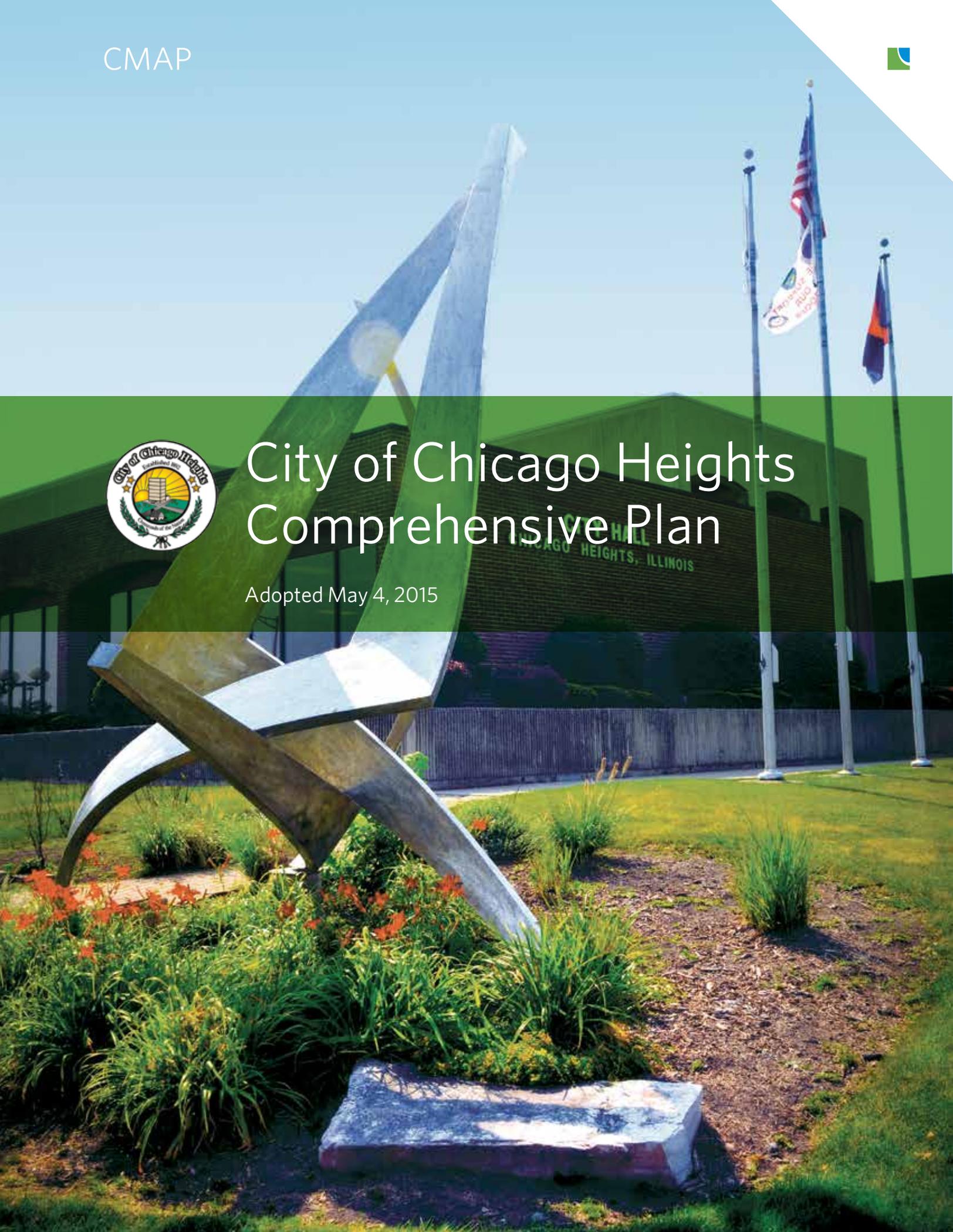




City of Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan

Adopted May 4, 2015



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the residents, businesses, community organizations and institutions, and elected officials who participated in the creation of this plan.

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CITY OF CHICAGO HEIGHTS

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
DAVID A. GONZALEZ

I am pleased to present the updated 2015 City of Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan to our residents, businesses, civic partners, vested stakeholders and community-at-large.

This Plan is the culmination of a 2-year process, in cooperation with the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)'s *GO TO 2040 Regional Plan*. Its purpose is to serve as a guiding set of principles that outline the City's vision for both its current state and future, long-range endeavors; and much like a roadmap, it will assist with leading us in the right direction.

Throughout the planning process, we engaged the community in public workshops to help identify our municipal values and set forth priorities for the future development of our City; as well as establish policies and strategies intended to achieve that vision.

This Plan represents a true collaborative effort and I am thankful to all who participated in the process for donating their time and providing valuable input. I especially want to acknowledge CMAP, our City of Chicago Heights GO TO 2040 Project Steering Committee, Plan Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and Department of Economic Development; as well as outside agencies and organizations such as the Active Transportation Alliance, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service; along with the many residents and businesses who partnered with us in a true collaborative effort to make this project possible.

Our previous Comprehensive Plan of record was published in 1994 and I am confident this updated *GO TO 2040* edition brings forth the overall vision we are set on achieving in order to maintain the character and integrity of our community.

I hope you will join me in working toward this vision to implement and achieve these goals for our great City of Chicago Heights.

Sincerely,

David A. Gonzalez
Mayor
City of Chicago Heights



OAK ST

SAM BENEDETTO
BLVD
TORONTO, ONT

Chicago Miracle Temple Church, Come Grow With Us!

Order Of Service:
Sunday School 10:30 a.m. Wednesday night Bible study 7:30 p.m.
Worship Service 12 noon

"He said a word of truth, that he gave us strength before, and whenever I believe in Him should we persevere, but have remaining us." - Luke 1:6

CHURCH OF
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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION





A comprehensive plan outlines a community's vision of its future and the process to realize that vision. In addition to providing a well-defined framework for the community's development and investment goals, the City of Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan seeks to explore and promote new opportunities to address changing community trends.

A comprehensive plan provides guidance for a community to work towards its vision over the next 10-20 years. Although the Plan is a long-term document, it should also be used daily by the community to assist in land use and development decisions. The Plan serves as a guide for elected officials, municipal staff, community residents, business owners and potential investors, allowing them to make informed administrative, investment and implementation choices in community development decisions affecting land use, transportation, infrastructure and capital improvements throughout the City.

A comprehensive plan is flexible and can adapt to change. At any time, the City can update its comprehensive plan to match local needs, interests or opportunities. It is typically recommended that a municipality update its comprehensive plan every five years to keep the plan as accurate as possible.

Elements of a Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is composed of a series of distinct yet interrelated elements, as defined within the Illinois Local Planning Assistance Act (Public Act 92-0768). The key elements addressed in the Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan are based upon those outlined in the state statute and include land use, housing, economy, transportation, environment intergovernmental coordination, and implementation strategies. Under the Illinois Municipal Code (65 ILCS) 5/11-12-5(1)), a municipal plan commission is responsible for preparing and recommending a “comprehensive plan for the present and future development or redevelopment of the municipality.”

Why Does Chicago Heights Need a Comprehensive Plan?

The City’s current Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1994 and provides goals and broad strategies for the future. Although the plan has served the community well in the past, it does not sufficiently reflect the current realities, challenges, and opportunities of the City. The community’s physical, economic, and social character will be determined by decisions made today and in the future. Having an up-to-date plan that clearly articulates the desired character of the community will help at all levels of the decision-making process.

Over the past decade, Chicago Heights has undertaken a number of subarea studies and planning initiatives focused primarily on transportation, natural resources, and economic development. The Comprehensive Plan builds upon these initiatives and introduces new topics not previously covered by other studies, helping to shape a more cohesive, community-wide plan.



Relationship with the GO TO 2040 Regional Comprehensive Plan

The Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan's highest priorities should be to provide guidance at the local level and to address community needs and desires. The plan should also reflect how Chicago Heights fits into the larger region to help the City understand and plan for the impact of regional economic and demographic changes.

As part of the larger Chicago metropolitan region, Chicago Heights influences and is influenced by the region. CMAP developed and now guides the implementation of GO TO 2040, metropolitan Chicago's first truly comprehensive regional plan in more than 100 years. To address anticipated population growth of more than 2 million new residents, GO TO 2040 establishes coordinated strategies that will help the region's 284 communities address transportation, housing, economic development, open space, the environment, and other quality of life issues. The Plan contains four themes and 12 major recommendation areas.

Livable communities

- Achieve greater livability through land use and housing
- Manage and conserve water and energy resources
- Expand and improve parks and open space
- Promote sustainable local food

Human capital

- Improve education and workforce development
- Support economic innovation

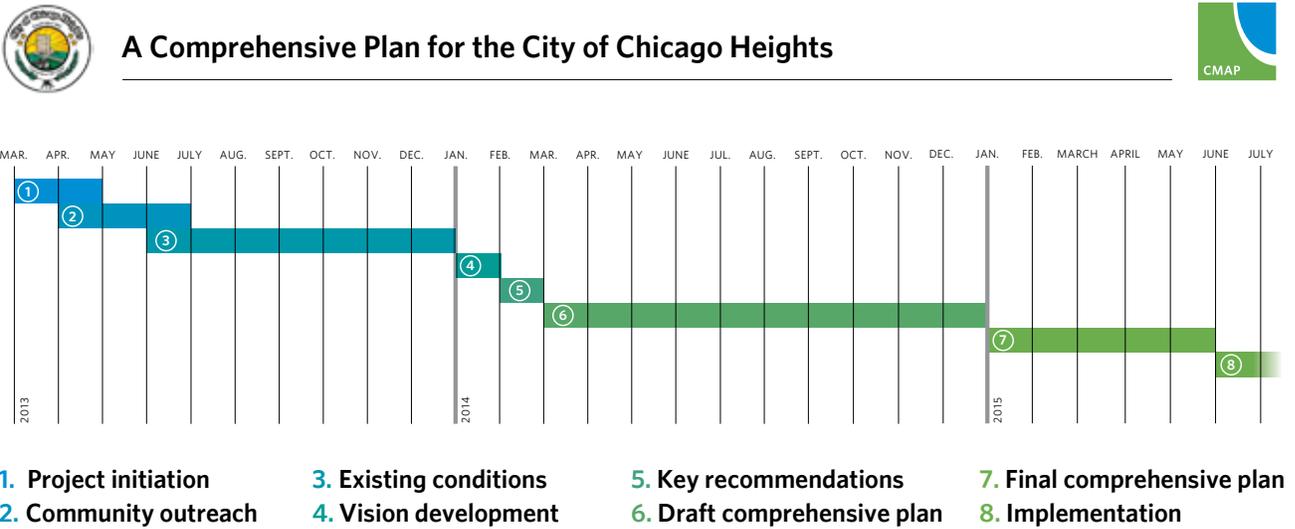
Efficient governance

- Reform state and local tax policy
- Improve access to information
- Pursue coordinated investments

Regional mobility

- Invest strategically in transportation
- Increase commitment to public transit
- Create a more efficient freight network

Figure 1.1. Planning process timeline



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

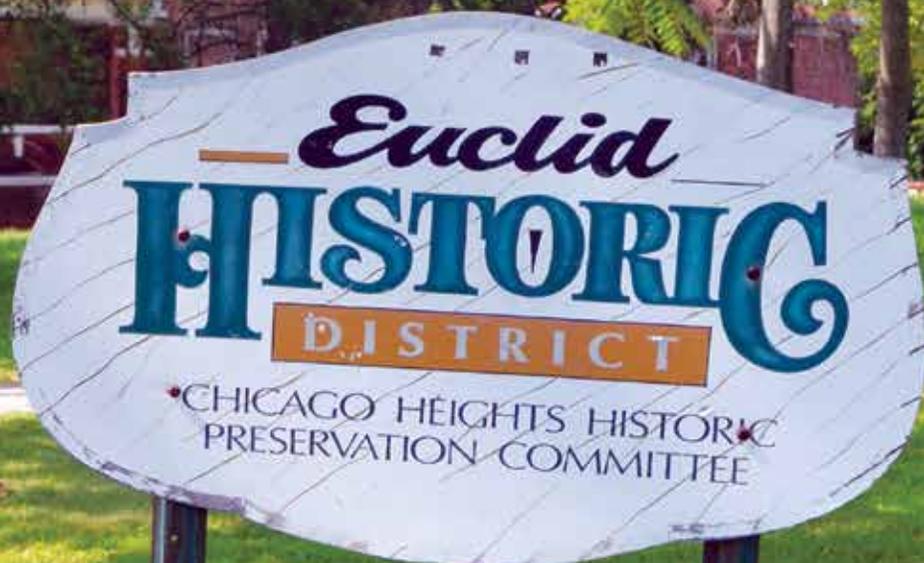
GO TO 2040 will be particularly relevant to the Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan in addressing the following issues:

- Commercial, industrial, and residential revitalization.
- Multijurisdictional coordination for major infrastructure projects and community development projects.
- Work with local educational institutions to expand workforce training programs based on current employer demand.
- Open space and trail enhancements.

GO TO 2040 states, “municipalities are critical to the success of GO TO 2040 because of their responsibility for land use decisions, which create the built environment of the region and determine the livability of its communities. The most important thing that a municipality can do to implement GO TO 2040 is to take this responsibility very seriously.” By undertaking this Comprehensive Plan, the City is taking necessary steps to make informed land use and development decisions and is demonstrating its commitment to helping shape the future of the region as well.

Planning Process

The planning process to create the City’s Comprehensive Plan included multiple steps undertaken over approximately two years. The process was crafted with assistance from Chicago Heights administration and staff and was designed to include resident and stakeholder input throughout. In March 2013, City staff met with Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) staff to develop a scope of work for the project. A work plan established program tasks, a timeline for the program, and recommended participation by a community steering committee to assist CMAP staff in developing the final plan and recommendations. The key steps in the planning process are illustrated in **Figure 1.1**.



Euclid

HISTORIC
DISTRICT

CHICAGO HEIGHTS HISTORIC
PRESERVATION COMMITTEE



Chapter 2

EXISTING CONDITIONS SUMMARY





Key Existing Conditions

- Chicago Heights faces serious challenges with having a large amount of vacant or underutilized land. Nearly 575 acres, or 10.7 percent, of its land is vacant.
- Chicago Heights faces several separate but related challenges in its commercial, residential, and industrial sectors. The City currently has very little retail and office space and has experienced significant decline in these sectors over the last decade. Industry remains an extremely important part of the City's economy. Industrial space represents 81 percent of all commercial space and accounts for over a quarter of all property value.
- A key community concern is the degraded condition of street and sidewalk infrastructure, as well as a perceived lack of sufficient public transportation access and service.
- Unsafe conditions for bicycle and pedestrian circulation were recurring concerns heard throughout the existing conditions analysis. The City lacks bicycle routes and the sidewalk network has major gaps, with many crossings unprotected by stop signs, road striping, or lights. Schools also lack designated walking routes.
- A major concern for the community is flooding due to Thorn Creek, which bisects Chicago Heights. Although the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) has a detailed watershed plan (DWP) for Thorn Creek, much of the flooding is on local, rather than regional, waterways. Therefore, many improvements have to be addressed by Chicago Heights directly.
- The Park District has recently completed a Master Plan that recommends the addition of new public open space throughout the community. New park sites throughout the community can improve community pride, safety, and overall health of residents.
- The downtown has seen years of disinvestment and vacancies have increased. An updated vision is needed to improve and move the area forward.

History of Chicago Heights

Chicago Heights was originally inhabited by the Illini, Iroquois, and Potawatomi tribes, with the first white settlers arriving in the 1830s. Over the next two decades, more settlers arrived in the area, which they called Thorn Grove after the plentiful thorn apple trees. In 1849, German residents changed the name to Bloom in honor of Robert Bluehm, a German patriot who had been executed the year before. With the completion of the railroad stations along the Joliet & Northern and Chicago & Eastern Illinois in 1853 and 1869 respectively, the village grew in population.

The 1890s marked a turning point for the village. Charles Wacker and other Chicago developers who envisioned the village as an outer-ring industrial suburb purchased much of the land around the railroads. The developers brought in titans of heavy industry such as Inland Steel and built the Hotel Victoria, which was designed by the renowned architect Louis Sullivan. The developers also convinced residents to change the village name to Chicago Heights, a name that evoked its high topographical location in Cook County and, more importantly, strongly associated the city with the burgeoning metropolis to the north. On September 24, 1892, the city was officially incorporated and named Chicago Heights.

Another turning point for Chicago Heights came in 1916, when city leaders successfully petitioned for the Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental highway, to be routed through the city, thus establishing Chicago Heights as “the Crossroads of the Nation.” The highway was a point of pride and a boon for city coffers, bringing in residents, workers, and commerce. Development continued to advance rapidly and by 1920 Chicago Heights had a population of 19,653. Its population was diverse, as industrial jobs attracted African Americans and Europeans of many nationalities. At the time, Chicago Heights served as a local center in the sub-region, with residents of nearby communities and rural settlements traveling to the downtown for its commercial, retail, transportation, and entertainment uses.

Chicago Heights became somewhat notorious in the 1920s and 1930s, as bootleggers ran bustling businesses in the city during the Prohibition Era. With the bootleggers came crime, and at one point Al Capone called Chicago Heights home. The city’s reputation was also challenged by the Great Depression, which delivered a strong blow to the city’s industrial base.

Industry recovered in the 1940s when Chicago Heights factories worked feverishly to produce steel, chemical, and war materials. In fact, World War II ushered in a time of great prosperity for the city. There was residential growth to the north and booming business downtown, and major industries, like the Ford Motor Companies, established themselves in the city. At the same time, Bloom Township High School became well known for its academic and athletic excellence.



The city's population peaked at 40,900 in 1970, after which Chicago Heights began to face economic challenges. The commercial center experienced decline as retail patterns changed and competition, such as the nearby Park Forest Plaza, opened. At the same time, employment in heavy manufacturing also experienced declines.

Over the last two decades, Chicago Heights has seen a loss of population, but an increase in the diversity of its residents. As of 2010, the City had 30,276 residents with approximately 23 percent being White, 34 percent being Hispanic or Latino, and 41 percent being Black. Economically, Chicago Heights benefited from the prosperity of the late 1990s: the industrial sector experienced greater stability and a preservation movement, as well as efforts to revitalize the old East Side and Hill neighborhoods, gained momentum. Challenges in the commercial sector persisted.

Today, Chicago Heights leaders are working intensively to improve conditions in the City. The City has successfully balanced its budget, and in 2012, City leaders obtained a two-level increase in the City's bond rating.

Chicago Heights has also demonstrated strong commitment to its neighborhoods, undertaking various initiatives to increase safety and stabilize home values. In 2010, Chicago Heights was awarded \$1.6 million in Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) funds, which allowed the City to continue the demolition, acquisition, and redevelopment of abandoned and deteriorated properties in the residential neighborhoods in the City's east side. The program was met with so much success that in 2012 Chicago Heights received an additional \$1.3 million in NSP funds. At the time of the program's completion in 2013, 15 homes had been constructed and 12 were sold or under contract for sale. The City also used NSP funds to collaborate with developers and rehabilitate 44 residential properties. By offering both a "for sale" and a "rent to own" option, the City has helped make home ownership attainable for families at different income levels.

The City has also addressed the issue of foreclosed and vacant residential properties by taking advantage of the governor's 2012 "Building Blocks" down payment assistance program. Through the program, the City was able to help 36 families purchase homes in Chicago Heights. The city has also received \$300,000 in grant money from Cook County through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which it used to demolish vacant industrial and commercial structures that had become blighted and dangerous.

Regional Setting

Chicago Heights is located at the crossroads of Lincoln Highway (Route 30) and Dixie Highway, 33 miles south of the Chicago Loop and seven miles west of the Indiana border. The City is in Bloom Township in the southern portion of Cook County, close to Will County. Chicago Heights is surrounded by Glenwood and Homewood to the north, Flossmoor, Olympia Fields, and Park Forest to the west, South Chicago Heights and Steger to the south, and Sauk Village and Ford Heights to the east.

The City's strategic location and proximity to regional transportation amenities make it an ideal location for residents and businesses alike. It is located near three major interstates, and although it is not directly served by Metra commuter rail, there are a number of nearby stations on the Metra Electric District line. Chicago Heights is also served by five Pace bus routes. The list below summarizes the regional transportation options available in Chicago Heights, as well as the major regional destinations or points of interest.

Major Roadways

(note all distances are from Chicago Heights City Hall)

- Interstate 294 — 3 miles
- Interstate 80 — 3 miles
- Interstate 57 — 6 miles
- Lincoln Highway — <0.5 miles
- Dixie Highway — <1 mile

Regional Public Transit

Metra

- 211th Street Metra Station — 3 miles
- Flossmoor Metra Station — 4 miles
- Matteson Metra Station — 4 miles
- Olympia Fields Metra Station — 5 miles
- Richton Park Metra Station — 6 miles

Pace

All of these routes are less than 1 mile from City Hall.

- Pace bus route 352
- Pace bus route 357
- Pace bus route 358
- Pace bus route 366
- Pace bus route 372

International Airports

- Gary/Chicago International Airport — 23 miles
- Midway International Airport — 25 miles
- O'Hare International Airport — 50 miles

Other Major Destinations

- City of Chicago downtown Loop — 33 miles
- Indiana state border — 7 miles



Demographic Findings

Similar to many communities throughout Cook County and the region, the City of Chicago Heights experienced a population decline between 2000 and 2010, losing 7.6 percent of its population. Even while experiencing population decline, Chicago Heights has remained a diverse community, with no single race or ethnicity constituting a clear majority. However, a rapidly growing Latino population and younger age cohort (34 percent of the City's population is under the age of 19), will help shape the future of Chicago Heights.

Table 2.1. Population, households, household size in 2010

	Chicago Heights	Cook County	Region
Population	30,276	5,194,675	8,431,386
Households	9,587	1,966,356	3,088,156
Average Household Size	3.09	2.60	2.73

Source: 2010 U.S. Census.

Table 2.2. Change in population, 2000-10

	Chicago Heights	Cook County	Region
Population, 2000	32,776	5,376,741	8,146,264
Population, 2010	30,276	5,194,675	8,431,386
Change, 2000-10	-2,500	-182,066	285,122
Change as percent, 2000-10	-7.6 percent	-3.4 percent	3.5 percent

Source: 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census.

Table 2.3. Race and ethnicity by count and percent, 2010

	Chicago Heights		Cook County		Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
White	7,062	23.3 percent	2,278,358	43.8 percent	4,486,557	53.2 percent
Hispanic or Latino*	10,254	33.9 percent	1,244,762	24.0 percent	1,823,609	21.6 percent
Black or African American	12,370	40.8 percent	1,265,778	24.4 percent	1,465,417	17.4 percent
Asian	87	0.3 percent	318,869	6.1 percent	513,694	6.1 percent
Other**	503	1.7 percent	86,908	1.7 percent	142,109	1.7 percent
Total	6,770	29.1 percent	7,105	23.2 percent	285,122	3.5 percent

Source: 2010 U.S. Census.

* 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

Table 2.4. Change in race and ethnicity by count and percent, 2000-10

	Chicago Heights		Cook County		Region	
	Change in population	Percent change	Change in population	Percent change	Change in population	Percent change
White	-5,000	-41.5 percent	-280,351	-11.0 percent	-200,702	-4.3 percent
Hispanic or Latino*	2,464	31.6 percent	173,022	16.1 percent	414,407	29.4 percent
Black or African American	65	0.5 percent	-124,670	-9.0 percent	-72,117	-4.7 percent
Asian	-51	-37.0 percent	61,026	23.7 percent	137,701	36.6 percent
Other**	22	4.6 percent	-11,093	-11.3 percent	5,833	4.3 percent
Total	6,770	29.1 percent	7,105	23.2 percent	285,122	3.5 percent

Source: 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census.

* 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.

Table 2.5. Age cohorts by count and percent, and median age, 2010

	Chicago Heights		Cook County		Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Under 19 years	10,331	34.1 percent	1,374,096	26.5 percent	2,346,937	27.8 percent
20 to 34 years	6,361	21.0 percent	1,204,066	23.2 percent	1,790,049	21.2 percent
35 to 49 years	5,606	18.5 percent	1,067,351	20.5 percent	1,807,886	21.4 percent
50 to 64 years	4,762	15.7 percent	928,833	17.9 percent	1,534,488	18.2 percent
65 to 79 years	2,238	7.4 percent	436,799	8.4 percent	679,470	8.1 percent
80 years and over	978	3.2 percent	183,530	3.5 percent	272,556	3.2 percent
Median Age	31.2		35.3		N/A	

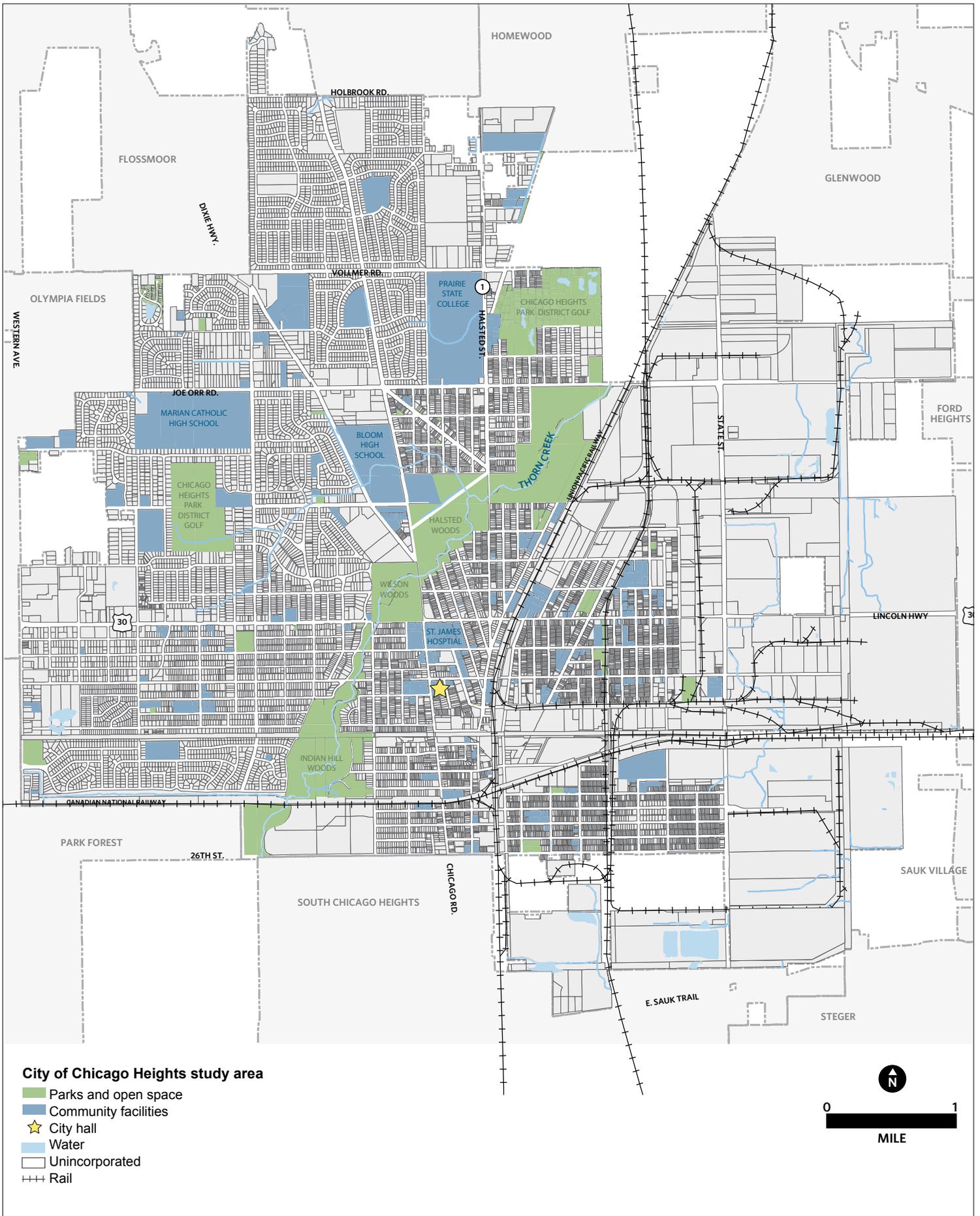
Source: 2010 U.S. Census.

Table 2.6. Median income, 2010

	Chicago Heights	Cook County	Region
Less than \$25,000	2,994	452,334	591,742
\$25,000 to \$49,999	2,470	439,225	643,646
\$50,000 to \$74,999	2,074	345,130	546,085
\$75,000 to \$99,999	1,138	238,954	408,895
\$100,000 to \$149,000	625	252,033	464,935
\$150,000 and over	336	207,095	391,533
Median Income (2010)	43,097	54,598	n/a

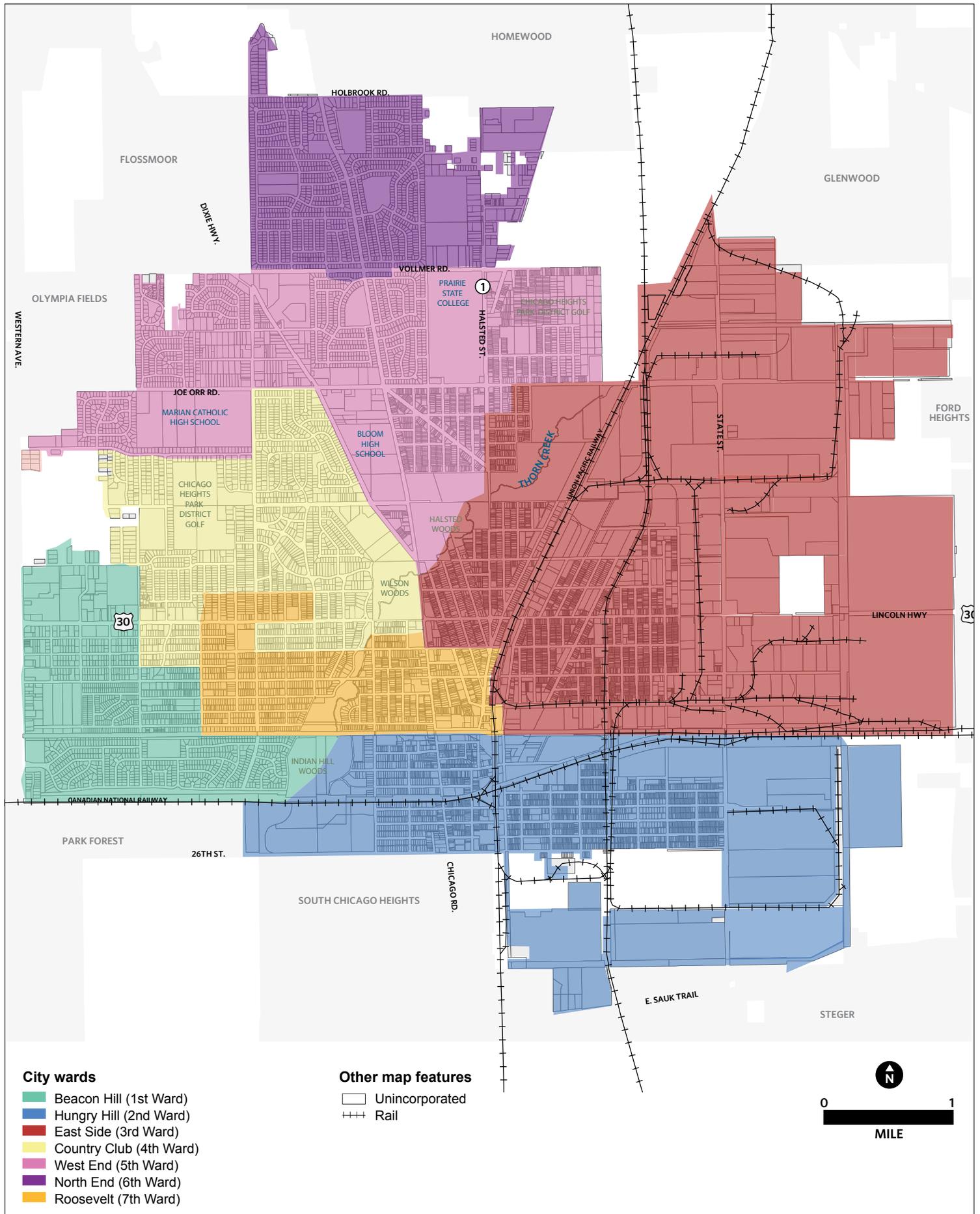
Source: 2007-11 American Community Survey, U.S. Census .

Figure 2.2. Study area



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 2.3. Ward map



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Community Outreach Summary

The development of the Chicago Heights Comprehensive Plan included broad community engagement, including many groups that have been underrepresented or hard to reach during previous planning initiatives. Numerous public engagement activities have been completed to better understand the opportunities and issues facing the community. Public engagement activities engaged local residents, stakeholders, and institutions in order to document Chicago Heights' unique strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

The following summary describes community input received throughout the process.

Key Strengths

- Affordable housing
- Affordable land and space
- City departments work well together
- Longtime residents
- Prairie State programs/expansion plans
- Public Works (police, fire, code enforcement)
- Recently completed plans (Parks Department, Active Transportation Plan)
- Recreation/open space activities
- Resources/programming in the city
- Schools

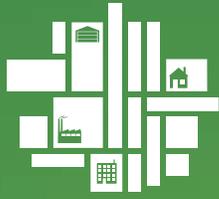
Main Issues

- Additional retail options needed
- Disconnect of Pace schedule with business and school hours
- Hammond water distribution/water rates
- High property tax
- Location (near Indiana border and Will County border-competition/tax revenue)
- Neighborhood safety
- Public health
- Single family rental bulk purchase by investors
- Street maintenance
- Transportation connectivity/accessibility
- Unemployment

Key Opportunities

- Economic development
- Improve library
- Improved quality of life
- Increased collaboration
- Planning for aging population
- Vacant land acquisition





Chapter 3 FUTURE LAND USE





The future land use plan presented in this chapter serves as the foundation for the recommendations contained within the Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of this chapter is to translate the community's vision into physical terms by providing a general pattern for the location, distribution, and characteristics of future land uses in the City of Chicago Heights.

Given that the community is primarily considered built-out, with few opportunities for new development, the Comprehensive Plan recommends that the City focus its efforts on redevelopment of underutilized and vacant properties. Therefore, the future land use plan builds upon the existing land use pattern of the community while proposing a combination of redevelopment and better utilization of specific areas to help the City realize its vision over the next 10-15 years.

Key Findings

- Chicago Heights has strong neighborhoods and community amenities like parks, trails, and recreational spaces. However, better and safer connections — especially for non-motorized transportation — would improve quality of life and community coherence.
- The City continues to host important industrial activity and facilitate freight movement through the region. Given its location at the junction of major north-south and east-west rail lines, freight rail will shape development patterns in and around Chicago Heights. Furthermore, cargo-oriented development has been studied and recommended by the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association and the Center for Neighborhood Technology, based on the City's existing infrastructure, population, and job density.
- Commercial developments lack distinctive identity and are unlikely to draw shoppers from places beyond the corporate limits. Restaurants and shopping centers are largely concentrated along arterial roads in strip malls.
- Multi-family developments — both publicly and privately operated — are increasing in prominence as the community's share of low-income families and seniors grows. Accessibility, affordability, and connections to goods and services are key considerations for future development.
- The predominance of vacant and blighted buildings diminishes the image of Chicago Heights. It also poses challenges to public safety and municipal resources.

Land Use Recommendations

Residential

Existing neighborhoods vary in age, lot size, and physical characteristics. Several neighborhoods contain historic homes, particularly around the downtown area. The Plan recommends maintaining the existing residential types while improving residential neighborhoods and adding new multi-family units, townhomes, and mixed-use developments especially within the downtown.

A number of enhancements are necessary to improve the connectivity, image, and accessibility of many residential areas. As discussed in greater detail in the transportation section, greater pedestrian and bicycle connectivity would benefit many neighborhoods. Improved non-motorized transportation routes would support bicycling and walking, which would improve residents' health, improve connections to schools, churches, employment, and shopping uses, and also help to create a stronger sense of community.

Multi-family developments are increasing in prominence as the community's share of low and moderate income families and seniors grows. The Housing Authority of Cook County owns and operates several public housing developments in the City. Multi-family developments should have better access to community services, medical/health offices, and retail to better serve low and moderate income and senior residents.

The City should also continue to address the issue of vacant and blighted homes. These structures create public safety issues, impact municipal resources, and perpetuate an unfavorable identity for the City. Recommendations for residential areas are further described in **Chapter 4**.

- **Single-Family Residential.** These parcels accommodate both detached and attached (townhomes) single-family homes.
- **Multi-Family Residential.** These parcels accommodate primarily multi-family housing types including apartments, senior housing developments, and condominiums. A number of public housing developments owned by the Housing Authority of Cook County exist within this category.
- **Mixed-Use.** These parcels accommodate a mix of residential, retail, and office uses arranged in a compact and pedestrian-friendly development pattern. Buildings could be configured as single-use buildings interconnected in a pedestrian-friendly manner and with complementary uses in close proximity, or could mix uses within the same building. The Comprehensive Plan recommends that the downtown be redeveloped as a compact and pedestrian friendly mixed-use district.



Commercial

Currently, strip malls along Dixie Highway/Chicago Road, Halsted Street, and Route 30 (Lincoln Highway) — all roads carrying heavy traffic at moderately high speeds — constitute the hubs of commercial activity. Moving forward, the City should focus its commercial development by distinguishing between commercial uses within commercial nodes and commercial uses along the corridors that connect them. Commercial nodes are generally recommended near key intersections. Existing commercial nodes within Chicago Heights to be enhanced include:

- Dixie Highway and Joe Orr Road (“Bloom High School node”)
- Halsted Street and Vollmer Road (“Prairie State node”)
- Lincoln Highway and Halsted Street (“Downtown node”)
- Lincoln Avenue and Western Avenue (“Lincoln/Western node”)

The Comprehensive Plan envisions four types of commercial districts with distinctive characteristics: local commercial, corridor commercial, regional commercial and downtown mixed-use.

- **Local Commercial.** Uses in this classification typically serve the day-to-day needs of households in the immediate surrounding area. These parcels contain retail, small office, and service oriented commercial uses. When feasible, these should be located near the intersections of collector and/or arterial streets.
- **Corridor Commercial.** This land use classification includes primarily commercial and retail uses but may also include other uses such as medical, office, and non-profit organizations. This classification includes uses that are predominantly auto-oriented with higher visibility than most local commercial uses and are primarily focused along arterial streets to take advantage of access and traffic volumes.
- **Regional Commercial.** Parcels included in this classification contain shopping, entertainment, lodging, and banquet facilities supported by the greater region and surrounding communities, not only the City of Chicago Heights.
- **Downtown Mixed-Use.** This classification is intended for the potential mixed-use development within downtown Chicago Heights. Parcels can include a variety of uses such as retail, office, multi-family residential, non-profit, and public spaces in a compact pedestrian friendly pattern.

Recommendations for commercial areas are further detailed in **Chapters 5, 8, and 9.**

Industrial

Industrial facilities are the second largest land use in the City at 18.8 percent (1,008 acres). The two million square-foot Ford Chicago Stamping Plant — an economic cornerstone since it opened in 1956 — accounts for 136 acres of industrial use. The Comprehensive Plan recommends supporting existing industrial businesses while also being proactive in attracting new businesses to the community. A part of attracting new businesses is the recommendation to improve the roadways, rail connectivity, infrastructure, and utilities within industrial areas. Vacant and underutilized parcels that are currently located within industrial areas are recommended for industrial use in the future. Industrial areas can include both small-scale and larger scale production, warehousing, assembly and distribution. Recommendations for industrial areas are further described in **Chapter 10**.

Transportation

Parcels identified as transportation uses also include those that are currently used for utilities and communications infrastructure. The majority of the parcels in this classification include rail right-of-way especially in the large industrial areas in the eastern portion of the City. **Chapter 6** contains more detailed analysis and recommendations for improving transportation and circulation throughout Chicago Heights.

Open Space

Parcels identified as parks and open space include both existing public parks that are primarily owned by the Chicago Heights Park District and the Forest Preserves of Cook County as well as newly identified public open space. New open space is recommended for a number of the currently vacant parcels that are within or adjacent to residential areas. In addition, several of the vacant parcels that are recommended for future open space areas are also within the current floodplain.

The addition of new open space in the community offers many benefits including additional parks and recreational opportunities. These parcels could also assist the City with stormwater management and help to minimize negative flooding impacts. **Chapter 7** addresses open space in greater detail.

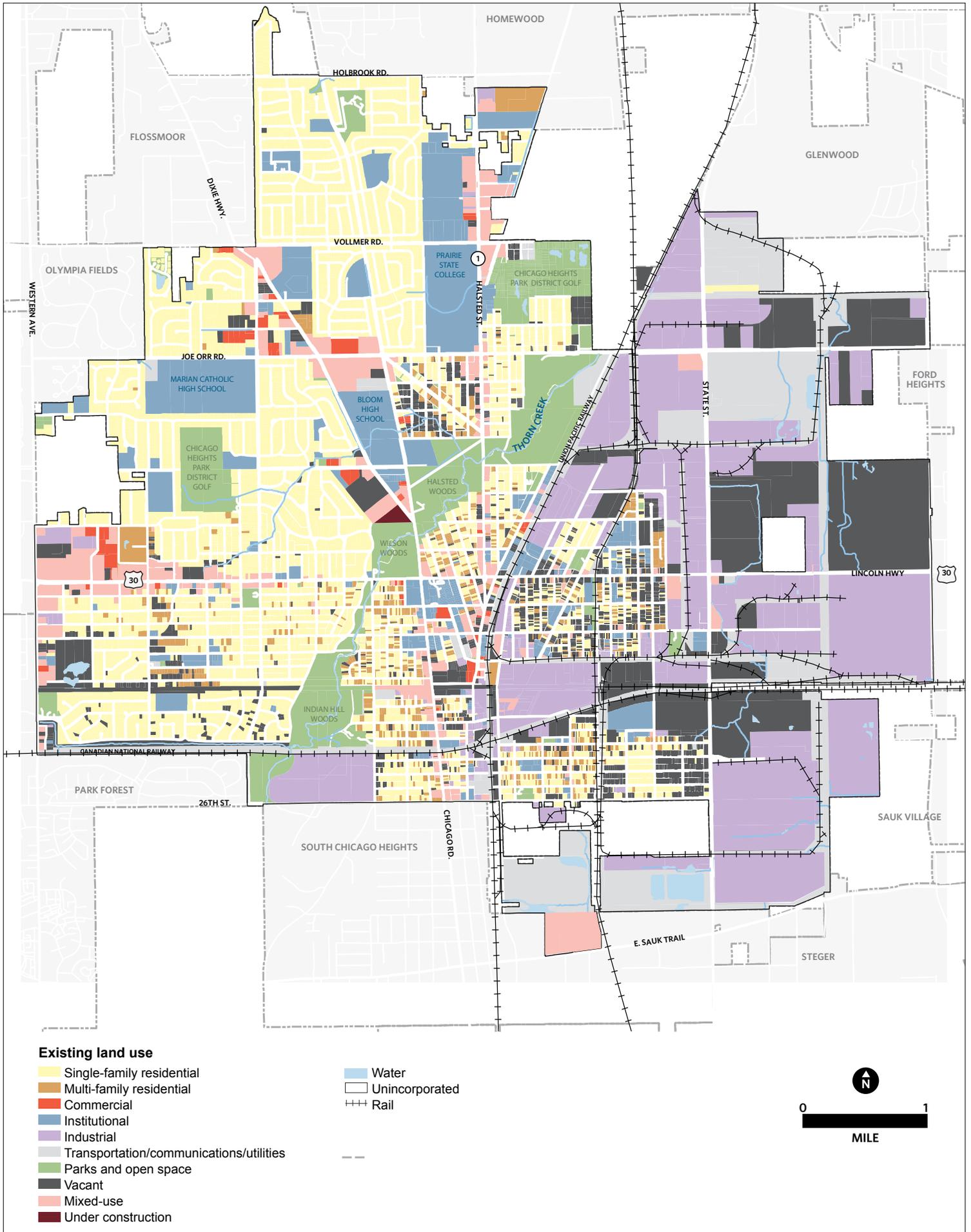
Institutional

These parcels include the community's institutional facilities such as the Franciscan St. James Hospital, Prairie State College, religious institutions, school facilities, and other public facilities.

Market Driven

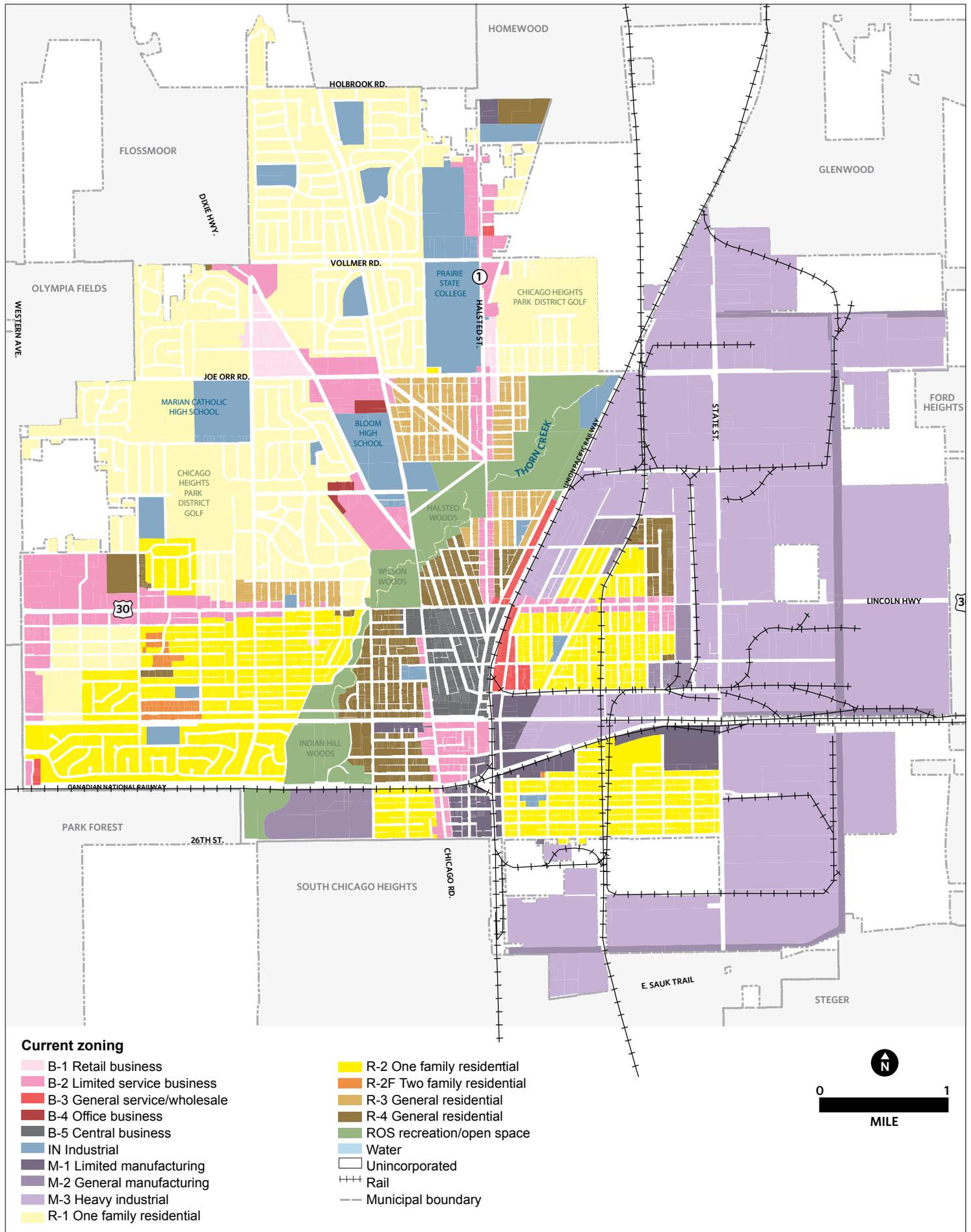
This classification may include a variety of land uses including multi-family residential, office, light industrial, and open space. There is no one recommended land use for this area due to its location adjacent to a large industrial area and its existing land use pattern consisting of vacant sites, multi-family housing, and single family detached homes. The City should be willing to work with property owners and developers to determine future land use on a parcel-by-parcel basis in this area. The purpose of this designation is to seek to attract reinvestment by providing significant flexibility to developers in reinvestment types.

Figure 3.1. Existing land use



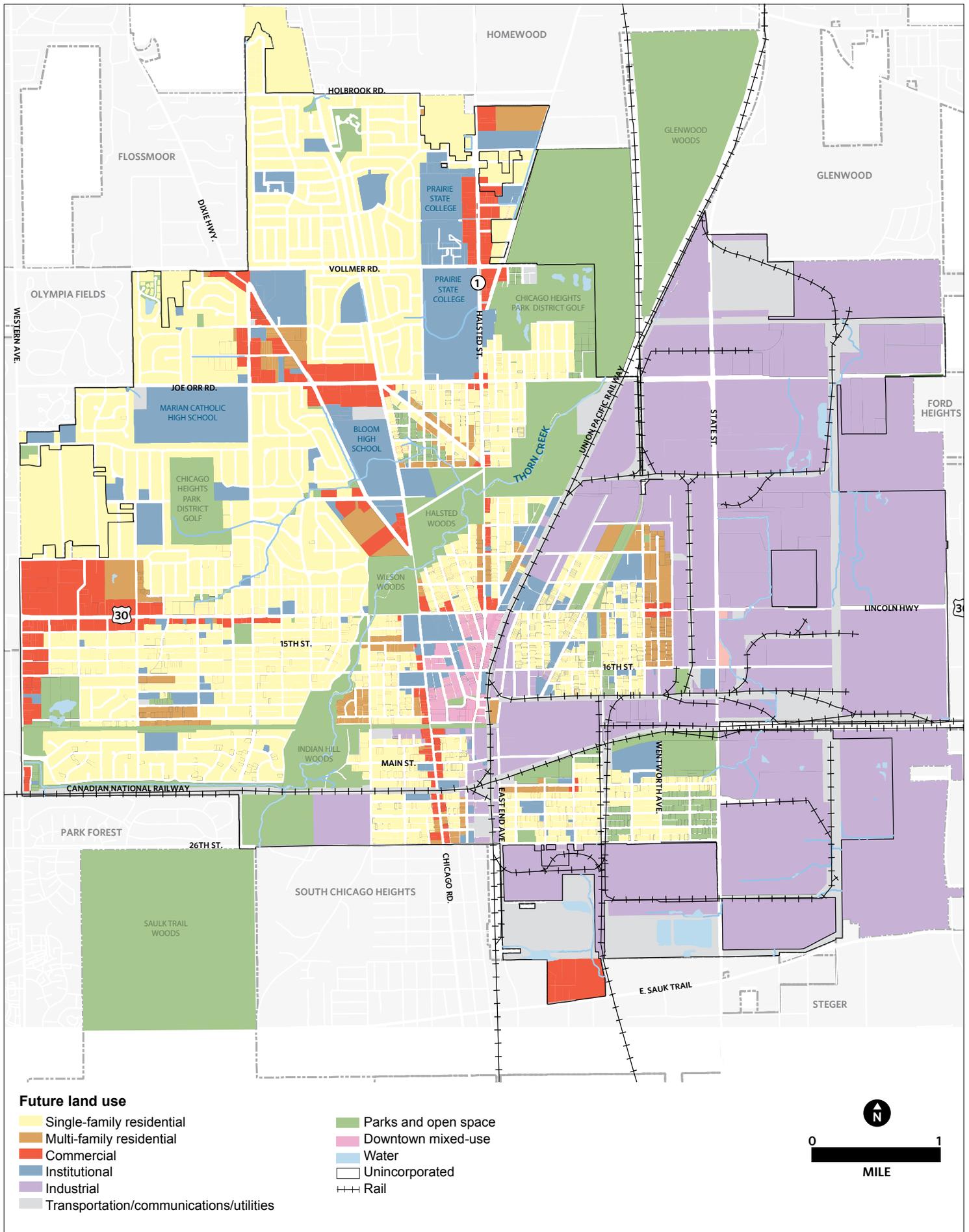
Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 3.2. Current zoning



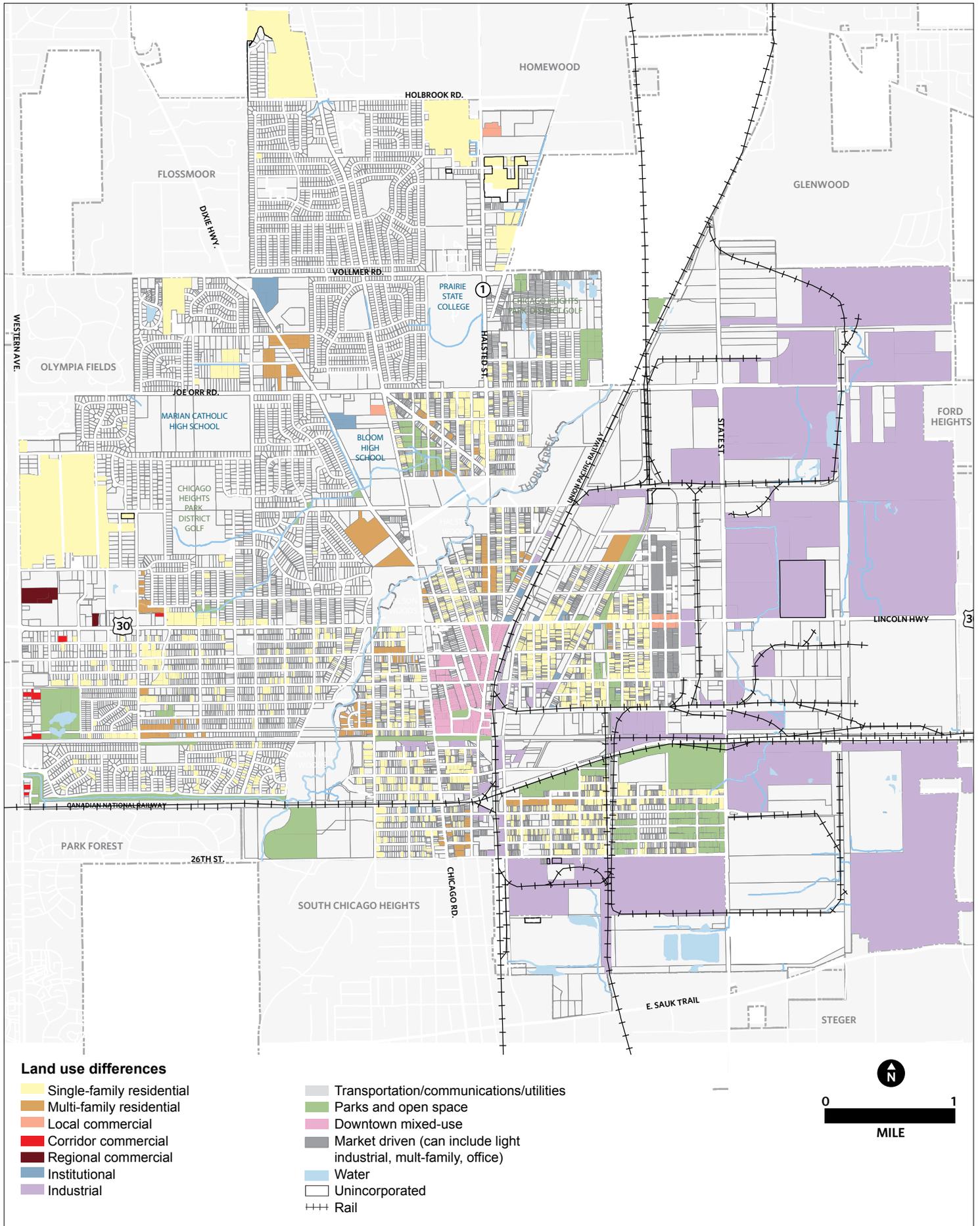
Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 3.3. Future land use



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 3.4. Differences between existing conditions and future plan

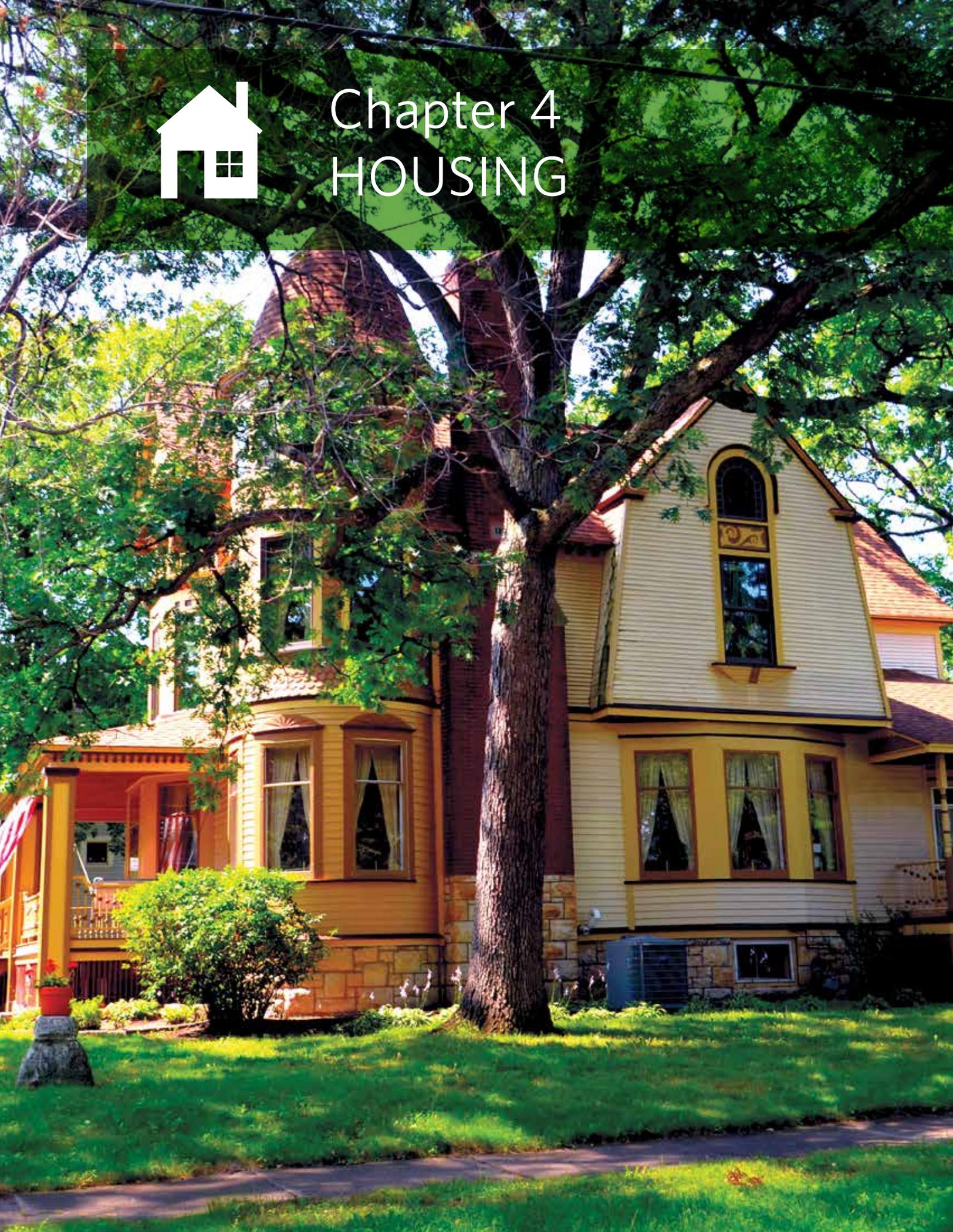


Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.





Chapter 4 HOUSING





The City of Chicago Heights will preserve existing neighborhoods and housing supply while identifying opportunities for new housing development in strategic locations, including the downtown area, that offer a diversity of housing types and densities to accommodate future growth.

Key Findings:

- Seniors (65+ years) are expected to drive future owner demand while future renter demand is expected to be driven by the 25-44 years age cohort. This projected growth highlights the need for investment in a diverse housing stock with varied density options.
- The age of the City's housing stock (only 3.5 percent was built after 2000) is old in comparison to the County and the region. Stakeholder input for new housing throughout the City was a common theme throughout the planning process.
- Chicago Heights lost 7.6 percent of its population between 2000 and 2010. An improved housing stock, coupled with the strong employment sectors in the community can potentially be a catalyst for population growth and housing unit demand.

Recommendations

Focus new housing development in the downtown

As a primarily built out community, there are not many areas where large-scale new construction of housing is possible in Chicago Heights. Many residents and community stakeholders expressed the need for new, contemporary housing to attract a diversity of residents to Chicago Heights. The proposed redevelopment of downtown Chicago Heights will allow for developments of this type.

The City should focus its efforts on higher density residential and mixed-use development in the downtown area, particularly on Halsted Street moving south between Lincoln Highway and 16th Street. The City has been working to acquire many of the vacant and blighted parcels in this area. These parcels should serve as priority development sites as downtown plans move forward. Newly developed units should represent a diversity of housing types and price points. The City should revisit its 2009 *Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) study* but also create an updated community vision for the downtown area that can be communicated to developers. **Chapter 8** provides a downtown sub-area plan that can be used as a foundation for an updated community vision.

Revise the zoning ordinance

The Future Land Use Map (**Figure 3.3**) should serve as the foundation for an update of the zoning ordinance. The City should revisit regulations and administrative procedures outlined in the zoning ordinance and ensure that they do not impede the construction of the types and densities of housing proposed.

Preserve existing residential units

Chicago Heights is home to an aging housing stock. Just over 96 percent of the City's housing stock was built prior to 2000, with the majority constructed between 1940 and 1979. Rehabilitation (and preservation where possible) will be key in maintaining the quality of the City's housing. There are a variety of programs offered through nonprofit organizations that can assist residents with funding maintenance and utility expenses. The City should promote these programs on its website through the "Resident Services" page that will allow residents to quickly and easily identify assistance programs, such as South Suburban Housing Center financial assistance programs, and Habitat for Humanity Chicago South Suburbs. The City should also follow up on future funding opportunities through Cook County Home, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and CDBG-DR (disaster relief) programs.



Identify strategic locations for infill development

In addition to newly constructed housing units in the downtown area, Chicago Heights has potential for infill development in a number of existing residential neighborhoods throughout the City. Development of vacant and underutilized parcels should be prioritized based on the future land use map.

Areas for consideration of infill development include the residential neighborhoods south of Lincoln Highway to 16th Street, just east of the Union Pacific Railway; west of Halsted Street just south of Prairie State College; and east of Chicago Road between 19th and 26th Streets.

New “infill” developments within existing residential neighborhoods — such as the areas noted above — should fit in with the character of the areas while also improving the neighborhood as a whole. New residential structures should be of high-quality design and should be attractive. Adding new structures on vacant parcels will help to create more vibrant neighborhoods and will improve residents’ sense of security and overall identity.

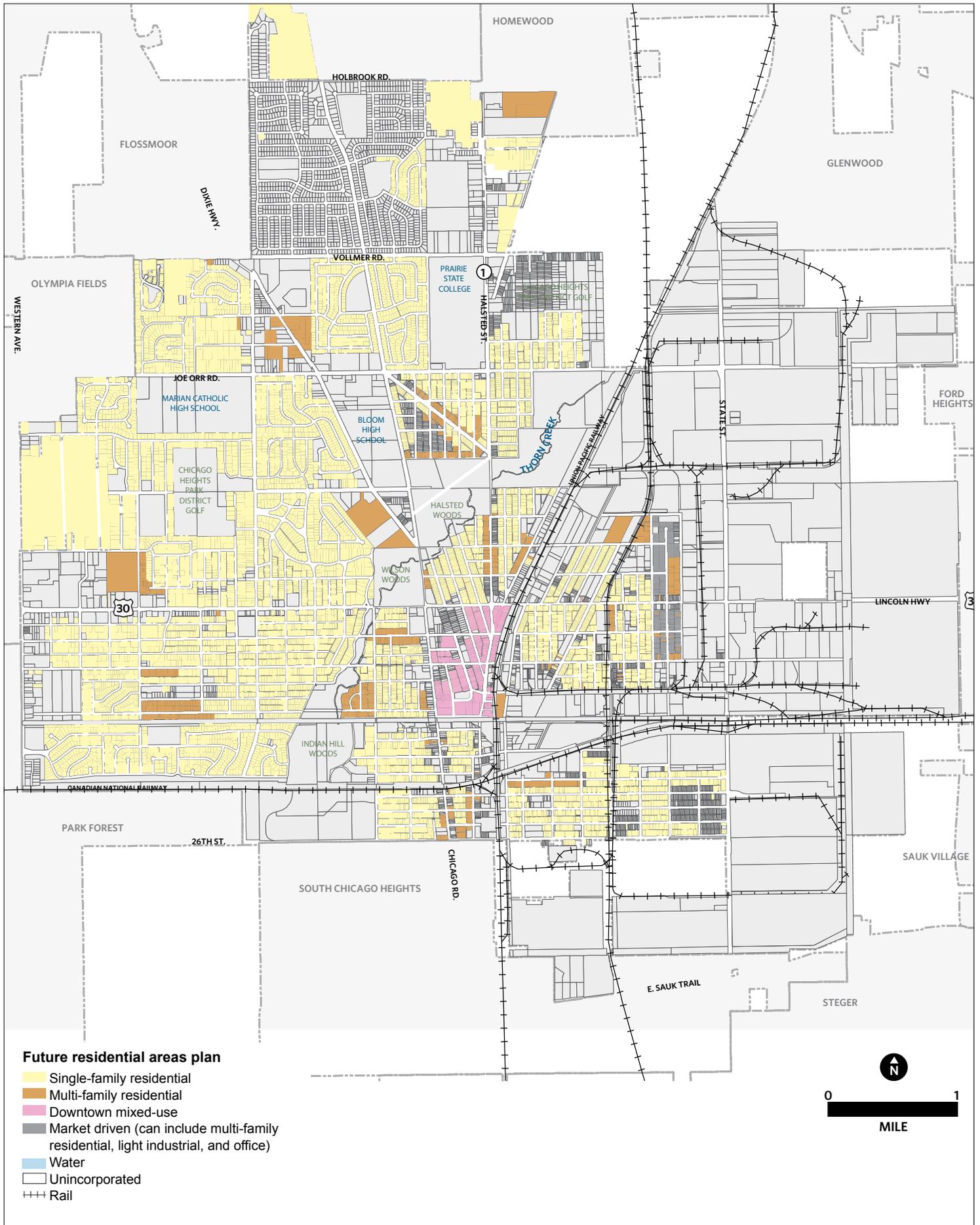
Support “Aging in Place”

Chicago Heights senior population is expected to affect housing demand in both the future renter and owner markets. Chicago Heights should work to make the community as age friendly as possible to allow residents to “age in place.” Aging in place is the ability to remain in one’s home and/or community as they age, if they choose, regardless of income or ability level. Providing affordable rental options, information on home maintenance and other senior service programs, and convenient location of potential senior developments to city amenities and transit are key components of creating a successful environment for aging in place.

As an opportunity for increasing senior housing options, Chicago Heights staff should ensure that any zoning ordinance updates include options for multifamily developments — particularly in the downtown area — and varied density that would support senior housing developments. Increased density allowance and universal design principles, particularly in the proposed downtown redevelopment area, would create walkable and transit-connected options for Chicago Heights seniors.

The City should work proactively with Cook County to inform seniors of available services. For example, Cook County Age Options provides a series of programs that promote “living well in your home and community.” The Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County, Inc. operates a Chicago Heights field office (located at 1203 West End Avenue) that provides Bloom Township seniors with assistance for property tax exemptions, nutrition programs, home weatherization, and other quality-of-life programming. City staff should work to ensure information on these and other senior assistance programming are available on the City website and at City Hall.

Figure 4.1. Residential plan

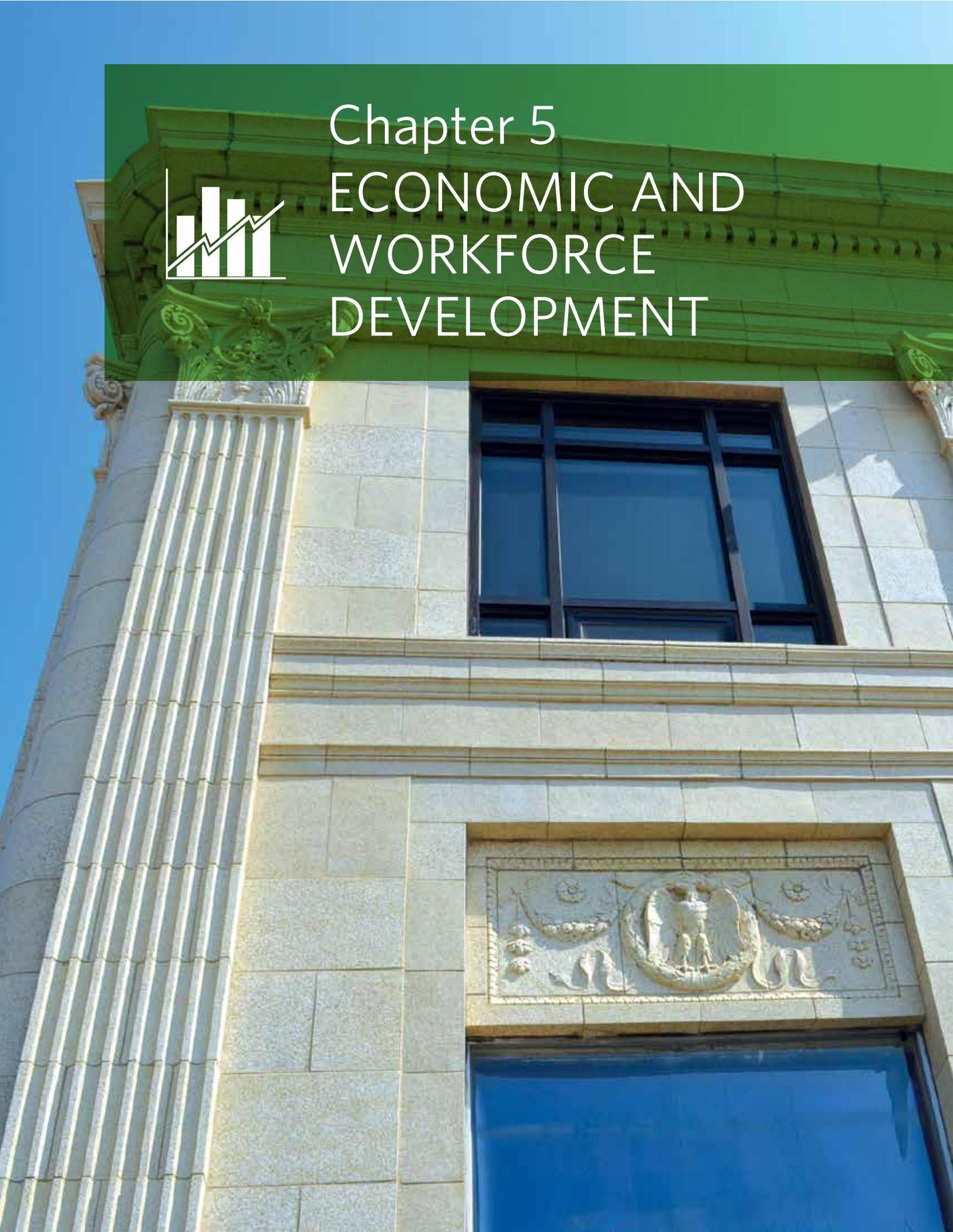


Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.



Chapter 5

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT





The City of Chicago Heights will continue to promote economic growth through investment in its commercial areas and through workforce development, creating a vibrant and sustainable business environment that serves as a valuable element of the region's economy while offering residents employment and training opportunities.

Key Findings:

- Stakeholders consistently identified unattractive commercial areas and the limited number of retail and entertainment establishments as a key challenge. Both City leadership and residents would like to see better defined commercial areas and new businesses, particularly sit-down restaurants.
- Chicago Heights has clear strengths in a number of industries. The City's jobs are highly concentrated in manufacturing, health care, and social assistance, employing nearly 30 percent of all private sector workers. Transportation and warehousing is also a major and growing employment sector. Between 2002 and 2012, the industry grew by over 250 percent and in 2012, it accounted for 12 percent of private sector jobs. All three industries are much more highly concentrated in Chicago Heights as compared to Cook County.
- Chicago Heights is home to a workforce trained and experienced in many of these industries—18 percent of Chicago Heights residents work in health care and social assistance and 11 percent work in manufacturing. A small percentage of residents (5 percent) also work in transportation and warehousing.
- Nearly 85 percent of residents work outside the City, and 87 percent of workers commute into Chicago Heights.
- Chicago Heights struggles with high unemployment (16 percent) and lower than average educational attainment (78 percent of residents 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, and 14 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher).
- Workforce development can lower the unemployment rate, increase local hiring, and help ensure future business investment in Chicago Heights.

Recommendations

Hire a city planner to lead the City's economic and workforce development initiatives.

In order for Chicago Heights to implement the recommendations discussed in this chapter, it will be important for the City to hire a city planner to lead implementation efforts. Hiring a planner can also help with implementation by making Chicago Heights a more competitive applicant for grants, as the City will have demonstrated local capacity to administer grant funds and manage projects.

The city planner should focus on economic and workforce development activities and should have experience working with zoning codes and other municipal ordinances, development review processes, and workforce development programs. Specific initiatives for the planner to lead are discussed in further detail in the recommendations below.

Commercial Areas Recommendations

Focus commercial development and improvements on key nodes and corridors.

As discussed in **Chapter 3**, the City should focus commercial development along its existing commercial corridors and particularly at commercial nodes near key intersections along these corridors. In the near and mid-term, the City should focus on improving and attracting new development to the Downtown node and the Lincoln/Western node, as well as the commercial corridors (Lincoln Highway and Halsted Street) that connect them. As shown in **Figure 3.3**, the Downtown node should be mixed-use and the Lincoln/Western node should accommodate Regional Commercial uses.

Additionally, both commercial nodes should accommodate transit-supportive infrastructure and provide a walkable environment. Through these actions, the City will create a land use pattern that supports the use of public transit, making Chicago Heights a more attractive place for transit agencies such as Pace to invest in and provide services.

In order to develop these nodes, the City should implement the subarea specific strategies discussed in **Chapter 8 and 9**, as well as undertake detailed market assessments and developer recruitment, as described below.



Undertake detailed market assessment and developer recruitment.

A detailed market analysis will allow the City to gain a better understanding of the types of uses feasible for Chicago Heights commercial nodes and the steps needed to move the developer recruitment process forward. The City should begin by undertaking a market assessment and developer recruitment for the downtown node, as its revitalization is a top priority. In the future, the process can be replicated for other commercial nodes. For commercial nodes that are part of a Tax-Increment Finance (TIF) district, the City can use TIF funds to finance these pre-development costs.

The City's market assessment should answer the following questions:

- In what order should parcels be redeveloped? What is the redevelopment timeframe? (short-, mid-, or long-term)
- What specific types of uses are feasible on which parcels? For retail uses, specify type, size, and examples of potential retailers.
- What incentives can the City offer to interested developers or investors?
- Does the City need to modify its development review or approval process? If so, how?

The study should also identify one pilot project site and assist the City with moving it through the entire process, answering all the questions identified above.

After the market assessment is complete, the city planner should undertake a pre-development process to assist with recruiting developers. The pre-development process will involve a focused campaign that includes meetings and presentations by the City to the development community, active developer engagement, financial analysis of development and design options, streamlining of the City's development review process, and development guidelines for catalytic projects that would allow the City to issue effective requests for proposals or qualifications.

Revise the zoning ordinance.

In order for the City to implement its vision of commercial nodes, it will be necessary to revise the zoning ordinance and map to allow for the type of focused development described above. The existing zoning ordinance's business districts allow for too great a variety of commercial uses, and there is too much overlap between the various business district classifications, leaving the City without adequate tools to direct commercial development or shape the character of its commercial areas.

A zoning revision should consider reducing the number of business district classifications and giving each business district a distinct purpose and character. A revision should also examine the possibility of reducing parking requirements in all commercial areas, particularly the downtown, as well as allowing for shared parking (see **Chapter 9**). Additionally, the mixed-use regulation amendments made during the City's 2009 Central Business District zoning update should be modified to allow for the construction of new higher density units in the proposed downtown area. Finally, the findings of the market assessment(s) should be used to inform the revision and to ensure that new business district classifications accommodate the types of uses found to be feasible.

Establish commercial design guidelines to enhance attractiveness to both businesses and customers.

In order to strengthen existing businesses as well as attract new development, it is important that the City work to improve the appearance of local businesses and parking areas. Adopting commercial design guidelines is a key strategy for achieving this goal.

Design guidelines typically cover features such as pedestrian amenities, business signage, lighting, architectural details, landscaping and streetscape coverage. It is important that the guidelines also address parking lot design issues, such as shared driveways, pedestrian crosswalks, and bike parking.

Having guidelines in place also provides prospective developers clear information regarding the City's expectations for new developments. The City should also consider incorporating the guidelines into its zoning code in order to give the guidelines more authority.

Encourage business owners to undertake low-cost improvements through the creation of a facade and site improvement program.

The City can help improve the appearance of the facades, the street-facing exteriors of commercial buildings, by offering low interest loans or grants to improve the exterior appearance of the designated properties. Eligible improvements may include improvements that contribute to the visual enhancement of the property as viewed from the public right-of-way. Examples include painting, new lighting, new storefront windows, installation of awnings, and new parking lot screening/trees. This type of program could be implemented in the City's commercial nodes, particularly the downtown area.



Workforce Development Recommendations

Work with residents, local businesses and institutions, and external partners on workforce development.

In order for more Chicago Heights residents to become successfully employed and achieve greater career advancement, access to workforce development services (job readiness, job placement, and occupational skills training) is crucial. Additionally, access to a wide range of social services (i.e., mental/behavioral health services, supportive housing, childcare, and transportation assistance) also contributes to employment success.

The Southland region has many workforce training and social services agencies that can provide a range of services to residents. Currently, however, no existing system or process is in place for workforce development and social service organizations to inform Chicago Heights residents about services and resources that are available to them. Chicago Heights organizations providing social services can make more effective client referrals if they are more informed about the range of services available through other nearby organizations.

As discussed above, Chicago Heights should hire a city planner whose responsibilities would include informing residents about workforce development resources in the area, as well as the range of related social services that are available. This person would also assume responsibility for implementing the following strategies:

- Develop a “Resource Board” on the City’s website to post information about Southland workforce development and social services resources.
- Use local media and newspapers, the City website’s main page, community bulletin boards, community events, etc., to inform residents about the City’s resource web page and resource fairs.
- Coordinate resource fairs for residents and stakeholders.
- Identify a contact person at each Chicago Heights social services/community organization in order to relay key information about resources and related events to these contacts, so they are able to inform clients/constituents.
- Connect and communicate regularly with the Southland Human Services Leadership Council and its Workforce Development Committee, to learn about workforce development and social services in surrounding communities.

Key partners to engage, initiatives to participate in, and strategies to pursue are discussed in more detail in the recommendations that follow.

Launch programs and events that connect the City’s labor force to resources.

The City should host bi-annual resource fairs to increase linkages between Southland workforce development organizations and residents. At the bi-annual event, residents can learn about workforce development and social services available to them both in Chicago Heights and surrounding communities. Some of the key organizations to develop relationships with include:

- Calumet Area Industrial Commission
- Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership
- Chicago Federation of Labor Workers’ Assistance Committee
- Chicago Jobs Council
- Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation
- Cook County Bureau of Economic Development
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
- Illinois Manufacturing Excellence Center
- South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association
- Southland Human Services Leadership Council
- The Millennium Reserve/Calumet Green Manufacturing Partnership
- World Business Chicago

Work with local institutions to expand training and vocational opportunities for students and job seekers.

The city planner should work with local institutions, including education and health care institutions, to connect students and job seekers with training and vocational opportunities. The key higher education partner should be Prairie State College, which serves as an affiliate for the Illinois workNet Center and houses its own workforce center. Through its workforce center, Prairie State College offers a number of free services including career counseling, training and education, job development/placement, workshops, and referrals. The college also offers popular accredited programs in dental hygiene, nursing, and transportation and logistics—industries that are being targeted by the County as part of its workforce development programming.

Another key partner will be Aunt Martha’s Chicago Heights Community Health Center. In addition to offering a number of health services, Aunt Martha’s offers and facilitates coordination with a variety of education and life skills programs. Aunt Martha’s also offers volunteer opportunities, as well as health care, social services, and business internships.



The city planner should also work with local schools to increase middle and high school students' awareness of training and vocational programs, as well as career opportunities in various fields, particularly Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. A key resource to utilize is the Illinois Pathways program. Launched in 2011, Illinois Pathways aims to create a new, innovative public-private education infrastructure that can advance college and career readiness in STEM disciplines by coordinating statewide networks of P-20 education partners, business, labor, and other organizations based on career clusters.¹

| ¹ See <http://www.ilpathways.com>.

Illinois Pathways covers eight career clusters, including the three clusters being targeted by the County: health science, manufacturing, and transportation, distribution, and logistics. Each cluster offers several career “pathways” to students throughout their academic careers, from middle school to post-secondary study. For instance, high school students interested in health science have the opportunity to choose from the following pathways: Informatics/Health Information Technology, Biomedical Research and Development, Support Services, and Therapeutics and Diagnostics. Within each pathway, there are opportunities for coursework, work-based learning, and credentials and assessments. Additionally, each cluster is supported by a learning exchange that has a lead entity coordinating a statewide network of businesses, employer associations, education partners, and other stakeholders. More information can be found at http://www.illinoisworknet.com/vos_portal/Stem/en/Home/.

Schools looking to integrate STEM courses directly into their curriculums also have a number of resources at their disposal. The City should work with local schools to explore the possibility of making curriculums, like the two examples listed below, available in Chicago Heights.

² See <http://www.iteaconnect.org/EbD/ebd.htm>.

- **Engineering by Design.** Engineering by Design (EbD) is a K-12 engineering and technology curriculum created by the International Technology Education Association. EbD has been adopted by 20 states. The EbD program is built on the belief that the ingenuity of children is untapped, unrealized potential that, when properly motivated, will lead to the next generation of technologists, innovators, designers, and engineers.² More information can be found at <http://www.iteea.org/EbD/ebd.htm>.
- **Project Lead the Way.** Project Lead the Way (PLTW) is a nationally developed curriculum for middle school and high school students that focuses on engineering while utilizing project-based learning. The goal of the program is to increase the number, quality, and diversity of engineers matriculating from United States educational systems. PLTW gives students just enough exposure to the engineering field so that they can determine whether the field is the right career choice for them. Within the PLTW curriculum, there is Gateway to Technology for middle schools and the Pathway to Engineering and Biomedical Science programs for high schools. The PLTW curriculum is available to interested schools at no cost; however, schools are financially responsible for program participation fees, classroom equipment, kits for hands-on activities, other supplies and required professional development for teachers. More information can be found at <http://www.pltw.org/>.



Leverage local industry strengths to participate in sub-regional workforce and economic development initiatives.

Chicago Heights can support workforce and economic development efforts, as well as local capacity building efforts, by participating in County and sub-regional initiatives. Two key initiatives include Cook County's economic development plan, Partnering for Prosperity, and the Millennium Reserve's Industrial Jobs Plan.

- **Partnering for Prosperity.** Cook County's 2013 Partnering for Prosperity plan sets out a cluster-based strategy for economic growth activities. The plan identifies the following four clusters as being concentrated in Cook County and as the focus for future initiatives:

- Fabricated metals
(sub-set of manufacturing industry)
- Food processing and packaging
(sub-set of manufacturing industry)
- Transportation and logistics
- Healthcare

These target clusters closely match Chicago Heights' strengths. As discussed above, health care, manufacturing, and transportation and logistics industries represent a significant percentage of the City's employers and employ a significant percentage of Chicago Heights residents.

As a center for these target clusters, Chicago Heights should participate in the County's economic development initiatives and leverage its existing strengths to qualify for funding assistance. By doing so, the City could attract more businesses, which would provide more employment opportunities. The city planner should monitor the County's implementation efforts in business attraction and work with the County's Bureau of Economic Development to stay abreast of current and future funding opportunities and programs.

- **Millennium Reserve Industrial Jobs Plan.** Chicago Heights is located in the footprint of the Millennium Reserve (MR), a 220 square mile area that extends from downtown Chicago, east to the Indiana border and southwest to Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Wilmington, Illinois. Specifically, the initiative is focused on the Calumet Core region, which covers many neighborhoods on Chicago's south side, the southeast lakefront and 35 south suburban municipalities, including Chicago Heights. The project is founded on the belief that efforts in conservation and sustainable land use in urban areas are closely tied to, and hinge on, successfully establishing healthy communities and a robust economy.

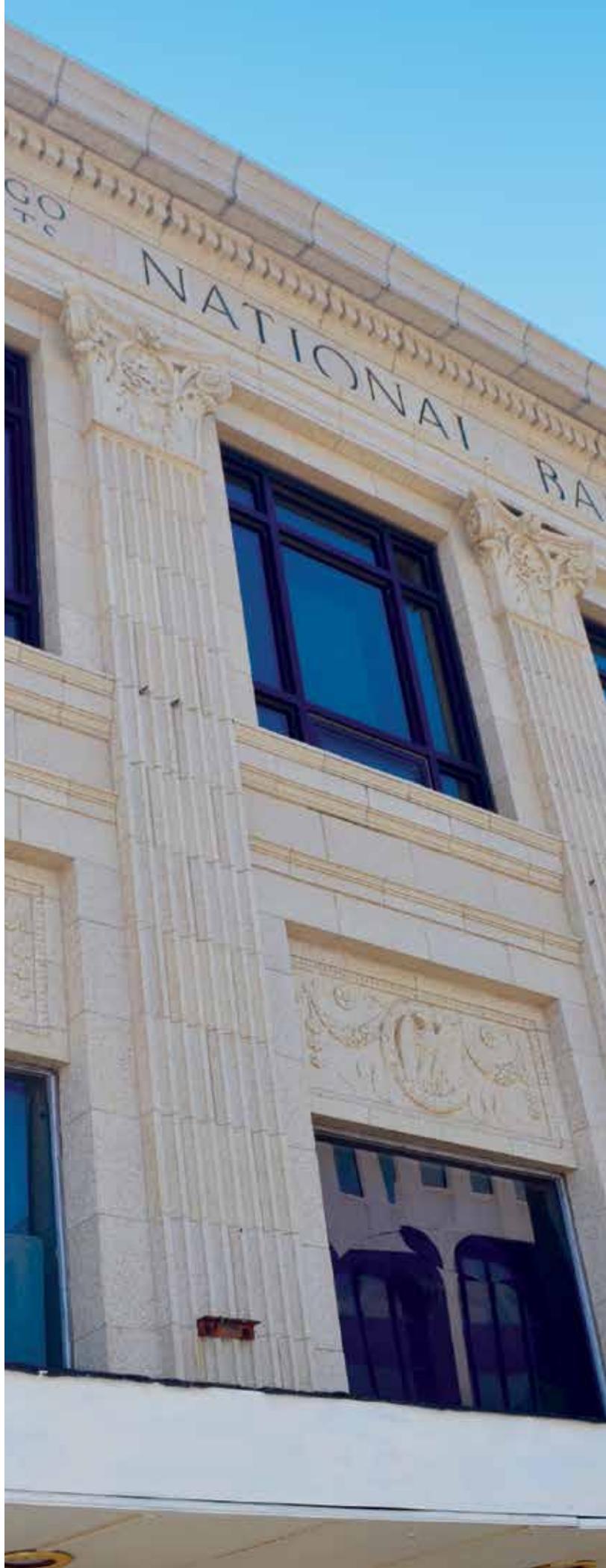
Recently, the Millennium Reserve Steering Committee identified the implementation of the Millennium Reserve Industrial Jobs Plan (IJP) as a priority project. The IJP will expand the Calumet Green Manufacturing Partnership (CGMP) initiative in order to address the current mismatch between the skills needed by manufacturers in the region and those available in the local workforce. A number of partners will be involved in plan implementation. OAI, Inc., a local non-profit training and business service organization, will assist with recruiting students, while training will be provided by Prairie State College, South Suburban College, and Daley College.

The city planner should work with local organizations to publicize the training opportunities available through IJP/CGMP and encourage residents to apply.

Educate employers about resources available through the public workforce system.

The publicly funded workforce development system offers several resources targeted to employers. The city planner should educate employers about these resources, with a focus on resources that help employers find and/or train qualified candidates who meet their specific business needs. For instance, on-the-job training and incumbent worker training are two resources available through the Workforce Investment Act that allow employers to train and increase the skills of new and existing workers. A number of programs are also available through the Illinois DCEO, including Accelerated Training for Illinois Manufacturing (ATIM), a multifaceted program that provides accelerated manufacturing training tailored to the needs of regional employers.

The city planner should coordinate with the sub-regional organizations listed above to facilitate information sessions for local employers about the various workforce development resources available to them. City staff can coordinate the space and market the event to Chicago Heights companies, while the workforce development agencies can facilitate the sessions. Chicago Heights should also engage with employers and partners such as SSMMA and neighboring communities to establish an ATIM training and certification program for the Southland region.





Educate employers about Employer-Assisted Housing programs.

³ http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/mpill_w00-8.pdf.

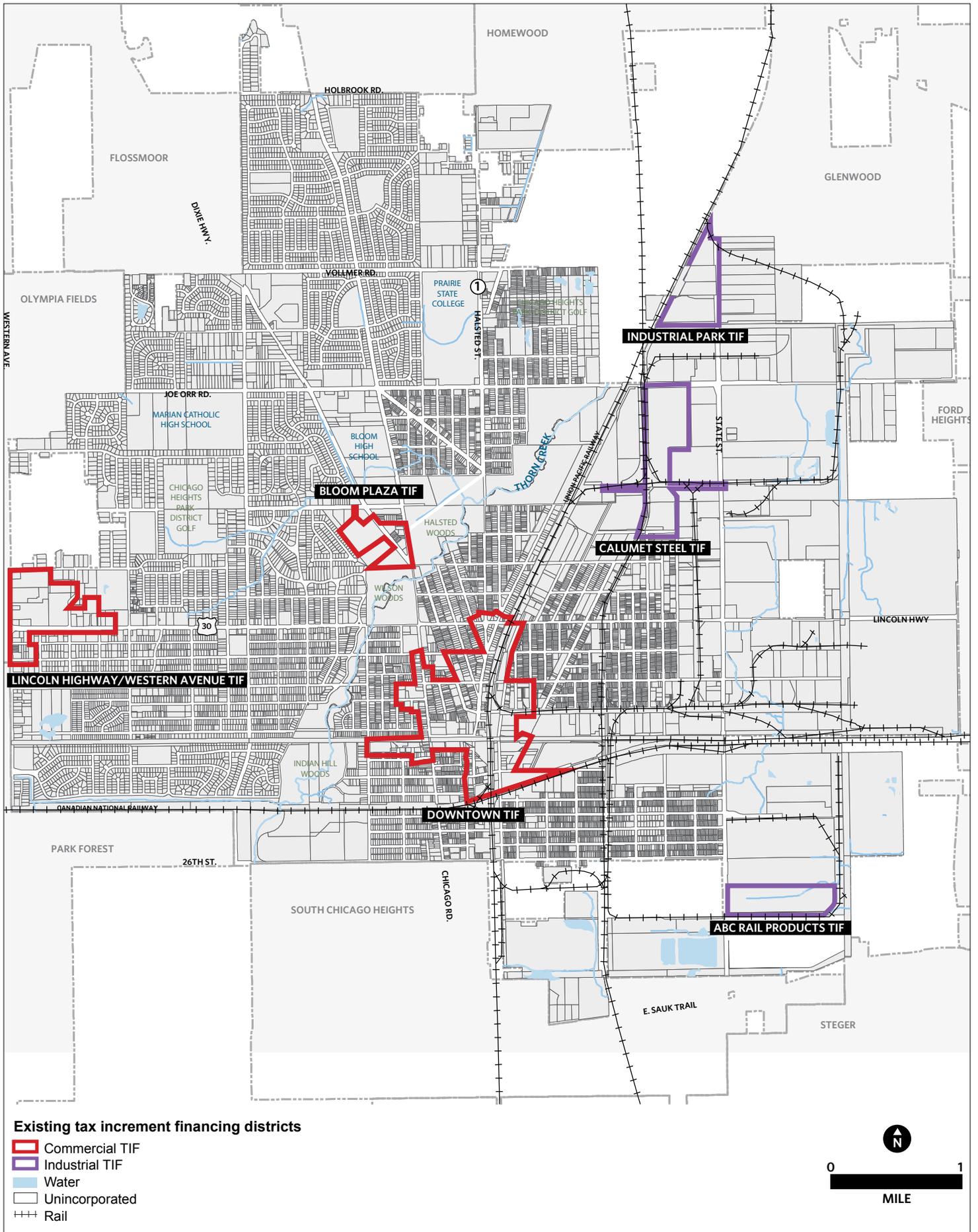
The city planner should also educate Chicago Heights employers about opportunities for employer-assisted housing (EAH). EAH programs assist employees in obtaining rental and/or ownership housing within the community with tax credits helping to offset the cost to the employer. By doing so, EAH programs help address the spatial mismatch between employment opportunities and housing availability and/or affordability. In Chicago Heights, where nearly 85 percent of residents work outside the City, and 87 percent of workers commute, EAH programs can allow a greater number of residents to find employment within the city and a greater number of workers to find housing options in Chicago Heights.

EAH programs are also beneficial to employers and are a good option for all types of employers, including private companies, public institutions, and nonprofit organizations. As described by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies and the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, “Employer motivations to undertake EAH initiatives can best be encapsulated by the “Four Rs”: employee recruitment; employee retention; neighborhood revitalization; and community relations, with reduced commuting an interwoven objective.”³

The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) offers services to connect employers with nonprofit housing counselors to assist in starting and managing EAH programs. The City should work closely with both MPC and local employers to explore options for EAH in Chicago Heights. Currently, MPC is focusing its outreach to employers who are anchor institutions—hospitals, schools, and manufacturers—in Chicago and south and west Cook County. For Chicago Heights, these anchor institution should include the Franciscan St. James Health Hospital, elementary and secondary school districts, and the City’s many manufacturers.

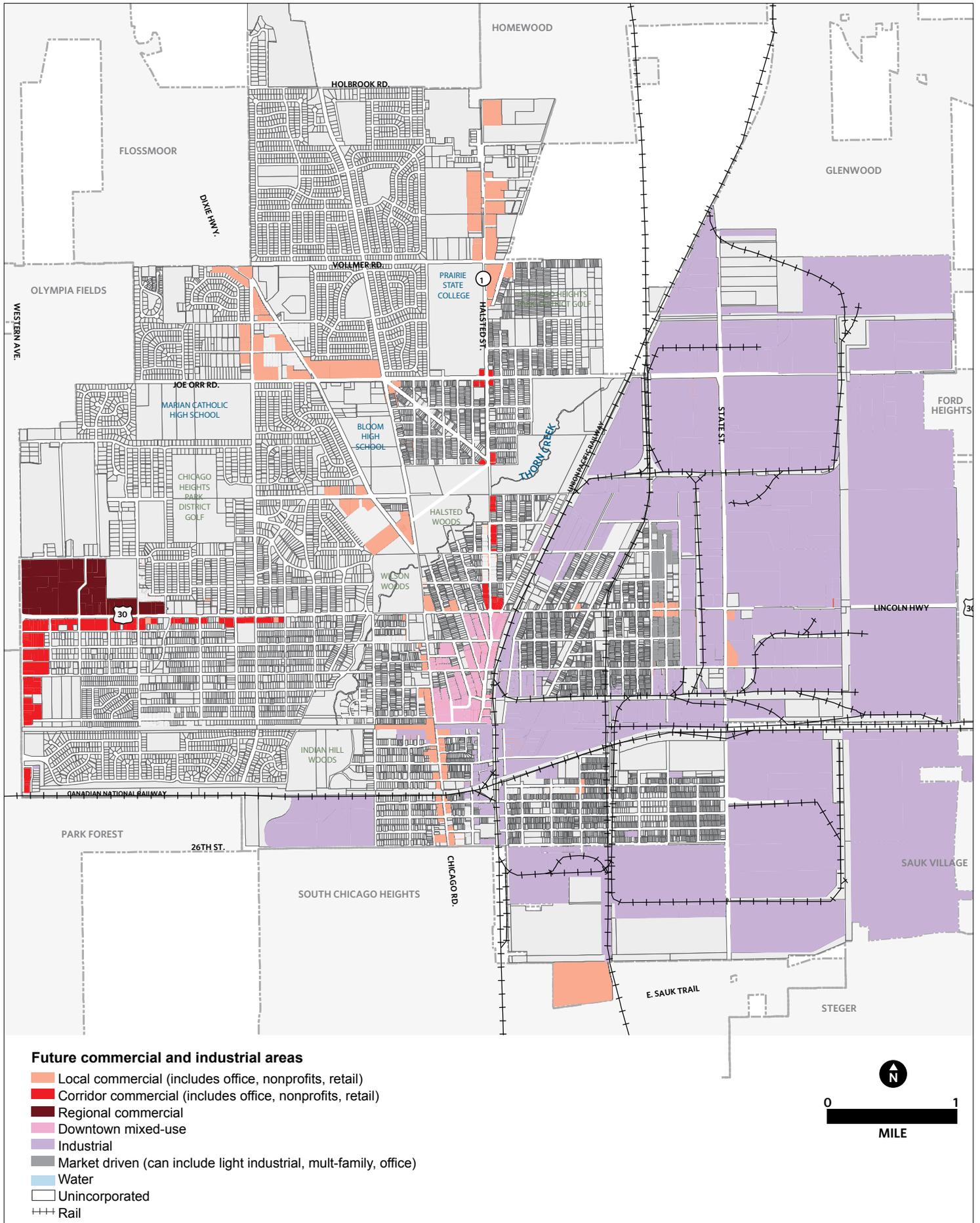
More information on EAH programs, including a guidebook, is available on MPC’s website at <http://www.metroplanning.org/work/project/8>.

Figure 5.1. Existing TIF districts

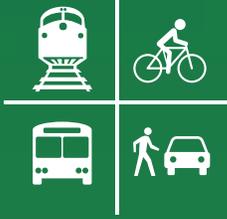


Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 5.2. Future commercial and industrial areas



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.



Chapter 6

TRANSPORTATION





The City of Chicago Heights should continue to provide safe and efficient transportation options to navigate the community and connect to regional transportation systems.

Key Findings

- The City's existing transportation network creates unsafe conditions for bicycle and pedestrian circulation. Many residential neighborhoods lack safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle connections to employment locations and community amenities.
- The proximity of Chicago Heights to the City of Chicago presents a logistical advantage that drives local economic and development patterns. Major employment centers are within commuting range, and cargo can reach most major ports within a day by highway or rail.
- A substantial portion of Chicago Heights residents are dependent on transit, which is linked to age, income, and household auto ownership, showing a potential market for increased service and improved ridership.

Recommendations

Promote an Active Transportation Network through the Implementation of the Active Transportation Plan.

Improve bicycle and pedestrian amenities on existing roadways.

Chicago Heights should ensure adequate bicycle and pedestrian facilities to schools, parks, recreational and other community facilities, as well as shopping and employment destinations. A continuous active transportation network throughout the City can provide alternate transportation options, which can help reduce the number of cars on the road and promote a healthy lifestyle.

The City's Public Works Department should create an inventory of local streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks that are either in need of repair or are missing in critical places within each of the identified areas.

When efforts are coordinated, bicycle and pedestrian improvements can often dovetail with private development and public projects. Although city-wide improvements are outlined in the active transportation plan, downtown Chicago Heights should be prioritized due to high collision rates and the concentration of key community facilities. The City's surrounding south-central area should also be targeted for pedestrian and bicycle improvements as well as key corridors that host a variety of destinations, such as Chicago Road, Halsted Street, Joe Orr Road, and Lincoln Highway.

Bike Network

Chicago Heights should create a series of local bike routes and trails to connect schools, parks, trails, retail areas, and regional transit. The bike system should be comprised of a network of signed routes, marked shared lanes, paved shoulders, bike lanes, and multi-use paths. For certain roadways, such as Dixie Highway, Ashland Avenue, and State Street, a road diet is recommended to accommodate on-street bike lanes. Road diets typically convert four-lane undivided roads into three lanes (two through lanes and a bidirectional left turn lane) and use the remaining right-of-way for bike lanes, sidewalks and/or on-street parking. Bike racks should also be provided at community facilities and businesses.

Pedestrian Network

The City should coordinate with Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) to improve pedestrian conditions on Lincoln Highway, specifically through the blocks west of Chicago Road where there have been a concentration of accidents. The City should work with IDOT to document the existing problems, identify potential solutions, and prioritize among these. Other key arterials that could benefit from pedestrian improvements include Ashland Avenue (from Dixie Highway to Lincoln Highway), Chicago Road (from Lincoln Highway to 26th Street), and Halsted Street (from Holbrook Road to Vollmer Road).

Recommendations for enhancing pedestrian amenities include improving poor sidewalk conditions or filling in gaps where sidewalk is missing, striping crosswalks at intersections and driveways, and installing bump outs/curb extensions and/or refuge islands at wide intersections. The City should continue to promote its sidewalk repair matching program to encourage resident participation.

Multi-use paths are off-street facilities to accommodate both pedestrians and bicyclists. The construction of multi-use paths along Chicago Road, Halsted Street, Joe Orr Road and Vollmer Road is recommended.



Implement Complete Streets Policy to ensure a walkable and bikeable community.

The primary objective of Complete Streets is to create a roadway that is safe for all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, and drivers. The City of Chicago Heights should prioritize the implementation of its Complete Streets policy to ensure new roadway projects and future roadway repairs accommodate all users.

Provide connections to regional trails.

The Chicago Heights Park District is working with Cook County to complete Old Plank Road Trail and Thorn Creek Trail segments through the City. Once completed, the trails will provide access to adjacent forest preserves and neighboring communities. In partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County, the City should lead the process to create trail connections to the Thorn Creek Trail and Old Plank Road Trail from selected bike routes and local roads identified on **Figure 6.2**. These connections should be prominently identified through proper signage to enhance crossing safety and advertise the trail for motorists.

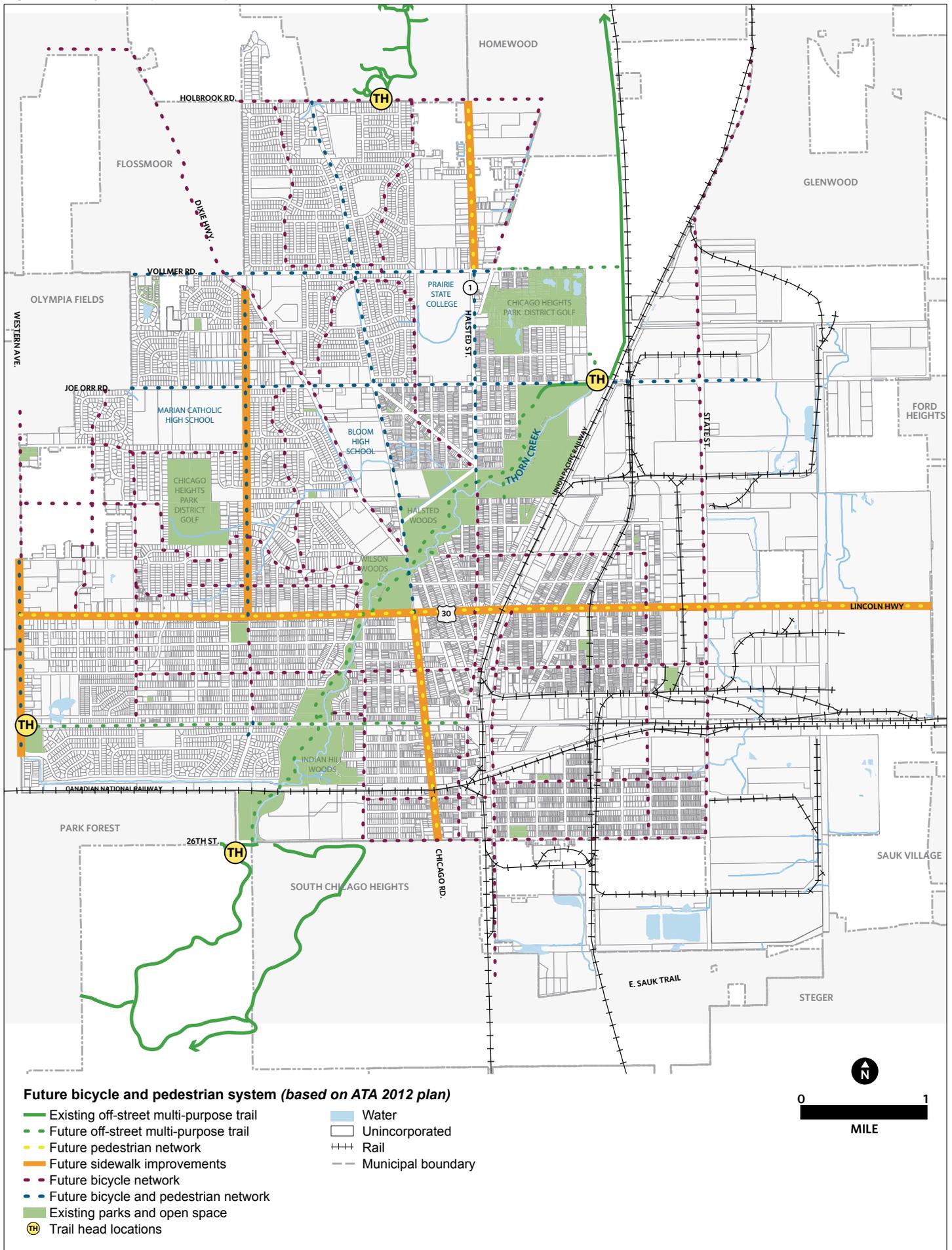
Organize a Safe Routes to School program with School District 170.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federally funded program to help identify and eliminate barriers for students to walk or bike to school. As outlined in the City's Active Transportation Plan, the Chicago Heights Pedestrian and Bike Task Force should organize a Safe Routes to School Committee and develop a SRTS Travel Plan that outlines the City's vision for safe routes and reflects both long-term and immediate goals for implementing the SRTS program. Once a travel plan is created, the City can qualify to receive SRTS funding for education, encouragement, enforcement, and engineering projects, including sidewalk construction.

Continue to facilitate awareness programs and events.

An annual Open Streets event on Ashland Avenue encourages residents to enjoy walking and biking in the City. Chicago Heights should continue to collaborate with the Active Transportation Alliance, Chicago Heights Park District, local schools, National Park Service, and University of Illinois Extension to promote similar events and programs that highlight the City's active transportation network.

Figure 6.1. Bicycle and pedestrian plan





Improve transit service and access.

Continue to work with Pace to ensure high quality and efficient transit throughout the community.

The existing conditions assessment indicates that a substantial portion of Chicago Heights residents are likely to depend on transit; however, some residents find there to be a disconnect between bus schedules and business and school hours. The City's demographic profile further signals a likely need for transit service, as transit dependency is typically gauged by household income, share of youth and elderly population, and household auto ownership. Chicago Heights has a relatively large share (34 percent) of residents under the age of 19 and a high share of very-low- and low-income families. Nearly half of all households have either one vehicle or no vehicles. Of those residents utilizing public transportation, the average commute time is nearly an hour, compared to less than 30 minutes for the average across all modes.

Since institutional and industrial areas are the employment centers and the key activity generators that centralize many potential transit riders, increasing transit use in these areas would translate into reduced traffic congestion, as fewer vehicular trips would be generated.

Significant improvements to the transit system will follow the build-out of the downtown area and other redevelopment priorities. Pace can assist the City with modifying routes as needed to accommodate changing or unmet demand, particularly to service the institutional and industrial areas as future redevelopment occurs.

Improve transit facilities and enhance accessibility.

Facility improvements, both at and adjacent to bus stops, can enhance access and make transit more desirable for potential riders. The City should work with Pace to support improvements such as addressing sidewalk gaps; installing paved waiting areas, crosswalks, curb cuts and countdown signals; and providing shelters, benches, and adequate signage. By working with Pace, the City should identify and prioritize improvements at high-use bus stops or those locations with the most need.

Support transit design for new downtown development.

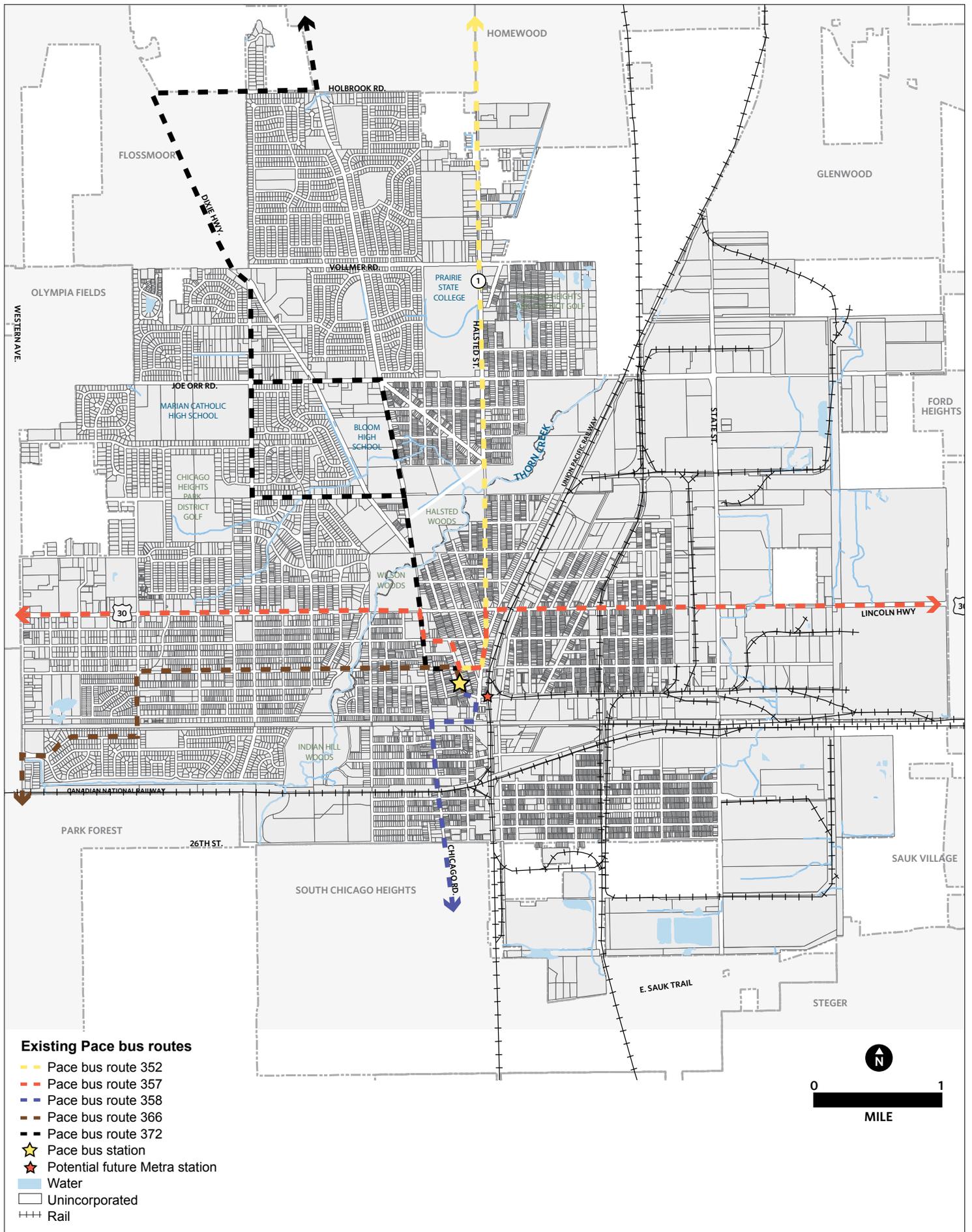
New downtown development is envisioned to be mixed-use, walkable and served by public transit. Since there will be a number of options for new construction and redevelopment, there is an opportunity to plan for transit accommodations from the beginning of the process. In accordance with Pace's Transit Supportive Guidelines, these accommodations should include designated bus stop areas that include passenger amenities and are in proximity to key destinations, roadway design to accommodate full-size buses, and an extensive sidewalk system that is fully accessible to all users.

The Downtown Subarea plan illustrates the proposed location of a future Metra station. Although the likelihood of a station being constructed in the downtown area is likely beyond the timeline of this Comprehensive Plan, because past plans and studies have discussed and recommended such a station at this location, it continues to be shown on the Subarea Plan (see **Chapter 8**). The Comprehensive Plan acknowledges the proposed location of the Metra station, and although it does not necessarily plan for it, it does not recommend land uses or development that would preclude it from happening in the future.

Promote taking transit to work.

Many Chicago Heights employees drive to work despite being within walking or biking distance of transit. The City should implement educational and awareness programs that target transit use and available options to serve the "last mile" of a commute. The Chicago Heights Active Transportation Plan (ATP) includes strategies such as implementing local media campaigns and incentive programs, hosting events, and providing Chicago Heights residents and employees with maps and other helpful information. Pace also has the ability to provide an employer shuttle and other van pool services that can help improve the first-last mile connection to transit.

Figure 6.2. Transit map

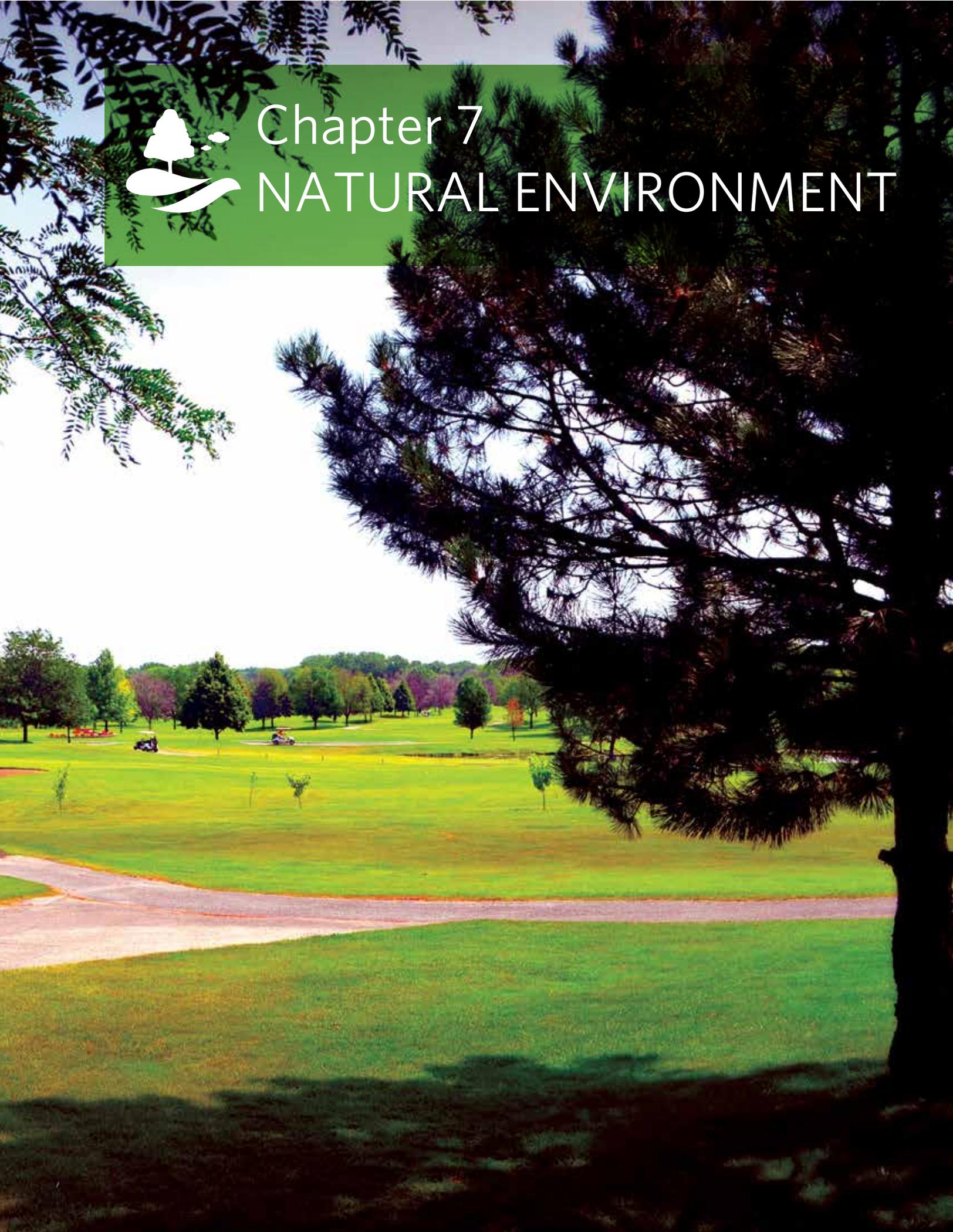


Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.



Chapter 7

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT





The City of Chicago Heights will work with local and regional partners to improve Thorn Creek's water quality and address flooding challenges. The City will also create new open spaces for active and passive recreation.

Key Findings:

- Flooding is a key concern for Chicago Heights. The City struggles with the flooding of Thorn Creek and its tributaries, as well as limited local drainage capacity due to aging infrastructure. Several projects are underway or have been completed to address flooding; however more needs to be done.
- Thorn Creek's water quality is also a concern for the City. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)'s most recent evaluation found that the Creek does not meet the standards necessary to support aquatic life or allow for primary contact.
- The City does not meet the national standard of 10 acres of open space for 1,000 residents. The Chicago Heights Park District is currently working to achieve an open space ratio of 11.5 acres per 1,000 people and to expand the number of Chicago Heights residents it reaches.

Recommendations

Flooding, Stormwater Management, and Water Quality

Increase awareness of City initiatives and programs to address flooding.

The City is already investing significant resources to address local flooding issues. The City should continue these initiatives and raise awareness of existing programs so more residents can take advantage of them. Current initiatives include:

- Large-scale flood relief planning initiatives for:
 - Ashland Avenue and Glengate Avenue
 - Saratoga Farms neighborhood
 - Chicago Road and Elmwood Street area
 - 202nd Street, near Ashland Avenue
- 50-50 Flood Prevention Program, under which the City matches individual homeowners' investments for residential flood prevention projects.

Continue City-wide infrastructure upgrades.

Infrastructure upgrades are required to ensure safe, reliable water service and to protect water quality. Chicago Heights' current sanitary and storm sewer infrastructure is nearing the end of its life cycle, contributing to flooding and water quality issues. Sanitary sewer repairs, as well as any future water supply repairs and maintenance, should not only be undertaken in response to emergencies but also proactively pursued to avoid costly damage and risks associated with water system failures. Likewise, it is recommended that the City upgrade its storm sewer infrastructure when possible to avoid contamination of local water bodies and flooding by improving its drainage and grading, as well as reducing the incidents of inlet clogging.

Recently, the City initiated a Preventive Maintenance Cleaning Program, under which all storm sewers in the City are being cleaned. This proactive initiative should be continued and expanded to include sanitary sewer improvements. These measures should also be included in a capital plan for infrastructure investments, as discussed below.

Create a Capital Improvement Plan.

The City should create a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that identifies city-wide infrastructure improvements, including water system improvements, sanitary and storm sewer improvements, as well as green infrastructure investments. The CIP will help the City prioritize infrastructure projects in the near-term, as well as plan for mid-term and long-term needs. The CIP will also help ensure that a systematic approach is taken to infrastructure projects and allow the City to identify and rectify any geographic gaps or disparities. The CIP should be updated on an annual basis and should include line items for both initial investment and future maintenance.



Encourage residents to participate in the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's Rain Barrel Program.

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) is encouraging residents living in its service area to purchase rain barrels. Rain barrels are repurposed plastic barrels designed to collect rainwater from rooftops for reuse. The rain barrel program is a part of the MWRD's green infrastructure initiative to help municipalities with managing stormwater and reducing water pollution. Homeowners can collect and reuse stormwater by installing rain barrels that are available for a nominal price year-round. The price includes an installation kit and home delivery for all residents living in the MWRD service area.

The City's Water Department should advertise this program to its citizens using a variety of techniques including announcements on the City, Park District, and School District websites, community newsletters, water bills, City and Park District bulletin board displays, and others. The City should also encourage participation in similar programs as they are announced by MWRD.

Educate residents, business owners, and developers on MWRD's Watershed Management Ordinance in order to expedite and facilitate development and redevelopment projects.

The Watershed Management Ordinance (WMO), which was adopted in fall 2013 and became effective May 2014, establishes uniform, minimum, county-wide stormwater management regulations throughout Cook County. Components that are regulated under the WMO include:

- Drainage and detention
- Volume control
- Floodplain management
- Isolated wetland protection
- Riparian environment protection
- Soil erosion and sediment control

City staff should familiarize themselves with the WMO and utilize the training materials as well as the Technical Guidance Manual available on MWRD's website. Staff should also attend WMO trainings offered by SSMMA. Staff can then guide applicants on how to apply the WMO to their developments and help ensure a more efficient review and approval process. More information on the WMO is available at <https://www.mwrdd.org/irj/portal/anonymous/managementordinance>.

Implement the Thorn Creek Watershed Based Plan and Plan Update to improve water quality and address flooding.

In 2005, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) provided funding to the Northeastern Illinois Planning Council, now CMAP, for the development of a Thorn Creek Watershed Based Plan (WBP). The Thorn Creek WBP identifies resource-based and watershed coordination goals, as well as a broad variety of recommendations, ranging from policy and educational initiatives to structural and non-structural interventions. Currently, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and CMAP are working on a plan update, which will create a watershed-wide summary of the best management practices (BMPs) recommended for the watershed, with a focus on water quality and BMPs for nonpoint sources pollution.

The City should work to implement both the Thorn Creek WBP and the plan update. The Thorn Creek WBP should be used as a guide for both Citywide and watershed-wide initiatives and policies, while the plan update should be used to identify the BMPs most relevant to Chicago Heights and specific projects to undertake.

Thorn Creek WBP.

As a first step, the City should work on implementing the municipal-level recommendations identified in the plan. More specifically, the City should prioritize the following initiatives:

- Adopt and enforce flexible local zoning and subdivision regulations that allow adaptable, nontraditional designs for development, stormwater management, and nonpoint source pollution reduction measures. Regulations should limit runoff volume increases, minimize impervious surface area, and minimize soil compaction during and following construction.
- Enact and enforce ordinances to protect floodplains, riparian buffer areas, flood prone areas, natural depressional storage areas, and other natural retention and drainage features. Acquire and protect floodplains for flood prevention, open space, and environmental enhancement along the main stem and tributaries.
- Evaluate existing road maintenance practices for opportunities to reduce pollutants in runoff, reduce use of road salt, etc.
- Initiate program to screen for illicit wastewater discharge connections to storm sewers.

In the longer term, the City should work to implement the goals and recommendations that require collaboration and coordination with partners. Key partners to work with include Forest Preserves of Cook County, Cook County and Will County, SSMMA, MWRD, Thorn Creek Basin Sanitary District, and neighboring communities.



Plan Update.

Funding for implementation of BMPs is available from a variety of sources, including the Clean Water Act Section 319 Grants. Once the plan update is complete, the City should identify specific BMP implementation projects to undertake. Potential projects include urban stormwater infrastructure retrofits (such as bioretention, vegetated swale retrofits, detention basin retrofits, and building retrofits), stream channel and riparian corridor restoration, chloride reduction, and stream maintenance and restoration.

In order for implementation to be successful, the City will need to educate businesses and residents about the benefits of BMPs and potentially develop incentives for their implementation. The City should also work with the Park District to introduce appropriate BMPs (such as native plantings, community gardening beds, planting beds, and drainage swales) in parks to assist with stormwater management. Similar efforts should be pursued with community schools, where they can also serve a valuable educational purpose. Installations for stormwater management can be used by teachers as outdoor classrooms to aid in teaching lessons about the natural environment.

Participate in sub-regional water quality improvement, flooding, and stormwater management initiatives and partnerships.

In addition to the municipal level measures Chicago Heights can take to address flooding and water quality issues, there are a number of regional and sub-regional level initiatives that the City can participate in for additional direction and support, and to address issues more effectively. Participating in inter-governmental initiatives is particularly important for water management and quality issues, as watersheds, and thus watershed management, cut across jurisdictional lines and involve many stakeholders. Key initiatives and partnerships in which to participate include:

- MWRD's Little Calumet Watershed Planning Council
- The Millennium Reserve Calumet Stormwater Collaborative
- Chicago Wilderness's green infrastructure mapping and planning process

Additional detail on these initiatives is provided below.

Attend MWRD's Little Calumet Watershed Planning Council meetings to promote implementation of MWRD's Detailed Watershed Plan for Thorn Creek. MWRD is responsible for the maintenance of metropolitan Chicago's sewage system and water reclamation plant capacity. Since 2004, MWRD has served as the Regional Stormwater Management Agency for Cook County and is involved in the planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of flood control facilities and related stormwater management projects. As part of this work, MWRD developed Detailed Watershed Based Plans (DWP) to assess the specific conditions and needs of each watershed. The Little Calumet River DWP includes a chapter that focuses on Thorn Creek and analyzes flooding issues in the communities of the Thorn Creek Watershed. While no near-term major flood control projects have been identified for the Thorn Creek Subwatershed as of the DWP's publication, the data from the DWP is used to inform MWRD's county-wide stormwater management plan and CIP.

MWRD's Watershed Planning Councils (WPCs) play a key role in advising and assisting implementation of these plans, as well as advocating for local needs. SSMAA serves as the Little Calumet River WPC and convenes quarterly meetings. The City should attend these meetings to monitor and promote the implementation of the DWP and bring any new local issues to the attention of the WPC. Attending quarterly meetings will also help the City stay abreast of sub-regional flooding and stormwater management initiatives and opportunities for multi-jurisdictional collaboration.

Participate in the Millennium Reserve Calumet Stormwater Collaborative.

The Calumet Stormwater Collaborative was recently selected by the Millennium Reserve Steering Committee as a priority project (see **Chapter 5** for additional information on the Millennium Reserve). The Collaborative is facilitated by MPC and comprised of the key stakeholders controlling land, infrastructure, financing tools or regulatory powers related to stormwater. As described by MPC, its initial purpose is to foster awareness of the many ongoing stormwater management initiatives in the Calumet region, forge a shared understanding of terms, establish common goals and identify opportunities to align existing projects (or develop new ones) toward those goals.

By attending Collaborative meetings, the City can stay abreast of local and regional stormwater management initiatives, learn more about BMPs, and assist in the identification of priority projects for the Collaborative and partners such as the County, MWRD, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and the IEPA to undertake and/or fund.

Participate in the Chicago Wilderness’s green infrastructure mapping and planning process and in future implementation.

Chicago Wilderness, a nonprofit coalition, is working with the communities of the Millennium Reserve Calumet Core on a green infrastructure mapping and planning process that is set to conclude by the end of 2014. As described by Chicago Wilderness, the process will increase awareness of local natural assets and issues and build the foundation for long-term natural resource protection and stewardship through sustainable land-use strategies. More specifically, the project will:

- Map the core green infrastructure for the Millennium Reserve. This will focus on an interconnected network of public and private open space and natural resources that conserve ecosystem functions, sustain clean air and water, and provide trails and greenways that benefit people and wildlife.
- Map opportunities for sustainable localized green infrastructure strategies. The project team will work with the communities to map potential “opportunity areas” for green infrastructure that include retrofits, brownfields, and other issue areas that represent priorities for site-based green infrastructure. Communities and area partners will be able to reference this map to identify potential places for future green infrastructure implementation projects.
- Assist organizations and communities in the Millennium Reserve in understanding the impacts of climate change and potential adaptation strategies using green infrastructure.

The City should participate in the mapping and planning process and stay involved as the project moves towards implementation. Additional information is available at <http://www.cwmemberhub.org/lead-a-project/swat-millennium-reserve>.



Parks and Open Space

Assist in the implementation of the Park District’s Parks and Open Space Master Plan.

The Chicago Heights Park District’s (CHPD) 2013 Master Plan outlines key recommendations to improve the District’s operations, programming, administration, and communication. The Master Plan includes a number of goals including: 1) to expand the District’s holdings and 2) to increase the District’s visibility and impact. The City of Chicago Heights should support the Park District in property acquisition and park development whenever feasible. In addition to supporting the Park District’s Master Plan, the City should also work towards implementing the parks and open space plan in this document.

Work with the Park District to design spaces that support recreational activity and assist with stormwater management.

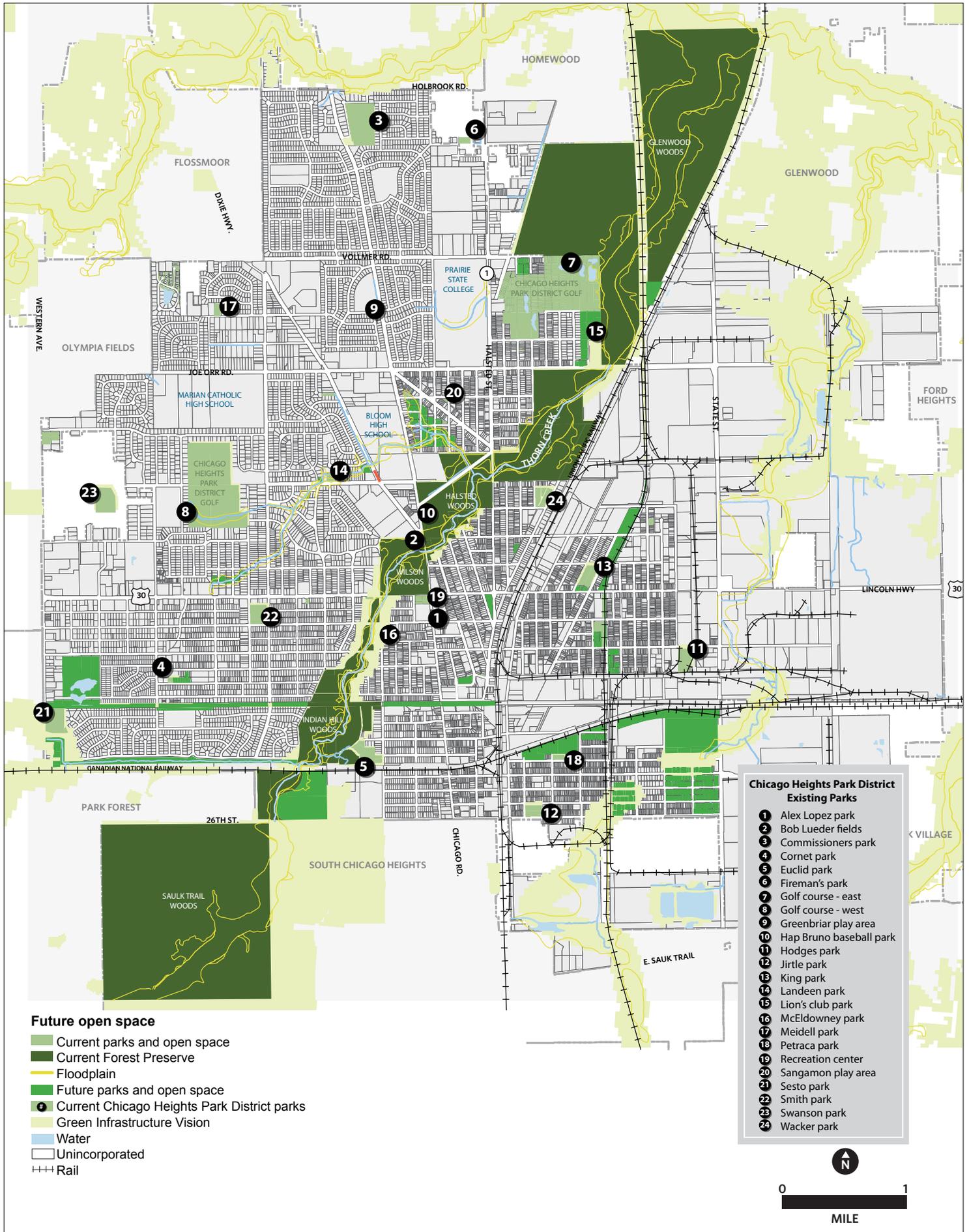
Chicago Heights has significant amounts of vacant land, much of which is vacant due to flooding issues. A key strategy for increasing park and open space acreage will be for the City and CHPD to target this land and use it for both recreation and stormwater management. By incorporating green infrastructure and stormwater management BMPs into park design, and by designing detention and retention facilities to serve recreational purposes, the City and CHPD can ensure a greater likelihood of implementation, as projects will be eligible for a wider array of grant funds.

It is important to note that the potential acquisition or ownership of future open space recommended on **Figure 7.1** is not set in stone and that likely stakeholders to involve in finalizing land acquisition will include the Park District, the Forest Preserves of Cook County, residents and homeowners associations, as well as businesses.

Protect natural areas as recommended in the Green Infrastructure Vision.

In 2004, Chicago Wilderness developed a Green Infrastructure Vision (GIV) for the broader metropolitan region, including the City of Chicago Heights. The GIV identifies many acres of land that can be restored, protected, or connected through conservation and thoughtful, sustainable development practices. It also guides the protection and development of an accessible, interconnected network of healthy ecosystems that contribute to economic vitality and quality of life for all the region’s residents. Chicago Wilderness recently facilitated an update to the Green Infrastructure Vision (titled GIV 2.0) which enhances the functionality for decision-makers across the region. The City should work with the Park District, the Forest Preserve, as well as businesses and residents, to protect the natural areas and habitats as recommended in the GIV.

Figure 7.1. Parks and open space plan



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.



Chapter 8 DOWNTOWN SUBAREA PLAN





This chapter highlights the key issues and opportunities within downtown and outlines key recommendations to help strengthen this important area within Chicago Heights.

Key Findings:

- Downtown Chicago Heights represents the heart of the community. A number of important community facilities are located within the area including City Hall, the Park District facility, the library, the police station, St. James Hospital, and several religious institutions.
- Downtown includes a number of historic buildings and public art displays which strengthen and support the City's rich history. Adding to the historic character of the downtown is the former Chicago Heights National Bank building at 1651 Halsted Street, which has been designated a local landmark.
- Unfortunately, the downtown area has seen years of disinvestment and vacancies have increased. One of the key objectives for the City of Chicago Heights is to strengthen its downtown area.
- Although several plans have been completed over the years, including a transit-oriented development (TOD) plan in 2009, a new plan is necessary to help guide City staff and property owners. Because of the economic downturn that has happened since the creation of the TOD plan, and because of the importance of the downtown area, the following section presents a new plan to strengthen the area.

The new downtown subarea plan builds upon the relevant recommendations from the 2009 TOD plan, input received from the public and City officials throughout the planning process, as well as an examination of existing land use patterns and economic conditions.

The downtown subarea plan consists of the following four components:

1. Existing land use
2. Future land use plan
3. Transportation and circulation improvement plan
4. Image and identity plan

Recommendations

Mixed-use walkable area

Strengthen downtown to be more pedestrian-friendly.

To keep consistent with the character of residents' vision, the downtown should continue to feature a mix of uses. Mixed-use projects should be designed to allow residents to work, shop, access recreation facilities, and live all within walking distance, which lessens the dependence upon the automobile and supports a healthy lifestyle through biking and walking opportunities. Future uses should include a mixture of retail, as well as civic uses, public amenities, offices, and services such as human services/nonprofits. These should be mixed within the same site or ideally within the same building.

Potential Metra station

Continue to engage with regional transportation agencies.

Although the likelihood of a Metra station opening in the downtown area within the life of the Comprehensive Plan is low, the subarea plan recommends future land uses and improvements that would not preclude a transit station in the future. Therefore, the 2009 TOD Plan's station location and much of its commuter parking areas are shown in this new plan. The City should continue to engage with regional transportation agencies to work towards the creation of a Metra SouthEast Service, while recognizing that the new rail line is not currently funded and funds for its construction are not projected to be available before 2040.

Downtown Redevelopment

In order to implement the recommendations of the downtown subarea plan the City should take a proactive approach to working with current owners and marketing the area to future businesses and developers.

Support walking and biking in the downtown area.

The City should install more highly visible pedestrian crossings at key intersections within the area. Pedestrian crossings should include improved signage and brick pavers or painted markings. The City should also work to create on-street bike trail connections between the downtown and other areas of the community.

Pursue economic development incentives.

Consider a combination of economic development incentives such as the creation of a special service area (SSA).

Update the city's zoning ordinance.

Create a new zoning designation such as a mixed-use downtown classification. A mixed-use district would help promote the type of land uses and development patterns envisioned for the downtown.

Improve the street network.

Close unnecessary streets, and extend other streets as shown. Benefits to realigning the street pattern as recommended would include strengthening connectivity, improving circulation, and creating larger more cohesive development sites.

Realign the intersection of 15th Street and Halsted Street. The City should conduct an engineering study to determine what type of realignment is most feasible at this intersection. The subarea plan also recommends closing Emerald Avenue as part of this strategy. The intent of this recommendation is to create a unique entrance into the downtown area that also improves safety and circulation.

Improve the image of downtown.

Bury overhead utility lines to improve the appearance of the downtown especially within the Chicago Road and Lincoln Highway corridors. Unfortunately, the overhead utility lines negatively impact the attractiveness from the street near amenities like St. James Hospital and the Fresh Market.

Enforce design guidelines through a development review process.

It is important that new developments are attractive and constructed of high-quality design and materials. New developments should also support the historic character of the community.

Adopt a vacant storefront ordinance.

The City should adopt an ordinance for vacant and underutilized properties that requires landlords to install some form of decorative display to obstruct direct view into the first floor of vacant properties within 60 days of the tenant vacating the premises. Potential options for screening could include:

- Art and historic imagery displays
- Decorative paper applied to the window
- Public art displays
- Seasonal decorations

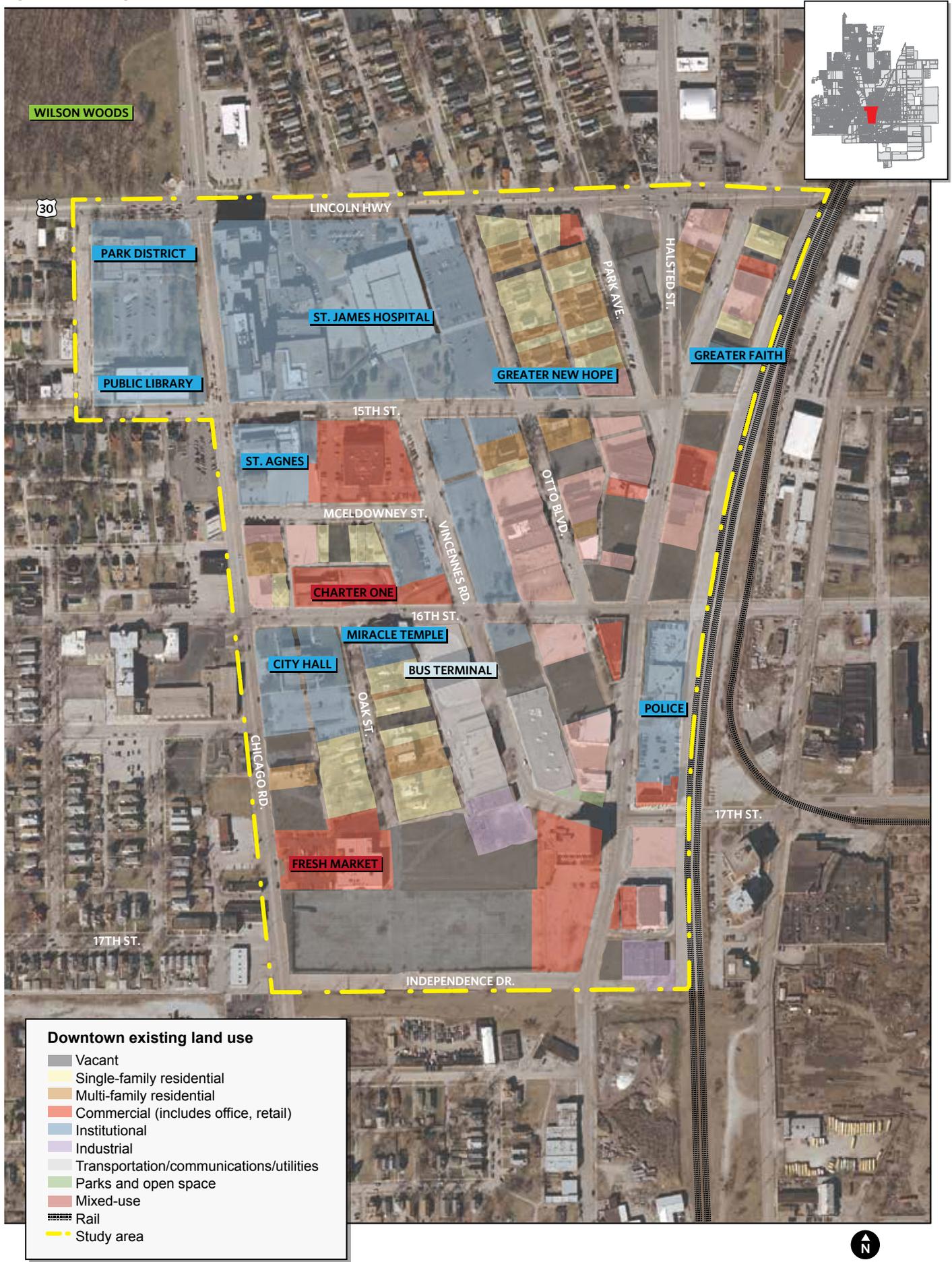
Create new public open space.

The City should work with property owners, developers and the Chicago Heights Park District to add more public parks and plazas in the downtown.



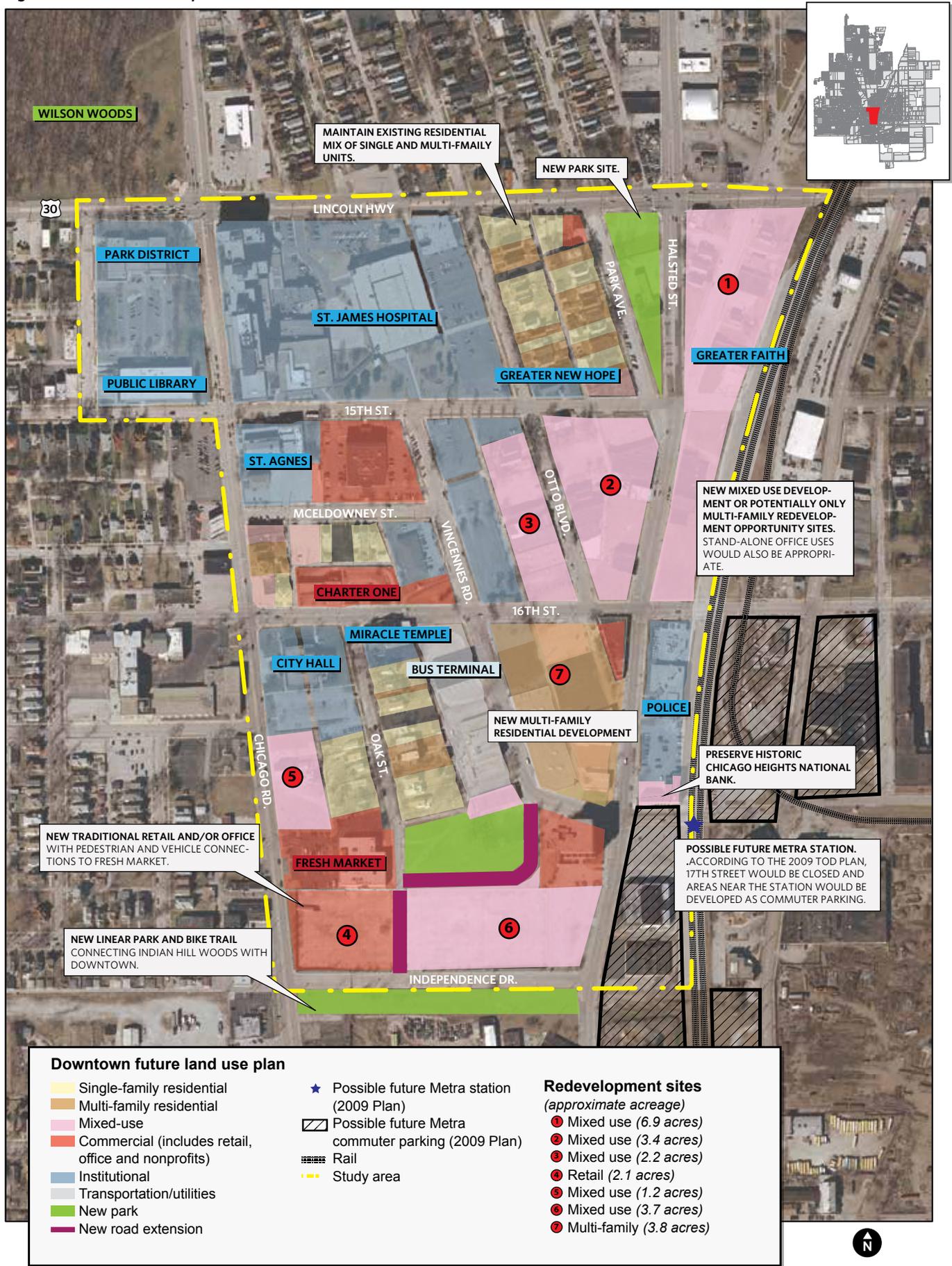
| Image credit: Solomon Cordwell Buenz

Figure 8.1. Existing land use in the downtown area



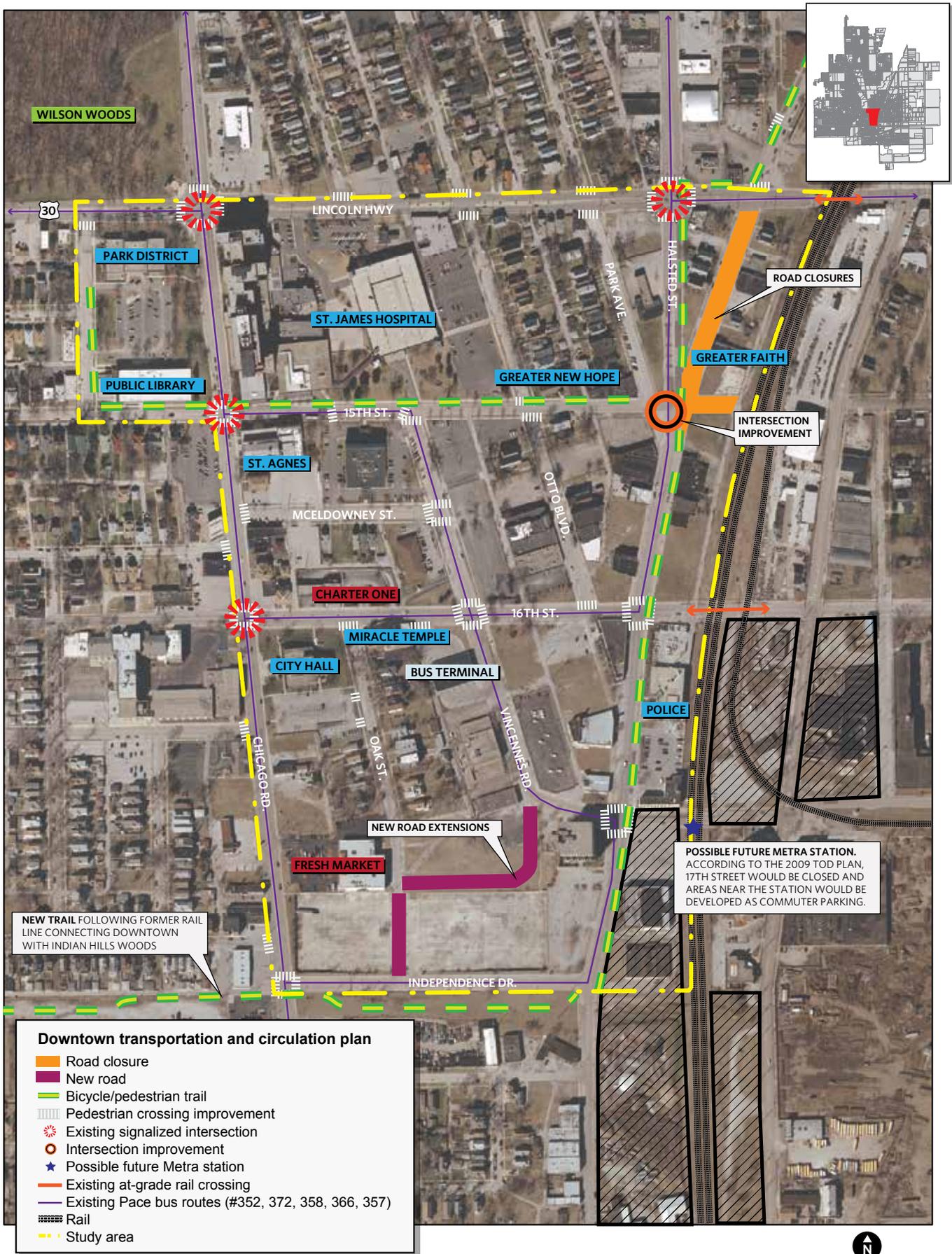
Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 8.2. Future land use plan for the downtown area



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

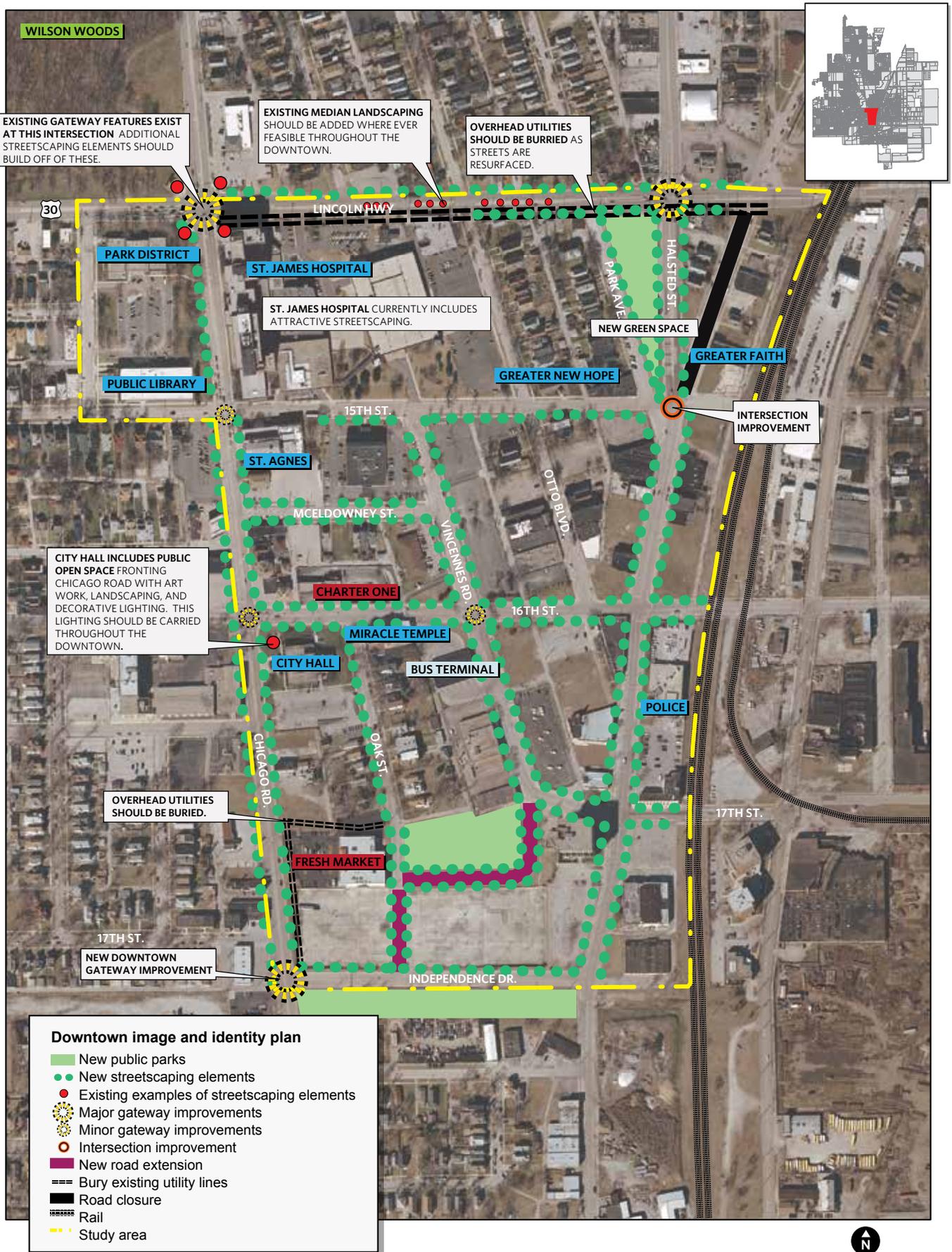
Figure 8.3. Transportation plan for the downtown area



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.



Figure 8.4. Image and identity plan for the downtown area



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 8.5. Conceptual illustration for redevelopment in the downtown area



Source: Solomon Cordwell Buenz.



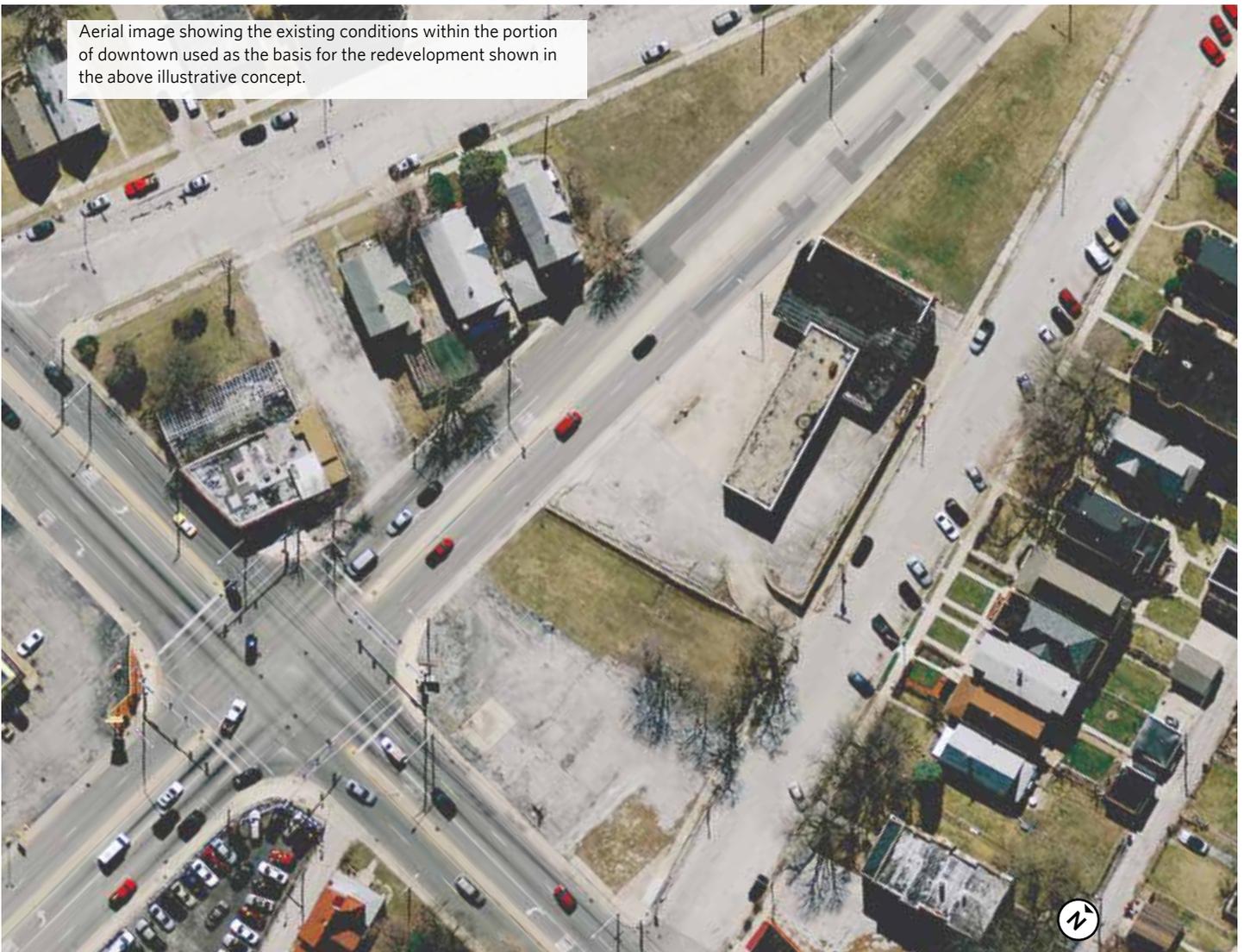
Aerial image showing the existing conditions within the portion of downtown used as the basis for the redevelopment shown in the above illustrative concept.

Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Figure 8.6. Conceptual illustration for redevelopment in the downtown



Source: Solomon Cordwell Buenz.



Aerial image showing the existing conditions within the portion of downtown used as the basis for the redevelopment shown in the above illustrative concept.

Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.



Chapter 9

LINCOLN HIGHWAY AND WESTERN AVENUE COMMERCIAL SUBAREA PLAN





This chapter highlights the key issues and opportunities within the Lincoln Highway and Western Avenue commercial subarea and outlines key recommendations to help strengthen this important commercial area within Chicago Heights.

Key Findings:

- It is a City priority to attract sit-down restaurants and/or additional retail opportunities to the area. The subarea's current zoning designation of B-1 Business and Retail is compatible with these goals, as it accommodates a wide range of retail stores and services establishments for day-to-day and occasional shopping.
- Multi-modal transportation access to and within the subarea is limited. Both Lincoln Highway and Western Avenue, the primary access roads for the area, are very busy, car-oriented corridors that are considered by many to be unsafe for pedestrians or cyclists. In the area north of Lincoln Highway, there are only two north-south streets, and in addition to lacking sidewalks and cycling lanes, neither of these streets connects directly to the rest of the City's street network.
- There is a Transportation Improvement Program project planned for the intersection of Western Avenue and Lincoln Highway which will address signal modernization and allow for continuous bi-directional lanes. This effort to improve vehicular circulation should be combined with pedestrian and bicycle circulation improvements.

Recommendations

The City should pursue the following strategies to help ensure the continued health of the Lincoln-Western commercial node, and to help market the area to developers and new businesses. These strategies focus on improving accessibility to the area, enhancing the area's visual appeal, and facilitating redevelopment. As this commercial node is part of a TIF district, the City can use TIF funds to finance the recommended infrastructure improvements.

Improve multimodal circulation to increase accessibility.

Increase accessibility within the subarea.

The City should increase the subarea's accessibility by implementing the pedestrian and bicycle improvements outlined in **Chapter 6** and described in more detail in the Chicago Heights Active Transportation Plan (ATP). Increased accessibility for individuals with limited or no access to vehicles will help existing businesses and assist in attracting new businesses

by expanding the number of potential customers. Improved pedestrian and bicycle accessibility is particularly important in Chicago Heights, where age, income, and household auto ownership suggest that a substantial portion of residents are likely to be dependent on transit and active transportation options.

Figure 9.1 depicts recommended multimodal circulation improvements, including the creation of new roads to improve both north-south and east-west connectivity. It will be important for the City to improve pedestrian and vehicular internal circulation both as development occurs and in order to attract and facilitate new development, since the subarea currently only has one internal road (Hilltop Avenue). **Figure 9.1** outlines potential new road alignments, but final street extension alignments will depend upon future site redevelopment and property ownership.

Improve the subarea’s appearance.

Install “gateway” signage and make streetscaping improvements.

The intersection of Lincoln Highway and Western Avenue is one of the City’s key “gateway” intersections, welcoming visitors to Chicago Heights and giving them their first view of the City. For visitors driving through the City, this intersection and the Lincoln Highway and Western Avenue corridors are their primary view of the City. It is important that this introduction be favorable, leaving visitors with a positive image of the community.

In order to improve the intersection and corridors, the City should adopt the “gateway” guidelines outlined in the ATP. Some key improvements to include are gateway and wayfinding signage, identity features, street trees, and landscaping.

Improve surface parking areas.

Create shared parking opportunities to facilitate development and reduce impervious surfaces.

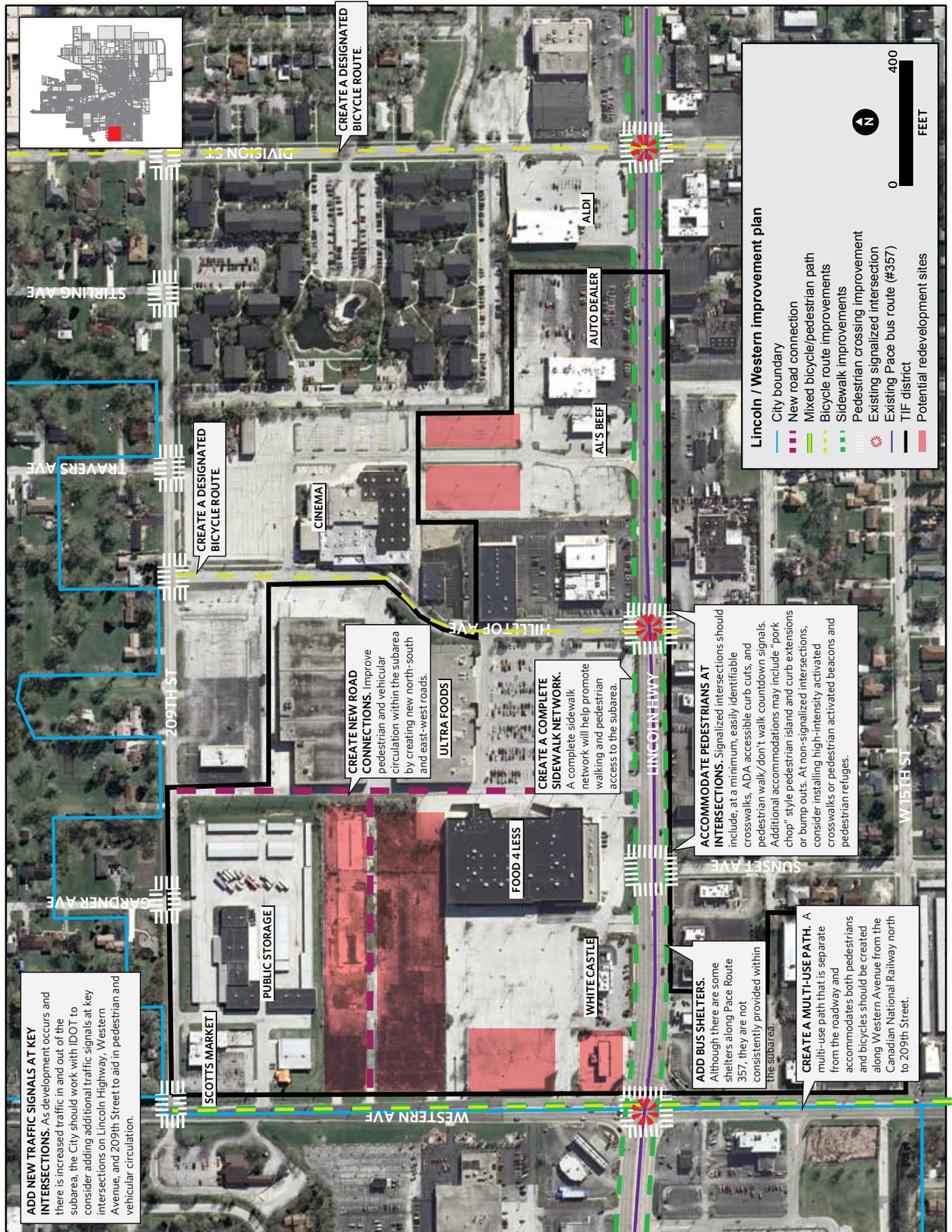
The subarea has a significant amount of surface parking, much of which is underutilized. Establishing shared parking opportunities would help the City encourage higher quality compact redevelopment by reducing the burden of parking requirements; attract new development without increasing — and potentially even reducing — the amount of impervious surface; and eliminate frequent curb cuts along Lincoln Highway and Western Avenue to improve vehicular and pedestrian circulation.

City officials should work with businesses that have underutilized surface parking to enter into contractual agreements with other existing businesses and with new developments. Subsequently, the City should explore the creation of a Shared Parking District, allowing businesses in the subarea to access all parking spaces. To create a Shared Parking District, the City would have to:

- Work with property owners and businesses to educate them about Shared Parking Districts and their advantages.
- Work with property owners and businesses to develop mutual agreements for public use of private parking.
- Install appropriate information signage and wayfinding signs for users.
- Launch an awareness campaign through subarea businesses and local media.

Depending on the success of the Shared Parking District, City officials should consider expanding the concept to all commercial nodes. The City should also update the zoning ordinance to permit shared parking in commercial districts and reduce parking requirements in general. This would allow for more efficient use of land as redevelopment occurs.

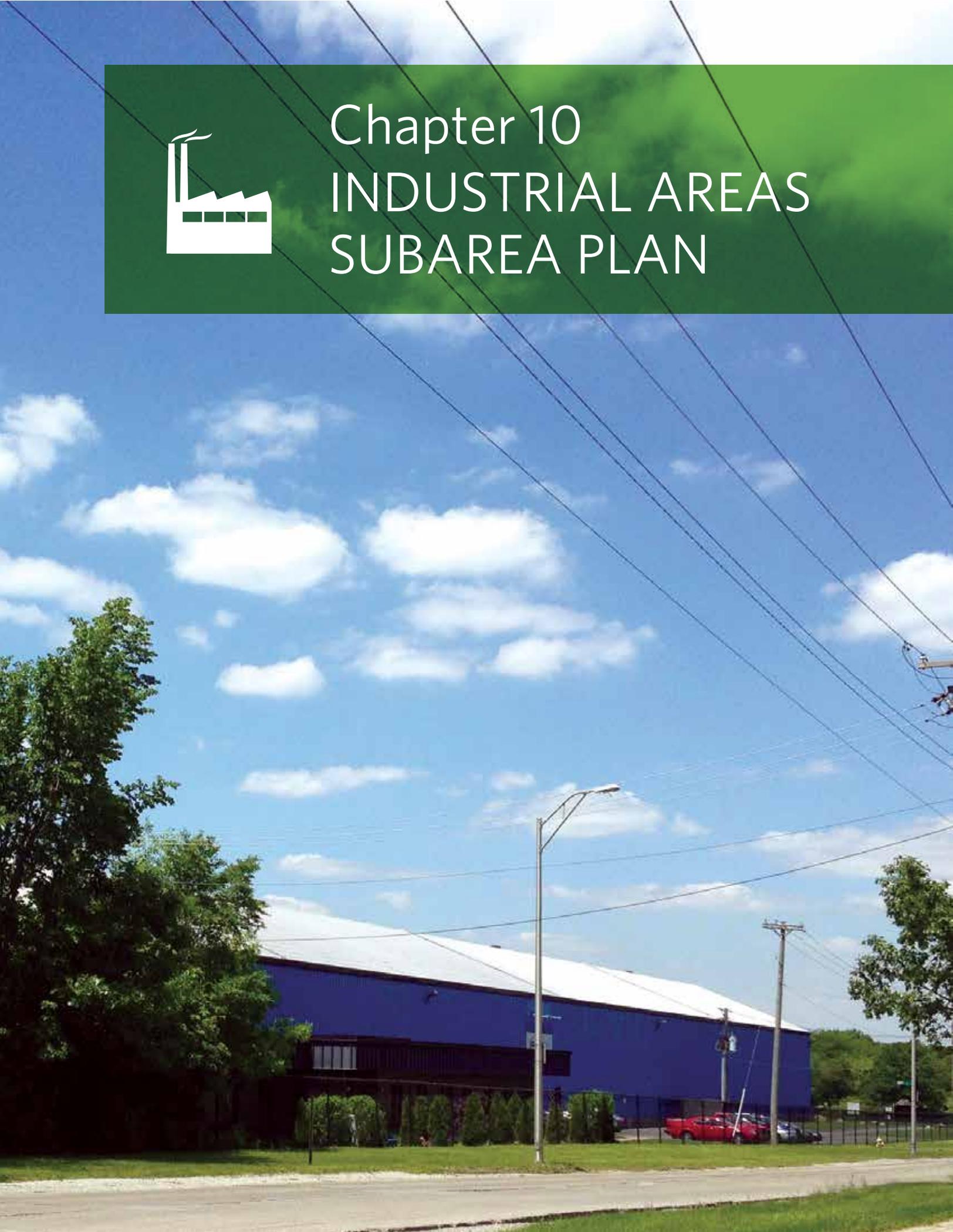
Figure 9.1. Enhancement plan for Lincoln Highway and Western Avenue commercial subarea



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.



Chapter 10 INDUSTRIAL AREAS SUBAREA PLAN





This chapter outlines the key issues and opportunities within the City's industrial areas and provides recommendations to strengthen industrial businesses.

Key Findings:

- Chicago Heights has identified five priority development sites located between State Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, just north of 14th Street/ Lincoln Highway.
- Union Pacific Railroad (UP) and Canadian National Railroad (CN) both serve Chicago Heights, making it an attractive option for heavy manufacturing industries that require direct access to rail.
- Labor force development is important to numerous industries that need to attract highly skilled workers. Numerous programs can be of assistance in educating workers for these types of positions and serve as a catalyst in attracting new companies to Chicago Heights.

South Suburban Sub-market

Chicago Heights is located within the South Suburban sub-market as delineated by CBRE (formally called CB Richard Ellis Group). The sub-market includes the following suburbs:

Table 10.1.
CBRE south suburbs industrial market communities

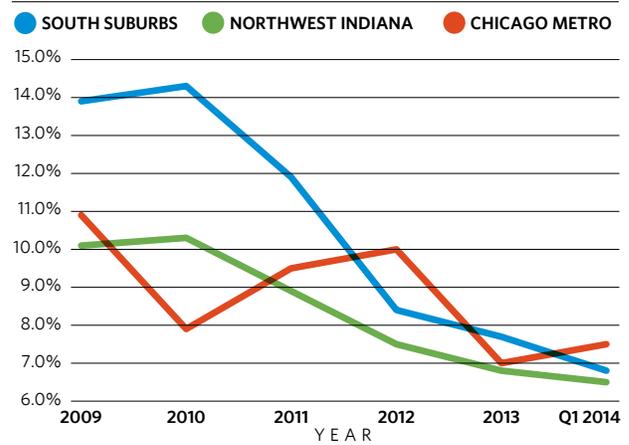
Beecher (distant)	Harvey	Palos Park
Blue Island	Homewood	Park Forest
Burnham	Lansing	Peotone (distant)
Calumet City	Lynwood	Posen
Chicago Heights (subject)	Markham	Richton Park
Country Club Hills	Matteson	Riverdale
Crestwood	Midlothian	Robbins
Crete	Mokena (part)	Sauk Village
Dixmoor	Monee	South Chicago Heights
Dolton	Oak Forest	Steger
Flossmoor	Olympia Fields	Thornton
Ford Heights	Orland Hills	Tinley Park
Frankfort	Orland Park (part)	University Park
Glenwood	Palos Heights	

Source: CBRE.

This sub-market has somewhat less than 575 million square feet of industrial space, representing 5.1 percent of the metro area's total of more than 1.1 billion square feet. The vacancy rate at the end of 2013 in the sub-market was 7.7 percent, 0.9 percentage points higher than the Chicago metro area as a whole. By the end of the first quarter of 2014, this gap has narrowed to 0.3 percentage points. Vacancy rates in the South Suburban sub-market have exceeded the metro area's for the past five years, sometimes by a wide margin. However, it has fallen steadily since the 2010 peak of 14.3 percent (when net absorption was also very negative) as the economy has recovered. The metro area's vacancy also peaked in 2010 at 10.3 percent.

According to the brokerage firm Colliers International, developers have not delivered any new industrial product in the South Suburban sub-market for the last three quarters, including the first quarter of 2014. In 2013, the greatest decline in vacancy occurred in spaces ranging from 30,000 to 60,000 square feet. Northwest Indiana, a competitive sub-market in terms of location and labor pool, showed greater volatility in vacancy rates since 2009, outperforming the south suburbs and the metro area in 2010, but then rising 2.1 percentage points by the close of 2012 as it went through two years of negative net absorption before a 2013 recovery.

Chart 10.1. Industrial vacancy rates 2009-14 (Q1)





Recommendations

The City should pursue the following recommendations to address industrial concerns, including vacancy, workforce development, rail access, and utilities, that plague both Chicago Heights and the South Suburban subregion.

Attract new industry and companies to key development sites.

Focus on priority development sites.

Chicago Heights has identified five priority development sites in its boundaries which will play a large role in attracting new industry to the city. For the purpose of the Subarea Plan, the southern parcels of Site C, Site D, and Site E have been analyzed in further detail.

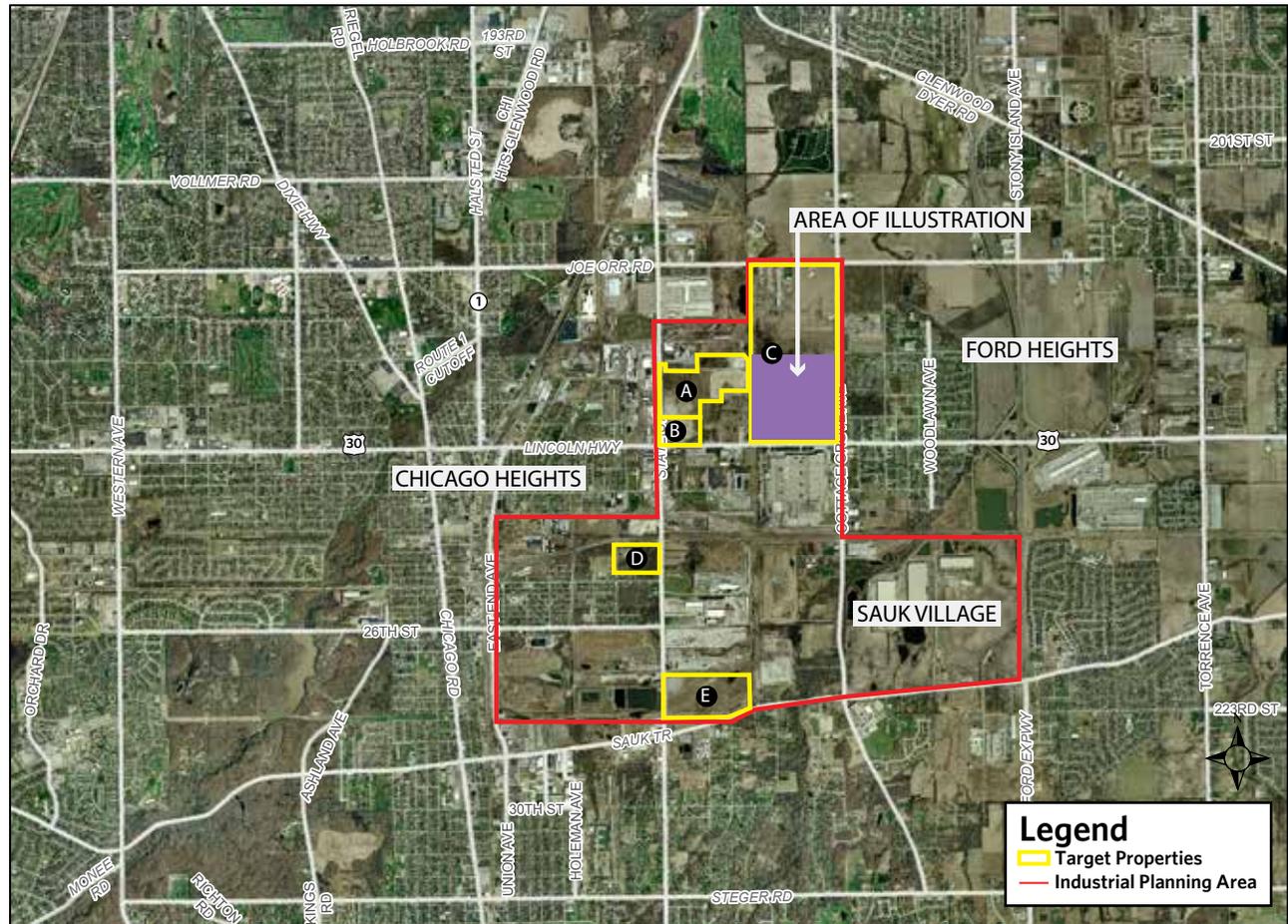
- **Site C (south parcels):** Located between State Street and Cottage Grove Avenue, north of Lincoln Highway, Site C is comprised of two large parcels (northern parcels and southern parcels). Both parcels on the site are located directly on the boundary between Chicago Heights and Ford Heights. This location, within Ford Heights School District 169 (rather than Chicago Heights School District 170), makes redevelopment difficult due to the extremely high tax rate in the Ford Heights School District. The City should work to identify funding resources and tax incentives that can assist in alleviating some of the tax burden associated with these parcels.

A recent market analysis conducted by Valerie S. Kretchmer Associates, Inc., identifies potential on the southern parcels for large scale, class-A distribution centers and small class-A logistics, manufacturing, or smaller warehouses. There is also a need for local retail and restaurants along Lincoln Highway that can be accessed by employees of neighboring business and the community as a whole. **Figures 10.2 and 10.3** provide configuration options for the identified southern parcels.

- **Site D:** Located on the west side of State Street just south of E. 17th Street, this 20-acre parcel covered in vegetation is currently owned by the City. This site is rail-served and has lower tax rates than Site C, due to its location in Chicago Heights School District 170.
- **Site E:** Located at the southeast corner of State Street and Sauk Trail, Site E has potential for rail service from the CN line. The 64-acre site has development potential that would be attractive based on the rail potential and access to Sauk Trail, making its proximity to I-394 similar to the newly developed LogistiCenter in neighboring Sauk Village. Taxes at this site would be some of the lowest in the industrial area.

The industrial area has additional vacant sites, but several of these are considered brownfields. A good number of the sites are currently owned by the City and could be well positioned for development if remediated. Sites within the industrial area are suitable for new or expanded manufacturing facilities, primarily for companies already located in the south suburbs or in areas with similar manufacturing bases. Other companies can be attracted that require good highway and close-in rail access.

Figure 10.1. Target industrial properties



Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, 2014.

Continue to utilize Cook County tax incentives and TIF infrastructure funds to attract new industry.

Utilize tax incentives.

Cook County tax incentives are critical to attracting business to Chicago Heights. Chicago Heights and surrounding communities in Cook County are at a disadvantage to those in nearby Will County and Northwest Indiana in terms of real estate tax rates. Illinois also has higher labor taxes than Indiana. County Class 6B and Class 8 property tax incentives can be used in Chicago Heights to significantly reduce taxes. The continued use of tax incentives and TIF infrastructure funds for development of new facilities will keep Chicago Heights competitive in various industrial sectors. The City should also participate in any efforts by Cook County to address the overall countywide tax structure and classification system.

Consider the creation of a new TIF district.

The City should also consider the feasibility of creating a TIF district that encompasses the south parcels of Site C. A detailed analysis should be completed to weigh the benefits of adding a fourth industrial TIF to promote development within Chicago Heights.

Improve energy efficiency.

Work with utility providers to improve energy efficiency.

For older industrial businesses, Chicago Heights should consider providing resources to improve energy efficiency in existing buildings. There are numerous energy efficiency improvements that could help reduce energy consumption and costs for industrial buildings throughout the City. Chicago Heights should reach out to utility providers to assist building owners in obtaining professional energy audits. Commonwealth Edison (ComEd) and Nicor Gas both run programs to help business conserve energy and reduce energy bills.



Figure 10.2. Illustrative concept showing industrial development (looking northwest from Lincoln Hwy. and Cottage Grove Ave.)



Source: Solomon Cordwell Buenz.

ComEd’s Smart Ideas for Your Business program offers a variety of incentives, services, and solutions to help identify energy saving technologies and operational improvements for businesses. Nicor Gas’s Energy Smart program provides assessments, incentives, loans and other services for local businesses. The City should provide access to this and similar services to local industrial business through the “Economic Development” page of the city website.

Support workforce development.

Connect with education partners.

Chapter 5 provides recommendations and resources for supporting workforce development in Chicago Heights. A primary focus of city staff should be connecting with education partners such as Prairie State College’s Industrial Technology program to produce an educated workforce that can support industrial growth and local hiring practices specific to Chicago Heights and its residents.

Make infrastructure improvements.

Undertake street, rail crossing, and intersection improvements.

Safety and infrastructure is important for attracting companies and employees to Chicago Heights. General roadway improvements, including general street resurfacing, smoothing rough rail crossings, and improved intersection signaling and signage, should be pursued. The City should also work with Ford Heights to ensure street maintenance and appearance is up to standards, especially along the 14th Street/Lincoln Highway corridor, a heavily used entrance into the area.

Figure 10.3. Industrial subarea plan



Source: Solomon Cordwell Buenz.

Market existing rail access.

Assemble and market development sites that utilize the existing rail infrastructure in Chicago Heights.

Rail served sites with a minimum of 20 acres are anticipated to be the most marketable sites for industry in Chicago Heights. The city should continue its work to assemble these sites for development. In addition to the assembly of parcels, the city should focus on marketing efforts to new businesses for these sites. UP and CN are the most prominent rail service providers in Chicago Heights, however CSX and Norfolk Southern have an unclear ownership structure of rail within the city. City staff should create a master directory of sites served by rail, noting the current

level of service, ownership, and which rails deliver service as part of the above-mentioned marketing efforts. The City should also investigate the cost and timeline for requesting and installing switch and spur systems for on-site rail connections for newly assembled parcels. It will be difficult to market sites where this process has not already been initiated.

Figure 10.3 provides additional detail of configuration options with buildings labeled “A” representing large-scale class-A distribution centers ranging from 400,000 gross square footage (GSF) to 500,000 GSF and buildings labeled “B” representing smaller class-A logistics, manufacturing or smaller warehouses ranging from 200,000-250,000 GSF.





Chapter 11 IMPLEMENTATION





The Comprehensive Plan should serve as the City's policy guide for land use, development, and community improvements. City staff should ensure residents, stakeholders, and community partners have access to the completed plan and subsequent updates, explain the plan and its priorities as it relates to new development in the City, and ensure all newly elected officials and new City staff understand the contents of the plan.

CMAP is committed to working with Chicago Heights for two years after the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan to assist in the coordination of implementation strategies.

Short-Term Implementation Actions

Short and mid-term priorities and goals should be formulated based on the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan in order to move forward with implementation. This section discusses short-term implementation priorities for the City to begin working on immediately following plan adoption, for completion in 0-2 years.

Create a Capital Improvement Plan.

Improving the City’s infrastructure capacity and condition is identified as a priority throughout the Comprehensive Plan. The creation of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is specifically recommended in **Chapter 7: Environment** in order to help address flooding, stormwater and water quality issues, but a CIP can help the City implement many of the Plan’s other recommendations that require capital investment.

A CIP establishes schedules, priorities, and estimated costs for all public improvement projects, typically over a five-year period. CIPs can address a great variety of projects, for instance roadway surface improvements, intersection improvements, sidewalk improvements, curb and gutter improvements, sewer cleaning and televising, streetscape improvements, lighting improvements, and bike route signage and striping. As part of the process, all projects are reviewed, priorities are assigned, cost estimates are prepared, and potential funding sources are identified. Creating a CIP will help Chicago Heights implement the Comprehensive Plan by aligning future infrastructure investments with the priorities and goals outlined in the Plan. More specifically, a CIP can assist the City in prioritizing and implementing the following recommended actions or components of them.

Table 11.1.
Plan recommendations that can be prioritized in a CIP

Plan recommendations that can be prioritized in a CIP	Comprehensive plan chapter
Create a facade and site improvement program.	Chapter 5: Economic and Workforce Development
Improve bicycle and pedestrian amenities.	Chapter 6: Transportation
Implement a Complete Streets policy.	Chapter 6: Transportation
Provide connections to regional trails.	Chapter 6: Transportation
Improve transit facilities and enhance accessibility.	Chapter 6: Transportation
Continue city-wide infrastructure upgrades.	Chapter 7: Environment
Implement best management practices identified in the Thorn Creek Plan update.	Chapter 7: Environment
Support walking and biking in the downtown.	Chapter 8: Downtown Subarea Plan
Close unnecessary streets, and extend other streets in the downtown.	Chapter 8: Downtown Subarea Plan
Bury overhead utility lines in the downtown.	Chapter 8: Downtown Subarea Plan
Realign the intersection of 15th Street and Halsted Street.	Chapter 8: Downtown Subarea Plan
Improve multi-modal circulation.	Chapter 9: Lincoln/Western Commercial Subarea Plan
Install gateway signage and streetscaping improvements.	Chapter 9: Lincoln/Western Commercial Subarea Plan
Undertake street, rail crossing, and intersection improvements.	Chapter 10: Industrial Area Plan



Funding to support CIP projects generally comes from a variety of sources, such as competitive grants, state and federal funds, as well as City funds. Potential funding sources include:

- City’s General Fund
- City TIF Funds
- City’s Utility Fund
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ)
- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA)
- Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
- Illinois Department of Transportation Motor Fuel Tax
- Illinois Transportation Enhancements Program (ITEP)
- Surface Transportation Program (STP)
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

Revise zoning ordinance.

The Comprehensive Plan emphasizes the fundamental role of well-written regulations and their effective enforcement will play in the implementation of the City’s vision for the future, from the revitalization of commercial areas to the preservation of natural features. The most important regulatory document is the zoning ordinance, which regulates, among other things, the permitted uses of land, lot sizes, density, yard requirements, building heights, parking, accessory uses and buildings, and other requirements.

The Comprehensive Plan calls for the City to revisit the regulations and administrative procedures outlined in the zoning ordinance to ensure that they do not impede the construction of the desired types and densities of proposed developments (see **Chapters 4 and 5**). A revised zoning ordinance will not only provide City officials with the tools to regulate the types and quality of development; it will also make it easier for private sector developers to understand the City’s needs and be encouraged to work with a community where the administrative processes are streamlined. Additionally, a revised zoning ordinance will enable the City to implement a number of the plan’s other recommended actions.

Table 11.2. Plan recommendations to be addressed in a revised zoning ordinance

Plan recommendations to be addressed in a revised zoning ordinance	Comprehensive Plan chapter
Focus new housing development in the downtown.	Chapter 4: Housing
Support “aging in place.”	Chapter 4: Housing
Focus commercial development and improvements on key nodes and corridors.	Chapter 5: Economic and Workforce Development
Establish commercial design guidelines to enhance attractiveness.	Chapter 5: Economic and Workforce Development
Implement the Thorn Creek Watershed Plan recommendation to adopt and enforce flexible local zoning that allow adaptable, nontraditional designs for development, stormwater management, and nonpoint source pollution reduction measures.	Chapter 7: Environment
Create a new zoning designation, such as a mixed-use downtown classification, that allows for construction of vibrant, compact mixed-use buildings.	Chapter 8: Downtown Subarea Plan
Create shared parking opportunities.	Chapter 9: Lincoln/Western Commercial Subarea Plan

Hire a city planner.

As discussed in **Chapter 5**, in order for Chicago Heights to implement the Plan's economic and workforce development recommendations, it will be important for the City to expand its staff capacity by hiring a city planner. In order to hire a city planner, the City's Planning and Zoning Department should develop a business plan for the new position, including a detailed job description, and work with the City Treasurer and Mayor's Office to identify funding sources and incorporate the position into the City budget. The Department of Planning and Zoning should then work with the Mayor's Office and the Human Resource Department to publicize the job posting and begin the selection process. Potential funding sources for the position include CDBG funds and TIF funds. It is important to note that if the City uses TIF funds, there will be some restrictions and requirements regarding the projects that the planner can undertake.

Pursue multijurisdictional and partner collaboration.

In order for the Comprehensive Plan to move forward, Chicago Heights officials should pursue coordination efforts with city departments, public agencies, neighboring communities, community organizations, and private market partners as appropriate.

- **City departments.** Coordination among city departments will be essential to the success of the Comprehensive Plan. Coordinated programming, cost sharing measures and streamlined review and permitting procedures can assist with the implementation of plan recommendations and strategies.
- **Public agencies.** Agencies such as Pace, Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA), IDNR, Illinois Department on Aging, Illinois DCEO, CMAP, Cook County, SSMMA, and South Suburban and Cook County Land Banks provide programming and/or funding opportunities that can assist Chicago Heights in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. City staff should work to engage key contacts and identify relevant programs within these agencies.
- **Public open space providers.** The City should continue to work with and support the Chicago Heights Park District and the Forest Preserves of Cook County to acquire, maintain, and improve parks and open space. A number of future open space areas are recommended in the Comprehensive Plan and cooperation between these agencies will be key in implementation.
- **Neighboring communities.** As part of the Southland subregion, Chicago Heights and surrounding communities face a unique set of challenges but also a unique opportunity to pursue coordinated community investment on a variety of topics. Efforts including enterprise zones, cargo oriented development, major arterial and corridor repair and beautification, and residential code enforcement may all present as opportunities for multijurisdictional coordination.
- **Community organizations and institutions.** The Chicago Heights community is rich with community organizations and institutions that can serve as partners in moving forward recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan. Workforce development, social service programming, and housing development and repair are all areas where partnerships can be strengthened and resources leveraged to connect residents and stakeholders to available services.
- **Private market collaboration.** In addition to public support and resources it is imperative for Chicago Heights to engage private market partners in the improvement and redevelopment of key sections within the community. Investments in the proposed downtown area, key commercial nodes and industrial area are prime locations where Chicago Heights can utilize the Comprehensive Plan to attract private market interest into the community.



Mid-Term and Long-Term Implementation Actions

This section discusses mid-term and long-term implementation priorities for the City to begin working on immediately following plan adoption. Mid-term actions should be completed in 3-5 years, while

long-term actions can span 6-10+ years. Details on potential funding sources can be found in the Funding Source Glossary that follows **Table 11.3**.

Table 11.3. Mid-term (MT) and long-term (LT) implementation actions

Recommended action	First steps	Lead implementers and partners	Details/potential funding sources
Undertake strategic land acquisition (LT — see Chapters 3 and 8)	The City should begin to undertake strategic land acquisition. City-owned land of larger, consolidated parcels could be better marketed for redevelopments. The City would also be in a better position to dictate the type, size, and architecture of new developments if they own the parcels and pursue a request for developer proposals.	Lead: City Administration Partners: Cook County Treasure, South Suburban Land Bank, Cook County Land Bank	The City could use OSLAD funds if acquiring property for public open space
Create new green space and add green infrastructure (LT — see Chapters 3 and 7)	The City should meet with representatives from the Park District to determine if they are interested in acquiring new green space either on their own, or as a partnership with the City. If there is no interest, the City should meet with property owners to consider parcel acquisition as recommended in the plan. In addition to new green space, the City should begin to add green infrastructure as parking lots and buildings owned by the City are renovated. The City should also update its zoning regulations to promote green infrastructure use on new developments.	Lead: City Administration and Park District Partners: City Engineering Department	CDBG, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, IGIG, KaBOOM!, LWCF, OSLAD, PARC, Section 319
Attract new multi-family/senior development (LT — see Chapters 3 and 4)	In an effort to strengthen Downtown as a mixed-use area, the City should work to attract new multi-family housing that could also include senior housing developments. A larger residential population in the Downtown would support other non-residential uses such as retail, commercial, office, industrial, and nonprofit/human services providers	Lead: City Administration Partners: City Plan Commission and Zoning Board, IHDA, Urban Land Institute, SSMMA, Cook County, private developers	CDBG, Local Lending Institutions, IHDA Tax Credits
Undertake detailed market assessment and developer recruitment. (MT — see Chapter 5)	The first commercial area on which to focus redevelopment efforts is the Downtown. As such, the City planner and City Economic Development should conduct a market assessment for the Downtown, and then undertake a predevelopment process. In order to finance these predevelopment activities the City can use funds from the Downtown TIF District, as well as CDBG or City funds. The Planner and Economic Development Consultant should work with the City Treasury to determine the best sources of funding to use.	Lead: City planner, City Economic Development Consultant Partners: City Treasury, local businesses and residents, development community	CDBG, General Fund, TIF
Educate employers about Employer Assisted Housing (EAH) (MT — see Chapter 5)	The City planner should become familiar with EAH programs, using resources such as MPC's guidebook. The Planner should also reach out to MPC for assistance in starting and managing a Chicago Heights EAH program. With MPC's guidance, the Planner can begin working with local employers to introduce them to the possibility of EAH.	Lead: City planner Partners: MPC, local employers	Staff time

Table 11.3. Mid-term (MT) and long-term (LT) implementation actions (continued)

Recommended action	First steps	Lead implementers and partners	Details/potential funding sources
Improve bicycle and pedestrian amenities on existing roadways (MT — see Chapter 6)	Create an inventory of local streets, sidewalks, and crosswalks that are in need of repair or missing in critical areas that would benefit from bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Include this inventory when considering CIP priorities and implementation of the Active Transportation Plan.	Lead: City Administration Partners: City Public Works, Active Transportation Alliance, IDOT	CMAQ, ITEP, Illinois Bicycle Path Program, CDBG
Organize a Safe Routes to School Program with School District 170 (MT — see Chapter 6)	City should coordinate with School District 170 to create a Safe Routes Committee to research best practices and funding opportunities.	Lead: City Administration and School District 170 Partners: IDOT	Safe Routes to School Grants, ITEP
Encourage residents to participate in MWRD’s Rain Barrel Program (MT — see Chapter 7)	The City Public Works and Water Departments should work with the Mayor’s Office, the Park District, and the School District to advertise the program on websites, community newsletters, bulletin board displays, as well as water bills. The Public Works and Water Departments should work with MWRD to educate and assist interested residents with rain barrel installation and maintenance.	Lead: City Public Works and Water Departments Partners: MWRD, the Mayor’s Office, Park District, School Districts	Staff time
Implement the Thorn Creek Watershed Based Plan (WBP) and Plan Update. (LT — see Chapter 7)	The City’s Public Works and Water Departments should work closely with the Planning and Zoning Department and the Park District to implement the municipal-level recommendations identified in the Thorn Creek WBP, as well as develop implementation projects for the BMPs identified in the Plan Update. Staff should also work together to educate and engage residents and businesses regarding implementation initiatives. Staff should also reach out to partners such as the Cook County Forest Preserve, the Millennium Reserve Calumet Stormwater Collaborative, SSMMA, and the Thorn Creek Basin Sanitary District for additional guidance and support with implementation efforts.	Lead: Public Works, Water, and Planning and Zoning Departments. Park District. Partners: local residents and businesses, Chicago Wilderness, Forest Preserves of Cook County, Millennium Reserve Calumet Stormwater Collaborative, MWRD, SSMMA, Thorn Creek Basin Sanitary District	CDBG, Chi-Cal Rivers Fund, IGIG, Section 319.
Educate residents, business owners, and developers on MWRD’s Watershed Management Ordinance (MT — see Chapter 7)	The City Planning and Zoning Department should familiarize themselves with the WMO and utilize the training materials as well as the Technical Guidance Manual available on MWRD’s website. Staff should also attend WMO trainings offered by SSMMA.	Lead: City Planning and Zoning Department Partners: SSMMA, MWRD	Staff time
Participate in sub-regional water quality improvement and flooding and stormwater management initiatives and partnerships (MT — see Chapter 7)	The City should designate a staff person to reach out to the relevant contacts for each initiative/partnership. The designated staff person should become familiar with recent work done as a part of each initiative, and attend meetings on a regular basis.	Lead: City Public Works and Planning and Zoning departments Partners: Chicago Wilderness, Millennium Reserve Calumet Stormwater Collaborative, MWRD, SSMMA	Staff time



Funding Source Glossary

Economic and Workforce Development Community Development Block Grant Program

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) is a federal program that provides communities with resources to address a multitude of infrastructure and development needs. Chicago Heights has historically received allocations of CDBG funding from Cook County. In addition to continuing to apply for these funds, Chicago Heights should investigate its eligibility for Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recover Grant (CDBG-DR) funding that has recently been made available through Cook County. Funds can be allocated in housing, infrastructure, and economic development related to declared disasters.

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) offers a number of grant programs that can assist with economic and workforce development projects. The programs fund a variety of uses and activities, such as public infrastructure for specific economic development projects, training programs, and land and building acquisition. Additional information is available at <https://www.illinois.gov/dceo/ExpandRelocate/Incentives/grants/Pages/default.aspx>.

Tax Increment Financing

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a financial tool used to incentivize and attract desired development within a community. TIF dollars can be used for infrastructure, streetscaping, public improvements, land assemblage, pre-development costs, and offsetting the cost of development.

Chicago Heights currently has six TIF Districts (**Figure 5.2**), three designated as commercial and three designated as industrial. The City should continue to monitor the progress of the Downtown TIF and Lincoln Highway/Western Avenue TIF as priority investment tools to implement recommendations of the Downtown and Commercial subarea plans detailed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Environment/Natural Resources/ Open Space

Chi-Cal Rivers Fund

The Chi-Cal Rivers Fund is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in partnership with a number of other organizations and provides funds for green stormwater infrastructure habitat enhancement, and public-use improvement projects.

Illinois Green Infrastructure Grant Program for Stormwater Management

The Illinois Green Infrastructure Grant Program for Stormwater Management is offered through the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) and provides funds to support green infrastructure stormwater best management practices. Possible funding projects relevant to Chicago Heights include stormwater retention and infiltration projects and green infrastructure small projects.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

The Land and Water Conservation Fund provides matching grants for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The funding opportunity, in addition to others mentioned in **Chapter 7** of this plan, may be an option in implementing open space recommendations of the Chicago Heights Park District Master Plan.

Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development

The Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) Program is a state-financed grant program that provides funding assistance to local government agencies for acquisition and/or development of land for public parks and open space. The program is managed by the IDNR. Projects vary from small neighborhood parks or tot lots to large community and county parks and nature areas. Under the program funding assistance up to 50 percent (90 percent for distressed communities) of approved project costs can be obtained. Grant awards up to \$750,000 are available for acquisition projects, while development/renovation projects are limited to a \$400,000 grant maximum.⁴ The City should consider encouraging the Park District to apply for an OSLAD grant or potentially collaborating with the District to apply for an OSLAD grant together.

⁴ <http://dnr.state.il.us/ocd/newoslad1.htm>

⁵ <https://dnr.state.il.us/ocd/newparc1.htm>

Park and Recreational Facility Construction

The Park and Recreational Facility Construction (PARC) Act was created by Public Act 096-0820 effective November 18, 2009, to provide grants to be disbursed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to eligible local governments for park and recreation unit construction projects. A park or recreation unit construction project means the acquisition, development, construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, improvements, architectural planning, and installation of capital facilities including, but not limited to, buildings, structures, and land for park and recreation purposes and open spaces and natural areas. Units of local government that are authorized by Illinois law to expend public funds for the acquisition and development of land for public indoor/outdoor park, recreation or conservation purposes are eligible to apply for funding assistance.⁵ Similar to the recommendations for the OSLAD and LWCF grants, the City should encourage the Park District to apply or potentially partner with the District to apply for a PARC grant project.

Section 319 Grants

Section 319 of the Clean Water Act was enacted in 1987 and established a national program to control nonpoint source pollution. IEPA is the designated Illinois state agency to receive 319 federal funds and administer the grant program. Projects must address water quality issues relating directly to nonpoint source pollution. Funds can be used for the implementation of IEPA approved watershed management plans including the development of information/education programs and for the installation of best management practices.



Housing

South Suburban Land Bank Development Authority

Chicago Heights should inquire with the South Suburban Land Bank Development Authority (SSLBDA) on becoming a member community and work toward an infill development strategy in key locations throughout the community. SSLBDA facilitates the redevelopment of acquired properties (residential, commercial and industrial properties are eligible) through strategic partnerships with developers, community organizations, lenders and local governments in order to improve quality of life, stabilize the tax base and enhance economic activities for Chicago Southland communities.

Illinois Attorney General Bank Foreclosure Settlement

In 2012, \$70 million in funding was allocated for Illinois communities as part of the National Foreclosure Settlement (NFS). Proposals were submitted by area housing organization to target communities with vacant and abandoned properties and foreclosures.

Hispanic Housing Development Corporation (HHDC) was awarded funds to implement a model scattered site rental program in Chicago Heights. In addition to acquiring and rehabbing single-family homes in the community, HHDC will provide rental housing and financial literacy to occupants of the rehabbed properties. Chicago Heights should position itself as a strong partner to HHDC in order to move forward infill strategies and bring new residents to the Chicago Heights community.

South Suburban Land Bank Authority (SSLBA) will manage funds for use in Chicago Heights, proposing to build and renovate seven to ten affordable for sale homes, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity Chicago South Suburbs. Chicago Heights should coordinate with SSLBA and other identified project partners to identify site selection and support marketing of the completed homes and housing counseling opportunities associated with the project.

Illinois Housing Development Authority Abandoned Property Program and Blight Reduction Program

IHDA's Abandoned Property Program provides grants to municipalities for the maintenance or demolition of abandoned residential properties. Grant funds may be used for securing, maintaining, demolishing or rehabilitating abandoned homes. In coordination with the Abandoned Property Program, the Blight Reduction Program is used to decrease preventable foreclosure and stabilize neighborhoods by providing municipalities and not for profit partners resources to target blighted, vacant residential properties.

These programs are a possible funding source to be used in the early stages of the proposed Downtown revitalization. By creating opportunities to address abandoned property issues while investing and stabilizing the occupied housing surrounding downtown, the use of this public resource can be used to spur and leverage private interest and investment in the downtown area.

Transportation Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program

Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) is a federally funded program for surface transportation improvements designed to address air quality improvement and mitigate congestion. Chicago Heights should consider CMAQ funding for intersection improvements in its Downtown and Industrial areas, bicycle and pedestrian facility projects, and bicycle and pedestrian encouragement projects (referred to as awareness programs in this Comprehensive Plan).

Illinois Bicycle Path Program

The Illinois Bicycle Path Program is administered through the IDNR to assist in the acquisition, construction and rehabilitation of public, non-motorized bicycle paths and directly related support facilities. The program provides financial assistance up to 50 percent of approved project costs.

Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program

The Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program (ITEP) is administered by IDOT. ITEP provides funding for community based projects that expand travel choices and enhance transportation experience in communities. ITEP is designed to promote bike and pedestrian travel and streetscape/beautification projects. ITEP funding may be best used in the implementation of bike and pedestrian recommendations of the Chicago Heights Active Transportation and Comprehensive plans.

Surface Transportation Program

The Surface Transportation Program (STP) provides flexible funding that may be used for projects to preserve and improve the conditions and performance on any federal-aid highway, bridge and tunnel projects on any public road or pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure as well as transit capital projects, including intercity bus terminals.

Transportation Alternatives Program

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a federal funding program that focuses on non-motorized transportation projects. TAP funds are administered by CMAP and may be a good fit for Chicago Heights projects related to trail connection recommendations.





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