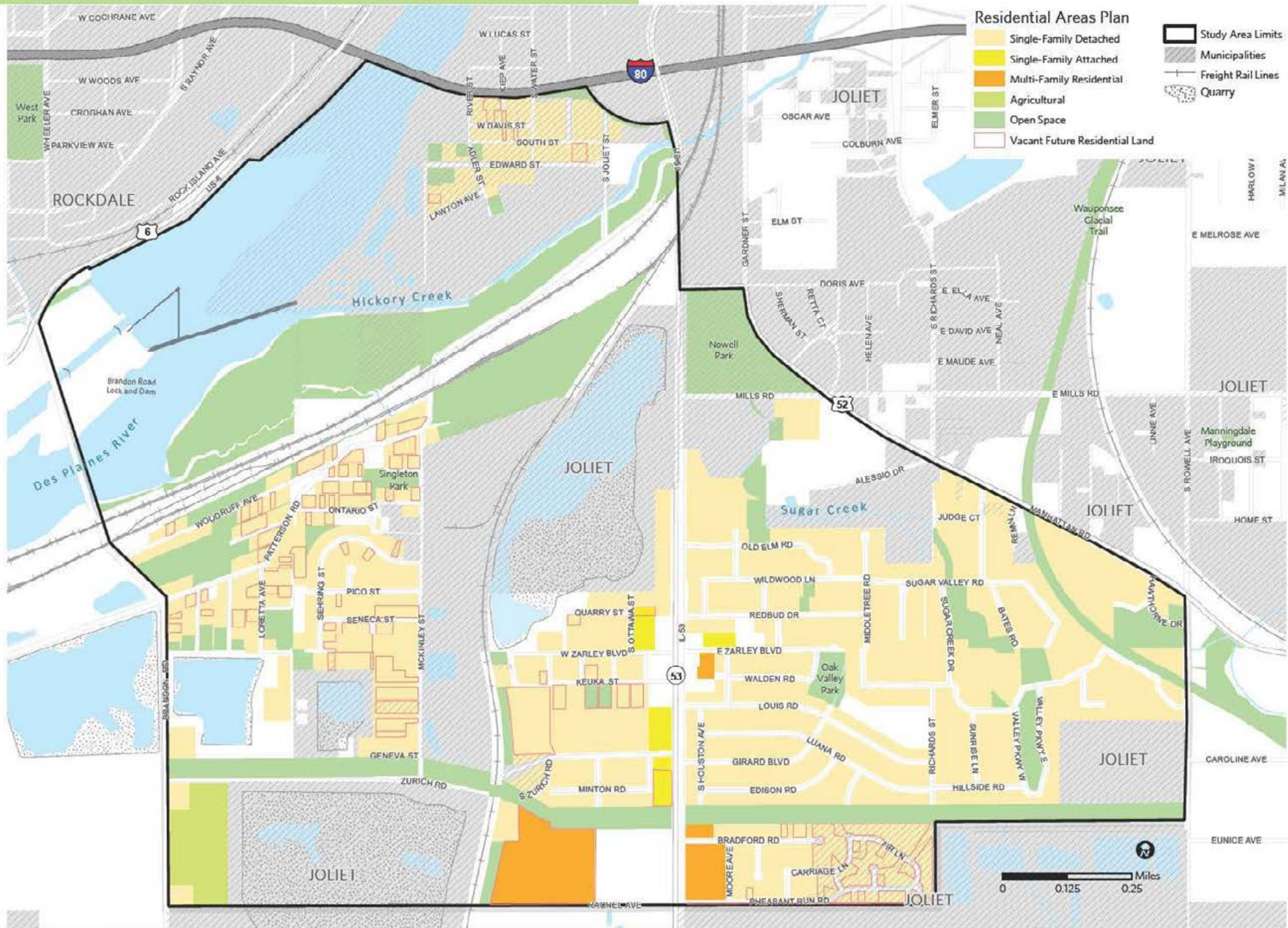
In response to the challenge presented by increasing truck traffic at the current Laraway School location, the Laraway Community Consolidated School District (LCCSD) purchased property at 1715 Rowell Avenue in 2011 with plans to build a new school at this site and close the current Laraway School building. The school district has also considered remodeling the existing Laraway School facility and working with local stakeholders to identify an alternative point of access to the school site that would limit impacts of traffic using Laraway Road.

The school board recently decided that moving the school to the Rowell Avenue location is the preferred solution, building the new school will require the District to sell the Laraway School property and pass a referendum. As of the adoption of this Plan, LCCSD was in the process of creating the referendum question to be put on the November 2016 ballot.

The Land Use Plan shows the LCCSD proposed location of the potential Laraway School facility on Rowell Avenue. This location would be in closer proximity to Sugar Run Creek Area households and would be better positioned to serve a larger population in the future while minimizing potential conflict with area truck traffic. If this location were to become the new site of the Laraway School facility, it is also recommended that LCCSD provide a suitable network of sidewalks and/or trails to promote a safe corridor to walk or bike to school.



Figure 3.6: Residential Areas Plan



## 3.5 Implementation

*[To be completed after public open house and review by Will County staff and the Steering Committee.]*





# Chapter 4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## Vision

*In the year 2030, updated development regulations combined with appropriate incentives have resulted in the expansion and redevelopment of the neighborhood center at Zarley Boulevard and IL Route 53. New investment and streetscaping have helped enhance this area as the focus of local shopping and community activity. Further to the south, a new commercial area has also been developed that caters to local residents as well as IL Route 53 traffic and visitors drawn to the new regional trail that travels along the ComEd right-of-way. New employment opportunities at the growing Alessio Drive Business Park, Zurich Road Industrial Park, and nearby business parks in Joliet have also drawn more residents to the neighborhood who have taken advantage of workforce housing programs.*



## 4.1 Existing Conditions

Sugar Run Creek is predominantly residential in character with limited access to goods and services within the Study Area. In addition to having to shop outside of the community, most residents must also travel elsewhere for employment. Although the Study Area is located in proximity to a large, growing concentration of logistics and warehousing companies, few local residents are employed at one of these businesses. Most study area residents are employed in nearby areas of Joliet and within a wide variety of industries.

### Key Findings

- *With a limited number of businesses, there is a strong desire for more commercial land use in the study area.* Two large gas station and convenience centers catering to passing truck traffic located at Laraway Road represent the most significant commercial development in proximity to the Study Area. Community outreach participants identified a need for additional retail, including a grocery store, during various engagement exercises.
- *While new development activity is limited within the Sugar Run Creek Area, significant warehousing and logistics development is occurring nearby.* Several million square feet of warehousing space is under construction or planned in the area south of Laraway Road. This new development complements the ongoing development of the 6,500-acre CenterPoint Intermodal Center which opened in 2002 and makes up much of the area west of IL Route 53 between Laraway Road and the Village of Elwood.
- *Neighborhood aesthetics are problematic along the IL Route 53 corridor.* Issues were observed with screening and landscaping, signage, and sidewalks in the Study Area, particularly regarding business appearance from public rights-of-way. The IL Route 53 Corridor Plan also establishes numerous recommendations for improving the appearance of the corridor.
- *Quarries, both active and inactive, are scattered throughout this portion of Will County.* Vulcan Materials operates a quarry on the southern boundary of the study area and several other inactive quarries are located within or adjacent to the study area. The quarries are privately owned, but residents and previous planning efforts have identified a desire for some of the quarries to be repurposed as public open space and recreation areas. Other quarry sites are being filled, but no long term direction exists regarding for their reuse.

## 4.2 Commercial Areas

### Update regulations to facilitate desired development.

The Land Use Plan should serve as the foundation for decision-making as the County Board and City of Joliet consider development proposals in the Study Area. Will County and the City of Joliet should consider proactive revisions to their regulations to facilitate desired development as identified in the Land Use Plan.

### Guide zoning map amendments.

The majority of the IL Route 53 corridor, where future commercial development is envisioned, is located in unincorporated Will County and is currently located within the A-1 Agricultural zoning district. As such, it is important that Will County utilize the Land Use Plan as a guide for determining the advisability of a map amendment for development desired by the property owner. Zoning districts that allow for the type of development identified in the Land Use Plan, such as pedestrian-friendly retail and mixed use development, include the C-1 to C-4 districts.

Portions of the Study Area identified for commercial or industrial development may be considered for annexation by the City of Joliet in the future. The Land Use Plan should be also be used to inform decisions regarding the appropriate zoning district under which annexation should occur.

### Establish design guidelines for the IL Route 53 corridor.

Allowing a change in zoning will remove barriers to commercial uses and mixed use development, but may not provide desired flexibility regarding urban design and site configuration. The Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan strongly supports development forms that enhance the pedestrian environment and improve the appearance of the corridor and the neighborhoods that surround it. Will County and the City of Joliet should consider the adoption of design guidelines that can be applied uniformly to properties within either jurisdiction.

The design guidelines can also be used as a mechanism for more widely broadcasting the vision for the corridor and communicating to potential developers that Will County and City of Joliet would be amenable to development proposals that help achieve that vision. While underlying zoning may not be in agreement with the plan (e.g. an area envisioned for corridor commercial may be within an agricultural district), adoption of design guidelines would indicate general support for rezoning and communicate a fair degree of certainty to the development community and potential investors. In addition to commercial design guidelines, Will County and the City of Joliet could also consider the joint adoption of a set of shared design guidelines for commercial and multi-family development along the IL Route 53 corridor to ensure development of unified character over the long term.

### Zoning Change: Reduce Minimum Street Setback Requirements for Commercial Properties.

The concept of placing parking in the rear of commercial buildings is supported in the Will County LRMP Forms & Concepts Handbook, particularly as it relates to the Neighborhood Commercial form. However, rear-loaded parking is not practical under the existing zoning ordinance due to large setback requirements. Will County should consider reducing the required minimum setback for commercial properties, so that parking spaces can be located behind buildings that are closer to the front property line. This change to development regulations would provide developers with more options without preventing conventional front-loaded retail or creating nonconformities with existing development. Additional standards that require sidewalks and building foundation landscaping should also be considered to enhance mobility and provide for more attractive commercial areas.

**Table 4.1: Existing Minimum Setback Requirements**

<b>Existing Minimum Setbacks (ft.)</b>	<b>C-1</b>	<b>C-2</b>	<b>C-3</b>	<b>C-4</b>	<b>C-5</b>	<b>C-6</b>
<i>Street (from CL of non-dedicated road)</i>	80	80	150	130	130	100
<i>Street (from ROW of dedicated road)</i>	30	30	100	80	80	50

Source: Will County, Illinois Land Resource Management Plan, Forms & Concepts Handbook (Revised 2011); Zoning Ordinance of Will County, Illinois (Ord. effective 10-1-2012)

Consider establishing an overlay district to enforce area-specific regulations.

Enforcement of design guidelines and other regulations intended to be unique to the Study Area could be facilitated through the adoption of an overlay district. An overlay district could require adherence to specific components of the guidelines and limit changes in zoning to specific areas located within the Study Area. The creation of an overlay district would eliminate the potential for conflicts with development elsewhere in the county or City of Joliet that might otherwise arise with revisions to County- or City-wide standards. Oversight of the overlay district could be provided by the existing zoning review bodies (Will County Planning and Zoning Commission and City of Joliet Zoning Board Of Appeals) operating independent of one another or a new joint commission could be established.

In creating an overlay district, it is important that Will County and the City of Joliet identify conflicting standards between the two adjacent jurisdictions and the vision for the Sugar Run Creek Area. For example, the City of Joliet does not permit mixed use development, which is desired along the IL Route 53 corridor, within commercial districts that would otherwise be appropriate. The overlay district would allow for revisions to be made to standards within the two ordinances to ensure that development in one jurisdiction is of a similar scale and character to that of nearby development in the adjacent jurisdiction.



## Support expansion of commercial development, including existing businesses.

Local commercial development should be expanded where appropriate to lessen the need to drive long distances for day-to-day needs. Additional assistance may be needed facilitate improvements to commercial properties and address competition from retailers outside of the neighborhood.

## Expand participation in Small Business Assistance programs.

The Land Use Plan encourages new commercial and mixed use development in the area surrounding Zarley Boulevard. This area has historically functioned as the neighborhood center and is home to several small businesses. Given the limited scale of development located in this area and envisioned moving forward, existing and future businesses are likely to be small, locally owned shops. In addition to considering incentives to promote desired improvements along the IL Route 53 corridor, Will County and its economic development partners can encourage greater participation in existing small business assistance programs. Joliet Junior College recently closed its Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) due to state budget issues. Will County and its partner the Will County Center for Economic Development should evaluate options for reestablishing an Illinois SBDC location in the Joliet region.

## Funding Economic Development Initiatives

While the Sugar Run Creek Area is located within the Joliet market, its location in unincorporated Will County has limited access to some traditional economic development finance mechanisms.

Annexation into the City of Joliet would create the potential for the use of incentives such as sales tax rebates, property tax and sales tax based revenue bonding to assist with infrastructure improvements, and tax increment finance.

Annexation would also give the City of Joliet greater control over the appearance of the corridor as a prominent southern gateway to the City. Conversely, the cost of extending necessary infrastructure and services to newly incorporated properties is a potential drawback that can be difficult to estimate in established neighborhoods.

Expanding the boundaries of the nearby Des Plaines River Valley Enterprise Zone would also provide several incentives to build new construction within the Sugar Run Creek area.

To facilitate desired development and promote the long term stability of the neighborhood, Will County and the City of Joliet should further evaluate the potential to strategically annex additional portions of the IL Route 53 corridor or expand the Des Plaines River Valley Enterprise Zone to include the area.

Expand local retail options.

There is a strong desire among residents for more local retail options, namely restaurants and grocery stores. As shown in **Table 4.2**, retail supply and demand data indicate that overall there is a surplus of retail within the market area and that retail competition from outside of the Study Area is helping meet the needs of local residents. For the purposes of this analysis, the market area for stores located in the Study Area is defined as the area within a 10-minute drive of the intersection of Zarley Boulevard and IL Route 53.

**Table 4.2: Retail Gap Analysis - Zarley Boulevard & IL Route 53 Market Area**

Retail Category	Demand (Potential spending of area households)	Supply (Retail sales)	Retail Gap
<b>Total - All Categories</b>	<b>\$695,747,534</b>	<b>\$802,657,350</b>	<b>(\$106,909,816)</b>
Total Retail Trade	\$626,393,066	\$728,870,260	(\$102,477,194)
Total Food & Drink	\$69,354,468	\$73,787,090	(\$4,432,622)

Source: ESRI Business Analyst Online, CMAP

While the market is relatively saturated, a closer look at potential with individual retail categories indicates there may be potential to support some new storefronts within the Study Area. As shown in **Table 4.3**, dividing unmet retail demand by sales-per-square-foot yields an estimate of additional retail square feet that can be supported within the market area.

Retail categories with positive values under 'Retail Gap' are those where demand from existing households exceeds retail sales generated at market area businesses. There appears to be sufficient unmet demand for a small grocer within the Study Area. Moreover, if the grocery store were able to attract patrons from a larger 15-minute market area, there appears to be ample support for a traditional grocery store of 40,000 to 60,000 square feet. Conversely, there is some unmet demand for a full-service restaurant within the market area, however this demand may be potentially offset by a more prevalent stock of limited-service restaurants.

**Table 4.3: Retail Gap Analysis for Target Retail Categories - Zarley Boulevard & IL Route 53 Market Area**

Retail Category	Typical Sales PSF	Retail Gap	Retail Potential (sq. ft.)	Potential Storefronts
<b>Food &amp; Beverage Stores</b>	<b>\$475</b>	<b>\$3,351,007</b>	<b>7,055</b>	<b>1</b>
Grocery Stores	\$500	\$14,352,451	28,705	1
Specialty Food Stores	\$475	\$442,456	931	-
Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores	\$475	(\$11,443,901)	(24,092)	-
<b>Food Services &amp; Drinking Places</b>	<b>\$400</b>	<b>(\$4,432,622)</b>	<b>(11,082)</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
Full-Service Restaurants	\$400	\$9,686,323	24,216	3 - 4
Limited-Service Eating Places	\$475	(\$9,915,653)	(20,875)	-
Special Food Services	N/A	(\$1,907,862)	N/A	-
Drinking Places - Alcoholic Beverages	\$300	(\$2,295,431)	(7,651)	-

Source: ESRI Business Analyst Online, CMAP

It is important to underscore that retail potential discussed in this plan is based on existing development and that future residential development within the Study Area and undeveloped portions of Will County will provide more rooftops to support local retailers. Overall, this initial analysis indicates there may be an opportunity for new development within the market area and can be used in seeking to start discussions with potential retailers to locate within the Sugar Run Creek Area. For example, Will County and local economic development partners should consider coordinating with existing retailers, such as a regional or local grocery chain, to evaluate the potential for relocation and expansion within the Study Area.

## Encourage parcel assembly to reposition underutilized commercial sites.

Small lots with limited depth make it difficult to accommodate contemporary commercial development along IL Route 53. Parcel assembly should be encouraged where appropriate to create more significant development opportunities and facilitate comprehensive redevelopment of underutilized sites. Potential strategies to encourage parcel assembly include:

- o Coordinating with local property owners to market adjoining sites for sale.
- o Providing grants or low-interest loans to encourage property assembly in targeted commercial areas.
- o Providing zoning or signage incentives to larger parcels through the use of an overlay district.
- o Considering the proactive rezoning of residential parcels adjacent to commercial parcels with property owner consent.

## Consider enhancement of local capacity for community economic development.

The Will County Center for Economic Development (CED) addresses broader county-wide initiatives to attract large employers and economic development. Beyond CED, there is a lack of full-time staff at any agency that is focused on facilitating neighborhood-level economic development. Pursuing strategies to capture or realize potential commercial redevelopment opportunities may require expansion of duties within either the Will County Land Use Department or some other agency.

## Leverage the South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority as a partner.

As with residential properties, land banks can be effective partners in getting distressed commercial properties on the tax roll. The South Suburban Land Bank and Development Authority (SSLBDA) acquires property through tax sales, donation, and market purchase. Upon acquisition, land bank property is tax exempt, listed in public inventory, and maintained in accordance with local law. SSLBDA works with partner communities to acquire and assemble properties, clean title, and transfer to local partner organizations.

Additional discussion of land banking and the SSLBDA is located in **Chapter 3: Housing**. As recommended previously, establishing an agreement between Will County and the SSLBDA could enable the land bank to provide its services in unincorporated portions of the County and provide another tool for facilitating property assembly in distressed commercial areas.



Figure 4.2: Illustration of recommended land uses and massing along IL Route 53 corridor.





## Enhance commercial and industrial area appearance.

The appearance of commercial and industrial areas, namely the IL Route 53 corridor, is a primary concern among Sugar Run Creek residents. In addition to screening and buffering discussed in Chapter 3: Housing, improvements to landscaping, signage, and public rights-of-way should be encouraged to improve the overall image of the community.

### Enhance code enforcement.

The Zoning Ordinance of Will County was updated in 2012 and provides quality guidelines relating to signs, landscaping, screening, and parking and loading. Many of the aesthetic issues observed in the Study Area are due to the age of non-residential development which all predates 2012. Will County should continue to provide adequate code enforcement to ensure that existing businesses with legal nonconformities cannot be expanded without coming into compliance with current regulations.

### Consider establishment of a site improvement grant program.

Incentives can be an effective tool in getting commercial property owners and tenants to make site improvements that foster an attractive shopping environment and positive community identity while also increasing business profitability.

The County should evaluate the potential for establishing a site improvement grant for properties in proximity to IL Route 53 or other major routes to support improvements in the Sugar Run Creek Area as well as other urbanized area of unincorporated Will County. Property owners and tenants could apply for matching grants or forgivable or low-cost loans to help pay for desired projects. Eligible improvements for such a program typically include a variety of projects such as awning and canopy replacements, exterior renovations, sign enhancements, non-conforming sign removal, landscaping, lighting, parking lot reconstruction, access improvements/consolidation and others. Such an incentive could also be used to encourage property owners that are not legally obligated to meet recently adopted standards to make improvements that would bring their property into compliance with current regulations.

Will County could consider a variety of sources to fund such a program. For example, the City of Naperville's Ogden Avenue Site Improvement Grant is funded as a line item in the annual capital improvement program. In other communities, grants are supported by CDBG funding or a special service area. A starting fund balance of between \$20,000 and \$50,000 is recommended to test the demand for such a grant program.

### Install streetscape at key intersections along IL Route 53.

IL Route 53 is characterized by local residents as an unattractive corridor that yields a poor impression of the surrounding neighborhood to passing motorists. The application of a uniform streetscaping treatment along IL Route 53 can further unify the appearance of the corridor and improve the image of the Sugar Run Creek community as a whole.

Streetscape improvements should be installed at key intersections along IL Route 53 and can be coordinated with other improvements such as IDOT-led intersection and roadway improvements and sidewalk installation. Will County should explore working with IDOT and local residents and property owners to identify a detailed streetscaping programming. Potential streetscaping elements include:

- o Street lighting that utilizes dual standards on a single pole or two distinct light types to provide both roadway lighting and pedestrian-scale lighting.
- o Street furniture including benches, trash receptacles, and bike racks of uniform or complementary style.
- o Street trees and planters.
- o Directional signage to highlight local community assets such as Nowell Park, Oak Valley Early Childhood Center, the future Laraway School location, religious institutions, and future parks locations.
- o Crosswalks that are differentiated from the roadway using paving materials of a different color or texture.
- o Public art such as sculptures, statues, murals, or installations can also be used to strengthen sense of place.

Figure 4.3: Alessio Dr. Industrial Park Area



## 4.4 Industrial Areas

### Expand existing employment areas.

The Sugar Run Creek Area is a predominantly residential area with limited opportunities for development that could employ a significant number of residents within the Study Area. In addition to employment opportunities that would be provided by new commercial development along the IL Route 53 corridor, the Land Use Plan supports expansion of industrial uses in the Alessio Drive area and the McKinley Street corridor.

### Establish Alessio Drive Business Park.

The Alessio Drive area is the location of several light industrial businesses. The area on the south side of Alessio Drive is located within the City of Joliet and has water and sewer provided by the City. The area to the north is unincorporated and is on well and septic.

Circulation in the northern portion is also fragmented, limiting access to parcels on the western end of the corridor.

Will County, Joliet Township, and the City of Joliet should work with local property owners and businesses to evaluate the consider the installation of a loop road that makes use of the existing Alessio Drive right-of-way and extends the drive to the north before reconnecting to Manhattan Road near the current access point to the Will County Farm Bureau. The new road would enhance the potential for new development and reinvestment on underutilized properties on the north side of Alessio Drive. Development to the south of Alessio Drive area comprises numerous small, light industrial buildings that could also be redeveloped incrementally as desired by the property owners, allowing for more intense development over time.



In addition to access improvements, the repositioning of the Alessio Drive area as a business park should also be considered to improve the environment for local workers and enhance marketing for existing businesses and new development opportunities. Improvements along the new Alessio Drive loop could include street lighting, sidewalk, and parkway trees as well as a gateway directory sign marking entrance to the business park. Will County should also partner with the City of Joliet to evaluate the costs and benefits of annexing the area to the north of Alessio Drive to enable the extension of water and sewer services and facilitate business expansion.

While partially located within the City of Joliet, if the Alessio Drive were annexed entirely, additional economic development tools could be made available to fund common area improvements. For example, the creation of a special service area could be pursued to fund roadway or infrastructure improvements using property taxes paid by business park property owners.

#### **Encourage expansion of existing industrial development along McKinley Street.**

A large, mostly vacant industrial property occupies the eastern side of McKinley Street between Patterson Road and Zurich Road. The property is located within the City of Joliet. As recommended in the Land Use Plan, this property should continue to function as an industrial site. Uses should be encouraged to expand within the property provided that adequate screening and buffering such as a landscaped berm is maintained along the McKinley Street and Zurich Road frontages. To minimize impacts to the adjacent Patterson Road neighborhood and nearby IL Route 53 corridor, the City of Joliet should consider requiring truck traffic generated by any expanded development on the site to utilize Zurich Road (west of McKinley Street) and Brandon Road.

#### **Identify desired uses for quarry sites.**

There are numerous quarry sites in and around the Study Area. While the potential for future reuse of most of the quarry sites is uncertain the Chicago Street Quarry and Zurich Quarry are both being gradually filled and may have potential to accommodate development.

#### **Promote industrial park development at the Zurich Road Quarry.**

The Zurich Quarry is a small quarry located on the north side of Zurich Road, between McKinley Street and Cecelia Avenue, and adjacent to the Boyd's Quarry site. The nearly 17-acre site was annexed by the City of Joliet in 2010 and the quarry is being filled with clean soil that is to be compacted so as to support future industrial park development once reclamation is complete. Similar to the McKinley Street industrial area, the site is adjacent the Patterson Road neighborhood and adequate screening and buffering such as a landscaped berm should be maintained adjacent to residential areas. The City of Joliet should also consider requiring the future Zurich Quarry industrial park to utilize Zurich Road (traveling west of McKinley Street) and Brandon Road for ingress and egress to the site to minimize impacts on the neighborhood.

Figure 4.4: Commercial & Industrial Areas

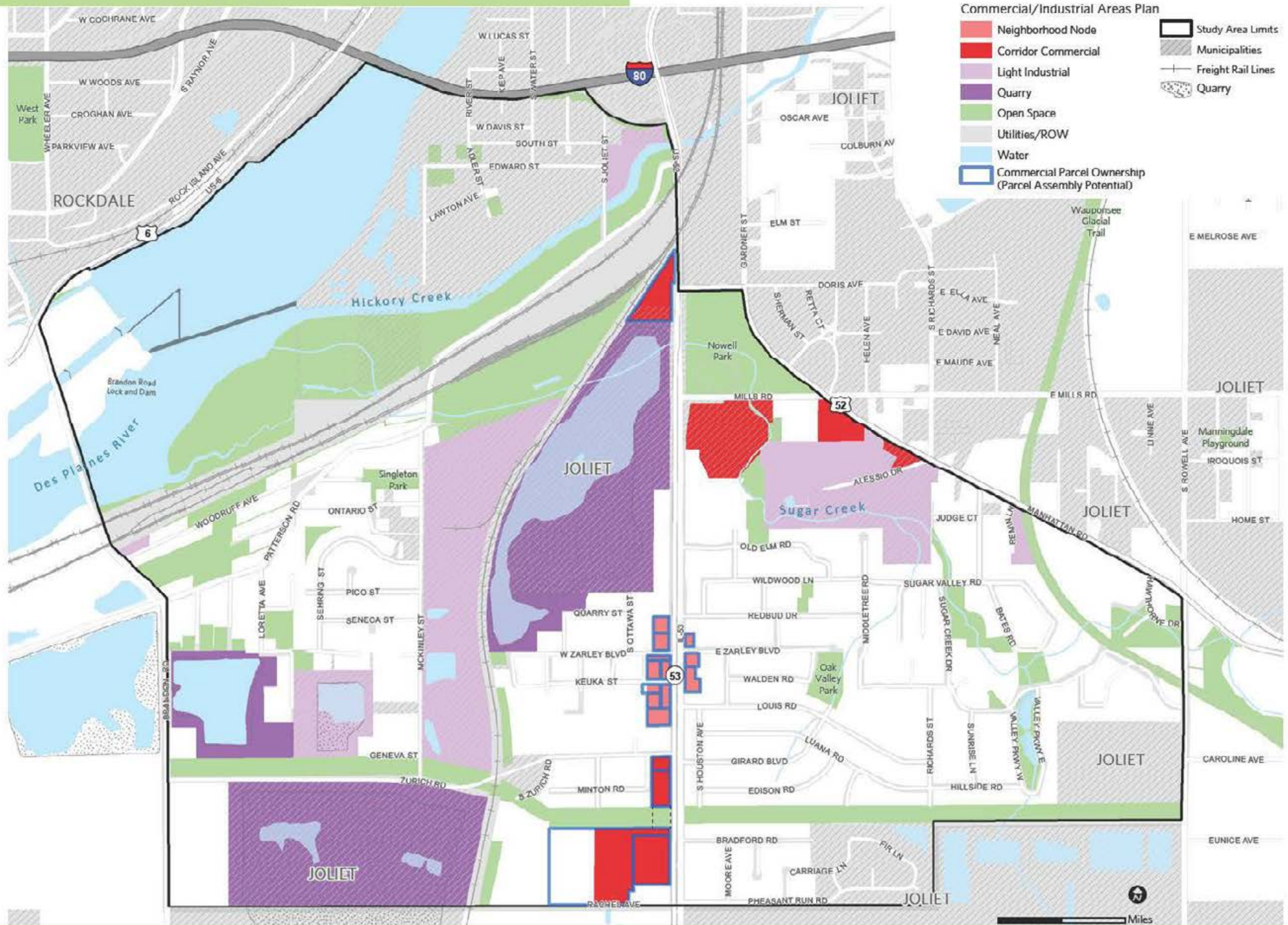






Figure 4.5: Quarry locations within the Study Area

- 1 Boyd's Quarry
- 2 Zurich Road Quarry
- 3 Chicago Street Quarry

Evaluate potential for a regional park at the Chicago Street Quarry site.

The Chicago Street Quarry comprises more than 90 acres in the area west of IL Route 53 between approximately Doris Avenue and Zarley Boulevard. The site was approved for a clean construction and demolition debris (CCDD) fill operation in 2007. Since that time the site has been accepting approved materials and the quarry is gradually being filled with uncontaminated soil, broken concrete (without protruding metal bars), bricks, rock, stone, or reclaimed asphalt pavement) generated from construction or demolition activities. It is anticipated that the filling operations will continue through the year 2040.

The initial CCDD permit applicant stated an intent to use the site as green space, however there is potential for post closure use of the site if the activities do not threaten human health. As part of the annexation agreement, the City of Joliet obtained the right of first refusal to acquire the property, creating the potential for public access in the future.

While the Chicago Street Quarry is likely to remain a CCDD fill site through the 10- to 15-year life of this Neighborhood Plan, given its prominent size and location within the community, the future reuse of the quarry could have a significant impact on the Sugar Run Creek Area. The Land Use Plan identifies the site as a quarry, however the site has previously been identified as a desirable location for a regional park in the IL Route 53 Corridor Plan. It is recommended that Will County and the City of Joliet work with the existing property owners and local residents to establish a reclamation plan for the site that leverages the quarry area as a unique asset and serves as an amenity to the public as well as future development. Desirable uses for the Chicago Street site include a combination of regional park and recreation attraction, single-family attached, and multi-family residential.



### Case Study: Three Oaks Recreation Area, Crystal Lake, Illinois.

The City of Crystal Lake opened the Three Oaks Recreation Area in the spring of 2011 on a nearly 500-acre site of a reclaimed stone quarry. The site is located near the intersection of IL Route 31 and US Highway 14 and features a public beach area, fishing, a boat rental marina, landscaped lake islands, hiking trails, a playground/spray park, and a concessions area and patio.

The public recreation facility also includes a privately-operated restaurant with tap room and large outdoor dining area, and live outdoor music venue. The facility is located on the smaller North Lake section of the recreation area and provides access to a 32-acre cable wake park on the lake.



Photo Credit:  
Creative Commons licensed (NC) flickr photo by contemplative imaging

Evaluate potential for a regional park at the Boyd's Quarry site.

Boyd's Quarry, which occupies the northeast corner of the Brandon Road and Zurich Road intersection, was cited by several stakeholders as a unique asset in the Sugar Run Creek Area. The quarry has been identified in the Corridor Plan for IL Route 53 as a site with potential for redevelopment for recreational use. It is envisioned that the site will include walking paths, a learning station and signage highlighting nearby assets including the I&M Canal, the Des Plaines River, the Brandon Road Lock and Dam and other amenities within and surrounding the study area. Counter to this recommendation, concerns have also been expressed regarding the ability to safely open the site to the public given the quarry's very low water level and steep walls.

Boyd's Quarry is currently owned by NRG Energy, Inc. which operates a power plant located along the Des Plaines River to the west of the Study Area. In the past Boyd's Quarry has been used to control water levels in the nearby Lincoln Stone Quarry which is also owned by NRG and will be undergoing remediation and post-closure maintenance for at least 30 years. NRG representatives have indicated they are open to the concept of selling the Boyd's Quarry property provided there are no legal obligations or other environmental issues that would prevent the sale.

As with the Chicago Street Quarry site, a long term plan for the reclamation of this site is desired. It is recommended that Will County partner with the property owners and local residents to establish a long term reclamation plan for the site. Such a plan must address issues of ownership as well as public access and safety related to the potential for the injury of visitors at a former quarry with steep walls and water hazards. Due to the long term nature of the project, the Land Use Plan identifies the Boyd's Quarry as a quarry.

## 4.4 Implementation

*[To be completed after public open house and review by Will County staff and the Steering Committee.]*

# Chapter 5

## TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY





## Vision

*In the year 2030, Will County and its partners have worked together to identify and implement a regional solution to alleviating truck congestion along IL Route 53. In the meantime, intersection and access management improvements to IL Route 53 have made the roadway safer for local motorists and less of a barrier to those walking or biking in the neighborhood. Improvements to bus service and the areas that surround bus stops have also increased local transit use while enhancing local resident access to employment opportunities in the broader region. These major roadway and transit improvements have been complemented by local road extensions and improvements to circulation at the neighborhood scale.*

## 5.1 Existing Conditions

This section provides information on natural environmental resources within the Sugar Run Creek Area with a focus on parks and open space, waterways, and groundwater. The study area and its surroundings are home to several neighborhood parks and regional open space assets including Nowell Park, Sugar Creek Preserve, and the I&M Canal. Its borders also include portions of the Des Plaines River, the waterway which connects Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River, and the historic Brandon Road Lock and Dam.

### Key Findings

- *Development in the Sugar Run Creek Area is not contiguous and consists of pockets of residential development divided by major roadways and industrial uses.* Particularly in areas west of IL Route 53, travel is hampered by a general lack of streets or pedestrian connections between neighborhoods.
- *Outreach participants identified truck congestion and related traffic safety issues along IL Route 53 and major intersecting routes such as Laraway Road as one of the biggest issues facing the Sugar Run Creek Area.* In 2014, an average of approximately 6,900 trucks used IL Route 53 on a daily basis, representing one-quarter of all traffic on the roadway. Truck congestion has also increased in recent years with the expansion of intermodal operations and logistics in the area and the closing of a railroad crossing near Elwood. A 2015 IDOT study confirmed that truck congestion is a growing issue along the corridor and that some routes will experience road surface degradation in the future.
- *As a response to increasing truck traffic, IDOT and other stakeholders are pursuing the construction of a new bridge over the Des Plaines River near Houbolt Road.* The new bridge would connect the Laraway Road corridor to Interstate 80 and allow for an alternate route to potentially decrease traffic along the portion of IL Route 53 through the study area.
- *The two existing Pace Suburban Bus Routes that travel through the Sugar Creek Area suffer from low ridership.* Less than 3% of study area residents take transit to work and combined ridership for routes passing through the area is less than 200 weekday boardings. Residents have indicated a desire for changes to service and stop amenities. Over the long term, potential exists to connect to planned bus rapid transit routes that will originate from Downtown Joliet and travel north along IL Route 53 to the Interstate 88 corridor.
- *With the exception of the Preston Heights neighborhood, the study area generally lacks pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.* While residential areas can be more safely travelled by walking along a roadway, primary routes including IL Route 53, Brandon Road, and Manhattan Road are problematic for non-auto traffic. The IL Route 53 Corridor Plan recommends the installation of a bike trail along the corridor that would greatly enhance north-south connectivity in the study area.
- *Reported accidents are concentrated along in the central portion of the Sugar Run Creek Area along IL Route 53.* Between 2008 and 2012 there were 31 auto and pedestrian crashes reported along IL Route 53 surrounding the Zarley Boulevard intersection. This is similar to the 33 accidents reported during the same time period at the Laraway Road intersection which is signalized.

## 5.2 Roadways

### Extend local streets to improve neighborhood connectivity.

The Sugar Run Creek Area is made up of several distinct neighborhoods. While areas to the east of IL Route 53 are well connected, the neighborhoods to the west of IL Route 53 are isolated with limited vehicular and non-motorized access to one another. Local street extensions should be considered to improve overall connectivity, promote non-motorized mobility, and help activate isolated neighborhoods.

Building on the recommendations summarized here and highlighted in the Proposed Roadway Improvements Map (*Figure 5.3*), Will County and Joliet Township should consider partnering with local residents and property owners to identify desired future vehicular connections or pedestrian connections. These recommendations represent general areas of priority and more detailed study is needed to identify precise routes. The Pedestrian & Bicycle Network section of this chapter also identifies potential pedestrian connections in areas where improved connectivity is desired.

### Extend local streets to serve new development.

As new development occurs, local streets should be extended to facilitate connections between established neighborhoods. To ensure such connections provide for safe and convenient pedestrian travel, new local streets should also include sidewalks that are separated from the roadway by a landscaped parkway.

### IDOT Illinois Route 53 Study

As of the adoption of this Plan, IDOT was engaged in preliminary engineering and environmental studies (Phase I) for the improvement of IL Route 53 from W Arsenal Road (near Wilmington) to Doris Avenue (in the Study Area). The study is intended to address safety and operations concerns along IL Route 53 and will result in a detailed preferred improvement plan for the corridor. Preliminary results from the study appear to be in line with the recommendations of the Sugar Run Creek Area Neighborhood Plan and it is believed that the Illinois Route 53 Study will provide the information to assist Will County in securing funding to implement Plan recommendations. Will County should continue to coordinate with IDOT representatives to ensure that the recommendations of this Plan and of the Illinois Route 53 Study support one another.



Source: <http://il53corridor.org/>



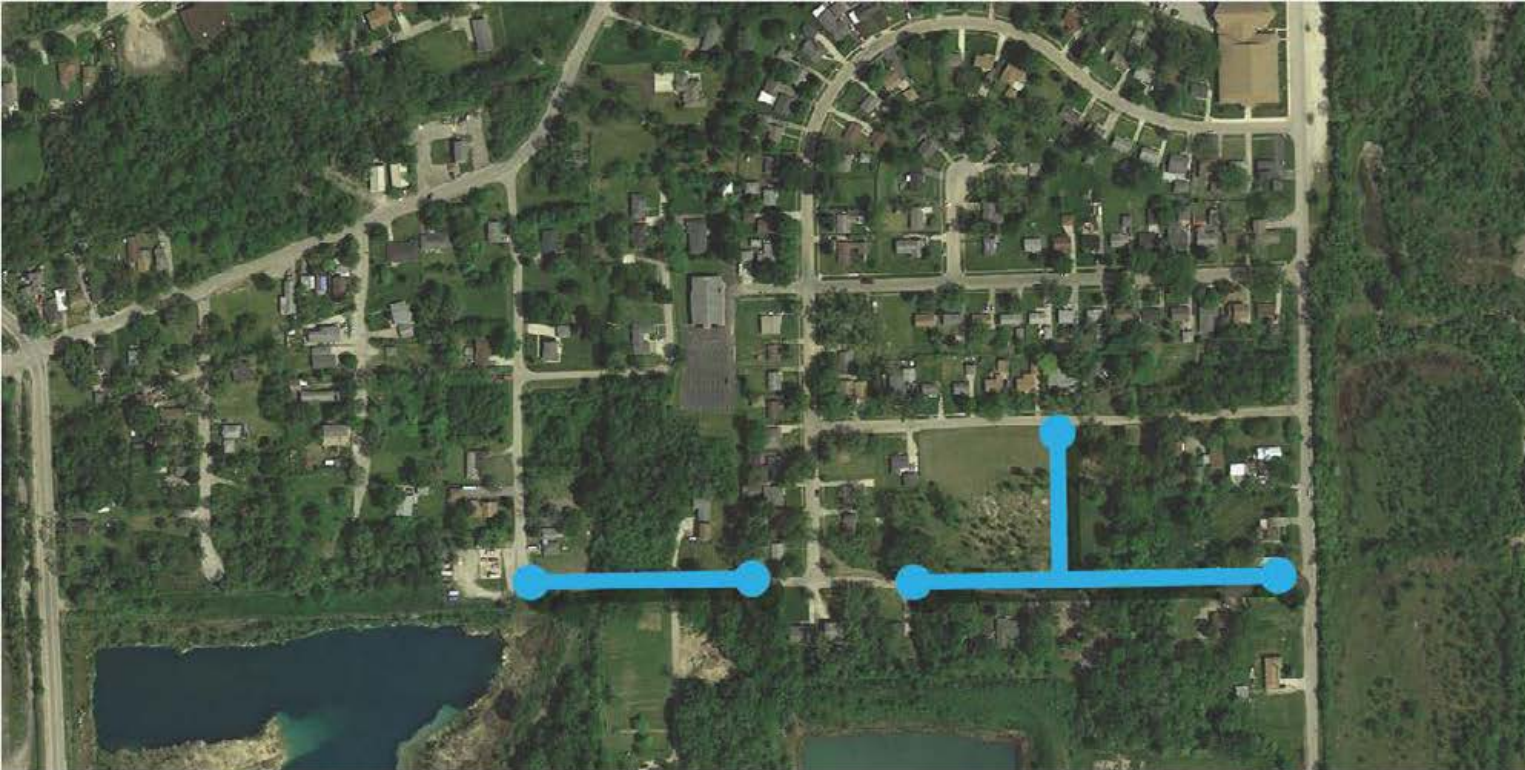


Figure 5.1 Potential road extensions utilizing unused ROW connections west of McKinley Street.



Local Road Extension

### Improve circulation in established neighborhoods

In established areas where significant development is not feasible, local roadway extensions should be considered to improve connectivity. There is particular need for such improvements in the westernmost portion of the study area which was platted for residential development, but several areas remain undeveloped decades later. Residential development occurred in pockets such that undeveloped right-of-way exists throughout the area. Strategically located segments of this right-of-way could be used to accommodate local street connections that minimize the driving and walking distance between adjacent portions of the neighborhood.



Figure 5.2: Potential road alignments in area north of Zurich Rd. along with commercial rear access.



#### Enhance access in commercial and industrial areas

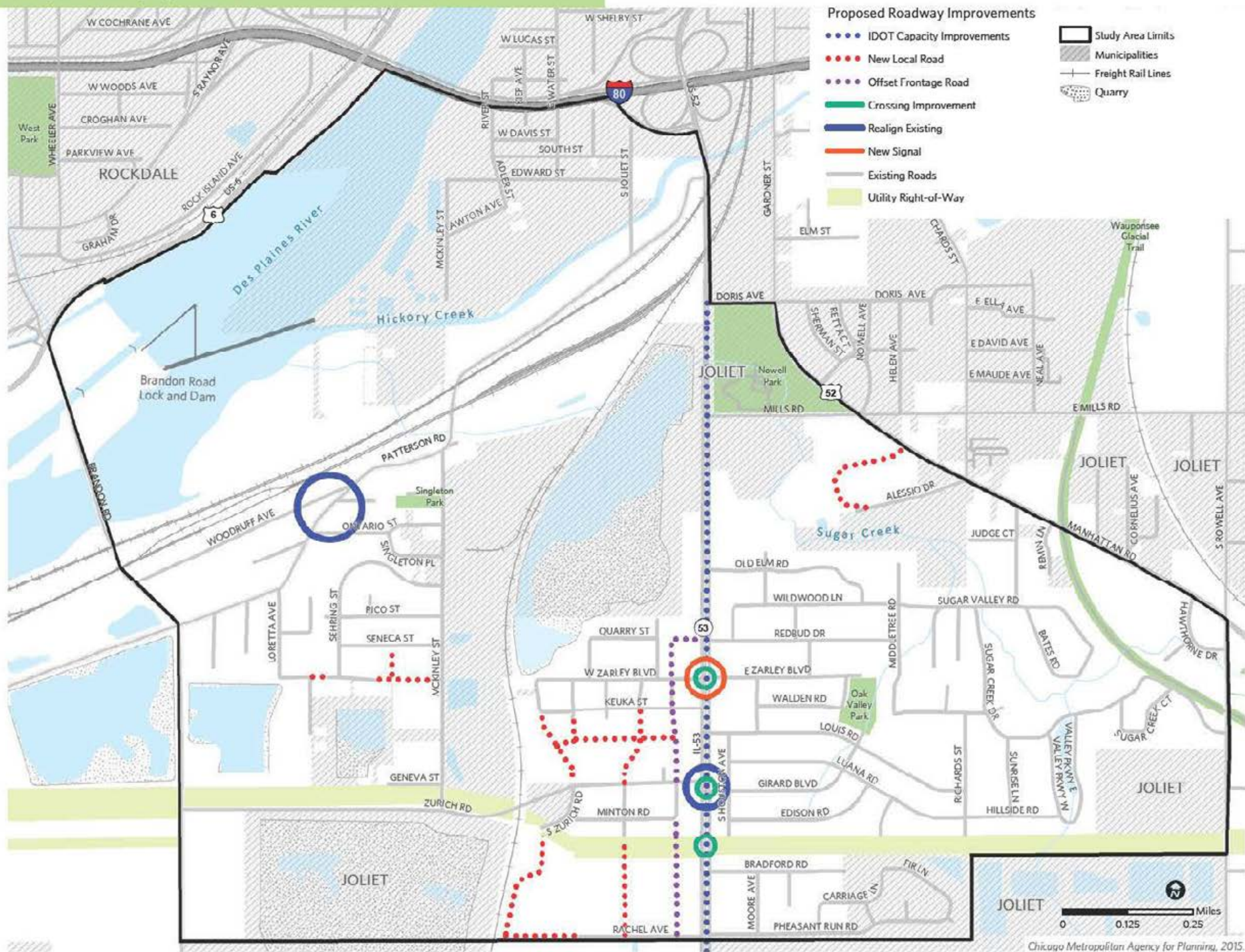
Local road improvements should also be considered to facilitate desired commercial and industrial development as identified in the Land Use Plan.

- o As discussed in **Chapter 4: Economic Development**, it is recommended that Will County, Joliet Township, and the City of Joliet partner to facilitate the creation of a formal business park in the area along Alessio Drive. To improve access to parcels in the western portion of this area, a new local street could be installed to create a business loop between the existing Alessio Dr. alignment and the northernmost driveway which currently serves the Will County Farm Bureau. Such an improvement could be implemented by Joliet Township, or by the City of Joliet if the area is annexed. In addition to typical roadway funds, potential funding sources could include a newly formed special service area (SSA) or tax increment finance (TIF) district comprising businesses in the new business park.

- o Where possible, to promote a more pedestrian friendly and attractive corridor, new commercial development along IL Route 53 should be located at or near the front of the property with vehicular access and parking provided in the rear. Will County and Joliet Township should partner with business and property owners to install an offset frontage road along the west side of IL Route 53 to facilitate rear access. This new route would also improve access management by directing business traffic from IL Route 53 to intersecting side streets.



Figure 5.3: Proposed Roadway Improvements





## Provide for safe east-west movements across IL Route 53 and other major routes.

IL Route 53 provides a centrally located north-south route through the community, but its high traffic volume also creates a hazard for east-west connections through the neighborhood. There are no signalized intersections along IL Route 53 and no marked pedestrian crossings exist to allow bikes or pedestrians to travel safely across. Improved crossings, intersection alignments, and strategic access management are needed to make IL Route 53 less of a barrier to both vehicles and pedestrians.

### Install a signalized crossing at Zarley Boulevard

There is a strong desire among local residents for a signalized intersection in the central portion of IL Route 53 as it passes through the Sugar Run Creek Area. The Zarley Boulevard intersection is a current focal point of neighborhood traffic and is at the center of a neighborhood node of commercial development as indicated in the Land Use Plan. Will County and IDOT should evaluate the installation of a signalized intersection at Zarley Boulevard to more safely accommodate cross-traffic and left turns on to IL Route 53.

Additional interest was expressed by the community for a signalized intersection at Zurich Road. The City of Joliet has plans to install a traffic signal at Emerald Avenue just to the south of the Study Area which would likely eliminate the Zurich Road intersection from consideration for a signal due to IDOT spacing requirements. Furthermore, the trail crossing recommended for the nearby Commonwealth Edison utility right-of-way (see **Section 5.3 Pedestrian & Bike Network**) would also minimize the need for a pedestrian crossing at Zurich Road.

Regardless of where any new signalized crossings occur, signal timing should be coordinated to provide for the maximum efficiency of traffic flow along IL Route 53.

## Realign awkward intersections.

Several of the intersections within the Sugar Run Creek Area are irregular, with roadways meeting at non-right angles. Irregular intersections are not problematic on local streets with limited traffic volume, but it is recommended that irregular or misaligned intersections should be addressed on major routes. As indicated in **Figure 5.3: Proposed Roadway Improvements**, the following intersections should be evaluated for realignment to establish 90-degree intersections.

- o **Patterson & Woodruff** – Woodruff Avenue should be realigned to meet with Patterson Road at Champlain Street. Existing undeveloped right-of-way appears adequate to accommodate this improvement. All roads near this intersection should form 90-degree intersections with the realigned Patterson Road. Impacted roadways are under the jurisdiction of Joliet Township.
- o **IL Route 53 & Zurich** – Zurich Road currently forms an offset intersection with Girard Avenue. As redevelopment of the commercial properties to the south of Zurich Road occurs, the roadway should be realigned to form a single intersection with IL Route 53 and Girard Boulevard. Will County should work with Joliet Township to encourage IDOT to incorporate this intersection realignment as part of future access management improvements along IL Route 53.

### Implement cross-walk improvements in strategic locations.

In addition to providing a signalized crossing at Zarley Boulevard, Will County should coordinate with IDOT and Joliet Township to make crosswalk improvements at key intersections throughout the neighborhood. Where possible, safety enhancements such as highly visible zebra striping and push-button signals should be installed to complement the potential future installation of sidewalks or multi-use paths as identified in the Pedestrian & Bicycle Network section of this chapter.

Intersections that should be prioritized for crosswalk improvements include:

- o Rowell Avenue at Manhattan Road
- o All four intersections surrounding Nowell Park:
  - » Mills Road at IL Route 53 and Manhattan Road
  - » Doris Avenue at IL Route 53 and Manhattan Road
- o Zurich Road/Girard Boulevard at IL Route 53
- o Brandon Road and Patterson Road
- o Zurich Road at Brandon Road

### Enhance Access Management along IL Route 53.

Currently, nearly all non-single family uses fronting IL Route 53 use multiple driveways or long, continuous curb cuts to access their property. Improving access management along IL Route 53 will improve traffic flow along the IL Route 53 corridor while reducing potential points of vehicular conflict.

As redevelopment occurs along the roadway, property owners should be encouraged to establish shared access drives and promote cross access between adjoining properties, thus reducing the number of curb cuts needed along the roadway. These improvements would also foster a safer and more welcoming environment for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. As recommended earlier in this section, the installation of a frontage street would enhance access management by facilitating rear access to existing and future commercial properties.

It is recommended that Will County and its partners should coordinate with local property owners to evaluate and identify specific opportunities for access management improvements. In addition to the guidelines and standards provided by the Will County Permit Regulations and Access Control Regulations, the County can provide guidance on agreements between abutting property owners such as cross access easements and shared parking agreements.

### Advocate for a long term truck traffic solution.

At more than 6,500 acres and with two active intermodal terminals, the CenterPoint Intermodal Center (CIC) is reported to be the largest master-planned inland port in North America. This is a unique regional asset that is responsible for significant economic growth in Will County, however, the truck congestion generated by the CIC and related development has also had a significant impact on local quality of life within the Sugar Run Creek Area. Continued expansion of logistics and warehousing development should only be supported in concert with the identification and implementation of a long term solution to mitigating truck traffic impacts.

### Support implementation of the Houbolt Bridge Project.

In response to the truck congestion issue, IDOT recently announced an agreement with CenterPoint Properties to build and operate a new tolled bridge on Houbolt Road (also known as Hollywood Road for the segment immediately south of Interstate 80) over the Des Plaines River and the BNSF Railroad tracks. Will County is required to pass a resolution allowing tolls to be issued and collected by CenterPoint. As part of the agreement, IDOT will also widen Houbolt Road and reconfigure the existing interchange with Interstate 80 to accommodate the increased traffic demand. The City of Joliet will work with IDOT to implement and oversee the improvements.

When complete, the project will provide two lanes of traffic in each direction over the Des Plaines River between Interstate 80 and CenterPoint's intermodal facilities. Approximately 11,000 vehicles, including more than 6,600 trucks, are projected to use the bridge initially. By the year 2040, it is anticipated that traffic will grow to approximately 30,000 vehicles per day, including about 18,000 trucks. As of the adoption of this Plan, it was estimated that construction would start as soon as 2017 with the bridge opening to traffic in late 2018 or early 2019.

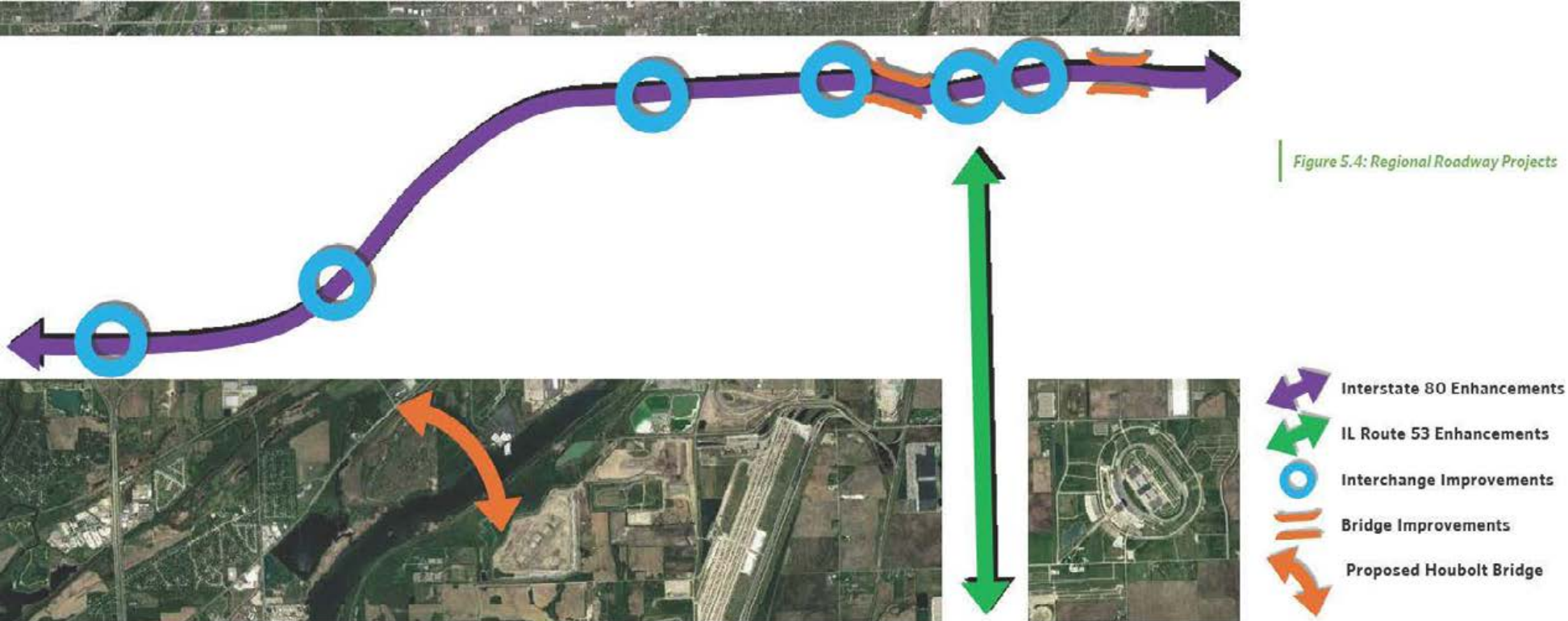
### Improve traffic enforcement.

In addition to identifying projects to reduce truck volumes on local roadways, improved enforcement of traffic laws will help minimize impacts to nearby residential areas. Will County, including the Sheriff's Office, should explore opportunities to coordinate with the CIC, UP, and BNSF and identify strategies that ensure that truck traffic is taking appropriate routes and obeying traffic laws. For example, the County and its partners could identify additional resources that can be dedicated to improving enforcement on roadways in targeted areas surrounding the CIC. Educating local residents regarding existing enforcement measures and resources, such as railroad security contact information to report unlawful driving by trucks that are traveling to or from the UP Joliet Intermodal Terminal (UP-JIT), may also be effective in empowering the community to help in policing the issue.

Trucks travelling east on Laraway Road adjacent to the CenterPoint Intermodal Center, just south of the Study Area.







## Coordinate local improvements with Interstate 80 interchange modifications.

IDOT is engaged in preliminary engineering and environmental studies (Phase I) for the improvement of Interstate 80 from Ridge Road to US Route 30. Some of the alternatives being studied include: providing an additional general purpose lane or a managed lane, potential bicycle and pedestrian accommodations, and interchange improvements, as well as realignment and reconstruction of the Des Plaines River Bridge.

As part of the study, IDOT is considering three potential concepts for the redesign of the IL Route 53 (referred to as Chicago Street in Joliet) and Interstate 80 interchange. None of the concepts would have an impact on the function of IL Route 53 as it passes through the Study Area, however IDOT is taking steps to ensure that the final design includes features that enhance bike and pedestrian connections between the Study Area and area north of Interstate 80.

For example, a diverging diamond concept is being considered that could potentially include a dedicated and protected median bike lane.

Given the access limitations created by the two railroad overpasses on the north end of the Study Area, Will County should encourage IDOT to align any future interchange pedestrian and bicycle connections with the west side of the intersection of Patterson Road and IL Route 53. This alignment would able a future connection to the proposed Patterson Road Gateway Park and Greenway (as discussed in *Chapter 6: Green Infrastructure*).

## Install regional gateway treatments along IL Route 53.

The IL Route 53 Corridor Plan establishes numerous recommendations for improving the appearance of the corridor including the installation of a gateway feature at Patterson Road to mark the northern gateway to the Historic Route 66 corridor. Will County should continue to work with IDOT, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad, the Union Pacific railroad, and local property owners to create a northern gateway feature. This should include:

- o Painting of the BNSF railroad bridge to provide an attractive entrance to the corridor, including design elements such as the historic Route 66 shield emblem that provide a visual connection to the regional identity of Route 66.
- o Installation of lighting and murals along the walls of the IL Route 53 underpass.
- o Development of a small park in the vacant parcel adjacent Patterson Road including a combination of unique signage, landscaping, public art, and lighting features.



A pedestrian refuge and planted median (top) and local gateway feature (bottom) should be considered for inclusion in future reconfiguration of the IL Route 53 right-of-way.

Photo Credit: Dan Burden





## 5.3 Pedestrian & Bicycle Network

### Establish a sidewalk or an off-street path along IL Route 53.

The installation of a bike trail or shared-use path along the IL Route 53 corridor would greatly enhance north-south connectivity in the Sugar Run Creek Area. IDOT is currently engaged in preliminary engineering and environmental studies (Phase I) for the improvement of IL Route 53 from W Arsenal Road (near Wilmington) to Doris Avenue (in the Study Area). In addition to projects that will improve vehicular flow, there is a focus on accommodating a shared-use path for pedestrians and bicyclists on one or both sides of IL Route 53. These preliminary considerations are in line with the IL Route 53 Corridor Plan which recommends the installation of a trail along the east side of IL Route 53 with a trailhead at Nowell Park. While a continuous pedestrian link should be encouraged on the east side of the roadway, sidewalks should also be prioritized on the west side of IL Route 53 in the commercial and single-family attached areas as identified in Land Use Plan.

### Improve Gardner Street as a key connection between the Sugar Run Creek and areas north of Interstate 80.

Traveling north of Nowell Park, the width of IL Route 53 right-of-way is constrained by the presence of two rail bridges. The narrow width of right-of-way prevents the safe accommodation of pedestrian or bike access. As recommended in the IL Route 53 Corridor Plan, Gardner Street includes a bridge over Hickory Creek and an underpass at Interstate 80 that enables an on-street connection between IL Route 53, Nowell Park, and portions of the City of Joliet to the north of Interstate 80.

It is recommended that Will County partner with the City of Joliet and local property owners to evaluate improvements to Gardner Street including a sidewalk on the west side to establish a pedestrian connection between Doris Avenue and the Hickory Creek Bridge which features a sidewalk on both sides. Trail signage and on-street markings such as sharrows should also be considered to clearly communicate to motorists that bikes have an equal right to the lanes when traversing the bridge. .

Figure 5.6: Bridge featuring a sharrow.



Source: CicLAvia.org



Figure 5.7: Illustration showing the intersection of Zarley Boulevard and IL Route 53 with desired future land use and landscaped median with gateway feature.



### Install a pedestrian crossing at Zarley Boulevard.

In conjunction with the installation of a signalized intersection at Zarley Boulevard, Will County and IDOT should also consider the installation of highly visible, zebra-striped pedestrian crosswalks. Traffic volume and speed along IL Route 53 may also require crossing signs with pedestrian-actuated yellow flashing devices (such as Rectangular Rapid Flash Beacons (RRFB) or High-intensity Activated crossWalK (HAWK) beacons), and advanced crossing signs. Lastly, a landscaped median should also be considered as part of the intersection design to provide a defined area where pedestrians may wait safely to cross until vehicular traffic clears.

### Install a neighborhood gateway feature.

In addition to serving as a pedestrian refuge, the landscaped median could be enhanced with raised planters and provide the space for gateway signage that welcomes motorists and lets them know they are visiting the unique Sugar Run Creek neighborhood. The neighborhood gateway treatment could include a tag line and symbolism that celebrate local culture and heritage including the neighborhood's strong connection to blues music.

Similar neighborhood gateway features should be considered for installation at other entry points into the community such as the Brandon Road and Patterson Road intersection. Existing gateway signs for the Sugar Creek Hills neighborhood at Manhattan Road and Rowell Avenue could also be updated. Neighborhood gateway features could also be complemented by streetscaping and public art installed along IL Route 53 and at major cross streets. Solar-powered up lighting and low-maintenance landscaping could also be included in the design to minimize long term upkeep costs.

## Install marked bike lanes or off-street paths along key routes.

Overall, pedestrian and bike mobility within the various neighborhoods of Sugar Run Creek is adequate. However, travel between adjacent neighborhoods can be problematic due to physical barriers, such as high traffic roadways and large quarries, and lack of pedestrian infrastructure. It is recommended that Will County, City of Joliet, and Joliet Township coordinate the installation of marked bike lanes or off-street paths along routes that provide key pedestrian and bike connections between the area's various neighborhoods.

Key routes that should be prioritized include:

- o Patterson Road;
- o Zurich Road;
- o Manhattan Road;
- o Brandon Road;
- o Zarley Boulevard;
- o Rowell Avenue; and
- o McKinley Street;
- o Mills Road;
- o Doris Avenue.

As indicated **Section 5.2 Roadways**, the intersections of these key routes should also be prioritized for crosswalk improvements to complement improvements to bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

## Construct a multi-use trail along the ComEd utility corridor.

Residents and other stakeholders have expressed a desire to connect the two regional trails that flank the Study Area's eastern border (Wauponsee Glacial Trail) and western border (I&M Canal State Trail). The ComEd utility corridor that traverses the southern portion of the Study Area presents a unique opportunity to transform an underutilized green space into a pleasant trail corridor that serves as a regional amenity while also improving local connectivity. The utility corridor would enable the shared-use path to directly connect with the Wauponsee Glacial Trail just east of Rowell Avenue. The utility corridor terminates near Patterson Road, providing the option to connect to a future on-street or off-street path along either Patterson Road or Brandon Road that could then travel north across the Brandon Road bridge and connect to the I&M Canal State Trail trailhead near Mound Road.

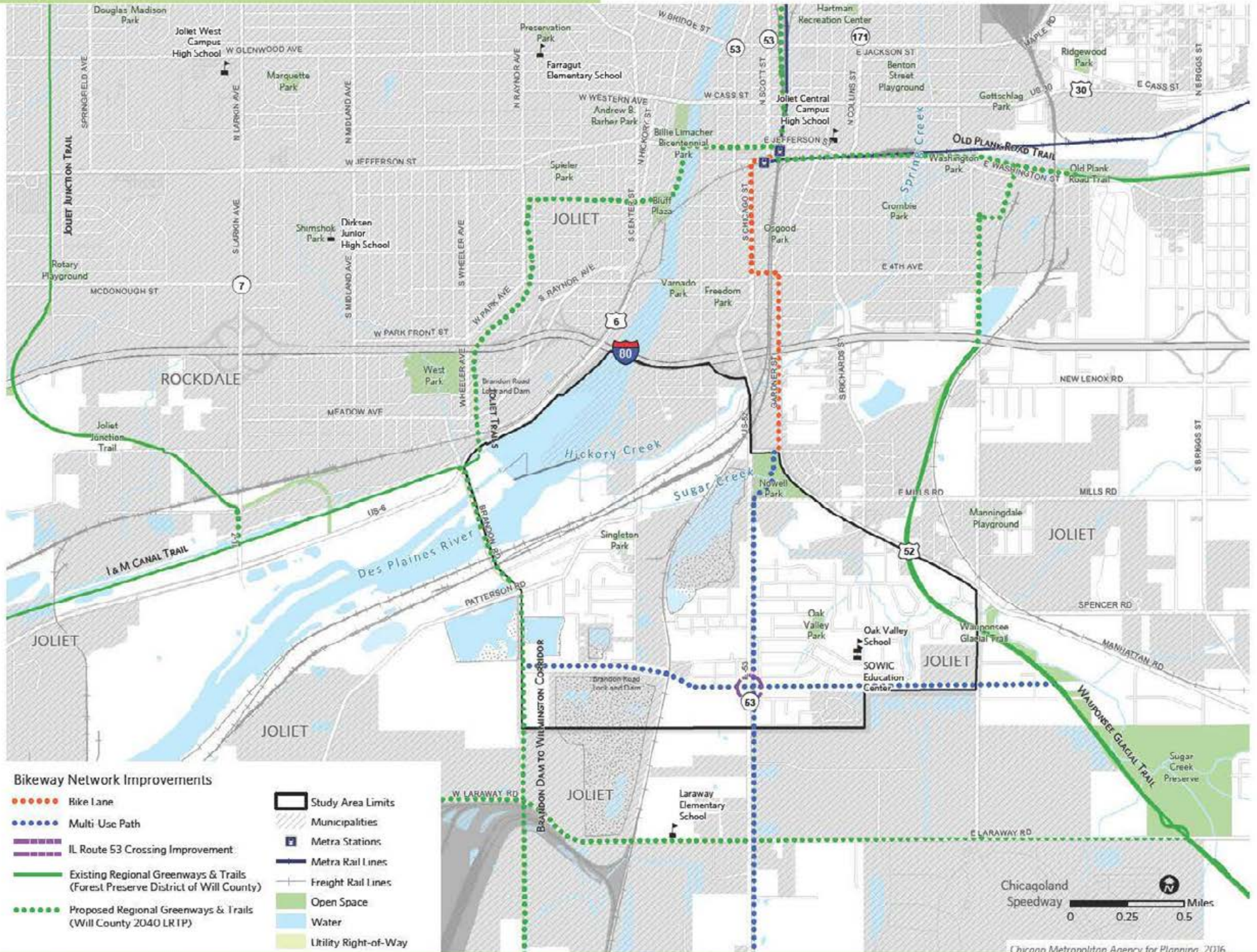
### Will County LRTP Update

As of the adoption of this Plan, Will County was undertaking an update to its Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) that will be titled Will Connects 2040. Preliminary recommendations from the updated LRTP indicate support the installation of a bikeway along the Laraway Road corridor between the Wauponsee Glacial Trail and the proposed Houbolt Bridge. The ComEd Easement alignment proposed in this Plan would provide a similar east-west connection, but would have the added benefit of providing direct connections to nearby residential areas along a greenway that is separated from vehicular traffic.

Will County should explore coordinating with the Forest Preserve District of Will County, Commonwealth Edison, IDOT, Joliet Township, and the City of Joliet to evaluate the proposed ComEd easement trail. As initial segments of the trail are installed, the trail can serve local needs. Once a full connection is established between Brandon Road and the Wauponsee Glacial Trail, the utility easement trail could potentially serve as a primary regional link that replaces the connection provided along Laraway Road to the east of Brandon Road.



Figure 5.8: Bicycle Network Improvements





## Design Considerations

The following design elements should be taken into consideration in creating more detailed plans for the ComEd trail connection.

- o **Local connections should be provided** to the trail by extending shared-use paths from the ends of existing local stub streets including Richards Street, Dallas Place, Houston Avenue, Wedgewood Drive, and McKinley Street.
- o While an at-grade trail crossing is desirable, **a bridge across IL Route 53 may be required** to safely transport bikes and pedestrians over the highway. Design features such as a switchback configuration should be considered to minimize the horizontal distance consumed by the bridge, allowing for connections to local streets within closer proximity to IL Route 53.
- o **A trailhead should be installed at Rowell Avenue.** The trailhead could be located within the utility corridor, or it could be developed in partnership with the Laraway School District which plans to locate a new Laraway Elementary School facility on the adjacent property to the north. Potential trailhead amenities to consider include parking, bike racks, a comfort station, drinking fountains, seating, an informational kiosk, wayfinding, and security lighting. An on-street or off-street path along Rowell Avenue could also be installed to provide bike and pedestrian access to the school and to the Wauponsee Glacial Trail entrance to the north.
- o As part of the trail development, Will County and its partners should **consider naturalizing the ComEd right-of-way** including the use of native prairie grasses and plants similar to the improvements at the nearby Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Figure 5.9: Trail using utility right-of-way, Romeoville, IL.



Source: Google Maps 2016

Figure 5.10: Illustration of proposed trail along utility right-of-way at IL Route 53.





## 5.4 Transit

The two existing Pace Suburban Bus Routes that travel through the Sugar Creek Area suffer from low ridership and less than 3% of Study Area residents take transit to work. Given the Study Area's proximity to transit hubs in Downtown Joliet, improving local transit access and connectivity could have a significant impact on improving access to employment for Sugar Run Creek Area residents.

### Undertake a Transit Market Survey in coordination with Pace.

A more detailed study of the factors impacting ridership in the Sugar Run Creek Area is needed to address residents' desires for improved service. It is recommended that Will County and the City of Joliet partner with Pace and Metra to survey area residents and businesses to solicit feedback on community use of transit, barriers to transit use, desired type of service, and desired destinations. Results of the survey should be summarized into a report and presented to the transit agencies.

Following the survey, Will County could work with Pace to identify ways of augmenting or modifying existing service based on community needs and initiatives Pace is implementing in the broader area. In addition evaluating existing service, the demand for other types of transit service such as employer-sponsored shuttles, circulator service, or dial-a-ride, which may better suit resident and business needs could also be considered.





## Case Study: Transit Improvement Plan, Village of South Elgin, Illinois.

An example of a Transit Market Survey is included in the Village of South Elgin's Transit Improvement Plan. The survey form used by the Village covered various aspects of community with a focus on evaluating existing ridership and trends, future preferences and desires, and user demographics. A hard copy of the survey was made available at community events and distributed among South Elgin employers and establishments by Village staff. The online version was advertised on Pace buses, the Village website, and on the hard copy version itself.

Source: Village of South Elgin

## Convert existing bus service to posted stop routes.

The Pace bus routes that serve the Sugar Run Creek Area are flagged routes, meaning that passengers can board or alight the bus at any intersection along the route where the driver deems it is safe to do so. While passengers are encouraged to wait for the bus at bus stop signs, it is not mandatory. Pace is in the process of converting all bus routes to posted-stops-only routes where passengers can only board or alight a bus at posted stops.

Pace is currently in the process of evaluating bus stop patterns for fixed routes in the Sugar Run Creek Area. While there is no firm date for implementation, Pace is converting routes on a rolling basis and anticipate a full posted-stops-only transition by 2018 or 2019. This will enable bus service to run more efficiently and reduce travel times on existing routes.

## Identify and enhance bus stop locations.

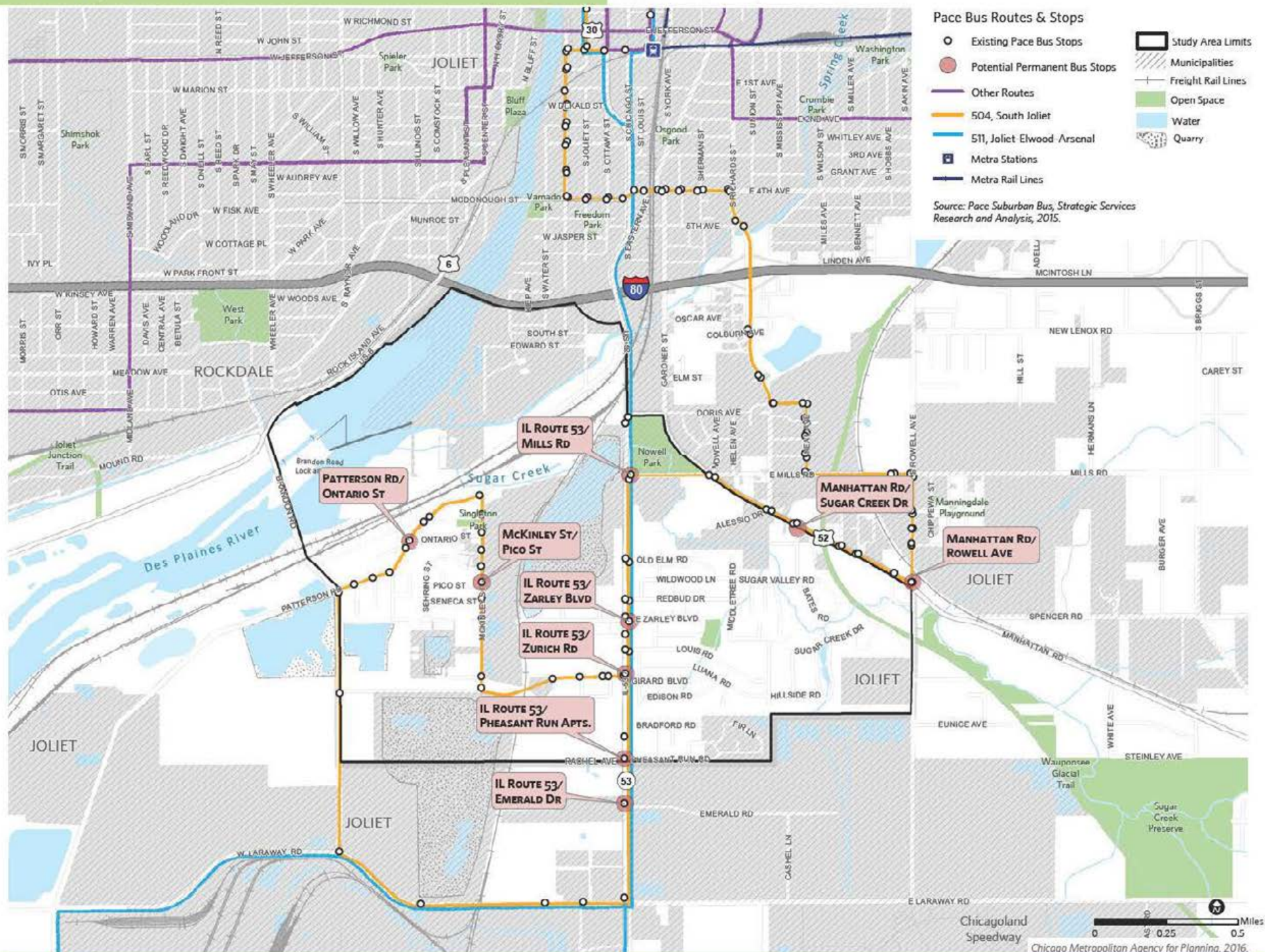
In addition to providing service that is attractive and better meets passenger needs, it is important that the environment that surrounds transit stops is safe and inviting. By enhancing bus stop locations and nearby areas, Will County and Pace can make the trip connection from the bus stop to home more comfortable for potential users.

Within the IL Route 53 corridor, Pace is also working with IDOT to identify preliminary stop locations for future accessibility improvements, potentially including stops at IL Route 53/Zarley Blvd., IL Route 53/Zurich Rd., IL Route 53/Pheasant Run Apartments, and IL Route 53/Emerald Dr. The installation of stop amenities will require use of rights-of-way and potentially easements on private property, so coordination with IDOT and local property owners is key to implementation.

It is recommended that Will County coordinate with Pace to identify desired stops locations and what amenities are appropriate for each. Regardless of the amenities offered at a given bus stop, sidewalks should be installed to connect bus stops with the local pedestrian infrastructure and provide at least one easily identifiable accessible route. Bus stops in high traffic areas such as near Zarley Boulevard should be prioritized for bus shelters, seating, trash receptacles, and lighting improvements.



**Figure 5.11: Transit Improvements**



## Support regional transit service improvements.

Improving resident access to regional transit options could be an effective strategy in enhancing access to employment outside of the study area. Preliminary recommendations included in Will County's updated LRTP identify three regional transit improvements that could benefit Sugar Run Creek residents and employers. These routes would provide direct connections to the growing western suburbs as well as the Interstate 55 corridor and south suburban areas.

- o IL Route 59 is a proposed target for an arterial bus rapid transit (BRT) route, originating in Downtown Joliet and traveling north along Plainfield Road and IL Route 59 to the DuPage County line and beyond. As a BRT route, Pace buses would make stops every half- to one mile and would utilize transit signal priority (TSP) technology that gives a bus approaching a traffic signal priority by extending a green light, shortening a red light, or by providing queue jumps. Pace has made the creation of BRT corridors a key part of its long-range plan, and IL Route 59 is one of three such corridors identified in Will County.
- o Metra's Heritage Corridor line is recommended for increased service levels including the addition of more trains and development of a new station in Romeoville at 135th Street.
- o Metra's Rock Island District line is recommended for the addition of more trains.

Will County should encourage local stakeholders to participate in informational meetings and discussions related to these projects to ensure that Sugar Run Creek Area interests are served as these projects move forward. Will County should also continue to work with Pace to prioritize improvements to local transit service to better connect local residents to service hubs in Downtown Joliet and improved and expanded regional transit.

## 5.5 Implementation

*[To be completed after public open house and review by Will County staff and the Steering Committee.]*



# Chapter 6

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE



## Vision

*In the year 2030, Will County and its partners will have made significant progress in maximizing recreational and open space opportunities by enhancing Sugar Run Creek's existing natural spaces. Open space amenities such as Nowell Park, the Patterson Road greenway, and Boyd's Quarry will be accessible to residents while also serving as a regional destination for visitors. New neighborhood parks will be established in areas underserved by park space and recreational activity. Improvements to the natural landscape will have enhanced the character of the community while supporting stormwater management techniques and providing safe clean water to the community.*

## 6.1 Existing Conditions

This section provides information on natural environmental resources within the Sugar Run Creek Area with a focus on parks and open space, waterways, and groundwater. The study area and its surroundings are home to several neighborhood parks and regional open space assets including Nowell Park, Sugar Creek Preserve, and the I&M Canal. Its borders also include portions of the Des Plaines River, the waterway which connects Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River, and the historic Brandon Road Lock and Dam.

### Key Findings

- *Adequate park land exists to meet the Sugar Run Creek community's open space needs, but access to existing parks is limited.* There are approximately 24-acres of park land in the study area which meets NRPA recommended standards of between 6 and 10 acres per 1,000 residents. Access to neighborhood parks does not appear to be a significant issue, but access to Nowell Park is being impacted by a lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure connecting residential areas to the community park.
- *The study area is proximate to several natural areas that could serve as regional amenities for outdoor recreation; however access is limited to many of these assets.* For example, Boyd's Quarry was also highlighted during the community outreach process as a potential asset. The quarry is privately owned and no plans are in place to permit public access. However, finding a public entity capable of purchasing the property and mitigating safety concerns of the former quarry with steep walls and water hazards may be a challenge.
- *Flooding is limited, but occurs within isolated portions of established residential areas.* Areas particularly affected are located to the east of IL Route 53 in the southern portion of the study area where residential development was permitted to occur in flood zones and areas with poorly drained hydric soils.
- *The majority of households in the Sugar Run Creek Area obtain their water from wells in a shallow bedrock aquifer.* Many households in Sugar Run Creek receive water from two community wells served by the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District, but well and septic serves approximately half of the study area's households. A number of efforts have been undertaken to protect groundwater including establishing minimum well setback zones and remediation sites, but additional efforts may need to be pursued as industrial development and quarry expansion occur proximate to the Sugar Run Creek Area.



## 6.2 Parks & Recreation

### Improve access to Nowell Park.

According to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), the Sugar Run Creek study area meets the recommended NRPA standard of 6 to 10 acres per 1,000 residents for neighborhood and community park space. Although park space is available and NRPA standards are met, residents have raised concerns around accessing the largest park in the community, Nowell Park. Nowell Park offers visitors the opportunity to rent pavilion space, play tennis and baseball, or have a picnic. Additionally the Joliet Park District holds an annual Flea Market and Back to School Festival at the park.

While the park offers a number of amenities and programming, barriers to access reported by local residents include roadway congestion and lack of pedestrian infrastructure. Enhancements to bike and pedestrian connections can be achieved through the addition of different traffic calming measures and installation of safe crosswalks, sidewalks, and bike access. While improved connections will benefit local residents, there is also a regional benefit to the enhancement of pedestrian and bike connections in the area. Visitors to Sugar Run Creek will have the opportunity to connect to the park from regional trails such as the Wauponsee Glacial Trail, the I&M Canal Trail, and the proposed trail along IL Route 53.

Potential pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements include:

1. ***Signalized crosswalk*** at Mills Road and Gardner Street/US-52:  
The intersection at Mills Road and Gardner Street lacks a clear crossing into Nowell Park which could particularly endanger youth as they attempt to access the park. While a signalized crosswalk is recommended, lower-cost alternatives may include painting a clear crossing path for pedestrian and bicyclists and/or ‘watch for pedestrian’ signage.
2. ***Curb bump-outs with defined pedestrian crossing*** at Doris Avenue east of IL-53 and Mills Road east of IL-53: A landscaped curb bump-out will help reduce traffic speeds and give pedestrians a stronger feeling of security while crossing to and from the park.
3. ***Sidewalk connectivity***: Establish a clear sidewalk along US-52/Doris Avenue that connects to the park’s existing trail.
4. ***Bike path that follows the park’s existing trail***: Ensure the bike path connects to Nowell Park’s existing trail network beginning at the intersection of IL-53 and Mills Road. A trailhead is recommended by the IL Route 53 Corridor Plan for the proposed bike trail at Nowell Park that connects to the Wauponsee Trail along Mills Road.
5. ***Buffer parking lots from pedestrian paths*** and install clear signage to bike trail entryways.

Figure 6.1: Proposed Nowell Park access improvements





## Establish new parks in underserved areas of the neighborhood.

Although park space is available in the Sugar Run Creek study area, residents have shared that access is limited by physical barriers such as IL-53 and the lack of pedestrian infrastructure. Due to the permanency of some of these barriers, it is recommended that new parks be planned for more underserved areas of Sugar Run Creek, particularly in the southern portion of the study area east of IL 53 where it is difficult to access the largest park in the neighborhood, Nowell Park.

New residential developments of single and multi-family homes are being recommended to attract young professionals and young families to the area west of IL-53 between Zarley and Zurich Roads (see Housing Chapter, section 3.4). To complement future residential development and improve access to open space, new park facilities could either be developed as part of a new residential developments, or built in vacant or underutilized properties. **Figure 6.2** displays the service area of existing parks and the presence of barriers such as heavily traveled IL Route 53.

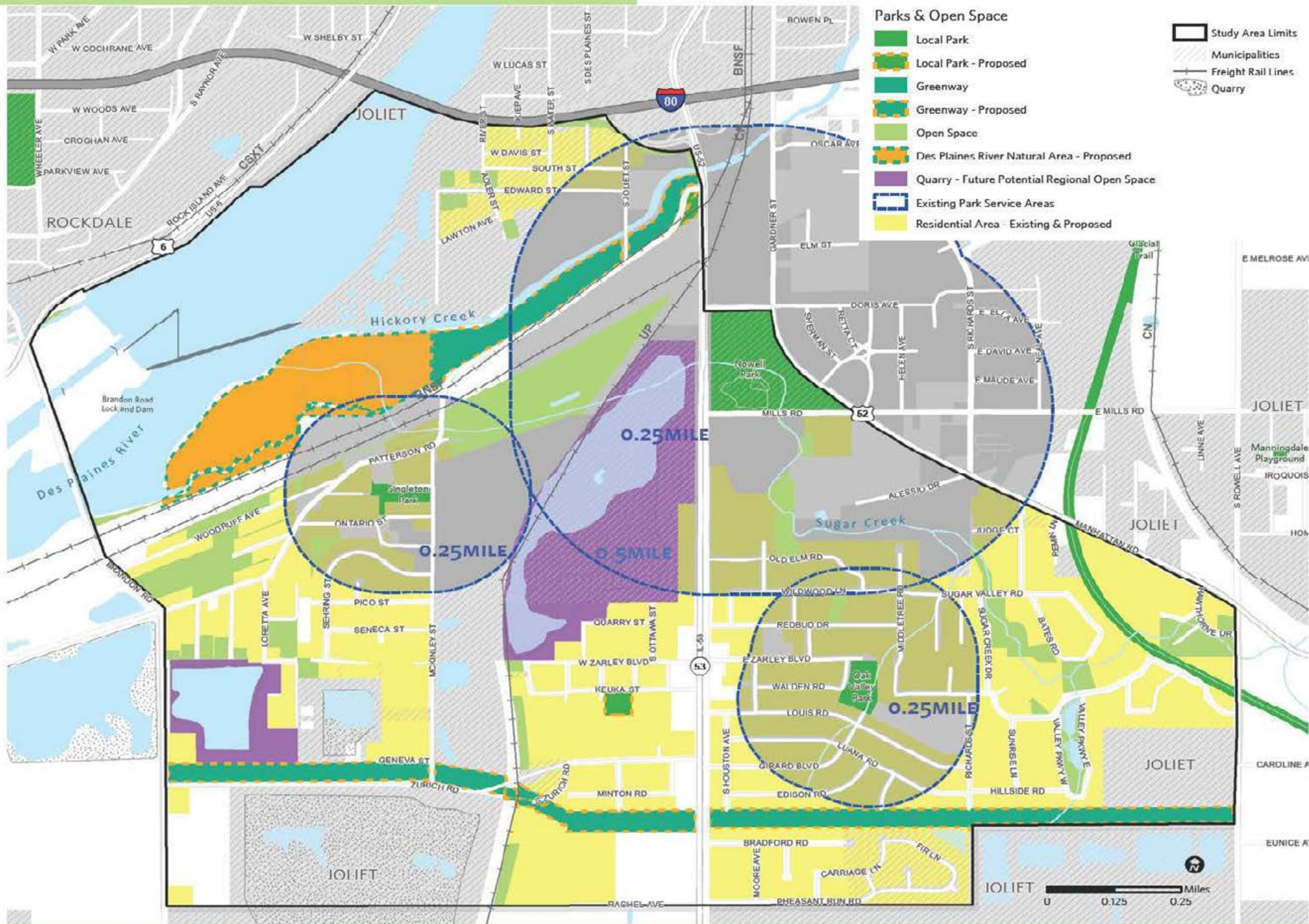
In addition to new and improved access to parks, local community members have asked for more recreational programming in the area. Expanding Joliet Park District's existing recreational programming to both, existing and new parks, would result in an increased number of recreational activities for all age groups and further activate park space.

*Trees lining the south parking lot of Nowell Park.*





**Figure 6.2: Park Service Areas**



## Encourage development of a Parks Master Plan for Southeast Joliet Area.

The Sugar Run Creek study area is home to three local parks owned and managed by the Joliet Park District: Nowell Park, Oak Valley Park, and Singleton Park. The Joliet Park District passed a referendum in 2014 to fund various improvements including the construction of an indoor recreation center at Nowell Park. While the Park District sought public input on the proposed improvements, residents have expressed frustration with a lack of progress on the project and have cited a perceived lack of direction regarding future improvements at area parks.

In anticipation for future growth, the Joliet Park District is encouraged to develop a Parks Master Plan for Southeast Joliet that will provide long term direction for existing and planned parks including park expansion and improvements to operations, programming, and finances. The park and trail recommendations of this chapter could be incorporated into such a plan and revised and updated to best complement broader park district initiatives. Sugar Run Creek Area residents and local institutions will benefit from the opportunity to suggest improvements and assist with implementation where possible. Additionally, the plan may be coordinated with the potential future residential development being recommended as a future land use for Sugar Run Creek's undeveloped areas.

Establishing a parks master plan for the area will help the Joliet Park District gain access to grant funding and provide local residents with greater certainty regarding the future of park district facilities in Sugar Run Creek. Benefits of a master plan include:

- o Building visibility and credibility for the group undertaking the plan;
- o Calling attention to local park's needs;
- o Helping target projects raise money;
- o Building community interest and participation;
- o Ensuring that the public wants the facilities and programming that are being developed;
- o Laying out a work plan; and
- o Creating a long term guide for decision making and making changes.

Possible funding options include external grant opportunities (listed in the Implementation section of this chapter).





Community garden in Blue Island, IL.

## Establish a community gardening program.

The reuse of vacant lots is discussed in **Chapter 3: Housing** with recommendations to allow for temporary or alternative uses. Community gardens are recommended as a transitional and/or permanent land use that could activate vacant spaces and enhance community character. Will County should explore partnering with local community groups and/or places of worship to create a community gardening program where residents can grow and potentially sell locally-grown goods (including at Nowell Park's annual Farmer's Market). This should include encouraging local groups to participate in the Will County Green Garden Grant program. Priority locations for community gardening initiatives include vacant parcels in close proximity to local institutions where members of the institution can actively manage the land.

Benefits to a community garden include:

- o Providing fresh and healthy low-cost food

- o Encouraging physical activity for all age groups
- o Creating a safe social atmosphere for local residents
- o Encouraging participants to learn basic gardening and agricultural skills

## Promote soil testing.

Before breaking ground, the county along with other interested local organizations will want to ensure that residential use of the area is safe by conducting a soil test and “building up” if necessary to prepare an edible growing area. The University of Illinois Extension provides an up-to-date list of soil testing labs that test the presence of heavy metals (<http://extension.illinois.edu/soiltest/>) and the Will South Cook Soil and Water Conservation District offers low-cost soil fertility testing. As discussed in Section 6.4, rainwater harvesting techniques should also be considered to help water crops while alleviating flooding concerns in the immediate vicinity.



## Evaluate potential for regional open space opportunities.

One of Sugar Run Creek residents' community aspirations includes the development of accessible open space areas that also have the potential to serve as tourism assets, particularly the inactive quarries in the area. The IL Route 53 Corridor Plan of 2014 recommends the installation of a regional trail link that travels along the IL Route 53 corridor with local connections future recreation areas at Boyd's Quarry, Chicago Street Quarry, and the Des Plaines River corridor. The goal of the corridor plan is to activate the quarries as open space and regional recreation amenities and attract visitors who would then explore the Sugar Run Creek area. Will County, along with recreation partners such as the Forest Preserve District of Will County, should work with residents and property owners to further explore the potential to pursue reclamation and reuse of quarries for recreation.

## Evaluate future potential public recreational opportunities at Boyd's Quarry.

Boyd's Quarry in particular has been the focus of resident input indicating a desire to see the quarry leveraged as a recreational amenity. Boyd's Quarry, located on the northeast corner of the Brandon Road and Zurich Road intersection, is owned by NRG Energy, Inc. and there are no plans in place for the site to be reclaimed. According to the IL Route 53 Corridor Plan, the Will County Environmental Network has been working to gain Boyd's Quarry for recreational use. Recommendations from the corridor plan envision the quarry with walking paths, picnic pavilions, fishing piers, rock climbing, a learning station about native plants, and directional signage highlighting nearby assets such as the Des Plaines River, I&M Canal, and expansion of the Will County Forest Preserve. Future developers will have to address the safety concerns that arise when opening the site for public use to visitors due to the quarry's low water levels and steep walls.

Additional discussion of Boyd's Quarry and the topics of quarry reclamation, including the reuse of Boyd's Quarry, is located in **Chapter 4: Economic Development**.

## Case Study: Kinston Music Park – Kinston, North Carolina.

Showcasing a 12 by 23 foot sculpture, benches and walkways with song quotes, and outdoor concerts, the Kinston Music Park serves as a regional gathering place in Eastern North Carolina that fuses African American heritage and Blues music. The park's elements were designed to celebrate local musical artists as well as pay tribute to historic icons and events. The large sculpture at the park's entrance is composed of glass panels that feature historic photographs, maps, and artwork that pay tribute to Kinston's African American musical community. A walkway is incorporated throughout the park with benches highlighting quotes from area musicians along with popular song lyrics. The park also features colorful tile mosaics created by local students that feature local musicians including women in jazz.

Figure 6.4: Mosaic art in Kinston Music Park



Source: North Carolina Arts Council. North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

## Promote parks and open space improvements in the Patterson Road corridor.

There is a local desire to develop a river walk, boardwalk, or some other greenspace feature that leverages the Des Plaines Riverfront as an asset. The Patterson Road corridor, which parallels Hickory Creek before it empties in the Des Plaines River, was also the location of several music venues and clubs in the early- to mid-twentieth century. The Patterson Road corridor should be considered for the location of a public park and trail that connects residents and visitors to the Des Plaines River and the area's unique music heritage.

### Establish a North Gateway Park Gateway Park.

The IL Route 53 Corridor Plan emphasizes the need for corridor connectivity, citing a lack of connections between the intersection of Interstate 80/IL-53/US-66 and the City of Joliet to the north. In addressing this issue, one of the plan recommendations is to establish a gateway feature, marking the primary entrance to the historic Route 66 corridor, on the vacant site located on the southwest corner of the intersection of IL Route 53 and Patterson Road. Will County should continue to support the IL Route 53 Corridor Plan recommendations to work with the property owners to repurpose this vacant, privately-owned site into a small park, or plaza featuring a parking area and wayfinding to other assets along the corridor. The North Gateway Park could then function as an anchor to the eventual expansion of public open space along the Patterson Road corridor.

## Encourage creation of a Patterson Road Greenway

The Patterson Road corridor and the undeveloped area to the west are located along the floodplains of both Sugar Run Creek and Hickory Creek where they meet the Des Plaines River. As such, future expansion of existing development, including outdoor storage areas, should not be permitted. The area comprises properties owned by the City of Joliet and a small number of individuals and businesses. Will County should explore the potential to coordinate with partner organizations and property owners to facilitate the long term transition of the Patterson Road area from an existing mix of predominantly vacant properties interspersed by residential, commercial, and light industrial uses, to a public greenway and trail. The Patterson Road Greenway could be improved with public art, signs, and other amenities that demonstrate the direct connection to the area's Blue music heritage. The corridor's remaining buildings related to that music history, such as the former Club 99, could also be renovated into museums or retail locations that cater to visitors and local residents alike.

## Evaluate potential development of a Des Plaines Riverfront Boardwalk.

The undeveloped area along the river to the west of Patterson Road is a potential target for open space improvement and is located within the viewshed of the historic Brandon Road Lock and Dam. The presence of two sets of railroad tracks and a meandering Sugar Run Creek and related wetlands limit potential for access to the area south of Patterson Road. The area is not suitable for significant development given its location almost entirely within a floodplain. The creation of a park along Patterson Road would enhance access to the undeveloped Des Plaines Riverfront. For example, the western end of the park could be enhanced to include a trailhead or parking area as well as an extension of the trail in the form of a boardwalk loop that winds through the area and along the river, providing views of the historic Brandon Road Lock and Dam as well as educational opportunities.

Utility easement and potential future trail corridor  
traversing the IL Route 53 corridor.



## 6.3 Regional Trail Network

### Create an east-west trail that safely traverses IL Route 53.

Residents and other community stakeholders have expressed a desire to connect the two regional trails in the study area (Wauponsee Glacial Trail and Illinois & Michigan (I&M) Canal State Trail) with a new east-west trail that would safely traverse IL-53. The ComEd utility corridor that traverses the southern portion of the Study Area can be transformed to serve as a local and regional connection for residents and visitors.

An east-west trail in Sugar Run Creek would provide regionally important recreation benefits as it would connect to other regional trails in the area, open up opportunities for trail and biking enthusiasts, and provide a good recreational amenity.

In particular, an east-west trail would connect trail users from the Wauponsee Glacial Trail east of the study area to the I&M Canal Trail on the west side of the study area, while safely crossing the Des Plaines River. This gives riders the opportunity to travel across the region, having the ability to travel from the beginning of the Wauponsee Glacial trail at Custer Park, Illinois to the I&M Canal Trail and south to Peru, Illinois and Starved Rock State Park, or north to the Cal-Sag Trail.

Further discussion and recommendations related to local pedestrian and bike mobility can be found in **Chapter 5: Transportation and Mobility**. **Figure 6.6** highlights existing and planned bikeway corridors that are being considered by Will County DOT as part of the on-going long range transportation planning process..





## Install regional trail gateway treatments.

The Sugar Run Creek Area is home to a variety of natural resources, including the Des Plaines River, Brandon Road Lock and Dam, I&M Canal State Trail, and Wauponsee Glacial Trail. By installing gateway treatments along these trails and other key locations in the community, visitors will be provided with direction to the trails, existing parks, and potential future open space amenities making their visit enjoyable and simple to navigate.

Pedestrian level signage and kiosks could be designed to celebrate Sugar Run Creek's local history and culture, tying in Route 66 and the potential Blues theme recommended for development at the Des Plaines Riverfront/ Patterson Road. Along with installing clear directional signage at popular trail entrances, additional locations could include:

- o Existing parks and open space amenities such as Nowell Park and the Brandon Road Lock & Dam;
- o The proposed Des Plaines River & Patterson Road Greenway;
- o The proposed Gateway Park on IL Route 53 at Patterson Road;
- o Trail heads at Brandon Road and Rowell Avenue along the proposed ComEd easement trail;
- o IL Route 53 at Zurich Road, directing visitors to access points along the ComEd easement trail; and
- o Gardner Street at Doris Avenue, connecting to Downtown Joliet.



Figure 6.5: Excerpt from Corridor Plan for IL Rt 53 (2015) showing regional connection to Des Plaines River/Patterson Road, quarries, and regional trails.

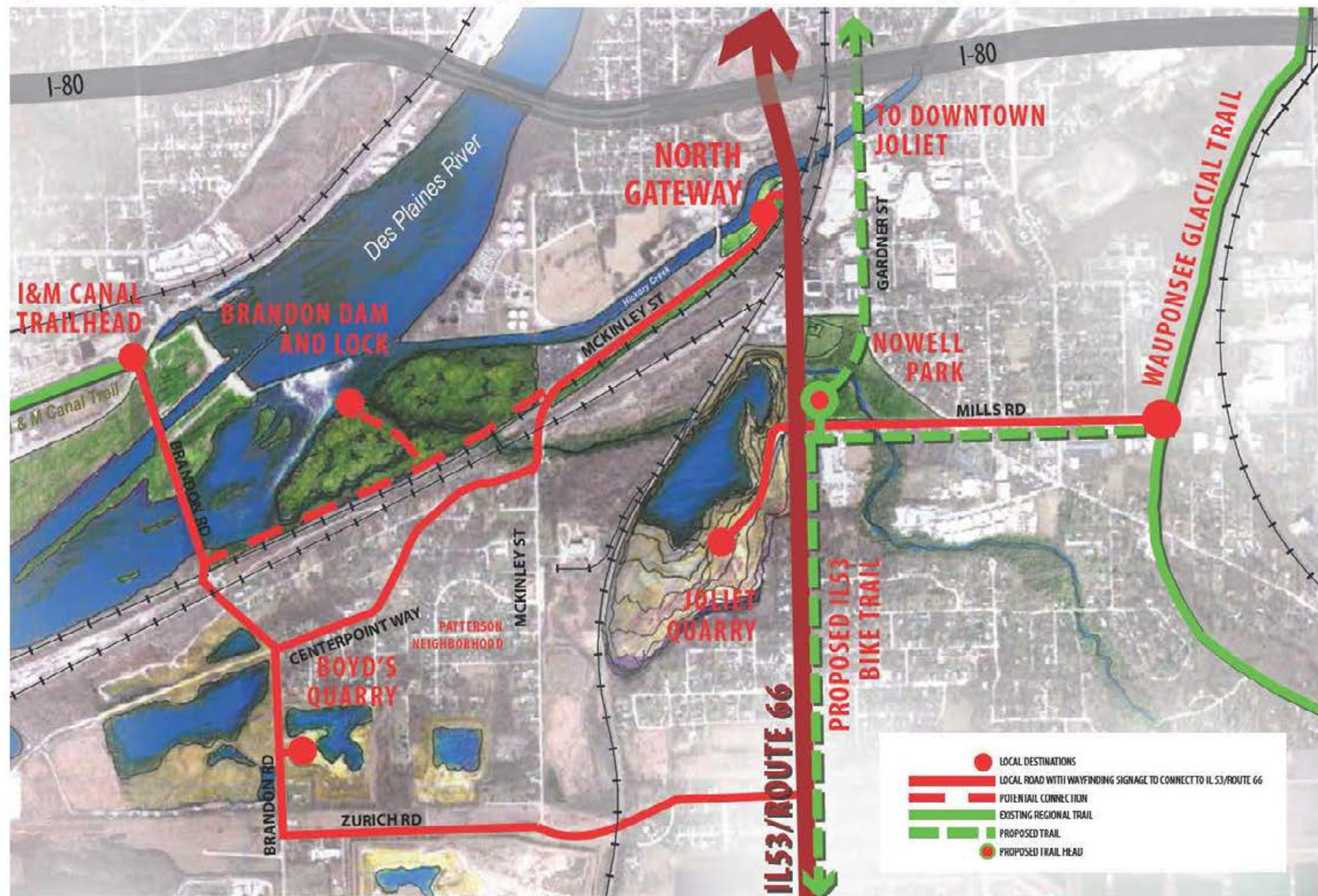
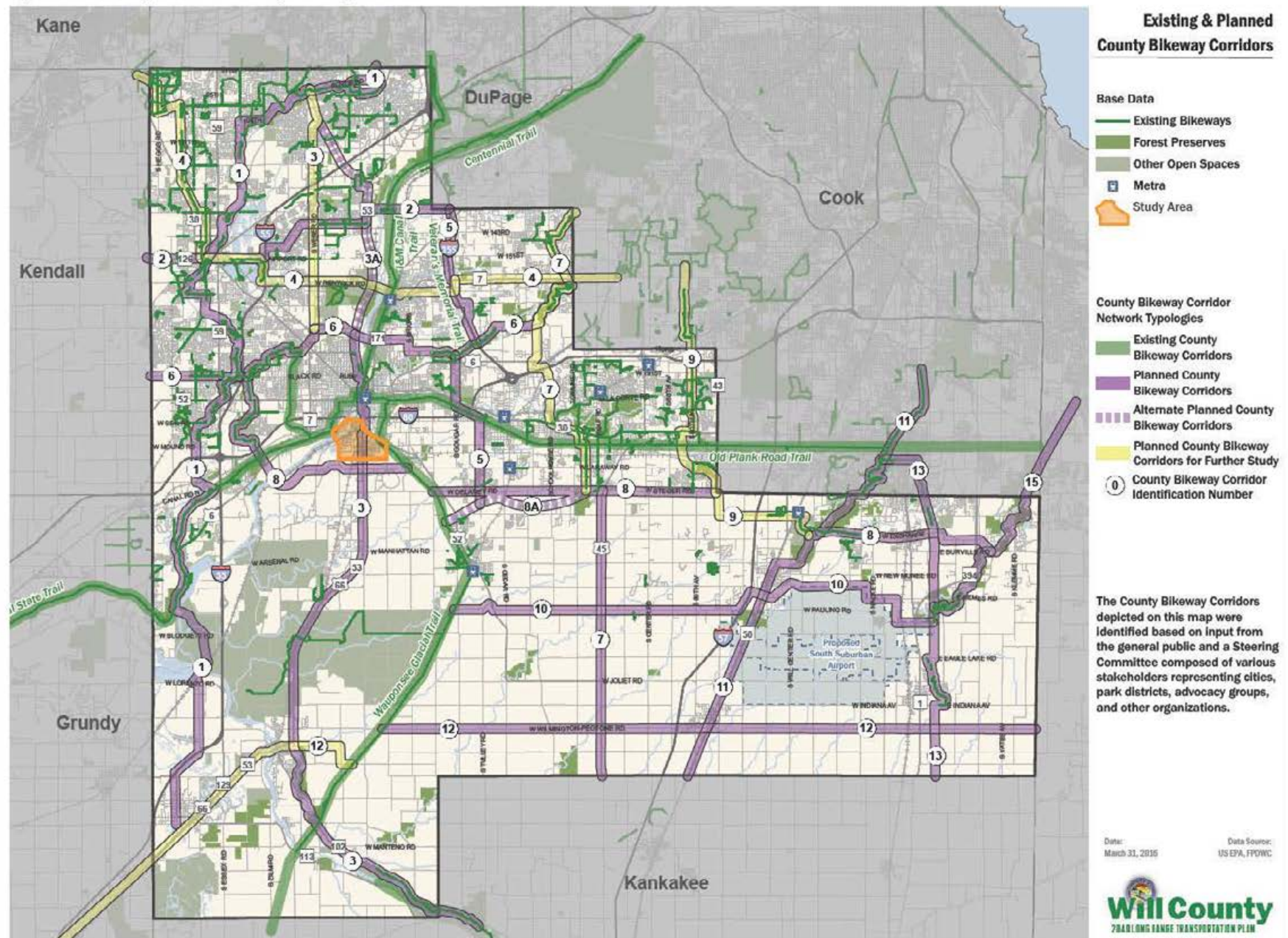




Figure 6.6: Existing & Planned County Bikeway Corridors



Source: Will County DOT, CMAP



## 6.4 Stormwater Management

Many residences and businesses in the study area are serviced by stormwater infrastructure provided by the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District or the City of Joliet. Elsewhere in the study area, no stormwater infrastructure is in place and natural drainage is relied upon. The City of Joliet, which utilizes a combined sewer, has an agreement in place to treat sewage from the district. This means that all stormwater collected from the sanitary district sewers is treated along with all other sewage at the treatment plant on the western edge of the study area. Flooding issues are not widespread, but have been observed in isolated areas where the floodplain has experienced development.

The Joliet South Side Comprehensive Plan of 2007 provides guidance for the strategies contained in this section and should be utilized by Will County, the City of Joliet, and other partners to further encourage sustainable best practices, manage future stormwater needs, and enhance the quality of the watershed of the Des Plaines River and its tributaries including Sugar Run Creek and Hickory Creek.

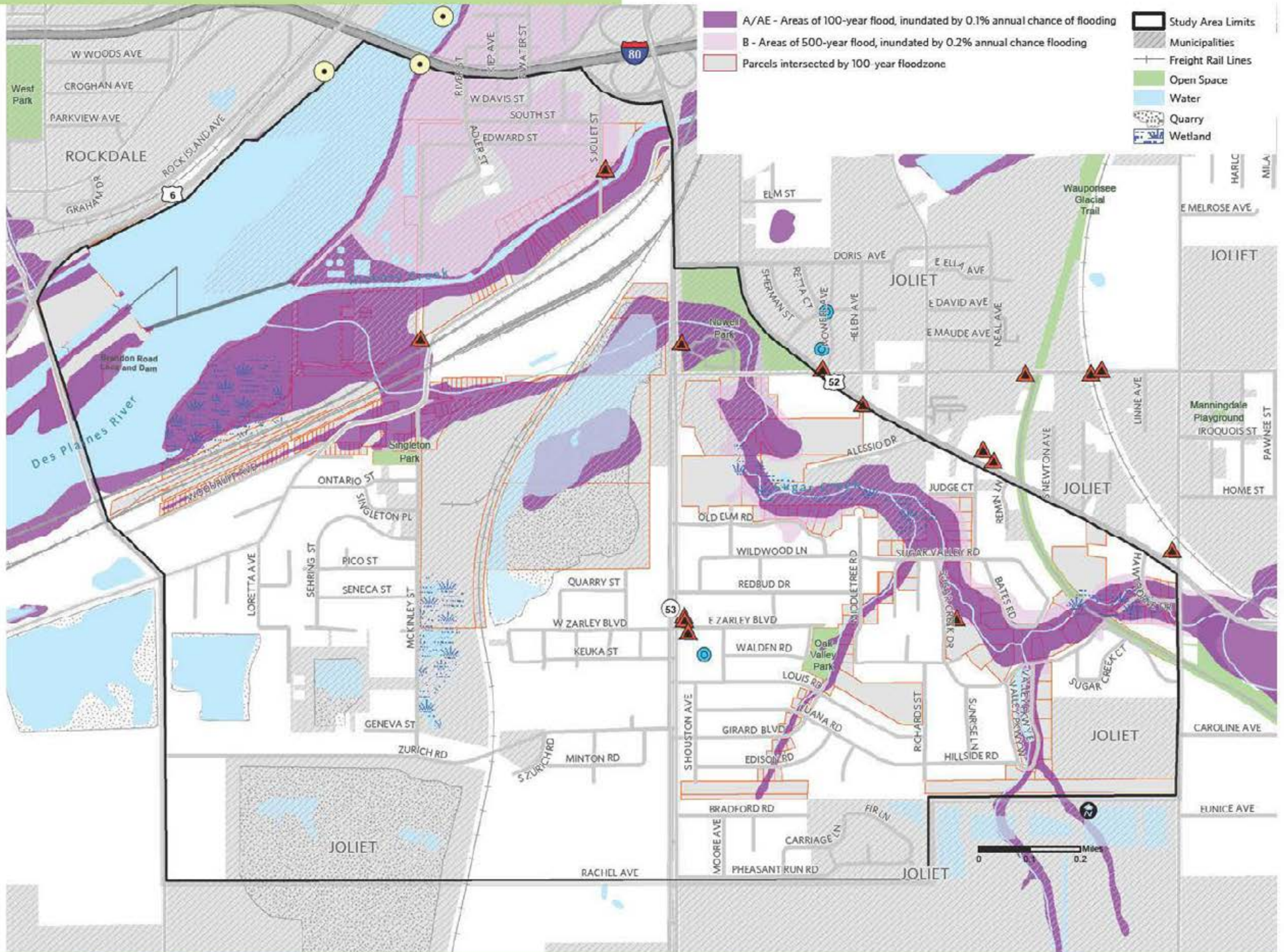
### **Establish and maintain natural riparian buffers.**

Landscaped areas, preferably planted with native vegetation, minimize adverse water quality, habitat, and drainage impacts from development located in proximity to creeks and other water bodies. Though setback and landscaping standards vary, both the City of Joliet and Will County require riparian buffers.

### **Maintain Des Plaines River corridor as natural area.**

The portion of the Des Plaines River that flows through the study area is an impaired waterway that is not suitable for indigenous aquatic life and fish consumption. Development should continue to be limited within the Des Plaines watershed within the study area. In evaluating the potential creation of the Des Plaines Riverfront Boardwalk, as recommended earlier in this section, the County should also evaluate the condition of the creeks and floodplains that cross the property and related restoration activities that could be incorporated into the new public greenspace.

Figure 6.7: EPA Floodzones





## Minimize development impact on Sugar Run Creek and Hickory Creek.

Similar to the Des Plaines River, Sugar Run Creek and Hickory Creek are both impaired waterways that fail to meet the standards for aquatic life. Riparian buffers can be expanded and modified to accommodate naturalized stormwater management to help the retain stormwater and slow it down before it enters the creek, thereby reducing the potential downstream erosion and helping improve overall water quality.

- o **Expanding buffer areas.** Riparian buffers are of limited width within the commercial and light industrial areas that exist along the creek corridors. The creation of a wider riparian buffer and more significant development setback should be encouraged as redevelopment occurs in these areas. Overtime, existing buildings located in proximity to the Sugar Run Creek can be repositioned or relocated to accommodate appropriate setbacks. For example, underutilized properties within the Alessio Drive Business Park area could be redeveloped and used to increase overall development potential of the park while offsetting any loss of buildable area within an expanded riparian buffer area.
- o **Naturalize existing buffers.** In the residential portions of the community, the area surrounding Sugar Run Creek has either been left in a natural state or, as is the case in the Sugar Creek Hills neighborhood, it has been developed as a turf grass buffer that serves as an open space amenity to local residents. The County should encourage the naturalization of riparian buffers including plantings of native prairie and wetland vegetation. Compared to existing turf grass improvements, native vegetation enhances soil stability and serves as a better filter for soil pollutants. Native plantings also typically require less maintenance, thereby reducing the potential for contamination from the application of pesticides, fertilizers, and gas and oil from lawn care machinery. Oak Valley Park is another site where naturalization could be considered in coordination with the Joliet Park District.

## Resource: RainReady Program, Center for Neighborhood Technology

In addition to helping self-motivated property owners, Will County and the City of Joliet should consider partnering with the RainReady Program through Center for Neighborhood Technology. RainReady provides resources and support to assess flood risk and identify effective, localized strategies that can be implemented by property owners and neighborhood groups.

A RainReady case study in Chicago's Chatham neighborhood exhibits a Bungalow homeowner who had experienced multiple instances of flooding in her basement. After applying to the RainReady Home Program, she was able to receive plumbing and landscape solutions. Recommendations for improvements included the installation of a backwater valve on her mainline home sewer, installation of a raingarden to capture water discharged from her downspout, and discharging downspouts to her lawn or raingarden.

Figure 6.6: Chatham homeowner exhibiting her rain garden.



Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology





## Evaluate cost-effective options to reduce flooding in target areas.

Although flooding is limited in Sugar Run Creek, it occurs in isolated portions of residential areas, particularly east of IL Route 53 in the southern portion of the Study Area in the Preston Heights neighborhood. The area of particular concern includes residential properties that have been developed within an area of hydric soils that was likely the location of a seasonal stream prior to development.

## Undertake a joint stormwater study with area partners.

A joint planning effort should be explored between the City of Joliet and Will County to identify flood-prone areas in the Sugar Run Creek study area and recommend stormwater infrastructure improvements. Will County's Land Resource Management Plan of 2011 also recommends government entities coordinating for stormwater management solutions. Such a study should focus on cost effective solutions that lead to minimal disruption to the neighborhood character and utilize naturalized stormwater treatments such as swales or ponds, etc.

The study could potentially be funded by incorporating it into the City of Joliet's and Will County's respective community investment plans (CIPs) which identify required infrastructure improvements, and accessing grants available for interjurisdictional flood planning. CMAP is also developing a stormwater planning and analysis tool that can be used to assist in identifying challenges and potential solutions to urban flooding problem areas.

In a similar situation, Will County successfully used Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and its own financial resources to commission a stormwater study for the unincorporated community of Fairmont on the northeast side of Joliet. As of the adoption of this Neighborhood Plan, the County was in the process of directing the design and construction of a storm sewer system for the Fairmont neighborhood as a result of the stormwater study.



## Encourage stormwater mitigation solutions on private property.

While some causes of flooding are larger in scale and require more distributed solutions; other types of flooding can be more localized and can be mitigated by individual property owners. Proper maintenance of buildings and landscaping can reduce the risk of being impacted by smaller storm events. The County can work with the City of Joliet and local organizations to ensure that residents and businesses are aware of the steps they can take to protect their assets.

### Educate property owners.

Educational materials can be made available to residents seeking to make private stormwater improvements. Property owners should be made aware of several low-cost techniques that can be used to capture or slow the flow of stormwater on a property and reduce the chance of flooding. These include improvements such as rain gardens, vegetated swales, french drains, dry wells, rain barrels. Education on flood proofing improvements such as waterproofing basement walls or installing a backwater valve or overhead sewer system is also needed.

Educational materials could be made available via different online outlets such as a city and county web pages or social media accounts, or printed and distributed via mailers, posters at public gathering spaces, pamphlets at public and religious institutions, or inserts in water bills or other official mailings.





## 6.5 Water Supply

Homes and businesses in the study area receive their drinking water from three main suppliers: private wells, the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District, and the City of Joliet (**Figure 6.9**). The source of water for the private wells and the Sanitary district are shallow groundwater aquifers. The City of Joliet is using the St. Peter sandstone aquifer. The local shallow aquifers are susceptible to contamination while the St. Peter aquifer is at risk of desaturation due to over pumping. Will County should continue to coordinate with the local water supply agencies as well as regional partners to ensure a safe and reliable drinking water supply for residents and businesses in the Sugar Run Creek Area.

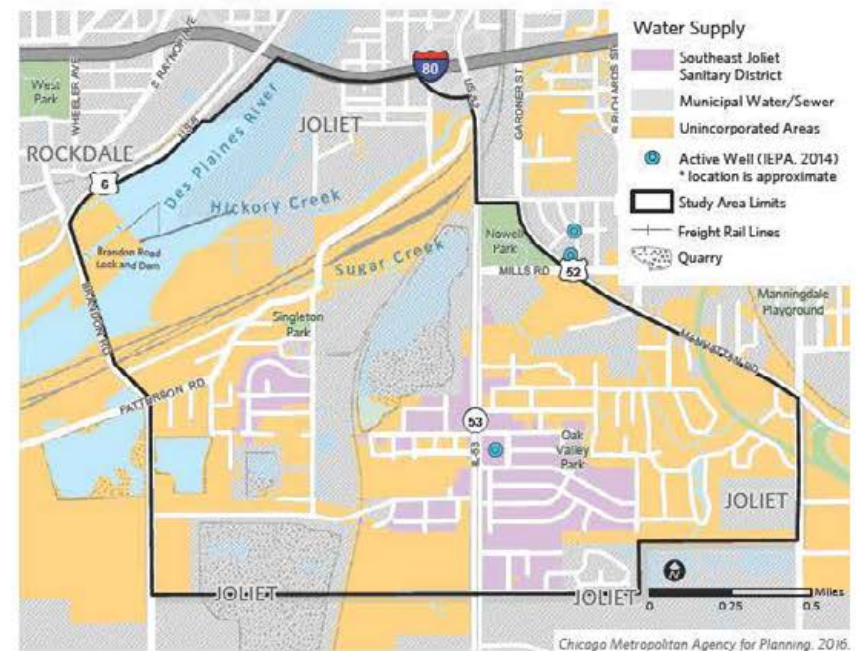
### Evaluate and protect the shallow groundwater aquifers

Private wells and the wells operated by the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District obtain water from a shallow bedrock aquifer. Shallow bedrock aquifers are vulnerable to contamination from surface contaminants such as chlorine from road salt, ammonia and nitrates from fertilizer, and oil and grease from roadways and parking lots and have a higher potential of contamination over the long term if protective land use and management measures are not put in place.

This issue was highlighted by the discovery of sulfate contamination from a former industrial user at McKinley Street in the private wells of several residential properties in the Patterson Road neighborhood. This discovery resulted in numerous properties being placed on Southeast Joliet Sanitary District which has wellhead locations that obtain water from outside of the contaminated area.

Given past water quality issues experienced by private well users, the County should continue to monitor the situation. If problems of contamination persist, it may be necessary to coordinate with the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District or City of Joliet to extend water service to additional properties within the study area.

**Figure 6.9: Water Supply**



## Support Joliet's efforts to seek an alternative drinking water supply.

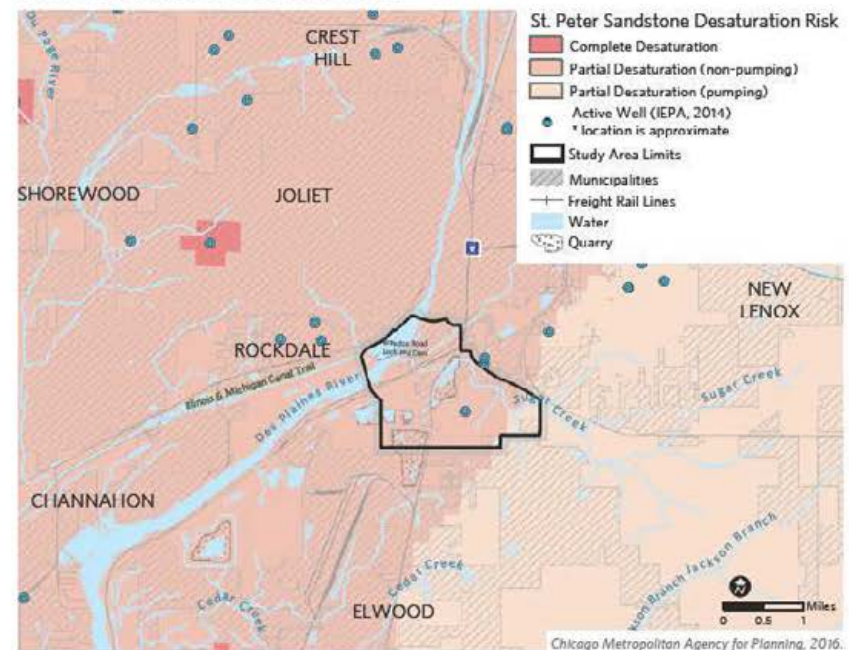
It is recommended that Will County work with the Southeast Sanitary District and the City of Joliet to evaluate the potential for long term transition to City of Joliet for water supply. The City of Joliet relies on the St. Peter Sandstone (one of the two sandstone aquifers that compose the Cambrian-Ordovician sandstone aquifer in northern Illinois). Regionally, water is being withdrawn from the aquifer faster than it is being replenished. A 2015 report by the Illinois State Water Survey indicates that the issue is particularly acute in areas of Will County, which have already seen water levels decline by as much as 800 feet. The decline has led to partial or complete aquifer desaturation in some areas and has put some supply wells in the Sugar Run Creek study area at risk of being exposed to oxygen which negatively alters the water chemistry (*Figure 6.10*). In addition, the continued use of deep aquifers may be impaired by high levels of radium which require treatment for public consumption.

With sections of the aquifer that serves the Joliet area at risk of desaturation in as little as 15 years if current withdrawal rates remain unchanged, switching to an alternate source of water will increase the viability of the aquifers and foster a more secure future for area residents and businesses. The Public Water Commission of Frankfort, Joliet, Lockport, Mokena, New Lenox, Rockdale, and Romeoville are exploring the use of the Kankakee River as an alternative drinking water source, with a potential intake facility in the vicinity of City of Wilmington.

The Illinois State Water Survey is currently completing a water supply planning study of the Kankakee River Sub-Region that will build a better understanding of the existing and projected future water use and availability of both the groundwater and surface water in this watershed.

Will County should continue to be an active partner in discussions regarding identifying a long term water source for its existing and future population. The County and its partners, including municipalities, environmental groups, and economic development interests, should further evaluate the Kankakee River water supply concept in coordination with the Illinois State Water Survey and consider the commissioning of a study to identify potential costs and benefits of such a project. The Southeast Joliet Sanitary District should also be a partner in these efforts to establish a more sustainable drinking water source for its customers.

**Figure 6.10: Aquifer Desaturation Risk**





## Encourage water conservation.

While particularly important for residents and businesses relying on water provided by the City of Joliet, water conservation practices should be deployed throughout the study area. Groundwater withdrawals can also negatively impact wetlands, streams, and lakes, in addition to leading to drinking water shortages. There are two main strategies that should be used, reducing water lost through the two distribution systems (Joliet and the Southeast Sanitary) and reducing consumer demand.

## Promote development and maintenance of asset management plans.

Will County should encourage both the City and the sanitary district to maintain an asset management plan. An asset management plan essentially answers critical questions about the system inventory and condition as well as life-cycle costs and funding strategies. The benefits of following a plan often include prolonging the life of the system components, setting rates based on sound operational and financial planning, and reducing overall costs for both operations and capital expenditures. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) Reference Guide for Asset Management Tools is a compendium of resources designed for small-sized drinking water systems (see <https://www.epa.gov/dwcapacity/reference-guide-asset-management-tools>).

## Encourage the undertaking of water loss audits.

The City and the Sanitary district should also be encouraged to conduct a water loss audit, using the M36 tool developed by the American Water Works Association (see <http://www.awwa.org/resources-tools/water-knowledge/water-loss-control.aspx>), to identify where water loss is occurring in their systems and use this information to inform the asset management plan. When implemented, the asset management plan will also serve to minimize nonrevenue water -- water that is treated but ultimately not covered through consumer fees due to leakage or metering issues.

## Consider modifications to existing codes and regulations to promote drinking water management.

While the techniques outlined above can help promote wise management of drinking water infrastructure, additional measures are needed to reduce the quantity of groundwater withdrawn for every day uses. With growing concerns about groundwater shortages, Will County should consider integrating water efficiency and conservation measures within sections of the building code and subdivision ordinance. High-efficiency fixtures are recommended for new development and redevelopment that meet a specific threshold. CMAP's Model Water Use Conservation Ordinance (see [www.cmap.illinois.gov/livability/water/model-water-conservation-ordinance](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/livability/water/model-water-conservation-ordinance)) can be used as a reference for a number of updates within the municipal ordinance. Conservation measures, such as establishing landscaping irrigation days and schedules, have been proposed by the NWPA, a consortium of municipal and county governments. Outdoor watering ordinances recommended by the NWPA could be used in this study area (see [www.nwpa.us/resource-center.html](http://www.nwpa.us/resource-center.html)). In addition, the County should continue to encourage the City of Joliet and the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District to report their water use to the Illinois State Water Survey.

## Implement septic best practices.

Most households of the Sugar Run Creek area rely on septic systems for wastewater disposal. Although regulated by the Will County Health Department, septic systems are a homeowner's responsibility and require regular maintenance to prevent environmental and health challenges. A malfunctioning septic system can lead to undecomposed waste material discharges onto the drainage field, resulting odor and gas emissions, groundwater pollution, and surface water pollution. Repairs to a poorly maintained or malfunctioning septic system can be expensive. To minimize homeowner burden and improve environmental quality, the extension of sanitary district services or the use of shared/clustered septic systems should be explored in areas of the Study Area where households relying on septic systems are concentrated, such as the Patterson Road neighborhood.

The Will County Health Department can work with local residents, neighborhood groups, and service providers such as Unity Community Development Corporation to perform a risk assessment and evaluate mitigation strategies.

- o **Risk Assessment:** Includes assessing public health and environmental risks for existing systems. Health and environmental risks may include soil permeability, depth to groundwater, proximity to sensitive surface waters, density of development, and system types. Risk assessments do not have to be long and expensive studies, identifying risks through community mapping (such as GIS mapping) can help identify problem areas, group similar risks, and prioritize implementation strategies.
- o **Community Clustered Systems:** A community clustered septic system utilizes local sewer infrastructure to feed wastewater from multiple homes to a single septic tank and treatment system. In some systems, each homeowner has their own septic tank which then feeds into a shared treatment system. Shared systems spread the costs of maintenance across multiple home owners and deliver cost savings and environmental benefits through improved maintenance and system reliability.
- o **Extending Wastewater Services:** Will County should consider coordinating with the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District to identify households in risk-prone areas where there is potential for the extension of sanitary service. Over the long term, while there are benefits of transitioning to the Southeast Joliet Sanitary District as development occurs, it also may not be the most cost-effective option. In these instances, Will County could also explore support for existing homeowners with individual well and septic systems including evaluating the creation of a community clustered system.



## 6.6 Implementation

*[To be completed after public open house and review by Will County staff and the Steering Committee.]*





