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Park Forest Growing Green Sustainability Plan

Implementation Status Update

July 16, 2014

The Park Forest Growing Green Sustainability Plan was completed in May 2012 through a partnership between the Village of Park Forest and CMAP. As part of this plan, CMAP committed to assist with the implementation of the plan's recommendations for a period of two years. Since the Sustainability Plan's adoption, CMAP has held periodic discussions with the Park Forest Department of Economic Development and Planning and Sustainability Coordinator to discuss implementation activities and has also assisted with grant and award applications, as requested. CMAP, through the Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program, is also helping the Village with two follow-up projects that will greatly aid in the Plan's implementation. These projects include a comprehensive revision of the Village's zoning and subdivision ordinances and the creation of a bicycle and pedestrian plan.

Summary of implementation progress

This summary outlines the Village's major implementation activities undertaken to date that are not otherwise mentioned under the following "Ten implementation priorities" section.

- Organizational improvements. Immediately following the adoption of the Sustainability Plan, the Village was awarded a grant from The Chicago Community Trust to hire a Sustainability Coordinator, who was tasked with implementing the Plan. This grant has subsequently been renewed for two additional years. The Sustainability Coordinator has been instrumental in many of the Village's implementation efforts and has also worked with the Sustainability Team's departmental representatives to assign specific implementation responsibilities to Village departments. These achievements respond to Strategy 7 of the Municipal Policies and Practices chapter of the Plan.
- Municipal policies and practices. To further work toward the goals of the Municipal Policies and Practices chapter, the Village created and adopted an environmentally-preferable purchasing policy, and staff now purchase biodegradable, reusable, and other environmentally-friendly options when possible. The lighting in Village Hall, the Police Department, the Tennis and Health Club, and Freedom Hall Performing Arts Center has been updated with grants from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Illinois Clean Energy Act. In addition, Village staff have been investigating transitioning the municipal fleet to more sustainable options.
- Green business certification program. Park Forest has partnered with the Illinois Green Business Association (IGBA) to develop a pilot program to educate the community's businesses on sustainable business practices. Part of this program includes a two-step process to attaining IGBA green business certification, a process which may be replicated in other communities. These achievements respond to Strategy 5 of the Green Economy chapter of the Plan.
- Community garden program. Park Forest is in the third year of its community gardening program. Six gardens have been established, and a food forest has been approved for the Wildwood School site. Community interest in the program is expanding, and the Village has

continued to look for further sources of funding to support the program. These achievements respond to Strategy 1 of the Local Food Systems chapter of the Plan.

Ten implementation priorities

The Sustainability Plan includes 14 chapters spanning a wide range of topics. Many implementation activities have occurred to date, and some activities are still ongoing. The purpose of this memo is to broadly summarize key Plan implementation efforts and prioritize strategies and actions that the Village should undertake over the course of the next three years. Implementation tasks that are currently ongoing are largely excluded from the priority items outlined here, as it is presumed that those efforts will continue. At five years post-adoption (2017), the Village should comprehensively reassess the Sustainability Plan's recommendations and indicators to ensure that they meet the needs and vision of the community.

1. Adopt and implement regulatory updates that support sustainability.

(Chapters: Development Patterns and others)

The short-term work plan included in the Sustainability Plan (see page 91) lists approximately 20 Plan strategies that relate to regulatory revisions. The majority of these pertain to updates to the Village's zoning and subdivision ordinances that will facilitate, incentivize, or require sustainable development practices or patterns. As a follow-up LTA project to the Sustainability Plan, CMAP is currently working with the Village to accomplish many of these updates, in addition to holistically modernizing and streamlining the regulations to align them with current best practices. The Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which will merge the zoning and subdivision ordinances, is expected to be adopted by late 2014 or early 2015. This is in line with the Development Patterns chapter of the Plan, which set a target to update the Village's zoning and subdivision ordinances by 2015.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Review, edit, and ultimately approve the draft Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) produced by CMAP staff later this year. Facilitate the public review and adoption process in conjunction with CMAP.
- Work with staff, Village boards and commissions, property owners, and developers to interpret and incorporate the requirements of the new UDO after its adoption.
- Draft and adopt any remaining regulatory revisions that were not addressed by the LTA project, such as modifications to Municipal Code Chapter 110 Vegetation to permit native plantings and updated stormwater management requirements.

2. Complete and implement the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

(Chapter: Transportation and Mobility)

The Village is currently working toward one of the Sustainability Plan's major goals to "become more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly" by creating a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in conjunction with CMAP's LTA program. This plan will provide a greater level of detail for the following recommendations included in the Sustainability Plan's Transportation and Mobility section:

Reduce the community's annual vehicle miles traveled.

Create street types appropriate for the Village's context areas.

Continue to evaluate the Capital Plan to ensure sustainable transportation improvements.

Create a bicycle routes plan that establishes criteria for new bike lanes and trailways.

Improve walkability and pedestrian safety throughout the community.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Review, edit, and ultimately approve the draft bicycle and pedestrian plan produced by CMAP staff. Facilitate the public review and adoption process in conjunction with CMAP.
- Incorporate requirements for bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the new subdivision regulations prepared in conjunction with CMAP.¹
- Prioritize funding for the plan's recommended bicycle and pedestrian improvements in the Village's Capital Plan, and augment the Village's funds by securing additional funding for these improvements from grant programs such as the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ), Surface Transportation, and Transportation Alternatives Programs.
- Other implementation actions as described in the bicycle and pedestrian plan.

3. Continue to improve Pace and Jolly Trolley transit services.

(Chapter: Transportation and Mobility)

The Sustainability Plan recommends continued coordination with Pace and Rich Township (regarding the Jolly Trolley) to improve transit service in the Village and subregionally. The Plan sets targets to increase Pace weekday ridership levels by 33 percent by 2020 and Jolly Trolley ridership by ten percent by 2017. To meet these goals, the Plan proposes that the Village conduct a needs assessment in conjunction with Pace to identify the most underserved and transit-dependent areas of the community and develop strategic enhancements that would improve the system's appeal to users. The Plan also recommends working with Rich Township to investigate the possibility of expanding Jolly Trolley service's fleet and hours of operation because improvements to Pace service may not be implemented for some time.

The Village has made progress in working with Pace to increase the number of bus shelters along routes, but other transit-related recommendations have not been implemented to a significant extent. While these are longer-term strategies that will require diligence and time to fully achieve, it is important to begin the process now in order to ensure benefits in the future.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Remain in contact with Pace to determine when funding might be available to conduct a needs assessment.
- Coordinate with Rich Township to create a plan for expanding Jolly Trolley service. Apply for CMAQ grant funding if Township or Village funds are not adequate.
- Create an educational campaign to promote transit alternatives that communicates associated cost savings and environmental benefits and identifies transit routes to connect residents with sub-regional attractions. This information could be conveyed in conjunction with outreach initiatives proposed by the bicycle and pedestrian plan.²

4. Create a network of green infrastructure to manage stormwater.

(Chapter: Open Space and Ecosystems)

¹ This is also supportive of the Development Patterns chapter's recommendation to "Update subdivision regulations to encourage walkable neighborhoods."

² See Transportation chapter recommendation, "Develop a public marketing campaign to promote transportation alternatives" (page 33) for more information.

Building upon the success of the Central Park wetlands rehabilitation project, the Sustainability Plan recommends that the Village pursue the expansion of functional wetlands as a community-wide stormwater management strategy. The Village has identified at least three sites that would be appropriate for this purpose. Staff have submitted multiple applications for Illinois Green Infrastructure Grant funding to first conduct a feasibility study and then develop an engineering plan to direct stormwater from these sites to the Central Park wetlands to improve the quality of these natural areas and alleviate flooding issues. Unfortunately, grant applications have thus far been unsuccessful.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Continue to investigate new potential sources of grant funding (such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program's Disaster Recovery Grant) and submit applications.

5. Facilitate diversion of materials such as food scraps and construction and demolition debris.

(Chapter: Waste)

In 2010, Park Forest's single-family homes recycled and composted about 25 percent of their waste. The Waste chapter of the Plan sets a target for single-family homes to meet the national average recycling rate of 34 percent by 2017.³ To help meet these goals, the Village has been working with Curbside Value Partnership to provide education and outreach to increase recycling rates. The Village has also been able to ensure that more complete data on solid waste diversion will be provided for the single-family and multifamily sectors through waste hauling contract negotiations with Star Disposal, and should continue to investigate the possibility of attaining a complete data set for all sectors.

As additional strategies to accomplish this goal, the Waste chapter recommends facilitating composting among residents and businesses as well as requiring the recycling of construction and demolition (C&D) debris by 2015. The chapter suggests that the C&D recycling requirement could apply to new residential buildings of four units or greater, new non-residential buildings over a certain size, and certain building rehabilitations. While the Village was not able to incorporate a pilot composting program into the newly negotiated Star Disposal contract and has not yet adopted a C&D debris recycling ordinance⁴, staff should continue to be proactive in pursuing specific tasks to help further increase diversion from the waste stream.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Create and disseminate educational materials to dispel myths and describe the benefits of composting and provide detailed instructions on how to compost. Work with schools to incorporate an educational component on composting and install composting bins in lunch rooms.

³ The Village is currently coordinating with Homewood Disposal to establish a baseline diversion rate for both single-family and multifamily properties, and should establish a new target for these sectors once the baseline is identified.

⁴ This type of regulation is typically found outside of a municipality's zoning and subdivision regulations and is therefore not addressed by the ongoing LTA project.

- Continue to offer compost units for sale at the Downtown farmers' market.
- Look for new chances to start a pilot composting program, including grant opportunities (such as from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity) and future waste hauling contract negotiations.
- Create and adopt a C&D debris recycling ordinance.

6. Develop an energy efficiency campaign to encourage modification of energy use behavior and habits.

(Chapter: Energy)

The Energy chapter of the Plan identifies several strategies to help conserve energy, including:

Provide informational resources and solicit financial resources for home and business energy audits.

Develop a retrofit program for existing buildings.

Encourage replacement of older inefficient appliances with energy efficient appliances.

Significant energy savings can be achieved through simple behavioral changes like turning off lights, performing regular maintenance on building systems, slightly modifying heating and cooling temperatures, and unplugging devices that continue to draw energy when not in use. In addition to learning about these simple techniques, community members may benefit from greater information and resources on more complex strategies like home and business energy audits and retrofits. It may be useful to approach all of these strategies together under an educational campaign that would inform residents and property owners about opportunities to reduce energy consumption and increase energy efficiency within homes, businesses, and institutions. There are many examples around the country of effective energy efficiency campaigns from which the Village can draw to develop its own approach to potentially include a series of workshops, green fairs, and ongoing communication prompts that will encourage long-lasting changes in energy habits.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Research examples of energy efficiency campaigns to serve as models for a Park Forest-specific campaign.⁵
- Develop and implement the campaign.

7. Adopt an environmentally preferable facility maintenance policy.

(Chapter: Municipal Policies and Practices)

The Village has made great progress toward the goals of the Municipal Policies and Practices chapter by creating an environmentally preferable purchasing policy, looking into greening its municipal fleet, working to establish a baseline waste diversion rate for Village Hall, and assigning Plan implementation responsibilities to various Village departments. The Municipal Policies chapter also establishes targets to conduct a sustainability audit of all Village facilities by 2017 and reduce annual kilowatt hours, therms, and water consumption in Village facilities by ten percent by 2025.

To help meet these goals, the Village should create and implement an environmentally preferable facility maintenance policy. Such a policy will serve to establish a regular maintenance schedule that prioritizes sustainable practices when feasible and plan for building improvements that can have an impact on sustainability, such as energy-saving (insulation, replacement of windows, roofs, and

⁵ Relevant examples include [Cool Cities](#) (Sierra Club) and [Flex Alert](#) (California).

HVAC systems, and lighting upgrades) and water-saving (water-efficient fixtures and appliances) improvements.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Conduct (or commission an outside party to conduct) a sustainability audit of Village facilities, including examination of building envelopes, operations and maintenance of building systems, and occupant behavior to identify potential ways to save energy, water, and materials and reduce cost. If necessary, allocate funding for this task in the Village's Capital Plan.
- To fill in gaps of knowledge, staff should research best practices for environmentally friendly facilities maintenance practices and policies that other communities have created.
- Based on the findings of the audit and staff research, create and implement an environmentally preferable facility maintenance policy.

8. Develop the Village as a clearinghouse for sustainability resources and add to the Sustainability Interpretive Center.

(Chapter: Education)

Since community action is critical to the creation of a sustainable community, a variety of methods should be utilized to engage the public on sustainability issues. The Village has made great strides toward incorporating information on sustainability on its website, in community announcements and Discover magazine, and at Village Hall. The Plan's recommendation to develop the Village as a clearinghouse for sustainability resources envisions a continued effort to expand the wealth of resources and programming opportunities available to community members.

One such programming opportunity includes providing tours of the community's sustainable initiatives and "green" pilot projects. Tours could feature municipal demonstration projects as well as homes and businesses that demonstrate exemplary water conservation or reuse, native landscape techniques, or energy efficiency and renewable energy retrofits. To take advantage of the Village's demonstration projects, the Plan also proposes creating a Sustainability Interpretive Center, which would function as a "virtual learning center" with signage at each demonstration project. The Plan sets a goal to provide signage at each green initiative site or sustainability project by 2017. Since the adoption of the Plan, the Village has installed interpretive signage at three locations within the Aqua Center complex (rain garden, butterfly garden, and solar panels) to explain the projects. The purchase and installation of the signage was funded through the general budget.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Continue to add to the Village's sustainability resources and search for the most effective ways to disseminate information to the community. Consider posting information online or in newsletters or mailers, holding "green bag" events, and communicating timely information via social media.
- Develop and implement community tours of exemplary sustainability projects.
- Continue to add to the Village's demonstration projects and interpretive signage. When possible, fund this task through the general budget; otherwise, pursue grant funding as necessary.

9. Create an annual sustainability scorecard for monitoring and reporting.

(Plan Section 3)

The Sustainability Plan includes a section on the importance of monitoring the results of Plan implementation and communicating those results to the public. Although not included in a topical chapter, this is a key Plan recommendation because monitoring and reporting results helps to provide justification for budgetary and policy decisions, inform community stakeholders about sustainability-related activities and resources, and bring recognition for the hard work being done to implement the Plan. The Plan recommends creating a graphically-appealing scorecard with associated narrative on an annual basis to convey progress toward implementation activities and targets over the past year and outline the work plan for implementation for the coming year.

While this task specifically has not yet been undertaken by Village staff, documentation and communication of sustainability-related activities has regularly been relayed to the Village Board. Since 2015⁶ is a major reporting year for indicators, the upcoming year is an ideal time for the Village to prepare a more formal scorecard to be shared with both the Village Board and staff as well as the community at large.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Inventory implementation efforts that have taken place over the reporting year.
- Prepare a scorecard template that may be used each year. CMAP staff submitted a template worksheet to Village staff in June 2013 that may be used as a starting point, although it may be worthwhile to polish the format to make it more accessible and appealing to the public.⁷
- Gather and analyze data related to the indicators that have a reporting year of 2015 (see pages 93-94).
- Create the scorecard and distribute it to community members, Village staff, and Village Board members.

10. Pursue certification by the STAR Community Rating System.

(not included in Sustainability Plan)

Almost two years after the Sustainability Plan's adoption, the Village was invited to participate in the 2014 Leadership STAR Community Program. The Program coaches each community through the STAR Community Rating System with the goal of becoming a certified sustainable community. While achieving STAR certification is not a specific recommendation mentioned in the Sustainability Plan, the rating system is very complimentary to the goals and recommendations of the Plan. The outcome of the Leadership Program will highlight Park Forest's successes and identify potential areas of improvement or opportunity relating to sustainability, which may complement or add to the recommendations of the Sustainability Plan. Village staff estimates that the community will obtain a 3-star Community rating.

Potential implementation steps from this point forward include:

- Complete and submit documentation to attain STAR certification (January 2015).

⁶ See the guidelines established in Table 1. Target indicators and reporting year(s) on page 93 of the Plan.

⁷ One local example is the PlanItGreen Community Sustainability Report Card 2012 (Oak Park River Forest Sustainability Plan): <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B9VmkLCyyHHPSThtZHkyQ0ZhbUE/edit?pli=1>

- Prioritize follow-up implementation efforts that may arise from the certification process. Analyze the alignment of these efforts with the implementation priorities of the Sustainability Plan to determine potential synergies.

Conclusion

We applaud the broad range of implementation efforts that have taken place to date and hope that Park Forest will continue to work toward achieving the Plan's goals. It is also commendable that the Village is continuing to build upon the ideas included in the Plan through activities like the STAR leadership program and the Village Board's annual strategic planning efforts. We strongly encourage the Village to comprehensively revisit the Sustainability Plan at the five-year mark to ensure that the Plan reflects the Village's evolving approach to sustainability. Although CMAP's two-year commitment has come to a close, CMAP staff will continue to touch base on an annual basis concerning Plan implementation and would appreciate updates on significant activities and progress.