

CMAP



Village of Worth Planning Priorities Report

May 2014

Introduction

Worth's Application

The Village of Worth sought technical assistance for a variety of planning projects to improve the built environment and capitalize on the Village's recent creation of an Economic Development Committee. Specifically, Worth identified pursuing transit-oriented development, enabling aging in place, and updating the Village's land use and zoning as its planning goals. CMAP determined that it would need to work with the Village to determine what type of planning project would be most appropriate given the priorities of the community. CMAP staff and the Village of Worth concluded that they would create a "planning priorities report" to assess the opportunities, assets, and needs in Worth and help determine what type of planning project would be most important for the Village to undertake. The Planning Priorities Report will help set the stage for Worth's energetic administration and stakeholders to pursue future plans and projects.

Planning Priorities Report

CMAP staff examined many data sources to better understand the community's demographics, economic health, and transportation system. The research included a thorough review of past plans, maps, and other planning documents that gave context to our current assessment and recommendations.

Our extensive conversations with Worth's Village President, Trustees, and members of the Economic Development Committee—along with Village staff, residents, and other community stakeholders—were highly influential in our analysis. Stakeholders shared diverse and candid perspectives on Worth's current conditions and needs, as well as visions for its future. Despite a variety of backgrounds and opinions, several common themes emerged that greatly informed the recommendations in this report. Many stakeholders expressed a desire to fill vacant storefronts along 111th Street and Harlem Avenue, as well as improve the experience of walking and shopping along these two major thoroughfares. Several residents and village staff described the lack of physical and economic connections between the Metra station and the Village's commercial districts; while the station serves hundreds of daily commuters, they mostly drive alone from outside of Worth and leave without patronizing local businesses.

Despite the creation of a TIF district and the existence of multiple recent planning studies, including the Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan and Village of Worth Comprehensive Retail Plan, the Village has attracted little new development or business growth to bring the plans to fruition. This report will recommend a catalytic project that can help the Village address commonly cited needs and implement many of the recommendations of existing plans.

This report is a distillation of our research, findings, and recommendations for the Local Technical Assistance program. It is organized as follows:

- Context (key indicators, elements of Worth's built environment, maps)
- Planning milestones
- Interviews (stakeholders interviewed, main themes from interviews)
- Recommendations for future planning projects

Context: Key Indicators

Demographics

Population, change, and ancestry. The Village of Worth lost a small amount of population between 2000 and 2010, at a rate similar to the population loss in Cook County as a whole. While the overall population and white population have decreased, the Latino population greatly increased.

Population and Change in Population, 2000 and 2010			
	Worth	Cook County	Region
Population, 1990	11,208	5,105,067	7,300,589
Population, 2000	11,047	5,376,741	8,146,264
Population, 2010	10,789	5,194,675	8,431,386
Change, 2000-10	-258	-182,066	285,122
Change as percent, 2000-10	-2.3%	-3.4%	3.5%
Change, 1990-2010	-419	89,608	1,130,797
Change as percent, 1990-2010	-3.7%	1.7%	15.5%

Source: 1990, 2000, and 2010 Census

Change in Race and Ethnicity, 2000-2010						
	Worth		Cook County		Region	
	Change in Population	Percent Change	Change in Population	Percent Change	Change in Population	Percent Change
White	-908	-9.2%	-280,351	-11.0%	-200,702	-4.3%
Hispanic or Latino*	561	83.9%	173,022	16.1%	414,407	29.4%
Black or African American	91	52.0%	-124,670	-9.0%	-72,117	-4.7%
Asian	65	48.9%	61,026	23.7%	137,701	36.6%
Other**	-67	-30.5%	-11,093	-11.3%	5,833	4.3%
Total	-258	-2.3%	-182,066	-3.4%	285,122	3.5%

* Includes Hispanic or Latino residents of any race

** Includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, some other race, and two or more races

Source: 2000 and 2010 Census

Worth and many neighboring communities have relatively large Arab American populations. Although the Arab American population in Worth is much smaller than in Palos Hills or Chicago Ridge, it is still a larger percentage than in Cook County and the Chicago region. The percentage of residents reporting Arab ancestry is almost four times what it is in Cook County as a whole.

Arab American Population									
	Worth	Alsip	Chicago Ridge	Oak Lawn	Palos Heights	Palos Hills	Palos Park	Cook County	Region
Arab Population*	412	569	1,141	3,219	56	2,572	45	49,971	64,754

Total Population	10,787	19,264	14,303	56,524	12,446	17,458	4,805	5,197,677	8,432,516
Percentage	3.8%	3.0%	8.0%	5.7%	0.4%	14.7%	0.9%	1.0%	0.8%

*"Arab" includes people reporting their ancestry as Arab, Egyptian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian, or "Other Arab."

Source: 2008-12 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

Median age and age cohorts. The distribution of ages in the Village of Worth does not greatly differ from the distribution in Cook County or the Chicago metropolitan region overall. The median age in Worth is slightly higher than in the County and region.

Age Cohorts and Median Age, 2010						
	Worth		Cook County		Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Under 19 years	2,646	24.5%	1,374,096	26.5%	2,346,937	27.8%
20 to 34 years	2,353	21.8%	1,204,066	23.2%	1,790,049	21.2%
35 to 49 years	2,302	21.3%	1,067,351	20.5%	1,807,886	21.4%
50 to 64 years	2,182	20.2%	928,833	17.9%	1,534,488	18.2%
65 to 79 years	939	8.7%	436,799	8.4%	679,470	8.1%
80 years and over	367	3.4%	183,530	3.5%	272,556	3.2%
Total Population	10,789	100.0%	5,194,675	100.0%	8,431,386	100.0%
Median Age	37.8		35.3		35.5	

Source: 2010 Census

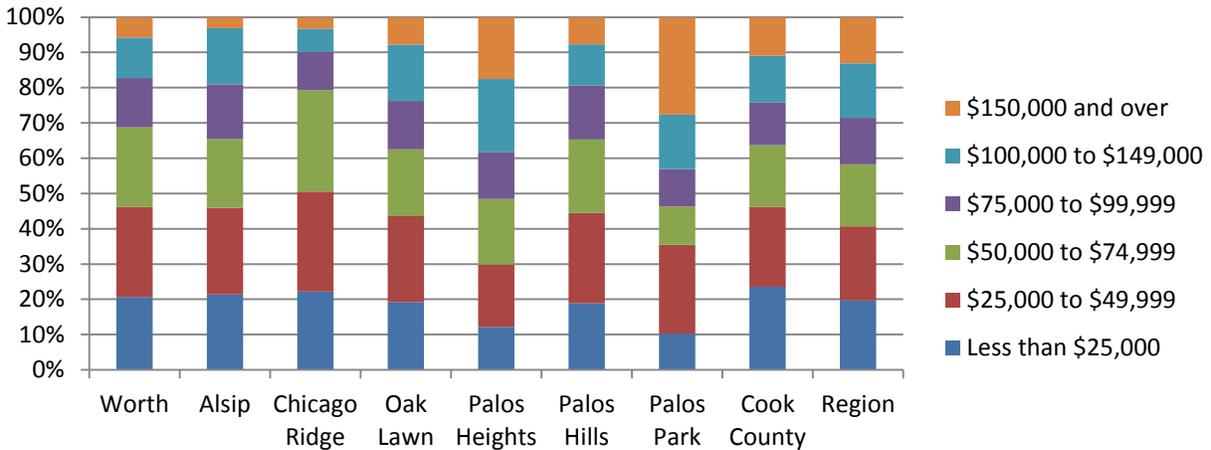
Unemployment comparison. Unemployment in Worth remains at over ten percent as of the 2012 ACS, which is comparable to the rate in Cook County overall. The rate of participation in the labor force is also higher in Worth, despite a higher median age.

Employment Status						
	Worth		Cook County		Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Population, 16 years and over	8,884	100.0%	4,112,868	100.0%	6,573,191	100.0%
In labor force	6,508	73.3%	2,742,562	66.7%	4,498,245	68.4%
Employed*	5,775	88.7%	2,424,917	88.4%	4,013,150	89.2%
Unemployed	733	11.3%	316,141	11.5%	471,447	10.5%
Not in labor force	2,376	26.7%	1,370,306	33.3%	2,074,946	31.6%

Source: 2008-12 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

*Does not include employed population in Armed Forces

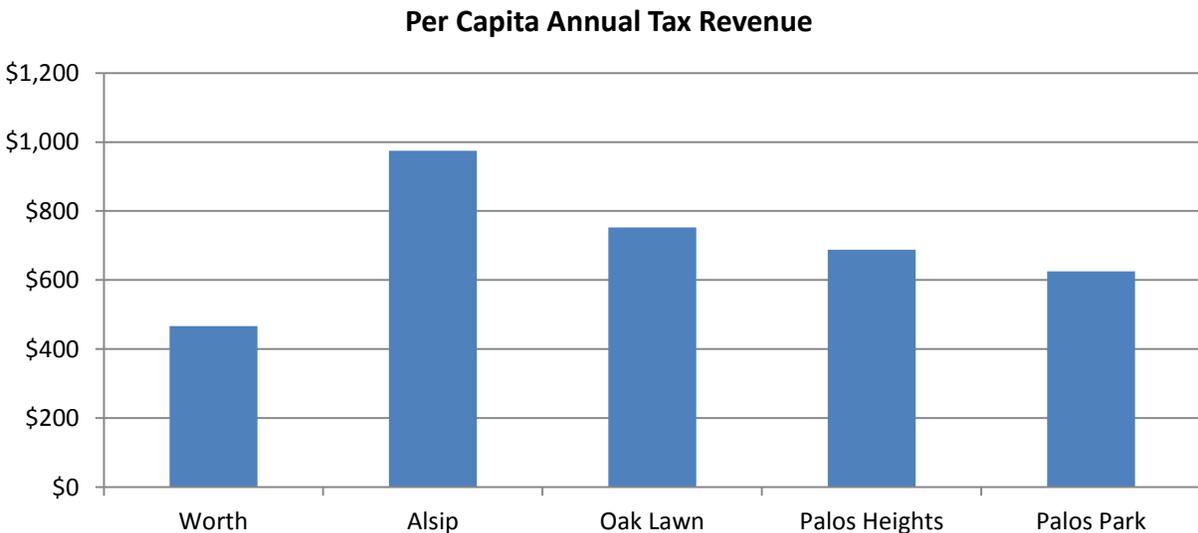
Household income comparison. The median household income in Worth is very similar to that in Cook County as a whole; both are significantly lower than the region’s median income. Worth also has median household incomes and income distribution that are very similar to those in many of the surrounding communities, such as Alsip, Chicago Ridge, Oak Lawn, and Palos Hills, although it has fewer high earners than Palos Park and Palos Heights. Many residents expressed the opinion that one reason retail businesses do not locate in Worth is that nearby communities have higher incomes, but data suggests broad similarities between Worth and its neighbors.



Source: 2008-12 American Community Survey

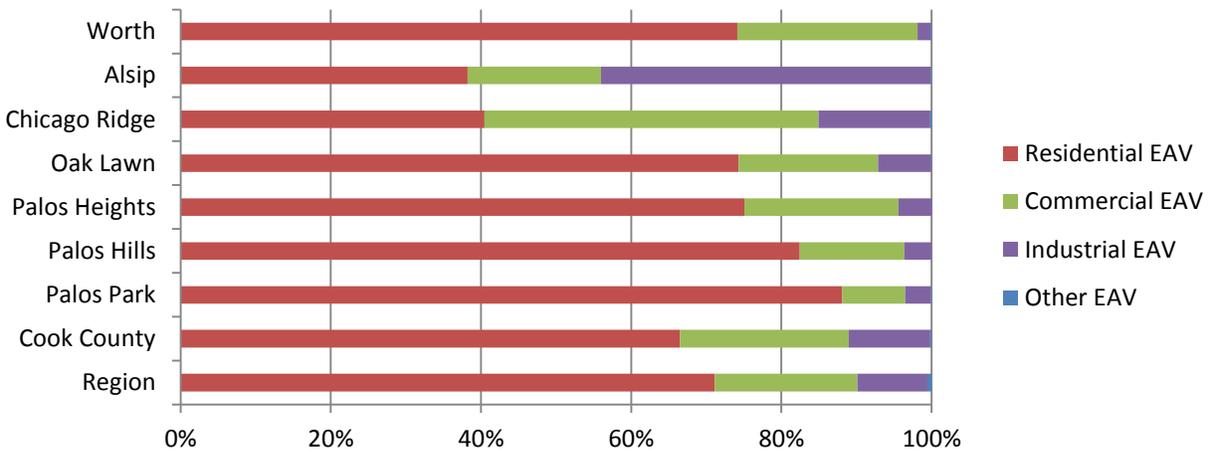
Economic Statistics

Per capita tax revenue. Based on Village and City financial reports, Worth has significantly lower per capita tax revenue than do many of the surrounding towns. Alsip, which has a large industrial tax base, receives more than double the revenue that Worth receives. Oak Lawn has a larger retail sector and considerable sales tax revenue, while Palos Heights and Palos Park contain high value residential areas.



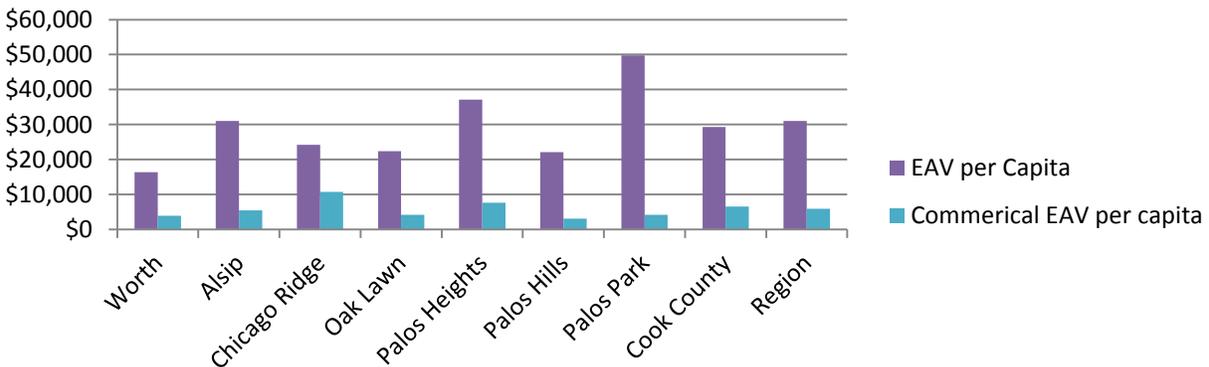
Source: Municipal budgets and financial reports.
 Note: Data for Chicago Ridge and Palos Hills unavailable.

Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) by property type. Compared to surrounding communities, Worth has unusually low industrial EAV, meaning that residential and commercial land make up almost all land value in the village. In terms of the overall value of land in the village, Worth has much lower per capita EAV than do the surrounding communities, and lower commercial EAV per capita than many nearby towns. The lower EAV means that even with the same tax rate, Worth would collect less revenue per capita than would its neighboring towns.



Source: Illinois Department of Revenue.
 Note: Data is for Fiscal Year 2011

Total and Commercial EAV per Capita.



Source: Illinois Department of Revenue.

Vacancy rates. Many residents of Worth expressed concern about the Village’s high rate of commercial vacancy. But recent data shows that retail and office vacancy in the Village is not unusually high for the area. In Worth and surrounding communities, 8.5 percent of retail and office square footage is vacant; in Worth alone, 7.4 percent is vacant. The percentage is lower than in Alsip and Palos Heights, although it is higher than in Chicago Ridge, Oak Lawn, Palos Hills, and Palos Park. The submarket average may be distorted by the very high rates in Alsip and Palos Heights.

Combined Retail and Office Vacancy, 4 th Quarter 2013				
	Number of Buildings	Total Square Footage	Vacant Square Footage	Percentage Vacant
Worth	77	511,159	38,044	7.4%
Alsip	94	1,326,620	209,247	15.8%
Chicago Ridge	54	1,666,464	58,751	3.5%
Oak Lawn	249	3,333,207	216,001	6.5%
Palos Heights	89	1,116,570	198,218	17.8%
Palos Hills	78	774,301	35,361	4.6%
Palos Park	15	242,352	11,218	4.6%
Submarket Total	656	8,970,673	766,840	8.5%

Source: CMAP analysis of CoStar data

The office and retail vacancy rate within a half-mile of the Worth Metra station is also comparable to that found at the nearest stops on the Metra SouthWest Service line. Oak Lawn, which has seen mixed-use development near its Metra Station in recent years, currently experiences the lowest vacancy rate within walking distance of transit. Palos Park has a very high percentage of vacant square footage, but with a total of only 10,000 square feet of retail and office space near the station, is a difficult basis for comparison.

Combined Retail and Office Vacancy within .5 Mile Radius of Metra Station, 4 th Quarter 2013				
	Number of Buildings	Total Square Footage	Vacant Square Footage	Percentage Vacant
Worth	52	348,933	35,384	10.1%
Chicago Ridge	39	568,431	52,071	9.2%
Palos Park	3	10,177	5,000	49.1%
Oak Lawn	54	529,296	31,585	6.0%

Source: CMAP analysis of CoStar data

Average square footage. While vacancy rates in Worth may not be unusual, the average square footage of each individual retail and office space is quite low. The small footprint of these spaces may discourage national retailers and space-intensive businesses from occupying existing buildings in the village.

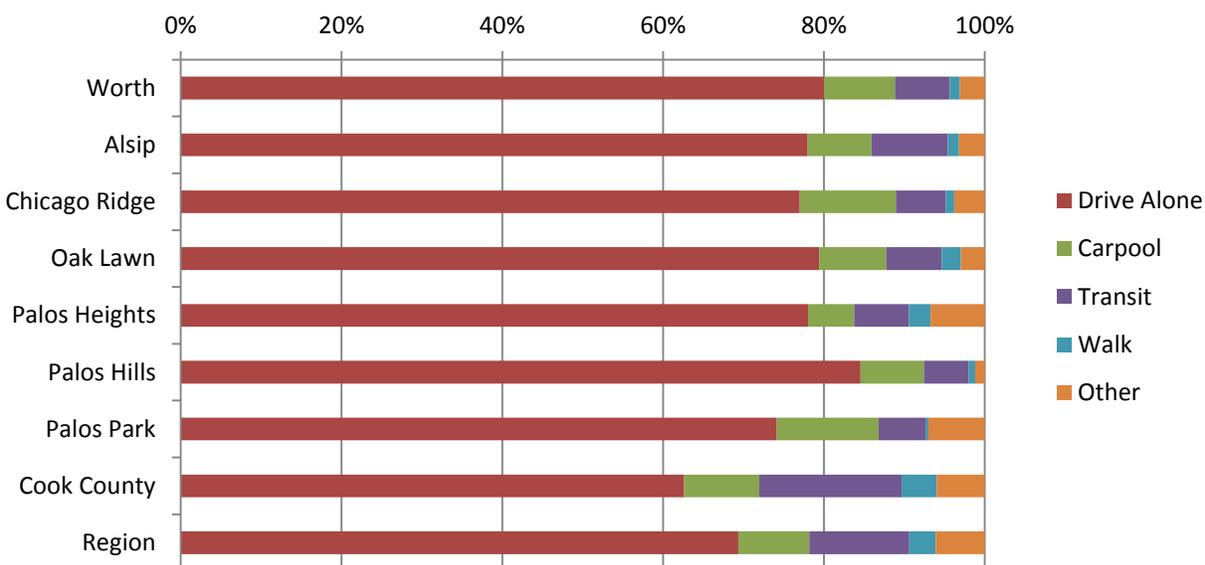
Average Size of Retail and Office Spaces, 4 th Quarter 2013			
	Number of Buildings	Total Square Footage	Average Square Footage
Worth	77	511,159	6,638
Alsip	94	1,326,620	14,113
Chicago Ridge	54	1,666,464	30,860

Oak Lawn	249	3,333,207	13,386
Palos Heights	89	1,116,570	12,546
Palos Hills	78	774,301	9,927
Palos Park	15	242,352	16,157
Submarket Total	656	8,970,673	13,675

Source: CMAP analysis of CoStar data

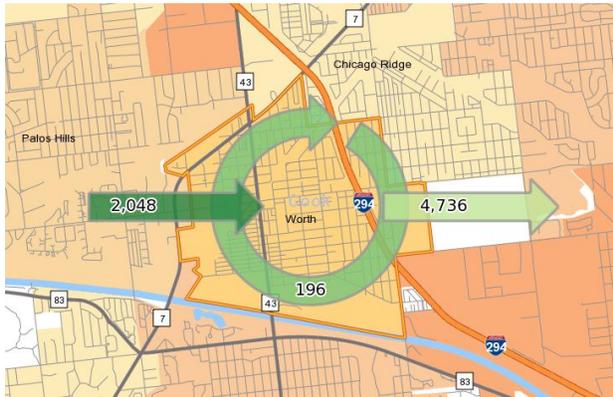
Mobility

Mode share. Despite the presence of a Metra station, about 80 percent of Worth residents reach work by driving alone, with about 7 percent commuting by transit. The percentages are similar to some nearby towns, but transit ridership is low compared to the region and Cook County as a whole. The percentage commuting by transit is similar to the percentages in Oak Lawn, Chicago Ridge, and Palos Heights, the other nearby towns with Metra stations, despite Worth having a lower percentage of its residents working in Chicago.



Source: 2008-12 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau

Commuter flow. As of 2011, only about 200 people both lived and worked in the Village of Worth. Most residents of Worth commute elsewhere, and most people who work in Worth reside in another town. In total, about 2,000 workers commute to Worth every day, while about 4,700 commute out of Worth to places like Chicago and Oak Lawn. Given the high percentage of residents commuting by driving, the daily flow of commuters into and out of Worth can result in traffic congestion, wear and tear on roads, and lengthy commute times. The greatest concentrations of jobs for Worth residents are to the north and northeast, in the area served by Metra and the CTA. The Loop, which is adjacent to the SouthWest line's terminus at Union Station, is the densest concentration of jobs for Worth residents.

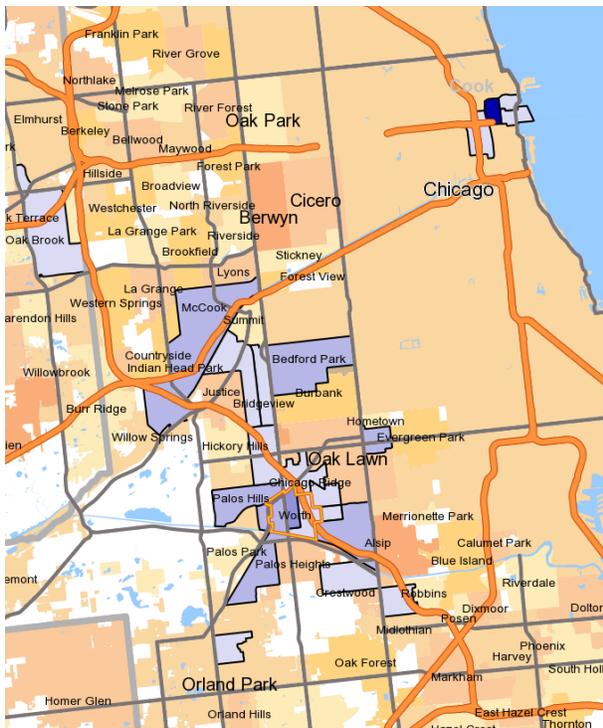


Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau
 Note: Arrows do not correspond to direction of travel.

Employment Location of Worth Residents by Municipality, 2011

	Count	Percent
Chicago	1,249	25.32%
Worth	196	3.97%
Oak Lawn	154	3.12%
Palos Heights	133	2.70%
Palos Hills	123	2.49%
Alsip	116	2.35%
Orland Park	108	2.19%
Bridgeview	107	2.17%
Chicago Ridge	96	1.95%
Bedford Park	81	1.64%
Other Municipality	2,569	52.09%
Total Employed Population	4,932	100.00%

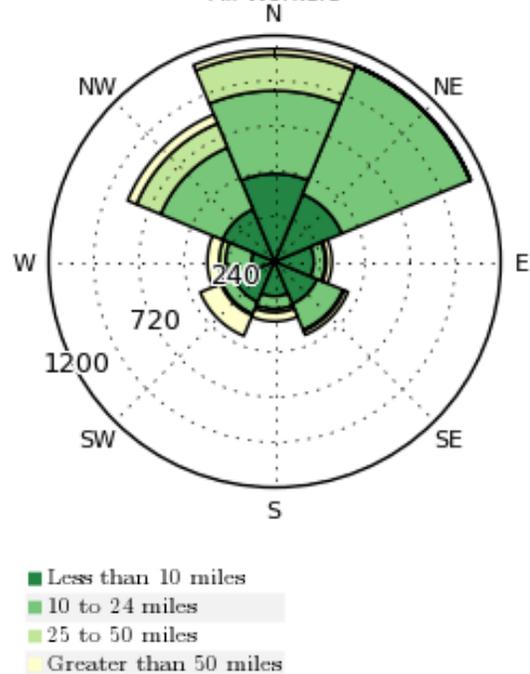
Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau



- 252 - 289 Jobs
- 215 - 251 Jobs
- 178 - 214 Jobs
- 140 - 177 Jobs
- 103 - 139 Jobs
- 66 - 102 Jobs
- 28 - 65 Jobs

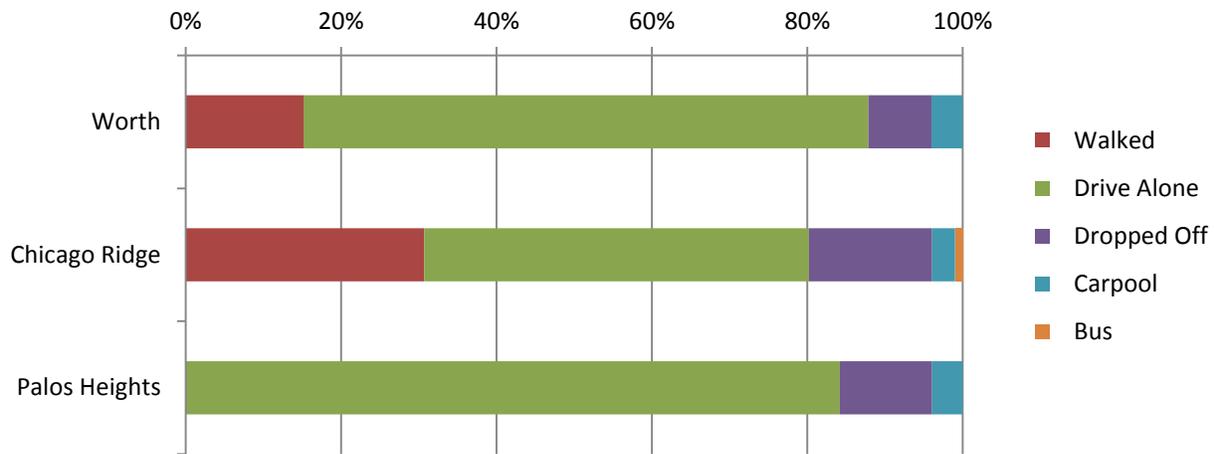
Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau

Job Counts by Distance/Direction in 2011



Source: Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau

Metra boardings, parking use, and mode of access. Boardings at the Worth Metra stop are higher than at Chicago Ridge or Palos Heights, the two stations adjacent to Worth. The parking lot holds 470 spaces, with a 61 percent utilization rate (as of 2006). Over two-thirds of those boarding in Worth reached the train by driving there alone, with none who were surveyed arriving by bus and only 15 percent walking. Improved connections between different commuting modes, such as improved pedestrian access to the Metra station or colocation of bus stops at the Metra station, would increase mobility and convenience for people who live or work in Worth.



Source: RTAMS

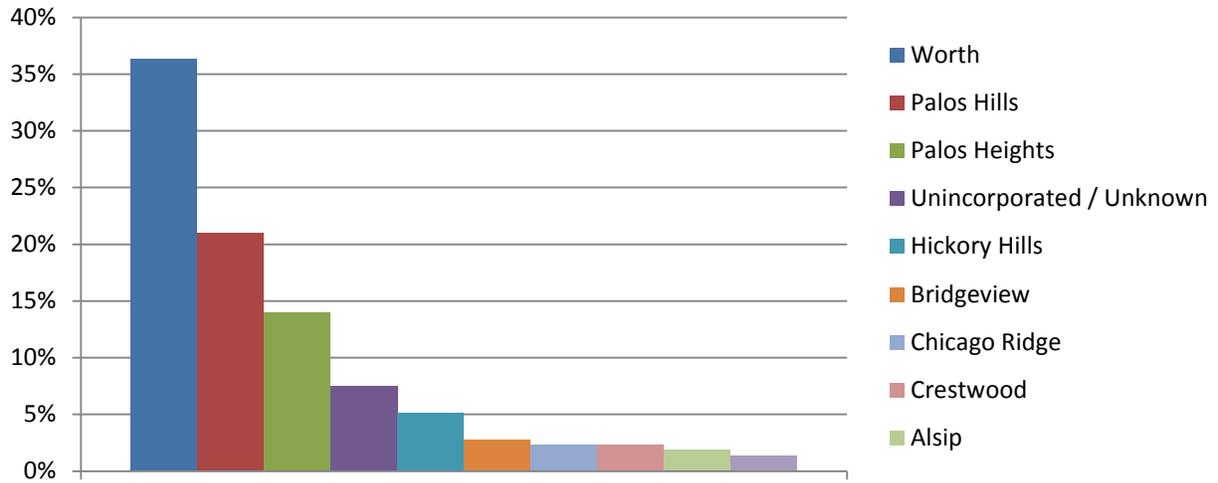
	Worth	Chicago Ridge	Palos Heights
Weekday Boardings	445	406	281
Parking Capacity	470	431	501
Parking Utilization	61%	40%	41%
Mode of Access			
Walked	15%	31%	0%
Drive Alone	72%	50%	85%
Dropped Off	8%	16%	12%
Carpool	4%	3%	4%
Bus	0%	1%	0%

Note: Boardings and Mode of Access Data from 2006 RTA Survey

Source: RTAMS

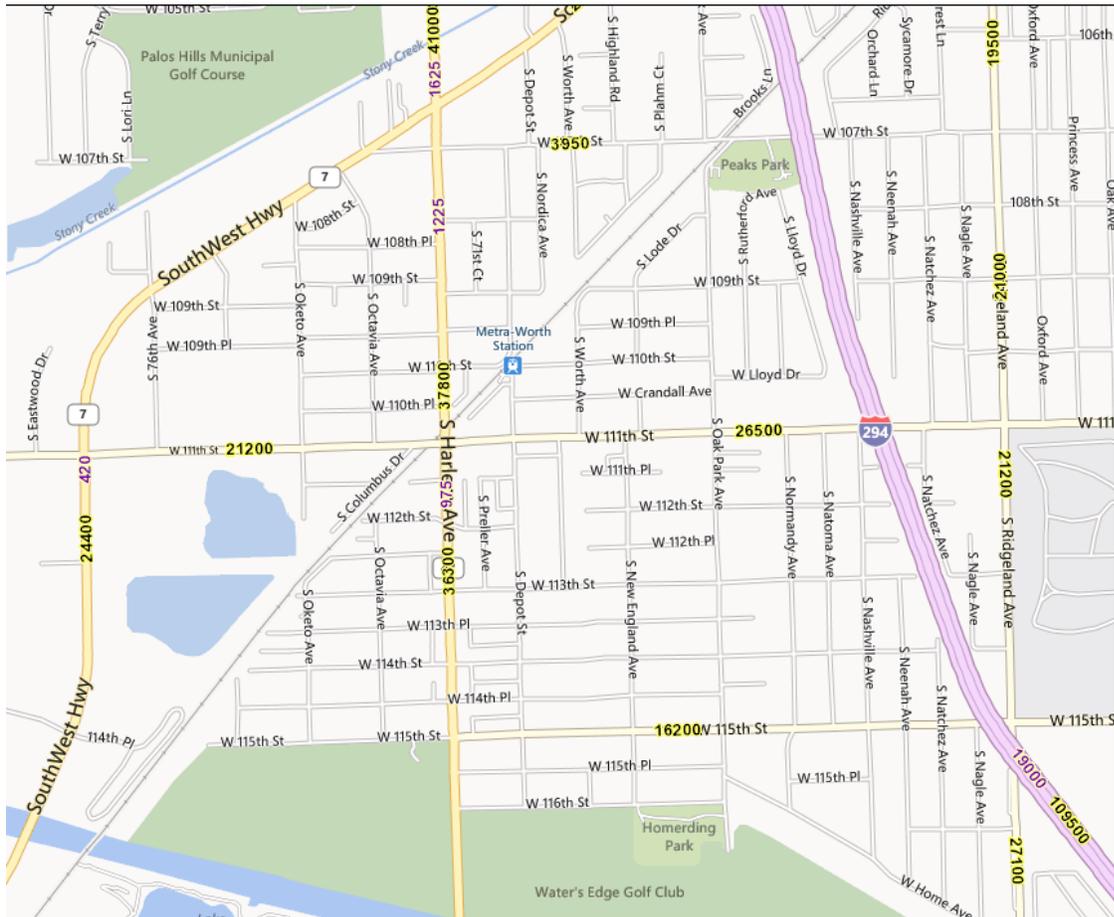
Origins of Metra passengers. As of a 2006 survey, about two thirds of passengers boarding the SouthWest Service Metra at Worth originated in other municipalities. Although, at over 35 percent, Worth is the single most common place of origin for passengers boarding at Worth station, many commuters came from nearby towns such as Palos Hills, Palos Heights, and Hickory Hills. The large number of out-of-town commuters using Worth station helps to explain the unusually high percentage of passengers who drive to the station and low percentage of pedestrians. Assuming that the breakdown of passenger origins remains similar to what it was in 2006, the many commuters who daily drive to Worth to use the Metra station

represent a sizable potential customer base for local businesses. Many of the stakeholders we interviewed cited the need for an anchor store or attraction that would make Worth a destination for shoppers from nearby communities; in many ways, the Metra station already serves that purpose, drawing several hundred people from outside the Village each day.



Source: Metra

Traffic in Worth. The Village contains several heavily trafficked roads, including the Tri-State Tollway (I-294) and several busy surface streets. The surface streets in Worth with the highest volume of traffic are 111th Street, with over 25,000 vehicles per day, and Harlem Avenue, with about 40,000. The limited access Tri-State Tollway carries over 100,000 vehicles per day through Worth, but has no on- or off-ramps within the Village. The heavy traffic offers economic opportunities for businesses that cater to the needs of drivers, but also contributes to the difficult pedestrian environment along the Village’s major commercial corridors.



Note: Black numbers represent counts of total traffic; red numbers are counts of truck traffic.
 Source: IDOT. "Getting Around Illinois." <http://www.gettingaroundillinois.com/gai.htm?mt=aad>

Context: Land Use, Zoning, and Ownership

Station area land use. In Worth, the bulk of land within one-quarter mile of the Metra station is occupied by single-family housing, with a number of commercial uses along 111th Street to the west. Several areas of multi-family housing exist near the Metra station as well. Notably, many of the parcels closest to Worth Station are owned either by Metra or the Village, including several lots of surface parking. These parcels are potential sites for new, catalytic mixed-used development.

Land Use within 1/4 Mile of Metra Station



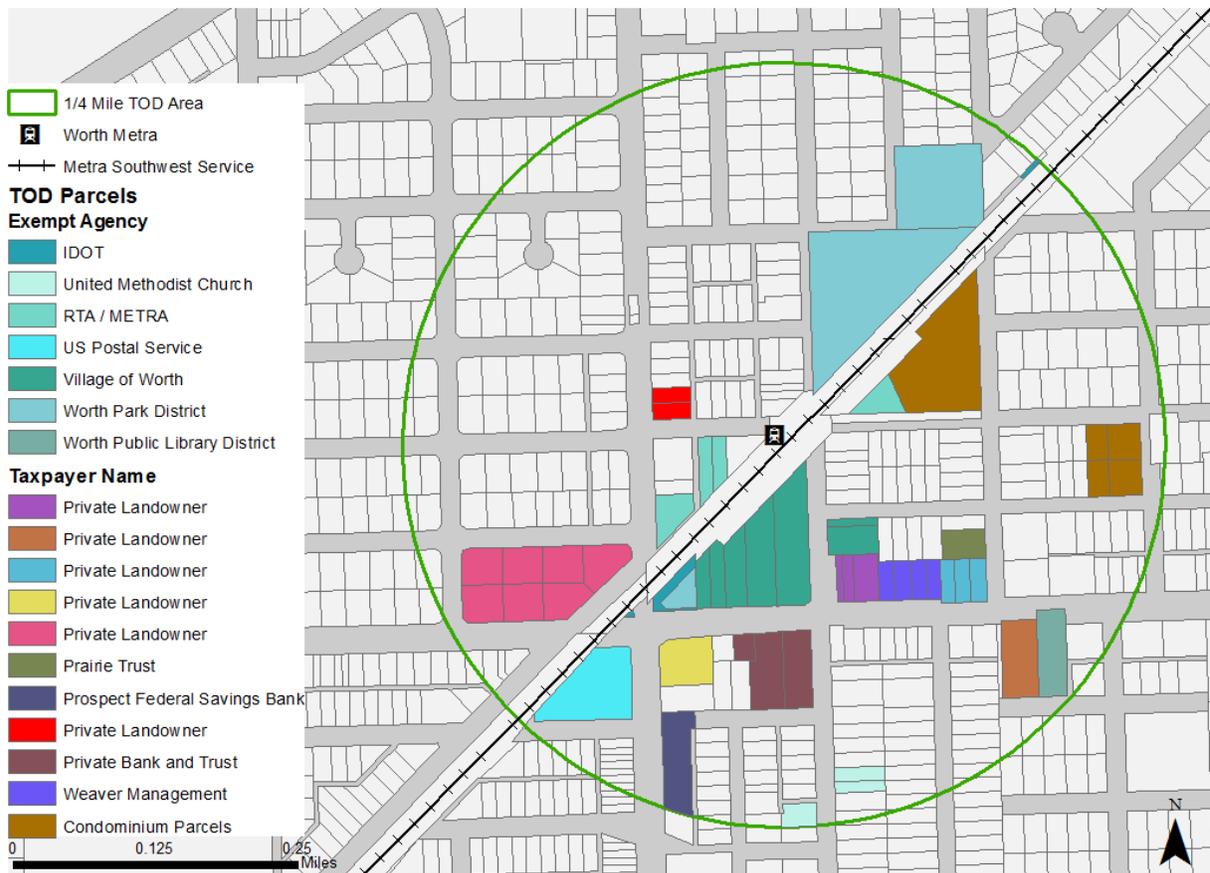
Station area zoning. The area around Worth Station is currently zoned for single uses. To the north and west of the Metra tracks, the zoning is predominantly residential. To the south and west, along 111th Street, current zoning supports business uses, including on parcels now occupied by municipal uses.

Zoning within 1/4 Mile of Metra Station



Station area land ownership. Much of the land within a short walk of the Worth Metra station is owned by public entities. Assembling large, contiguous blocks of land is a common barrier to successful TOD, as small parcels with many individual owners pose a challenge to siting mixed-use development at the appropriate scale. While the public land near Worth Station is actively used, including a large US Postal Service facility, Moore Park, the Worth Library, and the Village Hall, the Village is well positioned to implement TOD by relocating government uses if it decides to undertake such a project. The municipal parcels along Depot Street feature a large amount of surface parking that could be located further from transit, opening land for TOD. Besides the publicly owned parcels, the Worth Station area features a number of other contiguous lots under single ownership, simplifying possible land assembly tasks.

Major Property Owners within 1/4 Mile of Metra Station



Key Landowners within One-Quarter Mile of Worth Metra Station.

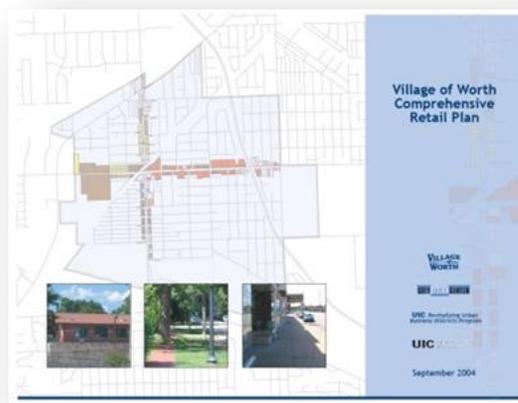
Property Owner	# of Parcels	Current Use	Total Size	Notes
Key Non-Residential Landowners				
Private Bank and Trust	3	Strip Mall (Vacancies)	1.8 acres	“Founders Square”
Prospect Federal Savings Bank	1	Bank	1.0 acres	
Private landowner	1	(Vacant) office building	0.8 acres	One-story office building plus parking
Weaver Management	4	Occupied strip mall	0.7 acres	Strip mall includes Neat Repeats and Bar Code 111
Private landowner	3	Occupied strip mall	0.5 acres	“Village Plaza” includes Worth Restaurant, travel agency, jeweler
Owners of Vacant Land				
Private landowner	2	Vacant	0.3 acres	Vacant lots on residential block across from active strip mall
Prairie Trust	1	Vacant	0.3 acres	Vacant lot between strip mall and residential area
Private landowner	2	Vacant + commercial	1.0 acres total; 0.4 acres vacant. (Additional 0.2 vacant acres adjoining; ownership unclear)	The corner is 3 vacant parcels, at least 2 of which Muno owns. He also owns the parcel next to these three, an active electronics repair store.
Public Landowners				
Village of Worth	7	Civic	3.4 acres	Fire station, village hall, parking lots on both sides of Depot Street
RTA/METRA	1	Parking	1.1 acres	Parking lot around active strip mall
Other Landowners of Note				
Private landowner	7	Multi Housing	2.9 acres	7 multi-family buildings, plus off-street parking
American Legion	5	Commercial/Non-Profit/Residential	0.9 acres	American Legion hall plus parking and 1-2 residential properties
Private landowner	1	Commercial	0.7 acres	S&S Auto Center

Planning Milestones

In recent years, researchers and policymakers have completed numerous studies and plans for Worth and surrounding communities. The Village of Worth has not undertaken a comprehensive planning process, but has commissioned several targeted plans, including a comprehensive retail plan covering Harlem Avenue and 111th Street. The 2011 Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan, while looking at a broader sub-region than just the Village itself, contains relevant and valuable insights on conditions in Worth and its future direction.

Village of Worth Comprehensive Retail Plan

In September, 2004, students from the University of Illinois-Chicago completed a study of the main retail corridors of Worth as part of UIC's Revitalizing Urban Business Districts Program. Focusing on the retail districts along 111th Street and Harlem Avenue, the study found that Worth has many assets, including high traffic volume and transit service, but a poor pedestrian environment and small retail spaces that discourage larger national tenants from locating there. Through a survey, the authors found a high degree of "retail leakage" from the Village; 82 percent of Worth residents' retail expenditures took place outside of Worth.



The study profiled the retail conditions along the Village's two major corridors, finding differences in scale and type of businesses, and identified several areas of unmet demand. On 111th Street, it noted the large number of banks, beauty salons, and small offices, but only three sit-down restaurants. The report also noted that several civic buildings, including the Village Hall and fire station, sit on prime land adjacent to the Metra station that would be desirable to retailers. The report profiled the seven small shopping centers on Harlem Avenue containing auto-related businesses, "special occasion" businesses (such as dress shops and funeral homes), and business oriented toward the needs of Arab-American customers. Unlike on other stretches of Harlem Avenue, the corridor in Worth does not feature big box retailers.

The study found that Worth has unmet demand for sit-down restaurants that serve liquor, hobby shops, auto parts, bakery/cafes, sporting goods, and electronics stores. While retail spaces in Worth were mostly occupied as of 2004, the report notes that Worth receives low sales tax revenues and has low assessed property value compared to its neighbors. Besides the small size of retail spaces, the report identifies several other factors that discourage thriving retail: parking is poorly distributed, zoning encourages small buildings through excessive parking requirements, and the pedestrian environment suffers from fast traffic, few sidewalks, and dangerous crossings.

The retail plan contains recommendations for four planning districts in Worth: a mixed-use, "village center" area serving transit riders and residents, and complementary corridors

featuring retail with wider appeal. The “village center,” in the area to the immediate south and east of the Metra station, would be pedestrian-focused and feature a mix of residential development and business that could serve Metra commuters, such as dry cleaners, coffee shops, restaurants, and day care facilities. The plan recommends national retailers with auto access on the north end of Harlem Avenue, regional retail along the eastern part of 111th Street, and convenience shopping on the south end of Harlem Avenue.

To implement these strategies, the plan suggests zoning and parking reforms, streetscaping changes, and the creation of a business development team to recruit and assist businesses. In the longer term, the plan recommends a catalyst project in the village center, such as a two- to four-story mixed commercial/residential building on a site near the Metra station.

Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan

Completed in 2011, the Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan is the SouthWest Conference of Mayors’ transportation and economic development plan for the corridor stretching from 63rd Street to Interstate 80. The segment between 107th Street and 130th Street encompasses Worth and Palos Heights. The plan characterizes that segment as containing retail and commercial zones surrounded by residential areas, with multimodal opportunities compromised by sidewalk gaps and numerous curb cuts.



In describing the potential for transit-oriented development in Worth due to underutilized land around the Metra station, the plan cites the need for design improvements around 111th Street. By upgrading sidewalks and crosswalks, installing permanent Pace and other bus stops, and improving traffic flow, the area around Harlem and 111th can become safer and more supportive of TOD.

The Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan identifies the Worth Metra Station Area as a Development Opportunity Site. With its access to the SouthWest Service Metra line and the presence of municipally controlled properties, the station area offers the opportunity to attract development. The plan points to recent successful developments in Orland Park and Chicago Ridge as helpful precedents. With an abundance of small parcels and difficult access from Harlem Avenue, the area will require planning and investment to prepare it for TOD. The Plan recommends developing a combined parking facility south of the station to make land available, as well as improving access and signage to the station.

Stakeholder Interviews

The core of the research conducted by CMAP staff for this report were confidential interviews with 35 key stakeholders in the Village of Worth. Nearly all were individual interviews (two featured pairs of stakeholders interviewed together), lasting between 45 minutes and one hour. One focus group, lasting one and a half hours, was held with nine community residents.

Village of Worth:

- Mary Werner – Village President
- Board of Trustees
- Economic Development Committee
- Wayne Demonbreun – Superintendent, Public Works
- Martin Knolmayer – Chief of Police
- Mark Micetich – Deputy Chief of Police
- Wayne Pesek – Village Economic Development Consultant
- Bonnie Price – Village Clerk
- Ed Urban – Assistant Superintendent, Public Works
- Bruce Zartler – Building Commissioner

Worth Park District

- Carlo Capalbo - Director, Park District

Worth Public Library District

- Carol Hall – Library Administrator

Worth School District 127

- Dr. Rita Wojtylewski – Superintendent
- Bahira Karim – Resident and School District Employee

Business owners:

- Joyce Athey and Doreen Holford – Neat Repeats Resale
- Isam Samara – Saraya Café & Restaurant
- John Staunton – The Chieftan Pub

Residents:

- Mike Collins
- Ed Guzdziol (resident and former Mayor)
- Russ Martin
- Jim Plahm
- Lisa Smith
- Becky Gunia Vinson
- Stewart Vinson

Main themes from interviews

The following is an overview of some of the main themes that emerged out of the entirety of the interviews. Summaries of comments from stakeholders (which are not intended to represent direct quotes) are included in *italics*.

“When you drive through Worth, you know you’re in Worth.” Nearly everyone expressed frustration—some even embarrassment—regarding the appearance of Worth’s commercial areas, and believed that the variety and economic health of the Village’s business mix are very weak. Several people independently brought up how bad Worth looks in comparison to neighboring communities.

- *People drive right through Worth and don’t even stop. We’d like it to be a quaint little town.*
- *There aren’t any real gateways to Worth.*

- *Worth has a mediocre reputation. People have misconception that there's nothing good or exciting here.*
- *With its bars, payday loan and "cash 4 gold" businesses, Worth is turning into Pottersville (as in It's a Wonderful Life).*

While nearly every person interviewed was critical about some aspect of the appearance of Worth, a few thought that Worth needed to recognize its assets and use them to help define Worth's identity for marketing and determining ways to enhance its character.

- *Don't forget Worth's positives. Communicate the good features. First task is defining that identity, and that definition must match the residents' view of the Village's identity. How does the identity accommodate changing demographics? The answers to questions like these can affect what 111th looks like in the future. Create a brand and make it seen beyond its borders. Then communicate it.*

The look of Worth's commercial corridor. Specifically, there were many complaints about the look of Worth's commercial corridors, usually focusing on the streetscape and other physical aspects of 111th Street.

- *111th street has no landscaping, few sidewalks and trees because there is no easement to work with along the widened 111th Street.*
- *Harlem and 111th have unwelcoming pedestrian environments. Lots of driveways, mismatched heights between curb and sidewalk.*
- *111th Street needs to be better lit, like street lighting that is found in surrounding communities.*
- *111th is too fast – buildings are set back and don't stand out to passing cars.*
- *The key is economic development. Model could be LaGrange's main street or 95th Street in Oak Lawn.*
- *Economic development is not all about streetscaping. Worth needs to get people into the stores.*

Many focused their criticism and concern on the façades of businesses that are in poor condition, particularly vacant properties located along 111th Street.

- *Bad aesthetics deter shoppers, who know they can go to the next town and have a more pleasant experience.... The appearance of many buildings is dark, dingy, and old.*
- *Storefronts need to be unified. Signs are all different style and size. Code may be lax on sign regulations. It would be helpful if stores could leave some of their lights on at night because it looks better and the village doesn't offer much lighting on 111th.*

A few people wanted to see an incentive program to improve facades. Some discussed their voluntary efforts to improve the appearance of some storefronts and facades, finding it very hard to get property owners to be a part of it, sometimes out of a concern for liability. Similarly, several people complained about neglectful commercial property owners, who may not live in Worth (or even Illinois), and felt that the Village should work with Cook County to try to contact these neglectful property owners. Several also claimed that commercial property owners

say it's cheaper to keep their buildings vacant, and that if there is a tenant, their property taxes go up. Whatever the reason, these vacant properties mean a loss of revenue to the Village, and generally seem to receive less maintenance.

Last, several people specifically criticized the quality of commercial signage in Worth.

- *Signage is horrendous. Some out-of-date signs remain in place, confusing consumers. The Village may choose to adopt a sign ordinance, but will require stepped up enforcement.*
- *People suggest requiring uniform signage, but how could it work if there is no room between the business and the road (buildings on 111th Street are right up against the road)?*

Worth's business mix. There seems to be universal dissatisfaction with Worth's business mix. Not only are residents acutely aware that there are almost no national chain stores or restaurants—unlike in neighboring communities—the current mix simply doesn't satisfy residents' basic needs.

- *Worth went from having tons of bars to just two, but now is back to having quite a few. They draw a crowd, but the town needs more restaurants.*
- *Worth has mostly mom & pop businesses. It needs some "name" stores such as national fast food chains, and especially a family restaurant.*
- *Worth should be a hometown area, creating more of a downtown feel (and leaving big boxes at malls). I would like something more like Tinley Park, LaGrange, 95th Street in Oak Lawn.*
- *Not many professional services either (such as doctor's offices).*
- *We don't have any regular American restaurants. No mall or shopping attractions. Need a midscale strip mall with nice shops. We lack an anchor store or restaurant. A single specialty store might attract lots of new customers from Worth and the surrounding area, but it would need to be really high quality.*
- *It would be great to have a bakery or pastry shop, flower shop, a home décor store, card shops, an affordable family restaurant that is open past 3pm.*

Several people observed that while it's nice to have a new restaurant like Gemato's Wood Pit BBQ or an upscale restaurant like Krapil's, they seem to be targeted at higher-income customers, who don't live in Worth, and don't represent the sort of establishment that residents actually want.

- *Most customers at sit-down restaurants aren't from Worth. Worth Restaurant attracts a local crowd but closes at 3pm, and Michael's Pancake House did, but it's closed. People don't really leave town to eat, and they just don't go out much. For financial reasons, people go cheaper than a place like Gemato's.*

Most people offered their opinion as to why more businesses have not come to Worth.

- *Past subdivision led to small, irregular commercial lots along 111th Street, and today frontage lots on 111th Street and Harlem are shallow and backed by an alley with underground and overhead utilities. National chains typically require larger parcels and more parking. Redeveloping the commercial area might require assembling lots, which might be difficult.*

- *Everyone wants businesses to come in, but the requirements are too much.*
- *The Village hasn't marketed itself enough to national chains. For example, if the Village measured the high volume of daily traffic along 111th Street and Harlem Avenue, it could lead to a Starbucks or a Culver's, etc.*

Past and future economic development efforts. Many had comments about what hadn't worked in terms of economic development efforts in the past.

- *The "Comprehensive Retail Plan" [a study of Worth's retail corridors completed in 2004 by graduate students from the University of Illinois-Chicago] had a lot of good recommendations, but the Village simply didn't have the money to implement them.*
- *Once there was a Chicago Ridge/Worth Business Association. It seemed hard to get people excited about promoting neighboring town's businesses. Chicago Ridge had habit of talking up their mall to the exclusion of Worth. More businesses want to locate there than in Worth. [NOTE: Chicago Ridge and Worth have since revived the Association.]*

There were suggestions for how the Village could help Worth's local businesses in the future.

- *Basically the Village needs to get all of Worth's business owners in the same room.*
- *There is a need to find ways for businesses to get assistance, especially with loans, federal programs, etc.*
- *It would be great to level the playing field. Currently it seems that many decisions [such as those involving businesses] and dealings are "relationship-based" among stakeholders, where who you know and informal deal-making are key.*
- *It's good that the Village is conducting a survey to help identify economic development needs, as well as what specific properties are working or not working. By inventorying available vacant properties, the Village can try to attract appropriate businesses.*
- *Many business owners in Worth don't have a lot of business training. The Village could try to develop a partnership with the business program at Moraine Valley Community College, where students could help small businesses develop a business plan, do better marketing, etc.*

Parking is problematic, especially for attracting new businesses. Parking was mentioned by most interviewees as one of the fundamental challenges Worth faces in trying to attract new businesses. The configuration of 111th Street, Worth's main commercial corridor, leaves relatively little room for parking due to relatively shallow lots or shared parking between businesses. Parking for more successful businesses often spills into the adjoining residential areas.

Several people noted that disheveled houses are located immediately behind strip malls along 111th Street and suggested some of these structures could be razed to supply additional parking. Quite a few interviewees thought that a centrally-located municipal lot serving multiple businesses would help relieve the problem, but when asked, all confirmed that currently almost no one walks along 111th Street.

- *There is plenty of parking in town overall, but it's just not used well. Businesses might come to town if they knew they would have sufficient parking.*
- *Usually there are no connections between adjacent private parking lots, so if someone is looking for additional parking they have to go back out onto 111th Street.*
- *Some people in the community promoted shared parking, but liability fears win out and businesses resist the idea.*
- *Current ordinances are against shared parking.*
- *In general, parking in Worth is non-conforming.*
- *There is a need to comprehensively study Worth's parking problems. The Village should not just go along with requests from a few businesses, but determine where the demand is and how far people would actually be willing to walk.*
- *It would be good for the Village to purchase a vacant business that is an eyesore and create a municipal lot in its place. Creating a municipal lot worked wonders for Oak Lawn and is a major reason for the success of their retail areas. Worth hasn't been able to do it and currently cannot afford it.*

Worth's Metra station has little relationship to the Village itself. Worth's centrally located Metra station is very popular, but it is mostly popular with non-Worth residents, who apparently don't patronize Worth's businesses to any noticeable degree.

- *The train station and Metra service are very valuable assets. Commuters just drive away after they get off the train – should try to attract them to local businesses*
- *300 cars in Metra lot, but they don't stay and shop.*
- *The town gets little benefit out of the Metra station. Commuters may buy gas in Worth, but nothing more. Of course, Worth doesn't have the restaurants that would capture commuters.*
- *We need signage around the Metra station directing folks to downtown businesses in Worth.*

Many thought that the area around the station offered a good opportunity for mixed-use transit-oriented development (TOD), with new commercial and higher-density residential development located right by the station. A few people cited transit-oriented development around Metra stations at Oak Lawn and LaGrange as examples of how this can work. Most of all, people seemed to want businesses that would be very attractive to commuters.

- *Worth could make the area around the station into a hopping corner.*
- *Worth's station is probably one of the better train stations for meeting consumer need, as it is attractive and its parking has good capacity. It brings in a lot of outside visitors. Therefore, complementary mixed use development would work, but it needs to serve commuters with their pre- and post-work needs.*
- *Although Metra commuter parking is currently located right next to the train station, it would be ideal if it could be relocated so that commuters walk past businesses on the way to their homes or parking lots. Meanwhile, these commuters must also feel safe. Possible businesses [for new*

transit-oriented development] include restaurants, coffee shop, bakery, dry cleaner, news stand, drug store, or a florist.

In the meantime, there was also interest in more actively programming Metra's parking lots on weekends, such as expanding already-successful farmers markets and flea markets, especially as they are at the center of the commercial district.

"The Village never follows through on anything." It was common for interviewees to suggest that Worth's problems have been well-known for some time, and that various administrations have different fixes in mind that never pan out or get carried out—in short, as one person said, "Nothing much changes." Many expressed frustration at "good ideas that never go anywhere," and often pointed to the high turnover among the Village's mayors. **It's worth noting that there was a consistent, noticeable degree of optimism in comments made about the current administration.**

- *We need more realistic goals, because we're too picky. For example, residents may want to have a mall move in, but then don't want the specific anchor store that is proposed.*
- *Everyone wants progress, but many don't want to participate in making that progress actually happen. This is often a combination of people not wanting to do the work and people who do the work not agreeing on what to do.*
- *Trustees are very hands on. But don't have a lot of practical experience in management and administration, and the Village has almost no professional staff. Sometimes trustees in similar situations are reluctant to give up control. But they are better suited to worry about policy, not management.*
- *We need to change the defeatist "it's just Worth" mentality.*
- *There is a lot that Worth could do. We just need to focus on what we have, and on who is willing to participate.*
- *There's a need for the Village to actively reach out to other politicians (such as congressmen, county officials, etc.), and even go to key conferences or meetings of fellow mayors. Without doing that, Worth may not be finding out about available grants and other opportunities for funding or resources that could really make a difference, such as improving the streetscape of Worth.*
- *The Village needs to implement a plan, stick to it, and then monitor progress.*

On a related note, several people argued that the Village doesn't do a good job enforcing its existing ordinances. There were many comments about Worth's ambitious and entrepreneurial business owners "pouring a lot of money into their properties" while some property owners "let their properties go, and nobody does anything about it."

- *[In Worth's residential areas] there are people who don't paint or maintain their houses. Worth has had lax enforcement staff in recent years. People are issued tickets, then complain to the mayor and get out of it.*
- *The Village is trying to push owners to fix things. Using existing ordinances, it has stepped up enforcement, offering to help out with insurance issues, etc.*

- *There is a lack of code enforcement. Attempts at persuading landowners to do the right thing are worthwhile, but the Village needs to be willing to enforce if persuasion fails. The Village seems reluctant to use the powers available to it. It needs to understand how and why it should begin asserting its authority. At the same time, the Village needs to handle any proposals gingerly: You can't just suddenly start harsh, by-the-letter enforcement of codes. People have lived with these conditions for years.*
- *The Village has been increasing code enforcement in recent years. But there is also a need to update ordinances; some government regulations have changed (such as lead paint, etc.) but ordinance has not.*

Worth's residents. Worth was widely-characterized by those interviewed as “a working-class community,” dominated by residents who have been in Worth for generations and are highly resistant to change or trying new things. While many seemed critical of these characteristics, one person was less so, explaining that “Lots of people like things the way they are, while others talk about a need for change without an idea for what or how.”

- *Residents very set in their ways, but Worth needs change. People are too content to say “it's just Worth.” They focus on constraints and limits and are content with mediocrity.*
- *People are resistant to change: older residents and foreign-born residents both. People don't want cleanliness and beautification standards enforced. Most voters are senior citizens, so the Village generally caters to their distaste for change.*
- *If you manage change, you don't have to be afraid of it.*

Several people noted that while they believe that Worth has traditionally been dominated by an older generation, they have noticed a substantial increase in the number (and overall percentage) of new families with young children, who were reported to be more diverse (especially ethnically and racially) and open to change. School enrollment is growing substantially, especially in early grades. At the same time, it was noted that people in this growing demographic tend to be busy with family and not engaged with the community as a whole, especially through civic involvement, whether demonstrating interest in serving on Village committees, participating in community improvement efforts, or voting in elections.

- *It's a small, tight-knit community. People are seen as either inside the box or outside the box. Most people are not that involved. But a few are very involved in every facet of village life.*
- *The village is a good, friendly place, where people really care about one another. The downside is that everyone knows everyone's business, and personal entanglements and rivalries can interfere with government and hold the Village back.*
- *Some long-term residents may be uncomfortable with new residents or business owners who are from different parts of the world, but immigration is a good deal for the town.*
- *Given the ongoing changes in Worth's resident population, all municipal departments and civic institutions (including the parks department, Village services, etc.) need to gain better understanding of other cultures.*

- *Many Polish, Hispanic, and Arabic families need more services that can support them. A good start would be for Worth to provide residents with a place in town where they can learn English, get to know one another, and become more integrated into the entire community.*

Discomfort with the area's growing Arab-American community. The percentage of Arab-American residents and, especially, Arab-American owned businesses has been growing, especially in this sub-region, and Worth is no exception. Nearly every person who was interviewed commented on this development.

Opinions varied widely, but it seemed that a majority of interviewees who were not Arab-American were either uncomfortable with some aspect of this development or felt like it was not necessarily a positive for the community, often saying that businesses owned by Arab-Americans did not sell anything that was relevant to their preferences and lives. There were several people who expressed frustration that Worth can't attract "any new businesses," seeming to overlook a number of recently opened businesses owned by Arab-Americans.

- *It's a fair statement that the Arab-American community businesses haven't meshed with the town. It's a whole culture of people we don't understand that is night and day different. If people don't like that kind of food, why would they patronize their businesses?*
- *It's natural to be uncomfortable. I feel uncomfortable going into Mediterranean restaurants alone. Many residents cannot read Arabic signs, so they don't know what the businesses offer. I'm not unaccepting of any business that wants to move in, but I won't go in if I'm not able to read the name and don't know what the business is.*

It's important to note that a sizeable minority of interviewees who were not Arab-American expressed opinions suggesting that they thought this could be good for the community, especially by adding viable new businesses to Worth that could generate needed revenue for the Village.

Arab-Americans who were interviewed reported occasionally feeling unwelcomed, singled-out, and treated differently in various aspects of community life, but maintained a commitment to the Village, praising Worth's many assets and good qualities.

Resident expectations for Village services. A few people suggested that Worth residents generally expect a fairly-high level of services in a community with modest tax revenue (Worth gets 14.5% of property tax and this is its main source of revenue, due mainly to lack of industry and relatively weak commercial).

- *Worth's a bedroom community with high property taxes. The Village's cut of tax bill is actually pretty low, with most going to the county, schools, etc.*
- *Business appeals for tax relief help individual businesses but depress property values overall.*
- *People assume taxes should be lower, but they are not out of sync with surrounding towns.*
- *The Village seems to be doing a better job explaining its projects to citizens, but it still could do a better job communicating the practical realities of municipal costs and ordinances.*

Other topics frequently mentioned. There was near-universal frustration with Worth’s TIF district, but no one seemed to have a strong opinion advocating a new strategy that the Village could follow. Similarly, while a few people had specific suggestions for increasing use of the Water’s Edge Golf Club, especially during the off-season—such as a banquet facility—most simply lamented the financial burden that the Village must now carry for many years to come.

A few people suggested that Worth should look into the possibility of a “riverwalk” development down by the riverbank of the Calumet Sag Channel, although all acknowledged that Metropolitan Water Reclamation District ownership posed a challenge to such ideas. There was also some discussion about how the Lucas Berg Nature Preserve (known by many as “The Pit”) could benefit the community, with a few people proposing that the site be considered for commercial development, especially given its location next to 111th Street.

Recommendations for Future Planning Projects

Worth would benefit from a wide variety of planning projects that could address its future needs and investment priorities for its residential areas, commercial corridors, streets and sidewalks, transportation system, and parks and open space. A comprehensive plan is one way to address these needs, but may not be the highest priority for Worth. While the Village has not completed a comprehensive planning process, it has been the subject of numerous planning studies that have devoted considerable time, attention, and thought to the Village's commercial sector and major corridors. Another broad plan may simply be an addition to the existing library of documents assessing the Village's needs. A more narrowly targeted planning project that can deliver short-term results and spur private investment could be a more effective next step for Worth.

Primary recommendation

CMAP recommends that the Village of Worth partner with relevant agencies to create a transit-oriented development (TOD) plan for the area surrounding the Worth Metra station.

The presence of the Metra station is a tremendous asset that brings hundreds of people to the Village on a daily basis. Developing a well-planned, mixed-use district that capitalizes on the Metra station's central location can be a catalytic project for the Village, enlivening the existing retail districts along Harlem Avenue and 111th Street.

Previous planning studies, including the Village of Worth Comprehensive Retail Plan and the Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan, have identified Worth as a prime target for transit-oriented development. Many factors point to the Village's potential for TOD: the Metra station is located within a short walk of residential areas and commercial corridors, the Village and other public entities own large, contiguous pieces of land, and much of the land within a quarter-mile consists of vacant lots and surface parking (although it should be noted that parking currently used by Metra commuters is clearly in high demand and will continue to need to be provided in the immediate vicinity of the station).

The Metra station already acts as the "destination" that many stakeholders told us is necessary for Worth's commercial areas to thrive. Bringing hundreds of visitors each weekday, the station helps to create a customer base for local businesses much larger than just the Village itself. Many of the specific types of businesses residents cited as desirable – such as sit-down restaurants, cafes, specialty retail – can thrive in TOD areas that have strong and safe pedestrian and bicycle connections.

Transit-oriented development in the center of Worth would generate numerous benefits for the community. As a built out, landlocked village, Worth cannot expand outward, but increased density and development in the area around the Station offer the possibility for growth within Village borders. TOD is also compatible with existing plans for commercial corridors in the Village. Much of 111th Street and Harlem Avenue lie within a ten-minute walk of the Metra station; successful development in the immediate station area coupled with pedestrian improvements and clear wayfinding could stimulate the many businesses that are located within a short walk of the station but oriented toward drivers. With sound plans for much of the Village already in place, what Worth needs is a catalytic project that can draw investment to

the community. A TOD plan can help the Village take advantage of its existing infrastructure and assets to create a showpiece project.

While TOD is a component of many of the existing plans for Worth, none of those documents included detailed TOD plans. We recommend that the Village pursue a focused plan for transit-oriented development, such as the type conducted by RTA's Community Planning program. Like CMAP's LTA program, the RTA Community Planning Program offers grant funding and technical assistance for planning projects, but with a special focus on plans that support and are enhanced by the regional transit system. RTA's TOD plans produce recommendations for land use and transportation within a quarter to half-mile radius of a rail station, with additional guidance on urban design, streetscaping, and multi-modal mobility improvements around the station area. For more information, please see <http://www.rtachicago.com/community-planning/eligible-projects.html>

Other Recommendations

The recommendations contained in the existing Harlem Avenue Corridor Plan and Village of Worth Comprehensive Retail Plan will help the Village guide development over time. We particularly recommend following through on some of the shorter-term implementation strategies detailed in the Retail Plan, including zoning reform, which can significantly increase development potential at little cost to the Village.

Zoning reform. Amendments to specific provisions of the Village Zoning Ordinance will help Worth address the small size of its retail and office spaces. Our analysis found that vacancy rates in Worth were not unusually high compared to rates in nearby towns, but that the average size of individual spaces was much smaller. The Comprehensive Retail Plan found that the small size of buildings likely deterred national retailers from locating in Worth and that the zoning code's parking requirements contribute to the problem.

The Village's zoning code requires different amounts of parking based on the size and use of a building. For example, restaurants serving food to be consumed on site most provide one parking space for every 100 gross square feet of floor area, and most general retail uses must provide one parking space for every 150 gross square feet of sales area up to 1,500 square feet plus one space for every additional 250 gross square feet. These standards apply regardless of the business' location within the Village, despite differences in context and form. The current zoning discourages property owners from building larger spaces; because parcels along 111th Street are relatively small, they cannot accommodate both a large building and the parking it requires. Reducing parking requirements, especially in the vicinity of the Metra station, would help promote full use of the town's small parcels and create the pedestrian environment that supports TOD.

Immigrant integration. Although one key stakeholder stated that "nothing much changes" in the Worth, the Village is undergoing a number of important demographic changes, just like most communities throughout the region. Not only is the resident population becoming more ethnically diverse, but Worth's community of business owners is as well.

In June 2014, CMAP and the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus will launch *The Immigrant Integration Toolkit*, which contains information on strategies that municipalities can undertake to engage immigrant residents in the civic life of their community. This toolkit is a direct result of an

identified need to assist municipalities in addressing changing demographics at the local level, and can be used as a resource by municipalities in the Chicago region that are interested in working to foster a better relationship with local immigrant populations. This means taking a proactive approach to incorporating immigrants into the civic and social fabric of the community.

Worth can be one of the first municipalities in the region to benefit from this new resource. It identifies common challenges, with step-by-step guidelines that offer potential strategies for municipalities in northeastern Illinois who want to be proactive in immigrant integration activities, highlighting what municipalities and community leaders can do to ensure a prosperous inclusive future. In light of the fact that this toolkit is aimed at municipalities, it focuses exclusively on sectors and strategies that municipal departments have direct or shared influence over, presenting a variety of options that can be tailored to the needs of a community.

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is the region's official comprehensive planning organization. Its GO TO 2040 planning campaign is helping the region's seven counties and 284 communities to implement strategies that address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality of life issues. See www.cmap.illinois.gov for more information.

Local Technical Assistance program

In October 2010, CMAP was awarded a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grant by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist with the implementation of GO TO 2040. With funding from this grant, CMAP has launched the Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program, which involves providing assistance to communities across the Chicago metropolitan region to undertake planning projects that advance the principles of GO TO 2040.

CMAP is currently working with 70 local governments, nonprofits, and intergovernmental organizations to address local issues at the intersection of transportation, land use, and housing, including the natural environment, economic growth, and community development. In the first call for projects in early 2011, CMAP received over 220 proposals from more than 130 municipalities, counties, interjurisdictional groups, and nongovernmental organizations.

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