Morton Grove's Industrial Zone Plan could provide jobs, help with property taxes

Morton Grove residents may not even realize the village has two industrial districts, which manufacture everything from machinery to pharmaceuticals to food products.

While they may keep a low profile, the industrial areas are extremely important to the village and to residents, a consultant told the village's Plan Commission Monday as she presented an Industrial Areas Plan designed to maximize their benefits.

"This [plan] is about promoting a strong industrial base for Morton Grove. The two industrial districts are an employment powerhouse, and they're beneficial to the village as a whole," said Nicole Woods, a senior planner with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, a state agency. The village of Morton Grove got help from CMAP to develop the Industrial Areas Plan.

Nancy Radzevich, the village's Economic Development Director, went a step further, pointing out industries pay a higher rate of property taxes than residents do, which helps offset the taxes residents must pay. Manufacturers also tend to offer high-paying jobs and bring a daytime population to the village, which provides customers for restaurants, stores, dry cleaners and other Morton Grove businesses.

"As we talk to businesses about locating downtown, we can talk about not only the resident population [of potential customers], we can talk about this captive audience of industrial employees who need to eat and shop," she said. "And [industrial] businesses have told us they bring people into town and need places to bring their business associates to dinner, so there are a ton of secondary benefits [to retaining and bolstering the manufacturing district]," she said.

There are two manufacturing districts: the North District, consisting solely of the Avon property near Golf Road, and the South District, spread out around Oakton Street and Austin Avenue. Combined, the two provide 57 percent of the jobs in Morton Grove, Woods said. Manufacturing provides 34 percent, wholesale trade provides 11 percent and other sectors provide the balance.

In comparison, retail businesses provide only 12 percent of the jobs in Morton Grove.

Commissioner Blonz questioned Radzevich on whether she thought the Industrial Areas Plan was realistic and realizable, or whether it would sit on a shelf.

"This is a good plan," she responded. "It fits in with our strategic plan and economic development goals, and also the priorities the mayor and administration are pushing now, such as developing the downtown area."

"There are a lot of consistencies here to other work we're doing."

Woods presented the Industrial Area Plan's goals and recommendations, which included the following.

- **Economic Growth —** The plan recommended the village's staff, economic development commission and the Chamber of Commerce hold occasional breakfasts with industrial district employers to keep abreast of their needs, talk with commercial real estate brokers to determine whether Morton Grove has the kind of buildings employers are looking for and encourage local businesses to create their own Industrial Business Development Association.

- **Encourage Businesses to Use a Cook County Tax Incentive —** To prevent businesses from fleeing to Lake County, where industrial property taxes are lower, CMAP suggested encouraging them to apply for what is called a Cook County 6B designation. It essentially allows businesses which make major investments in property to pay 10 percent property tax, instead of 25 percent, for a certain number of years.
- **Keep Tabs On Regional Trends For Large Businesses —** Someone from the village or Morton Grove Economic Development Commission should attend regional forums, where they can learn of trends such as the region's skills gap or new grant money or incentive programs.
- **Create An Industry Resource Center** — It could connect Morton Grove with workforce development programs, for example.
- **Develop a Database and Directory of Morton Grove's Industrial Businesses —** It might lead to them doing business with each other, Radzevich suggested.
- **Refine Morton Grove's Permitting Process and Fee Structure To Encourage Investment —** "There's some pent-up demand, and so when they're ready to build, they're ready and time is of the essence," Woods explained.
- **Create a Lively Downtown —** As Radzevich explained earlier, this provides a place for industrial business employees to spend their money.

Tags: Industrial Areas Plan , Morton Grove Industrial areas