Application form:
RTA Community Planning Program and
CMAP Local Technical Assistance Program

DEADLINE: Noon on Thursday, June 29, 2017

This application form is online at www.rtachicago.org/applications. You may submit the form by email to applications@rtachicago.org.
Upon receipt of application, you will receive an e-mail verifying that your application has been received.

1. Name of Applicant

Village of Thornton

2. Main Contact for Application

Name: Doug Beckman
Title: Village Administrator
Phone number: 708-877-4456
Email: dbeckman@thornton60476.com

3. Type of Applicant (please check any that apply)

_X__ Local government

___ Multijurisdictional group* Please list the members of the group (including government and nongovernmental organizations):
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

___ Nongovernmental organization* Name of local government partner(s):
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

*Applications submitted by multijurisdictional groups and nongovernmental organizations must include a letter indicating support from each relevant local government. See the FAQs for more information.
Nongovernmental applicants are strongly encouraged to contact CMAP or the RTA prior to submitting their application to discuss their project and the demonstration of local support.

4. Project Type (please check any that apply)

Please check all statements below that describe characteristics of your project.

__X__ My project involves preparation of a plan.
____ My project involves updating an already existing plan.
____ My project helps to implement a past plan.
__X__ My project links land use, transportation, and housing.
____ My project has direct relevance to public transit and supports the use of the existing transit system.
____ My project is not directly related to transportation or land use, but implements GO TO 2040 in other ways.

5. Local Match Requirement (please initial to indicate you are aware of the local match requirements)

I am aware that a local match will be required for most projects, and understand that if my project is selected it is up to the project applicant to contribute a local match. (See the program guide for further details on local match requirements.)

__X__ Yes, I understand that applicants will be required to contribute a local match.

6. Project Location

Please provide a brief description of the location of your project. You may include a map if that helps to describe location, but this is not required. If your project helps to implement a past plan, please include a link to that plan.

The Village of Thornton is located approximately 25 miles south of the City of Chicago. We are located between the Villages of South Holland to the north, Glenwood to the south, Homewood to the west, and the Cook County Forest Preserve to the east. Thornton is approximately 3.1 square miles in area with a population of 2,826 (according to the 2014 American Community Survey as cited in the MetroPulse Community Data Snapshot). Thornton is the oldest community in Thornton Township and was established as a Village in 1834. Our request for assistance would affect the entire community, but be mostly focused on the areas that aren’t limestone quarry or MWRD transitional reservoir.

7. Project Description

Please tell us what you would like to do in your community, and what assistance is needed. If you have more than one idea, please submit a separate application for each project. Please be specific, but also brief (less than two pages per project idea)—we simply want to have a basic understanding of what you want to do. For plan updates please tell us how you will be building upon (or replacing) the previous work. Program staff will follow-up with you if we need any additional information to fully understand your proposed project.

The Village of Thornton seeks assistance with development of a comprehensive plan that supports its tradition of mixed land uses within the village and provides a framework for planning and development decisions that accentuate the community’s strengths. Thornton as a town is defined by its quarry but has lovely tree-lined streets and nearby forest preserve holdings that are unrecognized assets. It is bisected by railroad and truck corridors but is home to a new
affordable senior housing development which was designed to preserve an existing historic building and aspects of the natural environment and floodway of Thorn Creek that contribute to the character of the community. The Village’s current Comprehensive Plan (2003) can be found at [www.thornton60476.com](http://www.thornton60476.com).

Thornton officials have recognized the challenge of community planning in a small but highly trafficked area. Failing to successfully secure CMAP LTA funding in the past, we considered contracting with a consulting firm but the cost of a comprehensive plan was beyond the Village’s financial means. We then decided to try and re-write our plan ourselves. A sub-committee was put together consisting of elected officials, representatives from the plan commission, village staff and the community. We attempted to follow some examples of other plans shown on CMAP’s website and engaged residents through a community survey. The initial goals of the group seemed simple: to develop a plan that promotes inclusive growth for residential, commercial and industrial development. Unfortunately, with our limited staff and no community planner expert available, we hit a ‘brick wall’ and have been unable to move forward alone.

The goal of the Village remains, to develop a comprehensive plan that promotes inclusive growth for residential, commercial and industrial development while creating a sense of place and community character. We see our project as an opportunity to develop recommendations that advance Complete Streets goals in a challenging industrialized suburban environment. We want to enhance walking and biking opportunities within the Village itself, but also identify opportunities and connections to the local forest preserve trail system. We also want to focus on expanding housing options within our community. Our current plan has limited options for multi-family and no option for multi-use housing. We’ve recently researched the current
housing needs regionally compared to what we offered currently in our community, and want to make sure our plan includes market value housing for everyone from single millennials, to families with young children to senior citizens. Another challenge that needs addressing is existing land uses. Until the late 1980’s the Village had a vibrant ‘downtown’ area with many bars and some restaurants along our Margaret & Williams Street corridor.
All those businesses have left Thornton and many of the buildings have been torn down. The committee has been interested in establishing new retail interest, but isn’t sure that the old ‘downtown area’ is the right place for it.

The Village of Thornton has many unique challenges as it tries to plan for its future. Thornton is landlocked, with no land to annex for growth. As stated earlier, Thornton is also home to the largest commercial limestone quarry in the United States. Although that provides us with some economic benefit, the quarry itself (including MWRD’s Thornton Reservoir) takes up approximately 1.8 square miles of Thornton 3.1 square miles of land.

Therefore, we must utilize the remaining 1.3 square miles of current residential and commercial space we have. Our current residential subdivisions are blocks away from where the original ‘downtown area’ was. Although the Village has a good sidewalk system, it has no bike lanes.
Another unique challenge for Thornton is its ability to enact a complete streets approach. Thornton has four main roadways (Chicago Rd., Eleanor, Williams St., and Margaret) which connect its various parts of the community. All four are I.D.O.T. owned roadways, roadways which the Village has no control over. Several of our Village owned streets were put in over 50 years ago when ‘complete streets’ wasn’t even a concept. They are barely wide enough to have parked cars and traffic on them at the same time, much less adding a bike lane to them. Even if we could figure out a way to make Thornton more walking and biking friendly, we have hundreds of quarry trucks and dozens of freight trains that travel on our transportation system daily. It is not uncommon with the amount of trucks and freight trains to have traffic backed up for blocks several times a day.

(Traffic back up on West Margaret from Union Pacific tracks)

Even though local law enforcement does a good job at enforcing truck tarping laws, they still create a large amount of dust in the air and on the roadways which hinders the ability for residents to walk or bike next to.
One final challenge (although certainly not the last of our challenges) is land use. As mentioned above, The Village of Thornton is the oldest community in Thornton Township. Residential areas, commercial areas and industrial areas were put in as developers showed interest. Long term community planning was not done back then, nor through the years as Thornton grew into what it is today. The amount of truck and train traffic has greatly increased over the last few decades, which could be a main reason Thornton’s old ‘downtown area’ has died out. We have blocks zoned half residential and half business because that’s the way Thornton used to be. I-80 runs right through Thornton, but the nearest on/off ramps are in neighboring communities. Thorn Creek runs through Thornton. The Village has tried for years to increase access to the creek for recreational activities and its banks for enjoyment. Trying to coordinate all the groups involved in the creek (Cook County Forest Preserve, MWRD, and the Army Corps of Engineers) has been difficult. We have dozens of freight trains traveling through town every day, but no commuter trains. The Village was told in the early 2000’s that a new commuter line was coming to the south suburbs and that Thornton would get a station. Past Board’s bought land in preparation for a station and parking needs. Recent presentations by Metra made the possibility of a Southeast Rail Service coming to the south suburbs seem very uncertain. Thornton is used to dealing with the dust and vibrations from the quarry blasting, but now residents and businesses have to deal with the occasional smell from MWRD’s Thornton Reservoir. All these are challenges we face in trying to plan what Thornton ‘will look like’ 20 years from now.

Village officials are committed to an inclusive planning initiative for Thornton’s future. We want to engage the community in a planning process that results in a plan for Thornton that recognizes its historic and current land uses but provides a road map for modernization and improvement. We believe a new comprehensive plan is the right step in planning Thornton’s
future. If CMAP staff believes we need to start with a different tool such as a Planning Priorities Report, we would be very open to starting with that.

8. Previous Plan Implementation Efforts
Please describe actions you have taken to implement previous plans in your community – whether your efforts were successful or not – to achieve infrastructure improvements, development investment, policy changes, advocacy, volunteer involvement, or other actions. If you do not have experience implementing previous planning work, please describe what you will do to make sure that your plan is implemented. Illustrating a commitment to implement plan recommendations is very important to both agencies as we consider new planning projects.

One of the current plan’s land use goals is to ‘Encourage the development of a variety of housing types, at various economic levels, which can satisfy the needs for a variety of life styles and living expenses within the community’. A development group recently finished building a 46 unit senior housing living structure in early 2016. The project received funding from the State and County as it was built to allow seniors of all income levels to live there. The building is currently full with a waiting list.

(Thorncreek Senior Housing located at 410 E. Margaret)

One transportation goal is to ‘Encourage the development of a variety of modes of travel to meet the needs of all citizens’. As mentioned earlier, Thornton bought land for a future commuter train station and train parking. Also in the last 5 years we have increased the number of PACE bus stops. Unfortunately, the new Senior Housing building was constructed after the PACE stops were in place and the closest stop to them is 2 blocks away.
These are just a couple of examples of how we’ve implemented parts of our current plan. If we were to get assistance to write a new plan, with more current goals and objectives we will be dedicated to seeing that plan come to fruition.

9. Additional Strategic Partnerships
Please list any additional partners you may want to include in this planning project. Please specify if you have made contact with them in advance of submitting this application.

We have a good working relationship with South Suburban Mayor’s and Manager’s Association in which our Mayor sits on their executive board. We have been in contact with Executive Director DeLaurentis regarding this application and she has offered her assistance and support in our planning process. Last year we joined their GIS consortium as well and have been working closely with SSMMA to complete our maps. We hope to use GIS data in helping us with different planning processes, but especially updating our zoning codes, identifying potential bike path alignments, integration of green infrastructure and stormwater management, and redevelopment of priority sites.

(Please include any additional information that is relevant, preferably by providing links to online documents.)

I am including a letter of support for our project needs from South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association. If you need a resolution from my Village Board in support of this project I could get that as well.
June 28, 2017

Honorable Robert “Bob” Kolosh
Mayor, Village of Thornton
115 E. Margaret St
Thornton, Illinois 60467

Re: Thornton’s Request for CMAP LTA Funding

Dear Mayor Kolosh:

On behalf of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association’s (SSMMA), I would like to express our support for the Village of Thornton’s LTA grant application. We recognize the need for strategic and comprehensive planning in Thornton so that you are better able to address current and future challenges for your community: your aging infrastructure, historic industrialization and future land use, multimodal access and improved walkability, and better position you to maximize and benefit from your adjacency to Cook County Forest Preserve holdings and the natural environment within the area.

We believe that this project will help foster responsible consideration of future freight and economic development needs within your community and position Thornton as a leader and champion for Inclusive Growth and Complete Streets goals. We know of your commitment to an inclusive public participation process and predict that the project will engage the community and better ensure a bright future for Thornton.

We wish you every success with your LTA application and stand ready to assist you in whatever way we are able.

Sincerely,

Kristi DeLaurentiis
Executive Director