



Green Vision of the Homer Glen Community

Executive Summary

June, 2004

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Homer Glen Planning Commission

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Community Participation



Hands-on Approach



Homer Glen Green Vision

An attractive, distinctive, and environmentally sustainable community that protects its valuable water resources, natural landscapes, wildlife habitats, open spaces, and agricultural settings essential to the well-being and quality of life of Homer Glen residents

Project Summary

The Village of Homer Glen has a Green Vision. This vision was created in response to development pressures emanating from the Interstate 355 expansion and the strategic regional arterial to be built. This unique community includes four major tributaries to the Des Plaines River, and Spring Creek in the Hickory Creek Watershed. The village has abundant native plants and wildlife, acres of undeveloped land, public open space, greenways, wetlands, floodplains, woodlands, ecological diversity, farms and scenic beauty. The vision is one that the Village foresees as the desired state of the environment projected 20–30 years into the future. This vision grew and developed with the ideas and commitment of a community dedicated to protecting its natural resources while facing the sweeping scope and pace of coming development that will change forever the face of the community. Comprehensive integration of stormwater management, native landscape systems, ecological restoration, and strategies to manage and sustain positive environmental growth are present concerns. This report is the story of how the Green Vision began, evolved, and resulted in a plan designed by and for the people of Homer Glen.



In 2002 the Village of Homer Glen was chosen as one of sixteen communities in the State of Illinois to receive a grant for the Governor Ryan’s Green Communities Demonstration Program. This grant, administered by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, was to undertake an innovative visioning process to protect the environment and enhance community well being. A steering committee, comprised of community members, local government officials, and individuals representing environmental organizations including The Conservation Foundation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC), was established to oversee the

program. NIPC was chosen to facilitate and provided technical support throughout the planning process.

The Green Vision Plan was created by stakeholders concerned with the future of Homer Glen.

The Steering Committee engaged a broad base of community members to serve as stakeholders in the visioning process. The recruitment process began by using the Asset-Based Community Development technique of identifying a list of potential stakeholders.

The result was a stakeholder group representing residents, business owners, farmers, land owners, developers, government officials, public safety officials, schools, senior citizens, athletic groups, community organizations, and religious organizations. This brought a high level of individual skill and knowledge to the visioning process. The participation of key stakeholders will also play a significant role in the success of implementing goals and objectives.

They came together through a series of community-wide participatory workshops. The overall green vision for the community, which emerged from an initial visioning meeting, states:

Homer Glen will be an attractive, distinctive, and environmentally sustainable community that protects its valuable water resources, natural landscapes, wildlife habitats, open spaces, and agricultural settings essential to the well-being and quality of life of Homer Glen residents.

This vision contains six major categories. These categories were identified during three large community-wide meetings that occurred during the first half of 2003.

Stakeholders worked in small groups and in large assemblies to define and refine a goal statement for each of the categories. Goal statements were written for each of the following categories:

- Community Image and Character
- Natural Resources, Habitat and Wildlife
- Open Space
- Parks and Recreation
- Transportation
- Water Resources

For each goal, a set of measurable and quantifiable objectives were created. To define the path to reach the goals. Recommended actions for achieving the objectives were later incorporated.



At one of the community-wide workshops, residents drew their green vision on large table-size maps. These resident stakeholders identified important places they know as familiar in the Homer Glen landscape, including streams, ponds, woodlands, wetlands, and trails. These high value features are identified in the green vision. Conceptual plans were also made for a new village center that is sensitively woven into the landscape, as



well as for a conservation design neighborhood.

The visioning process continued during the second half of 2003. Environmental experts presented model planning regulations that are designed to conserve

identified natural features within a context of sustainable development. Members of the Village Board, the Steering Committee and stakeholders attended this presentation. Later, stakeholders visited conservation design neighborhoods and corporate sites to learn the principles of this conservation technique.

During winter of 2004, the Steering Committee produced the preliminary Green Vision of the Homer Glen Community incorporating all results of the workshops and meetings, emphasizing goals and objectives, together with recommended actions. The Green Vision also includes a series of benchmarks and Next Steps to enable the village to measure implementation progress. Details of the three community vision sessions, the vision plan maps, and supporting documentation are included in this report.



Goals and Objectives

Community Image and Character

Goal:

Maintenance and enhancement of an attractive and distinctive community that builds upon and preserves Homer Glen's countryside character, unique natural resources and abundance of open space.

Objectives:

1. Promote attractive and well designed residential and commercial developments that meet community development goals.
2. Identify special character areas, tailoring growth to ensure that unique natural resources are supported and enhanced.
3. Create an attractive, centralized and distinctive town center, with parks, recreation center, municipal building, and cultural center accessible by walking or multi-use trail.
4. Hire progressive planning and marketing consultants to work with the Village to develop a town center plan and implementation mechanism.
5. Minimize negative visual impacts of development such as light pollution, obtrusive or unsightly signage, and parking areas.
6. Maintain and enhance the village's rural atmosphere.
7. Safeguard Homer Glen's environmental features

and natural resources as distinguishing features of the community.

8. Continue to involve community residents in planning, decision making, and plan implementation.
9. Find ways to preserve the agricultural uses that contribute to the rural character of the community.
10. Ensure a good visual image within each area of the village so that all parts contribute to the overall village image.
11. Identify and protect historic structures, ruins, and sites of interest.

Natural Resources, Habitat and Wildlife

Goal:

Preservation, protection and enhancement of the existing and potential natural resources and wildlife habitat that are enjoyed by village residents.



Objectives:

1. Prepare an area-wide inventory that identifies natural resources and habitats that are unique to Homer Glen.
2. Prepare a plan based on the area-wide inventory (objective 1, above) to preserve and manage existing and potential natural resources and habitats, emphasizing larger, connected areas rather than small, isolated pockets.
3. Educate residents about the role that natural resources and wildlife play in maintaining a high quality of life in the village and about residents' role in protection and restoration efforts.
4. Adopt design guidelines and ordinances for new development that support the preservation and protection of natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas.
5. Develop incentive measures for landowners and developers to create and preserve natural areas, including the use of conservation easements.
6. Encourage natural landscaping on both public and private properties throughout the village.
7. Encourage access by community residents, especially children, to public wildlife habitats and natural areas.

Open Space

Goal:

Protection and enhancement of the extensive open space areas that are essential to the overall image and character of Homer Glen.

Objectives:

1. Develop protection mechanisms, including ordinances where appropriate, for:
 - Wetlands
 - Stream corridors
 - Agricultural lands
 - Scenic views
 - Woodlands
 - Sensitive soils
 - Floodplains
 - Wildlife habitats
 - Groundwater recharge zones
 - Other natural areas
2. Develop an interconnected greenway system — an “Emerald Necklace” — that links open space throughout the Village.
3. Require land set-asides for open space as part of development process.
4. Retain a progressive, environmentally-sensitive planning firm to review development proposals.

5. Develop a plan for open space protection and acquisition that encompasses the broad objectives of farmland protection, natural resource preservation, passive recreation, trails, sustainability, visual relief, and limited development densities.
6. Identify and implement ways to protect and maintain the agricultural roots and heritage of the Homer Glen area.
7. Maintain low density zoning that allows public uses of open space.

Parks and Recreation

Goal:

A Parks and Recreation system that promotes healthy lifestyles by offering active and passive recreational opportunities for residents, employees, and visitors, and enhances the overall image and character of the community.

Objectives:

1. Create the means and mechanisms for Village ownership, management and maintenance of a parks and recreation program.
2. Cooperate with citizens, community groups, and various levels of government to develop an open space and recreation plan that reflects goals and objectives from the Green Vision Plan.
3. Develop design guidelines for commercial property that encourages trails and offers recreation amenities for employees.

4. Develop guidelines for incorporation of trail systems, and linkages to existing and planned trail systems, into site plans for all significant commercial developments.
5. Develop a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities for all, including special needs, such as neighborhoods, community parks, trails and open spaces that link to and complement the regional open space, parks, and recreation facilities in the Homer Glen area.
6. Develop a multi-use park, commons, and recreation center as part of a new town center to create a central gathering place and activity area.
7. Develop a network of multi-use trails and pathways to provide connections between subdivisions, schools, parks, and commercial areas.
8. Identify creative funding mechanisms in order to achieve and implement park, open space, and recreation objectives.

Transportation

Goal:

A coordinated, sustainable system of roadways, pedestrian facilities, recreational pathways and public transportation services that provides for the safe and efficient movement of vehicles and pedestrians and enhances the countryside character and environmental amenities of the Village.



Objectives:

1. Promote the Homer Glen vision by requiring wide, naturally landscaped corridors for major roadways — for example, requiring 80-foot minimum right-of-way for major roadways in new residential developments — and consider these features integral to the transportation plan (note: this is not a recommendation for wide pavement widths).
2. Develop a comprehensive network of multi-use trails and greenways to link residential subdivisions with schools, parks, shopping areas, public facilities, open spaces, forest preserves and other multi-use trails in the area.
3. Develop an integrated transportation and land use plan for the Village, identifying an efficient pattern of land use and a transportation system design that minimizes congestion and through-traffic on roads under Village jurisdiction.

4. Incorporate an assessment of the impact of regional transportation plans (for example, I-355, Caton Farms Road/Bruce Road/Strategic Regional Arterial plan) into the integrated transportation and land-use plan (of objective 3, above).
5. Improve transportation safety on existing roadways by evaluating the need for guard rails, street lighting, roadway profiles and other approaches.
6. Work with state and county transportation agencies to achieve these objectives along the village's state and county roads.
7. Work with regional agencies and neighboring municipalities to expand opportunities for public transportation within Homer Glen.

Water Resources

Goal:

Plentiful, high quality surface and groundwater resources that protect the quality of life for residents and all ecosystems, especially wetlands, by reducing the impacts on these systems.

Objectives:

1. Gather and assess data needed to protect key water resource areas and to develop growth strategies. Data to be collected includes, but is not limited to the following:
 - Hydrology and hydraulic studies
 - Soil analysis
 - Historic surveys

- Longitudinal profiles
 - Vegetation
 - Storm water runoff
 - Floodplains, wetlands, etc.
2. Create an education program that:
 - Educates elected officials to provide authority and resources
 - Educates stakeholders (e.g., residents, landowners, business owners, developers) as to how land-use affects water resources and to promote low impact development and green development
 - Educates the educators, establishes environmental education in schools, develops interpretive signage for natural resource features and drainage, and establishes a "Watershed Watch" program and voluntary monitoring
 3. Develop and enforce protection mechanisms, including ordinances, which support water resource goals and objectives for:
 - Wetlands
 - Stream corridors
 - Sustainable stormwater management
 - Groundwater recharge and protection
 4. Retain only environmentally sensitive engineering/planning firms to review development proposals.
 5. Tie in land use studies with the village's comprehensive plan (see objective 3 under Transportation, objective 2 under Parks and Recreation).

6. Utilize design solutions that reduce impervious surfaces, bring water and stormwater to public attention, and increase use of native landscaping.
7. Tailor and adopt templates as official guidelines for new development and redevelopment in Homer Glen.
8. Protect as key “environmental corridors” flood prone areas, wetlands, surface watercourses, and adjacent buffers of native vegetation.
9. Adopt best management practices for stormwater management to assure that new developments do not contribute runoff that increases off-site flooding or degrade water quality in surface or groundwater systems.
10. Identify and protect groundwater aquifers and their recharge zones to ensure safe and abundant water supplies for the Village.
11. Evaluate and implement options for sustainable wastewater facility planning and treatment that promote reuse, recharge, reduction, and minimization of impacts.

Benchmarks

Within One Year

- Gain Village Board approval of vision and goals
- Develop Implementation Plans & Oversight Responsibility
- Establish GIS database identifying environmental features to be protected from development

- Initiate Comprehensive Transportation Study
- Identify necessary changes to codes and ordinances
- Create community education program
- Initiate Farmland protection measures

Within Five Years

- Approve at least one Conservation Design Development
- Develop at least five miles of trail system
- Adopt Comprehensive Park Plan and acquisition program
- Protect 200 additional acres of open space
- Establish demonstration projects for innovative storm water management
- Produce plans for a town center
- Establish environmental accounting practices (life-cycle analysis for large capital projects)
- Adopt Strategic Transportation Improvement Plan (including alternative transportation options)
- Adopt environmental codes and ordinances
- Implement stormwater (watershed) protection measures
- Incorporate native plants into landscape designs

Within Ten to Twenty Years

- Approve at least 50% of new development as conservation design
- Develop additional 5 miles of trail system
- Connect local trails to regional trail system
- Protect 500 additional acres of open space
- Acquire land for Town Center and begin construction

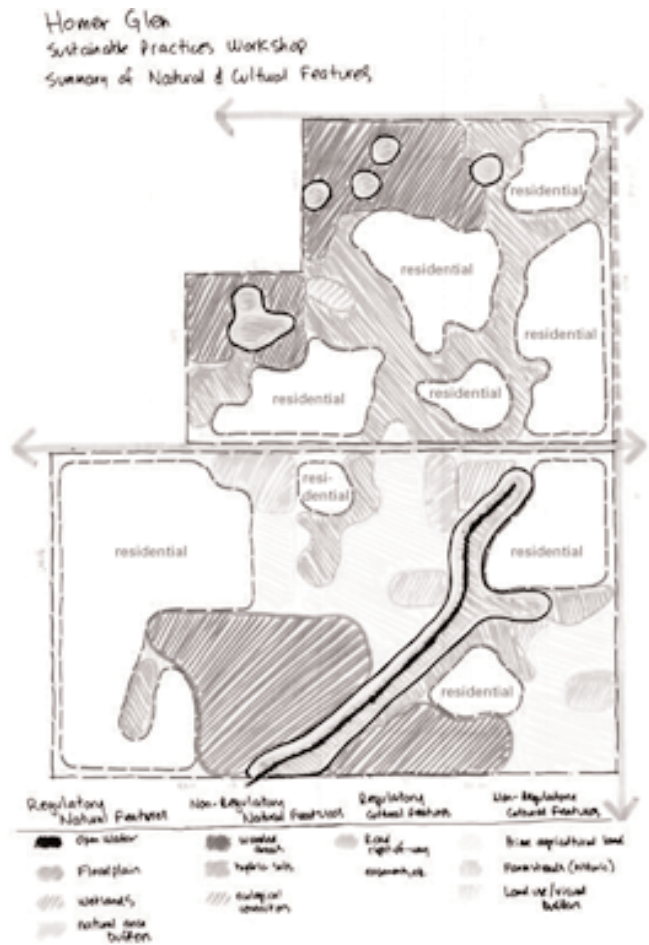


- Safeguard five active farming sites
- Acquire Recreational Park land and facilitate its active use
- Link environmental corridors and wildlife habitats forming an Emerald Necklace

Process

The planning process was carefully organized by the Steering Committee. The committee was composed of community members, current and former Village Board Members, a Homer Township Trustee, as well as indi-

viduals representing environmental organizations — The Conservation Foundation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC). NIPC acted as facilitator and provided technical support throughout the planning process. The planning process began in July 2002 and



Conservation Design Neighborhood
Not intended to recommend a specific location.

concluded in June 2004. It produced several significant results:

- Statement of the Homer Glen Green Vision
- Goals and Objectives with recommended action plans to achieve those objectives
- Benchmarks to measure progress of implementation
- Maps of the village's critical resource areas
- A town center concept design
- A conservation design neighborhood concept and ideas from a conservation design workshop
- Field visits attended by stakeholders to view conservation design communities
- Report mailed to all residents requesting feedback on goals and objectives
- Presentation to the village board
- An open-house event to present the green vision plan to the community

The Committee's prime objective was to document the Green Vision Plan generated from the active participation of Homer Glen residents and other stakeholders.

Three large public meetings were held from January to July of 2003. The Steering Committee put a significant amount of effort into recruitment to ensure a large attendance. NIPC prepared an extensive GIS database and maps for the public meetings. During the meetings the stakeholders worked on defining their goals and objectives for the Green Vision Plan. Each meeting was designed to move through a series of successive steps leading toward consensus on a final statement of goals giving guidance for all actions to follow.

Working at tables with trained facilitators, stakeholders began by identifying the issues affecting the Homer Glen natural resource base. At appropriate points in the meetings, a table spokesperson reported their conclusions to the whole room. These were discussed and voted on by the whole group using a computer-based keypad polling system to achieve consensus on the most significant issues. Goal statements were made in direct response to each identified significant issue and refined in a step-by-step process over the course of the three meetings.



The creation of goals was accompanied by the creation of a series of objectives for each of the goals. The objectives become quantifiable milestones along the path toward achieving a goal.

The goals and objectives were supported with maps of the village's critical resource areas. Stakeholders were directly involved in the mapping exercises, using their own knowledge of the local landscape, indicating the areas of high resource value that will require careful planning for preservation and their hopes for an envi-

ronmentally-sensitive town center and conservation neighborhood concepts.

When the series of community meetings was complete, the final report was prepared by the Steering Committee. To supplement the goals and objectives from the community meetings, action steps and Benchmarks to measure progress toward achieving goals were written. The green vision was presented to the village board and then again to the community at an open-house event held in May 2004.

Conclusion

Next Steps

Committee members made some initial recommendations for the Next Steps which highlight many of the recommended actions. Passionate and dedicated residents and stakeholders have developed this collective “green vision” together, including goals and an action plan for improving our local environment. Ongoing success of this vision rests upon *continued* community participation and commitment.

Working together strategically will ensure environmental issues such as quality water, the development of parks and recreation areas, and the restoration and protection of natural areas are a high priority. Of equal importance are issues of community image and character and transportation. As a new Village, we have the unique opportunity, and challenge, to use this vision to build upon our capacity to protect the environment and enhance our community’s well being.

It is essential and the benefits profound...for our families
...for our children...for everyone!

1. Create Implementation Plans
2. Establish Oversight Responsibility – transfer to Environment Committee
3. Develop Education & Awareness Program
 - Residents
 - Developers
 - Businesses
 - Teachers/Students (special projects)
 - Elected Officials
4. Vision Promotion & Sharing – develop ideas for sharing the Green Vision Plan, ideas, and implementation strategies with others, under the premise that “Nature Knows No Boundaries” including:
 - Neighboring municipalities
 - Chicago Wilderness
 - Reference Library
5. Review efficacy and make recommended changes to implementation plans
6. Community Involvement
 - Get involved! It’s true – you CAN make a difference!



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