

Niles aims to up recycling, cut driving

By TRACY GRUEN | Contributor February 18, 2013 9:02PM

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Increasing recycling and decreasing driving are two recommendations in the draft of the Niles Environmental Action Plan that were presented during a public hearing on Feb. 12.

The plan was created in partnership with Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) through its Local Technical Assistance program.

Kristin Ihnchak, of CMAP, discussed some of the recommendations to make the village more sustainable in terms of land use and development, transportation and mobility, open space, waste, water, energy, greenhouse gases and education.

Ihnchak said that in the village of Niles the overall recycling rate is 19.5 percent compared to 34 percent nationally.

"It's significantly lower here than a lot of other parts of the country," noted Ihnchak.

In order to help boost recycling in the village, Ihnchak said that the plan recommends possibly using larger recycling bins and increasing public awareness about the importance of recycling. In public places, Ihnchak said the village may want to place recycling bins next to trash cans to encourage recycling.

Other recommendations in the plan include creating a village-wide bicycle and pedestrian plan, updating development regulations to allow and encourage sustainable buildings and developments, work with PACE to implement Arterial Rapid Transit routes, and adopting sustainable municipal policies, such as designing new municipal facilities in order to meet green building standards.

"Usage rates by Niles residents are pretty low," said Ihnchak, about Niles residents who ride the PACE bus system.

After talking with residents at various meetings, Ihnchak said that Niles residents would like to see more open space for people to walk around and enjoy being outdoors.

Village Trustee Joe LoVerde, who is also the director of the Niles Park District, said that Niles being "land-locked" is a challenge.

"Sometimes it's frustrating when you see that acreage sitting there and you can't use it for anything," said Loverde, about Cook County Forest Preserve land.

Ihnchak said that they would like to see the village provide better access to the forest preserves, which will at least increase the perception of having more open space in town.

The Environmental Action Plan will likely go in front of the Niles village board for adoption at the Feb. 26 village board meeting.