

Annual Prioritization of Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives

Recommendations by the Winnetka Plan Commission Pursuant to Appendix 6 of the Winnetka 2020 Comprehensive Plan

- February 22, 2012

I. Background of the Annual Review process

The success of a comprehensive planning process depends to a very large degree on the articulation of a broad, long-term vision for the Village's land use and development. To remain vital and relevant, however, a comprehensive plan must acknowledge changing conditions and priorities. That is the purpose of the "Appendix 6" annual review process.

The *Winnetka 2020 Comprehensive Plan* ("the Plan") was developed in a collaborative fashion involving the talent and input of hundreds of Village residents. Adopted in 1999, and articulating an approximately 20-year vision for Winnetka, its goals and objectives address all facets of Village life, from the character of residential neighborhoods to the appearance and vitality of commercial districts, and it touches on areas as diverse as open space planning, transportation, historic preservation, and environmental protection.

Unanticipated conditions would, however, inevitably shift the Plan's priorities from year to year. In order to ensure that the Plan remains a vital and current policy statement of the Village's goals and objectives, its authors had the foresight to call for an annual review of the Plan's priorities and recommendations. In *Appendix Six*, the Plan Commission recommends to the Village Council what it believes should be the Village's top priorities for the short term, selected from the dozens of goals and recommendations articulated in the Plan (see attached *Table A-6*). *Appendix Six* and its annual update also serve a critical role in advocating for both the Plan and the planning process.

II. The Plan Commission's recommended priorities

After reviewing the recommendations in the most recent *Appendix Six*, the Plan Commission recommends that the Village Council consider focusing its attention on the following three objectives:

1. **Commercial Area Strategic Planning** - The quality of the Village's commercial areas plays a significant role in defining the character of the Village, while providing residents convenient local opportunities to meet many, if not all, of their daily needs in the Village. Built before the car became the dominant form of transit, and clustered around three commuter train stations, Winnetka's traditional downtown flexibly serves a variety of retail, office, residential and social needs in a close-knit, walkable, transit-oriented location. Both individual, and broader

community needs are fulfilled through convenient shopping and services, dining, and entertainment options.

The downtown areas also provide housing and employment, are home to many institutions, and are an important part of the “social infrastructure” of the Village, providing both informal gathering spaces and locations for community events. The importance of the continued success of the business districts cannot be overstated.

Recent changes in the economy have significantly impacted commercial real estate, retail trade, and consumer behavior at the national, regional and local levels. Similarly, growth and change in the retail and commercial base of surrounding communities and the region as a whole have dramatically changed the Village’s trade area, its ability to draw customers, and its ability to thrive.

A long-established, high priority goal of the Plan Commission has been to step up planning efforts intended to maintain and enhance the viability and vitality of the Village’s business districts. But this has been difficult for the Village, partly because Chapter 5 of the Plan, dealing with the Green Bay Road Corridor and the Village’s business districts, needs to be expanded and updated. For the last 10 years the Plan Commission has tried to work with the existing Chapter 5, often using the *Appendix Six* review process. Beginning almost immediately after the 1999 adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, and in view of the growth of “big box” retail in neighboring communities, the Plan Commission has used the *Appendix Six* process to make recommendations about the business districts that further the Plan’s existing goals. For example, previous *Appendix Six* efforts called for more focused attention on improving retail/economic development, advocating for transit station improvements, enhancing the pedestrian environment, and developing creative approaches to satisfy increased parking demand.

The Village Council has attempted to address some of these concerns: it has studied retail zoning standards, evaluated parking capacity, proposed streetscape improvements, and planned for the return of the Post Office block to Village control. Yet, these efforts have taken place as a series of individual “projects”, rather than as components of a comprehensive and widely-held vision for the business districts as a whole. In the absence of such a comprehensive vision, as should be contained in Chapter 5 of the Plan, the Village has made only limited progress. Although it recently revised the retail zoning standards, the Village Council has not taken action on the recommendations of the parking study, and it has put Post Office planning on hold while the Library Board did a comprehensive study of its future needs.

Without a well thought-out community-supported vision for the business districts, written into an amended Chapter 5, the Village will remain limited in what it can do to enhance the business and commercial areas in the heart of our Village. As the Plan states so well at the end of Chapter 1:

“Planning does not take place in a vacuum; it is driven by physical realities and community philosophy. An effective plan helps Village leaders make informed decisions by providing an inventory of the values shared by residents as well as an inventory of the community’s physical attributes. *A successful plan captures the imagination of*

residents, merchants and local officials, while reflecting the consensus view that allows diverse members of the community to support actions for the common good.”

The Plan Commission therefore recommends that the Village Council consider undertaking a two-step collaborative strategic planning process involving relevant stakeholders to articulate a shared vision for the future of the business districts and for the revision of Chapter 5 of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Plan Commission anticipates that such an effort would be broad in scope, and reflect both business and social/cultural considerations. With respect to business considerations, the strategic planning process should analyze the Village’s market trade area and its retail, commercial, office and mixed-use residential real estate markets. It should also assess other key factors that impact the viability and character of the business districts, such as the regional economy, land use planning, transit-oriented design, environmental concerns, parking, open space, and public facilities. With respect to the social/cultural considerations, the planning process should reflect the Plan’s goals of providing facilities and services that will accommodate the needs of the Village and enrich its cultural environment while attracting more residents and retail customers to patronize and support each of the business districts.

Due to the complexity of issues involved, the Commission believes that such a process would require both the commitment of adequate resources and the participation and support of many stakeholder groups, including landlords, merchants and business owners, shoppers and business patrons, institutions such as the Library and Community House, commuters, downtown residents, residents of adjoining neighborhoods, and others. Cooperation and collaboration amongst various groups will be critical to building broad support for such a plan’s goals and vision.

To move toward the creation of such a comprehensive vision, the Plan Commission, with input from BCDC and village staff, has reviewed several strategic planning efforts and recommends the following **Two-Step path toward creating a vision for Winnetka’s downtown areas.**

The first step (the “ULI Study”) involves engaging a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) of the Chicago Council of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), which is, arguably the preeminent trade association of land use and real estate development professionals in the world. “ULI assembles an interdisciplinary volunteer panel (of its professional members) who explore the project, interview stakeholders, and make (high level) recommendations. Panelists approach the assignment from all perspectives, including market potential, land use and design, financing and development strategies, and governance and implementation. This objective and diverse team of real estate and planning professionals would not be available ‘for hire’ anywhere.” The TAP report presents a possible “implementation strategy that is based on sound information, community realities, and best practices.”

Engaging a TAP as the first step has several advantages.

- It is a relatively quick exercise, typically completed in less than six months.
- It is relatively inexpensive, involving a \$15,000 contribution from the Village toward the costs of the effort (which arguably would be a multiple of this stipend if the volunteer

- professionals were paid for their time and effort). This is matched by a \$15,000 contribution from ULI for their services and materials.
- It engages a cohort of volunteer professionals who bring their expertise to address the issues raised and provide a fresh, competent, and capable view of the assets and impediments that exist here.
 - It requires Village representatives to articulate a precise and limited set of questions about the business districts to guide the TAP effort.
 - It offers a template of recommendations to focus discussion within the Village before proceeding toward the more involved, lengthier, and more expensive second step of the comprehensive planning effort.
 - It concludes in a public presentation of the TAP report, which can be the catalyst for a robust community-wide discussion in preparation for the second step.

The second step (the “Master Planning Process”) involves engaging a team of planning professionals (land use, market & economic analysis, traffic & civil engineering, and zoning experts) specifically focused on creating a detailed master plan for Winnetka’s business districts, including a ‘road map’ for pursuing the various public policy and legislative actions necessary to lay the ground work to ultimately implement the plan. This Master Plan process is a much more intense and lengthy process, including multiple opportunities for community input and comments throughout. A steering committee of Winnetkans, selected by the Council, would be engaged and involved, directing the process all along the way. Comparable Master Plan efforts tend to require 15 to 18 months, including the team selection period, and can cost in the low to mid six figures. (Partial funding may be available from public bodies such as Regional Transportation Authority, given the multiple Metra stations within the Winnetka business districts.) This process is very robust and must include significant community input and engagement throughout. Generally, several alternative plans will be considered with public comment helping to shape refinements in those ideas, resulting in a final plan acceptable to the community. Direction on issues such as density, land use, parking, transportation, and public/private partnerships can be addressed comprehensively for the business districts, and not piecemeal, one site at a time. The end product – the Master Plan - can then provide guidelines and a game plan, presenting the template for the revision of Chapter 5 of the Comprehensive Plan and other necessary public policy modifications as well as for focused market response to help achieve the plan goals over time.

The Village of Glen Ellyn completed a Master Planning Process for its downtown in 2009. Its formal process (following engagement of the planning team) commenced with interviews in April 2008 and concluded with the final Open House in January 2009 with a final survey of public reaction to the Preferred Plan at that time.

More recently, Wilmette completed a 2-step process such as this Plan Commission recommends for Winnetka. First, a ULI TAP was convened in January 2008, likely following a several month preparation. The report, titled “Revitalizing a Classic American Town: Wilmette, Illinois” can be found online at: http://www.ulichicago.org/PDFs/tap_reports/wilmette_tap.pdf. That study identified key strategies and initiatives—most crucially, that Wilmette immediately undertake the second step: “Developing and adopting a master plan...one that provides a clear and concise direction for the Village Center in addition to predictability of outcomes for the development

community.” In late 2009 Wilmette hired a planning and design team led by land use planners and that included independent professional experts in market and economic analysis, in traffic and engineering, and in zoning. The 10-month Master Plan process, began in January 2010 built upon several other past studies of the downtown, traffic and parking, and engaged hundreds of citizens in public conversation about their town.. (The RTA funded a grant of \$100,000 which covered ‘a majority of the costs’.) The Wilmette Village Center Master Plan report includes a list of Priority Action Tasks as well as a list of Catalytic Projects, and can be found online at <http://www.thelakotagroup.com/wilmette/1-VCMasterPlanCover.pdf>

The challenges confronting Winnetka’s business districts are not unique. Providing an articulate vision of how we as a community will address those challenges will accelerate the achievement of that vision. **The ULI TAP process will get us started, but it is not enough. A Step 2 professional master planning process that explores the ideas raised and hears from our citizens should immediately follow.**

2. **Storm water management** – Considerable effort is underway to study and expedite improvements to the Village’s storm and sanitary sewer infrastructure following severe storms in July. The Plan Commission acknowledges the importance of addressing those issues and supports those efforts addressing the collection and removal of storm water.

The Plan Commission recommends that consideration be given to complementary strategies to reduce the amount of storm water generated by development;

- a. Evaluate new, creative means for reducing storm water runoff generated by new construction;
- b. Evaluate innovative approaches to on-site storage and detention of storm water as a means of managing storm events.

3. **Voluntary Residential Design Guidelines** - Rapid change in residential neighborhoods arising out of the teardown phenomenon has prompted a series of zoning amendments intended to control the bulk and scale of new construction and to minimize its impact on neighboring properties. While zoning modifications have been comprehensive in approach, concerns remain about the degree to which new homes fit within their neighborhood.

Lingering concerns over the “contextualism” of new construction led the Village Council to establish the Voluntary Residential Design Committee to develop voluntary design guidelines. The guidelines address scale, massing, materials, landscaping and similar topics that are typically outside the scope of more traditional zoning regulations. **The Plan Commission recommends a renewed emphasis on completing the Voluntary Residential Design Guidelines.**

		SUBJECT AREA								RESOURCES REQUIRED			COMMENTS	
		Downtown area, retail environment	Streets, Intersections, Alleys (motorized transportation)	Sidewalks, Bicycles, Trails (non-motorized transportation)	Other public & quasi-public facilities	Residences & neighborhoods	Appearance, Beautification & Community Character	Parks & Open Space	Natural Environment	Studies / reports	Ongoing committee / commission support	Land acquisition		
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	*	*	*		
Ongoing and High priority - currently in process, should continue														
A	Support and work to enhance the success and viability of the Village's commercial districts through a strategic planning effort.	X										X	PC, BCDC	
B	Adopt voluntary Residential Design Guidelines as a means of encouraging more contextual new construction in established neighborhoods					X	X					X		
C	Evaluate sidewalk network and provide sidewalks along at least one side of public streets, with a priority near parks, schools and commuter stations			X		X		X						
D	Evaluate new, creative means for reducing stormwater runoff generated by new construction					X			X					
E	Evaluate innovative approaches to on-site storage and detention of stormwater as a means of managing storm events					X			X					
# 1 Priority - Very important, review annually														
1-A	Review and update the "Commercial Areas" element of the <u>2020 Comprehensive Plan</u> (Chapter 5).	X	X	X	X			X	X			X	X	May be implemented as part of Strategic Planning for commercial districts
1-B	Continue efforts to enhance pedestrian safety at the intersection of Green Bay Road and Winnetka Avenue.	X	X	X										
1-C	Continue efforts to enhance intersection of Willow Road and Forest Way (new signal scheduled for 2012).		X											
1-D	Develop standards for ravine and bluff development, including zoning standards that protect fragile lands.					X			X			X		
1-E	Create designated bicycle routes around schools and train stations and consider enhanced design and safety standards in such areas.	X		X		X								
1-F	Support the Park District in creating a bike trail system in the Village.	X	X	X										
1-G	Review vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety at intersection of Green Bay, Spruce and Chestnut for possible enhancement	X	X	X										
1-H	Review vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety at intersection of Green Bay Road and Church, adjacent to North Shore Country Day School and Music Institute	X	X	X										
1-I	Review vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety at intersection of Green Bay Road and Tower Road for possible enhancement	X	X	X										

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1-J	Review vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety at intersection of Green Bay Road and Elm Street for possible enhancement	X	X	X									
#2 Priority - Important, not immediate, but review idea annually													
2-A	Study options for creating housing for the elderly	X									X		
2-B	Explore methods of promoting the restoration, maintenance and / or rehabilitation of Commercial properties	X							X				could be part of a larger strategic planning effort for business districts
2-C	Review existing nuisance codes and model property maintenance codes as a possible means to address derelict commercial properties	X							X				Could be part of a larger strategic planning effort for business districts
2-D	Re-evaluate the B-1 and B-2 Multiple family zoning standards for internal consistency and clarification of purpose. Consider adoption of standards that facilitate town home development on existing B-1 zoned parcels.					X			X				
2-E	Upgrade the appearance and function of the Village parking lot north of Tower Rd., west of the railroad	X			X				X				
2-F	Enhance entrances to Village at Willow Road, Tower Road, Green Bay Rd. @ Scott Ave, & Green Bay Rd. at Kenilworth limits	X	X		X				X				
2-G	Study ways to increase bicycle safety along Sheridan Road			X									
2-H	Minimize regulatory signs and enhance their appearance.	X							X				
2-I	Highlight locations of business districts and related district elements (parking, commuter stations, etc) through an attractive, unified wayfinding sign plan.	X							X				
2-J	Enhance bicycle network by creating an east-west link between Sheridan Road, Green Bay Trail and Cook County Forest Preserve. Coordinate with Willow Road / Forest Way work scheduled for 2012.			X									
2-K	Improve the appearance of dead end streets at the lakefront, acknowledging their function as natural areas and for beach access.			X	X	X			X	X	X		
#3 Priority - Good to do													
3-A	Create a strategic plan for aesthetic improvements of public ways and spaces.								X	X			
3-B	Review and enforce regulations that address derelict residential properties	X					X						
3-C	Improve plantings around Parking Lots in Village	X			X				X				

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3-D	Encourage renovation of Indian Hill and Hubbard Woods Metra stations to enhance appearance and rider amenities, and continue to explore each as sites for retail/service business	X			X	X							
3-E	Develop zoning standards that relate building bulk to a lot's tableland area.					X							
3-F	Evaluate the possibility of placing "caps" on maximum house size by zoning district to address the impacts of large lots among smaller lots					X							
3-G	Explore methods of promoting the restoration or rehabilitation of residential landmark-eligible properties					X	X						
3-H	Encourage Cook County Forest Preserve District to enhance the natural appearance of the Forest Way Drive right of way (pavement, shoulder, etc.)						X	X	X				
#4 Priority - Consider if the opportunity presents itself													
4-A	Continue to evaluate the possibility of replacing the surface parking lot on Lincoln Avenue with an expanded and lowered structure opening onto the railroad embankment	X			X							should be a component of a larger strategic planning effort	
4-B	Evaluate possible acquisitions of land for parks, particularly along Lake Michigan					X		X	X	X	PC, EFC	X	
4-C	Study advisability of acquiring Green Bay Road from the State of Illinois.	X	X	X			X						
4-D	Consider acquisition of the northeast corner of Spruce and Birch for possible parking expansion.	X	X		X							X	
4-E	Improve landscaping in the railroad cut and along the Green Bay Trail			X				X	X				
4-F	Evaluate possibility of acquiring corner lots for pocket parks in densely developed neighborhoods					X		X	X	X	PC, EFC	X	
4-G	Create a vehicle to encourage gifts and charitable contributions for beautification purposes				X		X						
4-H	Remove chain link fencing throughout the Green Bay Road Corridor and, if needed, replace with more appropriate materials.						X						
4-I	Beautify the former service station at Green Bay Road and Winnetka Avenue (acquired by Village and leased to Land Rover)	X			X		X						
4-J	Institute "traffic calming" strategies where applicable to minimize cut-through commercial traffic within residential neighborhoods.		X			X							

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4-K	Consider a voluntary open space, conservation or scenic easement program, overseen by a volunteer board						X	X					
4-L	Consider acquisition of southwest corner of Oak and Linden	X									X		
4-M	Consider acquisition of any portion of North Shore Country Day campus				X		X				X		
4-N	Establish Guidelines for alley maintenance		X			X							
4-O	Consider a major design feature at Green Bay and Willow Roads		X		X	X							
4-P	Provide Streetscape Guidelines for residential neighborhoods				X	X						Focus on regulatory signs and lighting	
Completed - continue to monitor													
5-A	Evaluate 2002 residential zoning amendments directed at bulk and scale issues												
5-B	Evaluate residential construction processes to minimize impacts to surrounding neighborhoods.												
5-C	Enhance residential construction code enforcement and construction site management requirements												
5-D	Evaluate incentives for reducing residential demolitions												
5-E	Evaluate the effectiveness of demolition permit procedures												
5-F	Beautify the Village parking lot southeast of Green Bay Road and Winnetka Avenue, south of the former service station												
5-G	Intersection of Green Bay Road and Willow restriped.												
5-H	Engage in boundary discussions with Glencoe regarding split lots along Scott Avenue, boundary redrawn where possible												
5-I	Create design guidelines for commercial institutional and multiple family developments												
5-J	Repair guardrail along Green Bay Road between Elm and Tower												
5-K	naturalize landfill landscaping												
5-L	allow on-street parking on only one side of narrow streets within residential neighborhoods												

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5-M	discourage regional truck traffic from travelling on minor and collector streets												
5-N	improve lighting for Winnetka Avenue underpass												
5-O	Rehabilitate public works building and yards.												
5-P	Continue efforts to update affordable housing plan												
5-Q	Continue renovation of Elm Street Metra Station to enhance appearance and rider amenities												
Deleted													
	Improve the alley between Brier Street and Green Bay Road, including possibly opening to Kenilworth.												
	Redevelop the Elm Street Metra station into a commercial-retail structure that spans the railroad tracks												