

City of Highland Park

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT

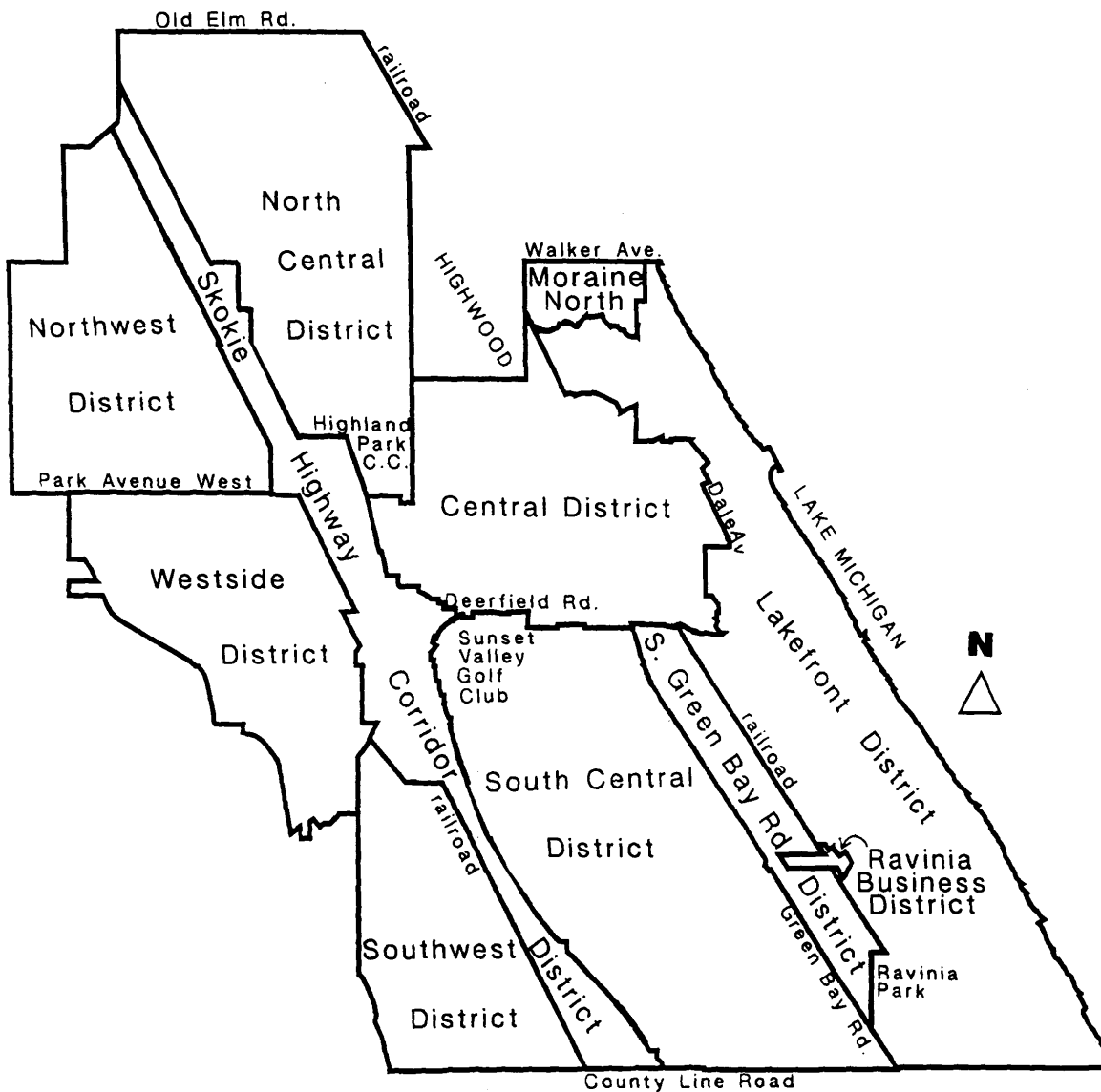
**Neighborhood
Strategic
Plan**

**Approved
April 1999**

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Planning Districts in Highland Park



INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The Lakefront District is one of 11 planning districts that were created for the purpose of updating the City's Comprehensive Master Plan that guides land use and community development decisions in Highland Park. For additional information about the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, please refer to the *"Introduction to the City of Highland Park Master Plan"*.

The Lakefront District Neighborhood Strategic Plan (the Plan) includes a **Vision Statement** describing positive qualities of the Lakefront District that should be preserved and enhanced in the future; **Issues and Recommendations** addressing concerns related to land use and community development in the Lakefront District; and **Action Steps** assigning responsibilities for implementing the recommendations within a specified timeframe to certain individuals or groups.

District Boundaries

The Lakefront District stretches along four miles of lakefront in Highland Park, from Fort Sheridan on the north to Lake Cook Road on the south. It is bounded by Lake Michigan on the east and primarily by the Metra/Union Pacific North Line railroad and the Central Business District on the west. It also encompasses Ravinia Festival Park west of the railroad, and the residential area south of Ravinia Park (see map).

Neighborhood Planning Process

The Lakefront District planning process began in December 1997 with a kick-off meeting attended by more than 80 residents. During that meeting and eleven subsequent meetings, residents identified neighborhood strengths and concerns, and evaluated recommendations and actions steps to include in the plan.

Public participation was an important element of the planning process, and through articles in the Highlander, school newsletters, and the local paper all Highland Park residents were encouraged to attend and participate in the meetings. Prior to the kick-off meeting, a mailing was sent to all Lakefront District residents, and everyone who expressed interest continued to receive mailings throughout the process. Before the Plan was finalized, a second district-wide letter urged all District residents to comment on the draft Plan.

Members of the Plan Commission and Community Development Department facilitated the meetings, and Public Works and Police Department staff presented additional background information about specific discussion topics, as did members of the Lakefront Commission, Environmental Commission, and Ravinia Festival Community Relations Commission.

Community Development staff drafted the Plan based on the meeting discussions and written comments from residents. The Neighborhood Planning Committee (NPC), made the final decisions about what to include in the Plan before it was submitted to the Plan Commission for the public hearing process. The NPC consisted of neighborhood volunteers who attended at least half of the planning meetings, and who agreed to set aside personal interests and consider the broad issues and input from all residents in making recommendations and approving the Plan.

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT VISION STATEMENT

“The rustic setting of East Highland Park is its most charming asset. The ravines, tall trees and winding streets create a feeling of openness and comfort. The variable appearances of the homes, the “non-development” look, is visually appealing and adds to the distinctiveness of the area.”

–Lakefront District Resident

The Lakefront District is a peaceful and scenic residential neighborhood enhanced by unique natural features, caring, involved citizens, and a high quality built environment. This section identifies in greater detail the qualities that define the character of the Lakefront District, and which should be preserved and enhanced in the future.

The Built Environment

Historic landmarks and landscapes, and winding streets that conform to the topography of the ravines significantly contribute to the character of the neighborhood. Four National Register Historic Districts and one Local Historic District have been designated in the eastside of Highland Park. Within these districts and scattered throughout the Lakefront District are numerous local and national landmarks. These include Yerkes Fountain/Horse Trough at Forest Avenue, donated in 1896 for the dedication of Sheridan Road; the Ward Willits House at 1445 Sheridan Road, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1902; an impressive log house built in 1893 at 1623 Sylvester Place; the Senior Center on Laurel Avenue; Ravinia Festival Grounds; Braeside and Ravinia Schools; Rosewood Park; and many other unique landmarks and homes.

Although no distinct architectural style or house size dominates the Lakefront District, residents feel that high quality architecture and “understated elegance” are its unifying elements. Pride of ownership manifests itself in excellent property maintenance and frequent home improvements throughout the neighborhood, and the relative absence of new subdivisions with uniformly designed homes is also notable. In addition to the architecture of the houses, lot size and the proportion of house size to lot size are also important determinants of the character of each block.

“Not many localities in the country enjoy the vast ocean-like panorama of Lake Michigan at one’s doorstep, or the wooded and flowering beauty of ravines off one’s back yard. Because of this unique beauty, ravine and lakefront properties are desirable locations for homes. Some ravines contain rare and endangered plant species and may be justly considered ecological treasures.”

--Living in a Ravine & Lakefront Community. City of Highland Park Lakefront Task Force and the Department of Community Development, 1994.

Natural Features

The ravines, lake bluffs, beaches and abundance of mature trees create a natural setting unique to the Lakefront District. Natural landscaping, wildlife, and a lack of fences contribute to the sylvan quality of the neighborhood, and a sense of being in harmony with nature pervade the neighborhood. Residents wish to preserve and enhance the important relationship between the natural and built environment.

Public Amenities

Public amenities are abundant in and around the Lakefront District. These include numerous recreation areas, some of which have limited beach access. Moraine Park, Central Park, and Rosewood Park are just a few of the public parks in the neighborhood, and a boat ramp and sailboat storage is available at the end of Park Avenue. The privately owned Ravinia Festival Park provides another significant recreational opportunity to residents of the Lakefront, and throughout the Chicago region.

Other amenities located in the Lakefront District include the Senior Center, religious institutions and neighborhood schools. Also, the Central Business District, Ravinia Business District, the Highland Park Library and other facilities and cultural opportunities are within minutes of the neighborhood.

Transportation

The Lakefront District provides a pleasant environment for walking, biking and driving. The curving roads were platted in a manner that respects the area’s natural beauty and topography, and most of the roads in the Lakefront District remain relatively congestion-free. Sidewalks exist in many areas throughout the neighborhood, and the Green Bay Trail, although primarily used for recreation, also provides a transportation alternative for pedestrians and bikers.

In addition, Lakefront District residents have a range of public transportation options available to them. Train stations in downtown Highland Park, Ravinia Business District, and Braeside Neighborhood Commercial District are easily accessible, and the downtown train station is served by all of Pace bus routes for Highland Park. The *Senior Connector* bus offers another transportation alternative for the City’s senior citizens.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

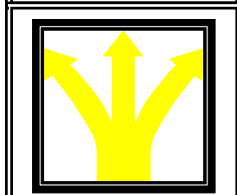
Lakefront District issues and recommendations are presented in six primary categories:



New
Development



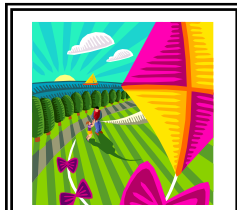
Natural
Environment



Transportation
and Infrastructure



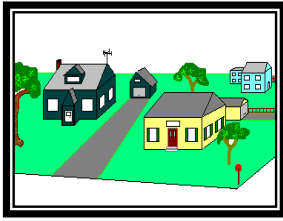
Community
Empowerment



Recreational Areas
and Opportunities



Braeside Neighborhood
Commercial District



“Our area is subject to “teardowns” and the subsequent construction of large homes that cover more of the lot than the former houses did.”

“The heterogeneity of the housing stock needs to be preserved. The current trend for “knockdowns” has resulted in structures which are garish and usually inappropriate for the lot size and other homes in the vicinity.”

“The building of over-sized houses which infringe on green space and involve loss of trees, give the view of ostentation and over-privilege.”

--Comments from Lakefront District Residents

New Development

Size and Appearance of New Homes

The most common issue raised during the Lakefront District planning process was the size and appearance of new homes and building additions. “Teardowns” - tearing down one or more older homes to be replaced with a new, larger house - was consistently cited as a problem. Although some Lakefront District residents felt this to be an acceptable or even desirable side effect of market forces, most residents want development regulations to do more to ensure that new development is consistent with the existing neighborhood character.

Residents were concerned about some new and remodeled homes that they identified as “problem sites” because of:

- Excessive floor area ratio (FAR), or the ratio of the floor area of a home to lot size;
- New homes on ravine lots that appear too large in relation to the lot;
- The height of new homes exceeding older homes;
- Lack of design compatibility between new homes and existing, sometimes historic homes;
- Uniform house design in new subdivisions; and
- Prominent garages on new houses.

With the adoption of a new Zoning Ordinance in 1997, many provisions were tightened, including FAR, sideyard setbacks, garage door width and height limits. The effects of these changes may not yet be fully evident. Therefore, the controversial size or appearance of some “problem sites” is the result of old zoning regulations (or zoning ordinance variations) rather than inadequate current regulations. However, the neighborhood planning process identified some specific zoning ordinance amendments that are warranted, especially for FAR, uniform house design, and prominent garages.

In 1997, the FAR for the R5 zoning district was reduced by 4% and for the R4 district by 6%. Residents feel, however, that the recent reductions in FAR do not go far enough in limiting the size of new homes, and support a further reduction in FAR using the zoning regulations for Lake Forest as a model. Residents also favor reducing the maximum FAR for homes on ravine lots. Lake Forest, for example, allows only

GRAPHICS:
Map of Lakefront Single-family Residential Zoning Districts

“No two single-family dwellings of identical front elevation, or façade, shall be constructed or located on adjacent lots, nor shall there be constructed or located more than twenty-five (25) percent of single-family dwellings of the same elevation or façade in any block. A change of front elevation or façade shall be deemed to exist when there is a substantial difference in roof line, type and location of windows, and/or kind and arrangement of materials.”

--Tinley Park, IL Zoning Ordinance.

50% of “non-tableland” to be included in measuring overall lot size, reducing the maximum house size for that lot.

With the exception of Local Historic Landmarks, the City does not require design review for residential development. In 1998, the City passed a Demolition Delay Ordinance giving the Historic Preservation Commission the power to delay demolition of an architecturally or historically significant home for up to three months, in order to find an alternative solution to demolition.

Although the design of a new home can be controversial, especially when it replaces or neighbors a historic home, residents are divided about whether to recommend design review for new homes including replacements for “teardowns”. However, there is strong support for specific regulations that would address the issues of uniform house design and prominent garages but without the level of subjectivity associated with a full-scale design review.

Requiring that more subdivisions be reviewed as Planned Unit Developments is another mechanism the City has for regulating the size and appearance of new homes. The City should also continue to evaluate the height regulations and amend them as needed to protect the existing character of the neighborhood.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Revise dimensional controls for lakefront neighborhood zoning districts to ensure that new homes and building additions, including those on ravine lots, are more consistent with the scale of existing homes, and are appropriately sized to preserve and enhance the character of the neighborhood.*
- ⇒ *Continue to evaluate the height regulations and amend as needed to protect the existing character of the neighborhood*
- ⇒ *Decrease lot size or number of lots that triggers PUD process.*
- ⇒ *Adopt guidelines, such as those used in Tinley Park, Illinois, to discourage uniform design in new subdivisions.*
- ⇒ *Create incentives to reduce garage width facing the street, such as allowing modest FAR or impervious surface bonuses for facing garage away from street and at back of property.*
- ⇒ *See additional recommendations under **Code Enforcement**.*
- ⇒ *Encourage residents to attend Plan Commission and City Council meetings to give public input regarding new development proposals and zoning amendments.*

“[M]any of the large lakefront properties have been further subdivided and built upon. Often this activity has been carried on exclusively to maximize profits, with little thought given to architectural or ecological sensitivities. Perhaps with greater interest in Highland Park’s fine architectural and landscape heritage, and with further public involvement in preservation issues, this disturbing trend can be reversed.”

--Highland Park: American Suburb At Its Best. An Architectural and Historical Survey edited by Philip Berger, 1982.

GRAPHIC: Sketch of a lot in depth.

Lot Density

The Lakefront District is zoned for low to moderate density single-family residential uses, with the exception of limited areas adjacent to Ravinia Business District that are zoned for medium to high density residential uses, and Braeside Neighborhood Commercial District.

Lot sizes along the lake are consistently larger than the minimum required for the next lower zoning district. These lots should be rezoned from R4 to R3 to preserve the existing density and character of the area. Because new development impacts steep slope areas, this will also help protect lake bluffs and ravines that are heavily concentrated on those lots.

In other areas of the Lakefront District current zoning designations are generally consistent with the existing lot density. Furthermore, provisions of the Zoning Ordinance prevent subdivision of lots in many instances when the resulting lots would meet the minimum lot size for the zoning district. An ordinance adopted in 1997 defines an “established lot width”, which may be greater than the minimum lot width for the zoning district. When 60% or more of the homes on a block have a lot width greater than the minimum required, the new lot must meet the average. This regulation limits the ability to subdivide property that would result in lots that are narrower than the majority of the existing lots on the block even if the new lot would meet the minimum lot width and lot area for the zoning district.

Many parcels in the Lakefront District that are large enough to be subdivided have a high proportion of steep slope areas. This further limits the potential for new subdivisions in the neighborhood, because new construction is prohibited on the slopes of the ravines and lake bluffs. Strict regulations on lots-in-depth (see figure) also prevent subdivision of lots that would otherwise meet lot size standards.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Rezone from R4 to R3 those areas along the lake where lots are consistently 40,000 square feet or greater.*
- ⇒ *Continue to eliminate the approval of lots-in-depth, especially where there is potential for additional lots-in-depth that would ultimately change the existing character of the block.*
- ⇒ *Also see recommendation concerning PUD trigger under **Size and Appearance of New Homes.***

GRAPHIC:Map of Subdividable Lots in Lakefront District.

“Any construction of impervious surface - buildings, patios, driveways - covers the natural surface of soil which could otherwise absorb large quantities of water.”

--*Living in a Ravine & Lakefront Community*. City of Highland Park Lakefront Task Force and Department of Community Development, 1994.

Impervious Surfaces

There is strong support from Lakefront District residents as well as members of the Environmental Commission and Lakefront Commission for adoption of maximum impervious surface ratios for new development. Limiting impervious surfaces is particularly important in the Lakefront District because any increase in the volume or velocity of storm water increases erosion of the ravines and lake bluffs.

Recommendations

⇒ *Adopt impervious surface ratios for all zoning districts in the City, or failing that, an overlay zone establishing impervious surface ratios for those districts in the Lake Michigan watershed.*

“There is too much abuse of the variance process. The charm and character of the neighborhood is being negatively impacted.”

--Lakefront District Resident

Enforcement of City Codes and Ordinances

Initially during the planning process, residents felt that many of the zoning regulations for new development in the Lakefront District needed to be tightened. However, many of those homes that residents identified as “problem sites” had been granted zoning variances, and therefore do not meet the standard regulations for development in the neighborhood.

Residents expressed concern that the frequency with which exceptions to the Zoning Ordinance are granted undermines the efficacy of the zoning standards and threatens the character of the neighborhood. They urged the Zoning Board of Appeals to reduce the number of zoning variations granted, especially in cases that would allow larger homes or smaller setbacks on ravine lots.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Reduce the number of zoning variances granted, especially for development on ravine lots that would allow larger homes or smaller setbacks than would otherwise be permitted.*
- ⇒ *Amend the standards for granting a variance by redefining “hardship” and/or reducing the variance granting powers of the Zoning Board of Appeals.*
- ⇒ *Provide stricter overall enforcement of the City’s zoning regulations.*
- ⇒ *Encourage residents to attend Zoning Board of Appeals hearings to comment on whether requested zoning variations in their neighborhood should be granted or not.*



“Ravine and lakefront properties are fragile lands which require special care if they are to be preserved for current and future residents.”

“Water erosion is the most threatening force impacting ravine and lakefront property. It is a natural force which can be slowed, but cannot be stopped entirely.”

“The damage is accelerated when additional erosion is caused by human activity; this type of erosion-causing activity can and should be controlled.”

--Living in a Ravine & Lakefront Community. City of Highland Park Lakefront Task Force and the Department of Community Development, 1994.

Natural Environment

Ravines and Lakefront

The ravines and lake bluffs play a unique and significant role in defining the character of the Lakefront District but are threatened by debris jams, stormwater run-off, new development and other activity that increases soil erosion in the area.

Although ravines and lake bluffs were created by the effects of erosion, urbanization has increased the volume and velocity of water flowing through the ravines eroding the soil at an alarming rate. According to the Lakefront Commission, erosion has claimed 50 to 100 feet of land from the lake bluff, and the ravines are deepening at a rate of approximately three to four feet every 60 years.

The City has become increasingly proactive in publicizing and addressing erosion of the ravines and lake bluffs. In 1994, the Lakefront Task Force prepared an educational brochure explaining the geology of the ravines and lake bluffs and the effects of erosion and other damage. The brochure provides tips for protecting the ravines and lake bluffs including best water management, good vegetation, and proper setbacks from the steep slope areas. Also, the Lakefront Commission and Public Works staff have mapped the ravines in a project to create a base line of ravine data.

The City is currently formulating a funding mechanism for a ravine remediation program. The program is expected to provide approximately \$200,000 per year for clearing debris jams and other maintenance activities to reduce the amount and velocity of water traveling through the ravines. These measures are expected to resolve a significant number of minor problems in the ravines, but additional funding is needed to address the major issues such as stormwater drainage improvements.

The City’s Steep Slope Ordinance tries to protect steep slope areas by regulating grading, demolition, construction, landscaping, tree removal, steep slope maintenance, drainage and other activity within ten feet of the ravines and lake bluffs.

GRAPHIC: Map of Ravines.

The Lakefront Commission has also been working with other municipalities and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to establish a shoreline protection program. This project will help protect the lake bluffs by dissipating wave energy before it reaches the bluff.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Increase funding for capital improvements to address ravine erosion and maintenance.*
- ⇒ *Increase public education and information about available resources concerning lakefront and ravine issues, and encourage voluntary maintenance and protection of the steep slope areas.*
- ⇒ *Enforce the provisions of the steep slope ordinance and amend the ordinance as needed to protect the ravines and lake bluffs.*
- ⇒ *Continue to lead the North Shore community effort to secure Federal funding for completion of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Shoreline Protection Study Report and to bring about the establishment of a regional shoreline protection program.*
- ⇒ *Encourage residents to attend Lakefront Commission meetings to raise concerns and learn about ravine and lakefront issues.*
- ⇒ *See additional recommendations under **Impervious Surfaces and Drainage Improvements**.*

Noise and Air Pollution

Clean air and the peaceful ambiance of the Lakefront District are important to neighborhood residents but are increasingly threatened by air and noise pollution. Air pollution is a regional problem and automobile transportation is one its leading sources. Noise pollution is a more localized issue and the use of leaf blowers for residential landscaping is one of the leading culprits. The City is currently seeking ways to reduce noise from leaf blowers.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Continue to provide and/or promote alternatives to single occupancy car travel including public transportation, biking, and walking.*
- ⇒ *Increase public education regarding methods to reduce air and noise pollution.*
- ⇒ *Strengthen the City's ordinances to reduce noise from leaf blowers.*

“We know that from a cultural-carrying capacity, there are too many deer in certain areas of Highland Park. The clamor over damage to residential landscape and gardens is not the result of a few nibbles here and there.”

--Deer Management Program Recommendations for the City of Highland Park, Highland Park Deer Task Force, November 1997.

Deer

Lakefront District residents are eager to restore a balance between the deer population and the natural vegetation in the area. Relocation efforts have fallen short of expectations and the City has not received approval from the State for additional relocation projects. In 1997 the Highland Park Deer Task Force created a “Living with Suburban Deer” brochure that provides information about the deer population, and techniques to protect landscaping from deer such as repellents, auditory deterrents and scare devices, tree wraps, fencing and netting. It also offers extensive lists of plants that are preferred and not preferred by deer. However, many North Shore communities are faced with an over abundance of deer, and the issue cannot be overcome with individual efforts alone. A long-term regional solution is needed.

Recommendations

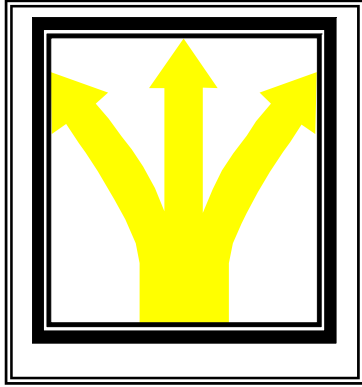
- ⇒ *Coordinate with other municipalities to adopt a regional approach to controlling the deer population.*
- ⇒ *Implement measures to reduce the deer population in **the Lakefront District**, and actively manage it at a sustainable level.*

Trees

Mature trees are plentiful in the Lakefront District and greatly enhance the natural character of the neighborhood. Tree preservation and maintenance will continue to be an on-going concern of residents in the Lakefront District.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Increase public education regarding mature tree maintenance on public and private property.*
- ⇒ *Increase enforcement of the City’s Tree Preservation Ordinance.*



“[R]elying solely on cars for transportation creates pollution, congestion, accidents, parking shortages, and deterioration in the community’s quality of life. The Greenways Plan can help to ease these problems by connecting open spaces, neighborhoods and business areas with trails, sidewalks, and bicycle routes. These facilities will make it easier to walk or ride around town and offer safe and scenic places for recreation close to home.”

--City of Highland Park Greenways Plan, 1995

Infrastructure and Transportation

Sidewalks and Bikepaths

The Lakefront District provides a pleasant environment for walking and biking which will be enhanced by providing additional sidewalks in the district and by minimizing conflicts between bikers, pedestrians and motorists.

Sidewalks and bikepaths are important for both transportation and recreation uses in the Lakefront District. The following recommendations for the neighborhood were included in 1995 as part of the *City of Highland Park Greenways Plan*:

Sheridan Road “Several blocks of Sheridan Road have no sidewalks which forces pedestrians into the street. This is hazardous due to the narrow width of the street and the curves and hills that create sight problems for drivers. This problem is most acute between Dean Avenue and Roger Williams Avenue where people often walk in the street to reach Rosewood Beach. Problems also occur near Ravinia Festival. Nearly 20% of the 1993 survey respondents identified Sheridan Road as the one street in the community where new sidewalks are most needed. Therefore, the Greenways Plan recommends that a sidewalk be built on at least one side of Sheridan Road to fill in the gaps that exist.”

Beech Street Trail “The City owns a strip of public right-of-way east of Sheridan Road at the end of Beech Street that was originally intended to continue Beech Street to Ravine Drive. The Greenways Plan recommends the construction of an off-street path within this right-of-way to provide access to Lake Michigan and Millard Park. Due to the topography of this area, it may not be possible to allow bicycles on this path but it is ideal for a pedestrian path that would allow access to the lakefront from the Green Bay Trail along Beech Street. Given the existing trees and vegetation on this land and the proximity of adjacent residences, this proposed path must be carefully designed to protect the vegetation and privacy of this neighborhood.”

“Lack of continuous sidewalks poses risks to children and limits access to other sections of neighborhood for those who want to walk versus ride a bike or drive.”

“There is a great need for sidewalks on Sheridan Road from Cedar to Ravinia Festival. This makes pedestrian travel to Rosewood Beach and Ravinia Festival dangerous.”

– Comments from Lakefront District Residents

GRAPHIC: Portion of Sheridan Road where sidewalks are needed and/or of the Beech Street extension.

Green Bay Trail Greenway “This is the most heavily used greenway in Highland Park. It includes three recommended routes: two segments of the Green Bay Trail and Green Bay Road. This Plan recommends that the Trail be maintained to make it consistently 10 feet wide and to remove hazards such as encroaching fences, bushes and tree limbs. Lake County recently received funds to build two new sections of the Green Bay Trail.... One segment includes a new bridge over Vine Avenue to connect the existing trail to Bloom Avenue. The second segment is in Highwood and will connect to the Lake Forest Bike Path at Old Elm Road. These improvements will significantly improve the Trail’s usefulness and safety.”

On-Street Bicycle Routes “[T]he Greenways Plan designates many streets as Bicycles Routes” to improve access to all parks, schools, neighborhoods, and shopping areas in the community. It is impossible to connect all parts of Highland Park with off-street trails because there is simply not enough vacant land in the proper locations. Therefore, it is necessary for bicyclists to use the streets for access. These bike routes were chosen based on the 1993 survey findings and the knowledge of the Greenways Committee members. Few improvements are needed to most of these routes besides properly identifying them with Bicycle Route signs.”

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Expedite implementation of the Greenways Plan recommendations for improvements in the Lakefront District.*
- ⇒ *Prioritize funding for a sidewalk along at least one side of Sheridan Road to improve pedestrian access and safety to Rosewood Beach and Ravinia Festival Park.*
- ⇒ *Maintain the Green Bay Trail to ensure its usefulness and safety.*
- ⇒ *Study the possibility of creating a designated pathway in the right-of-way extension of Edgecliff Drive for lakefront access.*
- ⇒ *See additional recommendations concerning pedestrians and bicyclists under **Traffic Safety and Enforcement and Ravinia Festival Park.***

“It was the intention of the Highland Park Building Company to build a gracious community of summer homes for nearby Chicagoans. They hired landscape architects Horace W.S. Cleveland and William French to plat the streets (1872), and by so doing initiated a tradition of landscape stewardship.... Cleveland and French took care to incorporate into their plans the beauty of the area’s natural attributes.”

--Highland Park, IL. Historic Landscape Survey Final Report, Highland Park Historic Preservation Commission, July 1998.

Sheridan Road

Sheridan Road is one of the oldest streets in the City and its winding, narrow contours have helped define the character of the Lakefront District. A significant amount of traffic travels along Sheridan Road, and residents feel that the road is being neglected by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) which owns and maintains it. There is strong support for improving maintenance of Sheridan Road, but in a manner that will not change its essential character.

Recommendations

⇒ *Reconstruct and maintain Sheridan Road at its current dimensions in a way that will not harm its unique character.*

Traffic Safety and Enforcement

Many roads are shared by cars and bikes, and in areas where sidewalks don’t exist, by joggers, pedestrians, and roller bladers as well. Potentially dangerous conflicts arise when rules of the road aren’t consistently followed. However, many people are unaware that the same laws apply to both drivers and bikers, or that bikers are required to ride single file adjacent to the edge of the road to keep from blocking traffic. Also, pedestrians, joggers and roller bladers are required to use sidewalks or other viable alternatives to the street whenever they are provided. The Police Department has initiated an educational campaign, which focuses on bike clubs and kids, to raise awareness about road rules and safety precautions.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Continue education efforts and increase enforcement activities by the Police Department to improve compliance with rules of the road and to increase biker and pedestrian safety.*
- ⇒ *Encourage residents to attend Traffic Commission meetings to raise concerns regarding traffic safety in the neighborhood.*
- ⇒ *See additional recommendations under **Sidewalks and Bikepaths**.*

Drainage Improvements

Stormwater management is important in all areas of the City, but drainage problems in the Lakefront District can create additional problems by eroding the ravines and lake bluffs that are so integral to the character of the neighborhood. Protecting the unique topography of the Lakefront District will

require additional financing for capital improvements such as storm sewers that protect the ravines.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Provide funding in the capital budget for the repair and replacement of sanitary and storm sewer facilities in the ravines and other areas in a systematic manner.*
- ⇒ *See additional recommendations under **Impervious Surfaces and Ravines and Lakefront.***

Electric Utilities

Lakefront residents are concerned about the frequency of power outages and about tree trimming practices adjacent to power lines. Tree trimming concerns include neglected trimming, which results in downed power lines from fallen branches, and damage to trees from excessive trimming. City representatives have met with Com Ed to address these issues, and as a result, the City expects that there will be faster response to downed power lines, and improved tree-trimming practices.

In order to reduce the number of power outages from fallen tree limbs, and also for aesthetic reasons, there is strong support from neighborhood residents to bury existing power lines. Utility lines for new subdivisions are placed underground, but ComEd has no plans to bury existing power lines and the cost would prohibit the City or neighborhood residents from funding the project alone. The cost of burying utility lines is very high, and therefore would require a long-term financing plan and the involvement of the City and residents.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *The City should develop an action plan to provide high quality electric service and reduce power outages.*
- ⇒ *The City should ensure that tree trimming practices are appropriate to reduce power outages and to preserve the health and aesthetics of trees.*
- ⇒ *The City should work with Lakefront District residents to formulate a long-term financing program for burying electric utility lines in portions of the Lakefront District where residents are willing to share in the cost of such a project.*



Community Empowerment

Lakefront District residents feel that public input should be a higher priority in community decision-making, and that information about public hearings for proposed development should be increased. In 1997 the City approved the following *Goals and Objectives* related to this issue:

Goals

- "To ensure that information flows to all segments of the community, including the opportunity for citizen feedback."
- "To use the neighborhood strategic planning process as a forum to encourage active citizen participation early in the process of making planning policies and decisions."
- "To expand a community spirit which is characterized by civility and courtesy, common concerns and interests, trust and cooperation, and community-wide participation in civic and cultural programs."
- "To improve communications and better inform the residents of pending actions."

Objectives

- "Expand the use of modern technology to better inform residents of issues, meetings, decisions, and events including greater use of community-access cable-tv, e-mail, the Internet, and interactive Home Pages."
- "Work with committees of residents and business owners to complete all of the neighborhood and district strategic plans by the end of 1999."
- "Continue utilizing commissions and task forces composed of residents to conduct hearings and meetings to advise the City Council and staff on matters of interest to the community."
- "Provide the resources needed to achieve [the 1997] Goals and Objectives and the Actions recommended in the neighborhood strategic plans."

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Assign high priority to the 1997 Master Plan Goals and Objectives related to community input, implementing the neighborhood strategic plans, and distributing more detailed information to residents in advance of public hearings.*
- ⇒ *Refer to relevant sections of the neighborhood plan when preparing staff reports for the Plan Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and City Council concerning development in the Lakefront District to determine whether a development proposal is consistent with the community's master plan.*
- ⇒ *Encourage Lakefront District residents to attend meetings of the City Council, Zoning Board of Appeals, Plan Commission, Lakefront Commission, Environmental Commission, Ravinia Festival Commission, and Historic Preservation Commission to learn about the issues before the City and provide input regarding decisions that will affect their neighborhood.*



**“Ravinia
has become an
international center
for the performing
arts that enhances its
reputation with each
season.”**

*--Ravinia Strategic Plan: A
Vision for the Business District
and its Neighborhoods, City of
Highland Park, 1994*

Recreational Areas and Opportunities

Ravinia Festival Park

Ravinia Festival Park is a well-established cultural asset enjoyed by residents in the Lakefront District and throughout the Chicago region. Its proximity to residential homes requires that the Park be sensitive to the adjoining neighborhood. For that purpose, the Ravinia Festival Community Relations Commission meets four times a year between March and October to address residents concerns.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Ravinia Festival Community Relations Commission should continue to be sensitive and proactive in addressing neighbors concerns regarding programming effects, access to grounds, traffic, parking, litter, crowds, or other issues that may affect the neighborhood.*
- ⇒ *Ravinia Festival Park is encouraged to work with the Environmental Commission to investigate environmentally-friendly pest control measures for the grounds.*
- ⇒ *Enforce the prohibition of the sale of parking spaces in private driveways and yards in residential neighborhoods surrounding Ravinia Festival Park.*
- ⇒ *Improve safety of bike path adjacent to Ravinia Festival.*
- ⇒ *Allow pedestrian access to Ravinia Park through east gate.*
- ⇒ *See **Sidewalks and Bikepaths** for additional recommendation.*
- ⇒ *Encourage residents to attend meetings of the Ravinia Festival Community Relations Commission to raise concerns regarding the Park.*

Lakefront Recreation

The Lakefront District is well served by passive recreation areas. Four large parks are situated along the lakefront, although beach access is generally limited. A boat ramp and sailboat storage is also available at the end of Park Avenue.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Projects to provide additional recreational opportunities or access along the lakefront should be sensitive to the surrounding residential areas.*
- ⇒ *Improve bike and pedestrian access to recreation areas.*
- ⇒ *See **Sidewalks and Bikepaths** for additional recommendation.*



“To protect and strengthen all commercial areas in the community, including all neighborhood business districts, to meet the needs of residents and effectively capture Highland Park’s share of the region’s retail sales.”

-- City of Highland Park
Master Plan Goal, Adopted in
1997.

**GRAPHIC: Braeside
Neighborhood
Commercial District
with zoning**

Braeside Neighborhood Commercial District

The Braeside Neighborhood Commercial District is located along the southern edge of the City of Highland Park adjacent to the Braeside train stop of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. The commercial district is zoned B1 for neighborhood commercial uses and occupies a portion of the irregularly shaped block bounded by St. Johns Avenue Lincolnwood Road, Braeside Road, and Pierce Road. The remainder of the block, along Pierce Road, is zoned R6 for medium density single family houses. Property adjacent to the Braeside train stop on the West of the tracks is developed with townhouses in compliance with the RM1 zoning for medium to high density multiple family development. (See map.)

The current zoning allows neighborhood commercial uses with residential units above the first floor, and multi-family residential uses adjacent to the train stop on the West. It also provides for a transition zone of medium density single-family between the commercial district and the surrounding moderate density single family homes. The zoning reflects the current uses and is appropriate for the area.

The only significant change that has been made in the Braeside Neighborhood Commercial District since the 1976 Comprehensive Master Plan is the establishment of Founder’s Park directly east of the Braeside train stop. The Park was dedicated in 1997 on the site of a former gas station. Its design, which symbolizes the “many layers of history concentrated at this unique location”, was the result of a competition sponsored by the City.

Any new development or redevelopment in the Braeside Neighborhood Commercial District should be sensitive to the surrounding residential areas. Improvements should enhance the character of the area as a pedestrian-friendly district that serves limited commercial needs of the neighborhood.

“Improve the image of all business districts by creating an attractive and unified appearance, relating new construction to the architectural character of existing buildings. Establish urban design standards for business districts that provide for additional yet sensitive treatment of signage and expanded parking.”

--City of Highland Park
Master Plan Objective,
Adopted in 1997.

The neighborhood commercial district should be safer and more inviting to pedestrians, and a distinct path undisturbed by cars should link the Green Bay Trail north and south of the train station. Adequate car and bike parking should serve the neighborhood commercial uses and the train station. Currently, the street between the commercial uses and the Braeside train stop is wide and undefined with scattered parking that visually dominates the street.

Recommendations

- ⇒ *Encourage a mix of residential and commercial uses that are appropriate for the neighborhood.*
- ⇒ *Create a “gateway” into the community using paving materials and landscape materials.*
- ⇒ *Work with a committee of property owners, business owners, and design professionals to establish appropriate urban design standards for the neighborhood commercial district.*
- ⇒ *Improve sidewalks, create bump-outs and add street pavers to enhance pedestrian access connecting train platforms and the commercial area to the surrounding residential neighborhood.*
- ⇒ *Link the Green Bay Trail north and south of the train station, by creating a distinct path undisturbed by cars adjacent to the train station parking lot and along St. Johns Avenue.*
- ⇒ *Improve the configuration of the parking lot and street parking to provide adequate parking capacity and reduce conflicts between cars, bikes and pedestrians.*
- ⇒ *Screen parking lots with landscaping.*
- ⇒ *Provide a sufficient number of bike racks and park benches to serve the neighborhood commercial uses and train station.*
- ⇒ *Require that new development provide sufficient open space and/or other public amenities as well as adequate screening for adjacent residential homes with a landscaped buffer.*
- ⇒ *Require new development to provide underground parking whenever possible to reduce the visual impact of parking lots along the street.*
- ⇒ *Prohibit curb cuts to commercial uses from the residential streets.*

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

New Development

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	Short-term Action Steps (0-2 years)	Mid-term Action Steps (2-5 years)	Long-term Action Steps (5+ years)
<i>Size/Appearance of New Homes</i>				
Revise dimensional controls for Lakefront neighborhood zoning districts to ensure that new homes and building additions, including those on ravine lots, are more consistent with the scale of existing homes, and are appropriately sized to preserve and enhance the character of the neighborhood.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Plan Commission public hearing and City Council adoption.		
Continue to evaluate the height regulations and amend as needed to protect the existing character of the neighborhood.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division and Plan Commission</i>	Ongoing.		
Decrease lot size or number of lots that triggers PUD process.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Plan Commission public hearing and City Council adoption.		
Adopt guidelines to discourage uniform house design in new subdivisions.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Plan Commission public hearing and City Council adoption.		
Create incentives to reduce garage width facing the street, such as allowing modest FAR or impervious surface bonuses for facing garage away from street and at back of property.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Plan Commission public hearing and City Council adoption.		
Encourage residents to attend Plan Commission and City Council meetings to give public input regarding new development proposals and zoning amendments.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Ongoing.		

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

<u>LOT DENSITY</u>				
Rezone from R4 to R3 those areas along the lake where lots are consistently 40,000 square feet or greater.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Plan Commission public hearing and City Council adoption.		
Continue to eliminate the approval of lots-in-depth, especially where there is potential for additional lots-in-depth that would ultimately change the existing character of the block.	<i>Plan Commission and City Council</i>	Ongoing as requests to create lots-in-depth are submitted.		
<u>IMPERVIOUS SURFACES</u>				
Adopt impervious surface ratios for all zoning districts in the City, or failing that, an overlay zone establishing impervious surface ratios for those districts in the Lake Michigan watershed.	<i>Public Works Department and Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Plan Commission public hearing and City Council adoption.		
<u>ENFORCEMENT OF CODES/ORDINANCES</u>				
Reduce the number of zoning variances granted, especially for development on ravine lots that would allow larger homes or smaller setbacks than would otherwise be permitted.	<i>Zoning Board of Appeals</i>	Ongoing as zoning variances are requested.		
Amend the standards for granting a variance by redefining “hardship” and/or reducing the variance granting powers of the Zoning Board of Appeals.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Plan Commission public hearing and City Council adoption.		
Provide stricter overall enforcement of the City’s zoning regulations.	<i>Community Development Department – Building Division</i>	Ongoing.		
Encourage residents to attend ZBA hearings to comment on whether requested zoning variations in their neighborhood should be granted.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Ongoing.		

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

Natural Environment

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	Short-term Action Steps (0-2 years)	Mid-term Action Steps (2-5 years)	Long-term Action Steps (5+ years)
<u>RAVINES AND LAKEFRONT</u>				
Increase funding for capital improvements to address ravine erosion and maintenance.	<i>Public Works Department</i>		City Council consideration of capital improvements plan.	
Increase public education and information about available resources concerning lakefront and ravine issues, and encourage voluntary maintenance and protection of the steep slope areas.	<i>Lakefront Commission</i>	Compile information about available resources for lakefront and ravine issues, and increase outreach to encourage voluntary maintenance and protection of steep slope areas.		
Enforce the provisions of the steep slope ordinance and amend the ordinance as needed to protect the ravines and lake bluffs.	<i>Community Development Department – Building Division, Public Works Department, and Lakefront Commission</i>	Ongoing.		
Continue to lead the North Shore community effort to secure Federal funding for completion of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Shoreline Protection Study Report and to bring about the establishment of a regional shoreline protection program.	<i>Lakefront Commission</i>	Monitor and encourage completion of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ Shoreline Protection Study Report.	Work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to establish a regional shoreline protection program.	
Encourage residents to attend Lakefront Commission meetings to raise concerns and learn about ravine and lakefront issues.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Ongoing.		
<u>NOISE AND AIR POLLUTION</u>				
Continue to provide and/or promote alternatives to single occupancy car travel including public transportation, biking, and walking.	<i>Public Works Department and Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Ongoing.		

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

Increase public education regarding methods to reduce air and noise pollution.	<i>Environmental Commission</i>	Ongoing.		
Strengthen the City's ordinances to reduce noise from leaf blowers.	<i>Environmental Commission</i>	City Council consideration of amendment to noise ordinance.		
<u>DEER</u>				
Coordinate with other municipalities to adopt a regional approach to controlling the deer population.	<i>Deer Task Force</i>	Establish a regional working group to address the deer issue.	City Council consideration of a regional program to control the deer population.	
Implement measures to reduce the deer population in the Lakefront District, and actively manage it at a sustainable level.	<i>Depends on the type of regional approach adopted.</i>		Implement program to control the deer population.	
<u>TREES</u>				
Increase public education regarding mature tree maintenance on public and private property.	<i>Public Works Department – City Forester, and Environmental Commission</i>	Ongoing.		
Increase enforcement of the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance.	<i>Public Works Department – City Forester</i>	Ongoing.		

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

Infrastructure and Transportation

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	<u>Short-term Action Steps (0-2 years)</u>	<u>Mid-term Action Steps (2-5 years)</u>	<u>Long-term Action Steps (5+ years)</u>
<u>SIDEWALKS AND BIKEPATHS</u>				
Expedite implementation of the Greenways Plan recommendations for improvements in the Lakefront District.	<i>Public Works Department</i>	City Council consideration of capital improvements plan.		
Prioritize funding for a sidewalk along at least one side of Sheridan Road to improve pedestrian access and safety to Rosewood Beach and Ravinia Festival Park.	<i>Public Works Department</i>	City Council consideration of capital improvements plan.		
Maintain the Green Bay Trail to ensure its usefulness and safety.	<i>Public Works Department</i>	Ongoing.		
Study the possibility of creating a designated pathway in the right-of-way extension of Edgecliff Drive for lakefront access.	<i>Public Works Department</i>	Complete feasibility study.	City Council consideration of capital improvements plan if path is feasible.	
<u>SHERIDAN ROAD</u>				
Reconstruct and maintain Sheridan Road at its current dimensions in a way that will not harm its unique character.	<i>Public Works Department</i>	Coordinate with IDOT and neighborhood residents to establish an appropriate reconstruction and maintenance program.		
<u>TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ENFORCEMENT</u>				
Continue education efforts and increase enforcement activities by the Police Department to improve compliance with rules of the road and to increase biker and pedestrian safety.	<i>Police Department</i>	Ongoing.		
Encourage residents to attend Traffic Commission meetings to raise concerns regarding traffic safety in the neighborhood.	<i>Public Works Department</i>	Ongoing.		

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

<u>DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENTS</u>				
Provide funding in the capital budget for the repair and replacement of sanitary and storm sewer facilities in the ravines and other areas in a systematic manner.	<i>Public Works Department</i>	City Council consideration of capital improvements plan.		
<u>ELECTRIC UTILITIES</u>				
Develop an action plan to provide high quality electric service and reduce power outages.	<i>Public Works Department</i>		City Council consideration of an action plan.	
Ensure that tree trimming practices are appropriate to reduce power outages and to preserve the health and aesthetics of trees.	<i>Public Works Department – City Forester</i>	Ongoing.		
Work with Lakefront District residents to formulate a long-term financing program for burying electric utility lines in portions of the Lakefront District where residents are willing to share in the cost of such a project.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division and Finance Department</i>	Formulate long-term financing program.		Bury electric utility wires in selected areas.

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

Community Empowerment

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	Short-term Action Steps (0-2 years)	Mid-term Action Steps (2-5 years)	Long-term Action Steps (5+ years)
Assign high priority to the 1997 Master Plan Goals and Objectives related to community input, implementing the neighborhood strategic plans, and distributing more detailed information to residents in advance of public hearings.	<i>Community Development – Planning Division and Communications Coordinator</i>	Ongoing.		
Refer to relevant sections of the neighborhood plan when preparing staff reports for the Plan Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and City Council concerning development in the Lakefront District to determine whether a development proposal is consistent with the community’s master plan.	<i>Community Development – Planning Division</i>	Ongoing as development proposals are submitted for approval.		
Encourage Lakefront District residents to attend meetings of the City Council, Zoning Board of Appeals, Plan Commission, Lakefront Commission, Environmental Commission, Ravinia Festival Commission, and Historic Preservation Commission to learn about the issues before the City and provide input regarding decisions that will affect their neighborhood.	<i>City Commissions, staff liaisons, and Communications Coordinator</i>	Ongoing.		

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

Recreational Areas and Opportunities

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	Short-term Action Steps (0-2 years)	Mid-term Action Steps (2-5 years)	Long-term Action Steps (5+ years)
<u>RAVINIA FESTIVAL PARK</u>				
Continue to be sensitive and proactive in addressing neighbors concerns regarding programming effects, access to grounds, traffic, parking, litter, crowds, or other issues that may affect the neighborhood.	<i>Ravinia Festival Community Relations Commission</i>	Ongoing.		
Investigate environmentally-friendly pest control measures for Ravinia Festival Park grounds.	<i>Ravinia Festival Park and Environmental Commission</i>	Ongoing as pest control programs are reviewed.		
Enforce the prohibition of the sale of parking spaces in private driveways and yards in residential neighborhoods surrounding Ravinia Festival Park.	<i>Police Department and Community Development Department – Building Division</i>	Ongoing.		
Improve safety of bike path adjacent to Ravinia Festival.	<i>Ravinia Festival Park, Public Works Department and Police Department</i>	Ongoing as safety concerns are identified.		
Allow pedestrian access to Ravinia Park through east gate.	<i>Ravinia Festival Park</i>	Open east gate for pedestrian access.		
Encourage residents to attend meetings of the Ravinia Festival Community Relations Commission to raise concerns regarding the Park.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division</i>	Ongoing.		
<u>LAKEFRONT RECREATION</u>				
Projects to provide additional recreational opportunities or access along the lakefront should be sensitive to the surrounding residential areas.	<i>Park District and Lakefront Commission</i>	Ongoing as additional recreation opportunities along the lakefront are considered.		
Improve bike and pedestrian access to recreation areas.	<i>Public Works Department</i>		City Council consideration of capital improvements plan	

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

Braeside Neighborhood Commercial District

<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>	Short-term Action Steps (0-2 years)	Mid-term Action Steps (2-5 years)	Long-term Action Steps (5+ years)
Encourage a mix of residential and commercial uses that are appropriate for the neighborhood.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division and Plan Commission</i>	Ongoing as redevelopment proposals are submitted.		
Create a “gateway” into the community using paving materials and landscape materials.	<i>Community Development Department – Urban Designer and Public Works Department</i>	Prepare urban design plan.	City Council consideration of capital improvements plan.	
Work with a committee of property owners, business owners, and design professionals to establish appropriate urban design standards for the neighborhood commercial district.	<i>Community Development Department – Urban Designer</i>	Establish urban design standards.	Ongoing implementation of design standards as development proposals are submitted.	
Improve sidewalks, create bump-outs and add street pavers to enhance pedestrian access connecting train platforms and the commercial area to the surrounding residential neighborhood.	<i>Public Works Department and Community Development Department – Urban Designer</i>	Prepare plan to enhance pedestrian access to commercial district and train station.	Ongoing implementation of pedestrian improvements by City as road and sidewalk improvements are budgeted and by developers as parcels are redeveloped.	
Link the Green Bay Trail north and south of the train station, by creating a distinct path undisturbed by cars adjacent to the train station parking lot and along St. Johns Avenue.	<i>Public Works Department and Community Development Department – Urban Designer</i>	Prepare plan to link Green Bay Trail north and south of train station and to improve configuration of parking lot and street parking.	Ongoing implementation as road improvements and train station parking lot improvements are planned.	
Improve the configuration of the parking lot and street parking to provide adequate parking capacity and reduce conflicts between cars, bikes and pedestrians.	<i>Public Works Department and Community Development Department – Urban Designer</i>	Prepare plan to improve configuration of parking lot and street parking and to link Green Bay Trail north and south of train station.	Ongoing implementation as road improvements and train station parking lot improvements are planned.	

LAKEFRONT DISTRICT ACTION PLAN STEPS

Screen parking lots with landscaping.	<i>Design Review Commission</i>	Require developers to provide landscaping to screen parking lots as redevelopment proposals are submitted for design review approval.		
Provide a sufficient number of bike racks and park benches to serve the neighborhood commercial uses and train station.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division, Public Works Department and commercial property owners</i>	Ongoing.		
Require that new development provide sufficient open space and/or other public amenities as well as adequate screening for adjacent residential homes with a landscaped buffer.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division, Plan Commission and Design Review Commission</i>	Ongoing as redevelopment proposals are submitted.		
Require new development to provide underground parking whenever possible to reduce the visual impact of parking lots along the street.	<i>Community Development Department – Planning Division and Plan Commission</i>	Ongoing as redevelopment proposals are submitted.		
Prohibit curb cuts to commercial uses from the residential streets.	<i>Community Development Department, Public Works Department, and Plan Commission</i>	Ongoing.		