Eastgate Redevelopment
Village of Park Forest

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Executive Summary

Homes for a Changing Regions is a program initiated by Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP). The Plan gives a sub-regional housing analysis, of communities in and around the Chicago region. With the Village officials and local organizations, CMAP identifies opportunities and gaps in the housing profile and looks for opportunities for collaboration between neighboring communities. The plans are an analysis of each community’s existing housing supply that compares the type and price of housing stock to the age, income, and tenure (rental or owner-occupied) of the population.

This project is a next step for the Homes Plan for the Village of Park Forest, IL. The initial Homes Plan analysis for Park Forest did not show a very promising future for the Village and identified foreclosed homes, slow economic growth and decreasing population as barriers to future growth. For the same, the Homes Plan has identified two potential urban design proposal sites, the Downtown Park Forest and the Eastgate Neighborhood.

This project entails a detailed analysis of the present housing conditions, future needs and development strategies for improving the Eastgate Neighborhood. The analysis was done with the help CMAPs toolkits, that have been made available by the organization on their website for developing further on the initial analysis. With detailed demographic and socio-economic analysis, community engagement and outreach was also conducted to get a better understanding of the community and needs of the residents.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted, separately, with residents, both renters and owners, village officials, management staff, local leaders and real estate professionals. Though there were slight differences in the perspectives of each, all groups mentioned the increasing number of foreclosed homes, inadequate commercial and recreational amenities, need for better schools and inadequacies in the housing stock. The groups were also asked for tentative strategies to help with improve livability and attract new investments.

The analysis is followed by tentative design as well as policy recommendations. These recommendations are based the results of the demographic and socio-economic analysis, projected future needs of the community and the region as a whole, CMAP’s recommendation toolkit and results from the FGDs. The recommendations are supported with case examples from neighboring towns and villages.

For implementation, the suggestions will be reviewed by the village board at the end of May 2017 and based on their feedback a timeline with yearly reviews will be prepared.
Introduction

Village of Park Forest is a southern suburb of Chicago and falls under the management of Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), along with Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) and South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (SSMMA). It is one of the most interesting and historically significant communities in the metropolitan Chicago region. It is the first fully planned post-war II suburb, developed by American Community Builders to include a variety of housing typologies, schools and other amenities. Unlike other suburbs at the time, the Village of Park Forest leadership worked to radically integrate the village in 1959.

It is famously known as “America’s Original GI Town” based on Gregory C. Randall’s book on planning and development of Park Forest. In his book Mr. Randall explains the intricacies involved in planning and design of Park Forest. Since Mr. Randall was a resident of Park Forest in until his adolescent years, his observation not only comes from the view point of a planner but also an experienced resident. He also explains in his book how Park Forest changed the community planning throughout the United States with its very active leadership.

This Community that was once known for its planning and community engagement is today, facing several housing and development challenges. It’s been more than 50 years since any significant development has taken place in the village and thus most of the construction is old and needs rehabilitation. But with a very active community and strong group of elected leaders, Village of Park Forest with the help of CMAP and the MPC is on its way to a better future.

The village, as said earlier falls under the management of CMAP and is part of the Homes for a Changing Region, an initiative by CMAP for communities in the region to enable municipal leaders to chart future demand and supply trends for housing in their communities and develop long-term housing policy plans. Under this plan Village of Park Forest falls under the South Suburban Housing Collaborative with Hazel Crest, Lansing, and Olympia Fields. As per date, the Homes Plan for the region has analyzed housing needs and demand, suggested strategies for improvement and has delineated areas for redevelopment and reinvestment in each community.

This report focuses on updating the housing and demographic analysis for Park Forest and suggesting a detailed housing plan development plan for the Eastgate Neighborhood of the village. The Eastgate neighborhood and the downtown were selected as potential redevelopment sites in the Phase 3 of the Homes Plan.

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1 Homes for a Changing Region. Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. CMAP 2016. [http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/livability/housing/homes](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/livability/housing/homes)
Village of Park Forest

When Village of Park Forest was first planned and developed, it was for sure one of its kind communities that offered varied housing typologies, shopping centers, schools and other amenities. But it has been more than 60 years since any new development has taken place in Park Forest. Today, it surely has evolved but into a community that is facing many emerging challenges. Neither can it sustain the present residents with the shortage in amenities and nor is it attracting new residents. It has also almost lost its initial marketing brand of the veteran and starters community. Newer suburban housing and shopping centers in the neighboring communities, is luring out both residents and businesses from the village. Though, there are quite a few advantages the location and the planning of Park Forest offers, for e.g. walkability, access to public transport, and its location, the village still needs to develop strategies to overcome housing shortage and lack of amenities.

According to regional forecasts by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), with no changes in the existing development pattern, the Village is projected to grow 11% between 2000 and 2030, as oppose to all the surrounding communities which are projected to grow over 250% each. The region, surrounding ten communities, also show potential for population and economic growth in the future and to benefit from this growth Park Forest needs to overcome its shortages in housing and commercial development. The Homes for a Changing Region Plan has suggested redevelopment and reinvestment strategies for Park Forest and surrounding communities to overcome the scarcity and be at par with neighboring suburbs.

HOMES FOR A CHANGING REGION PLAN

CMAP for the past few years, has been working with SSMMA in identifying the gaps and major hindrances that are causing slow development in the south suburban region. The Though all 42 communities under the leadership of SSMMA were being analyzed in understanding the housing demand and supply but the Homes Plan is focusing its redevelopment strategies towards just four communities to spur development. These communities are Hazel Crest, Lansing, Olympia Fields and Park Forest – all within a given sub-region. The reason behind this is active participation from both the community and elected leaders.

On analyzing the demographic and housing situation in the region, CMAP, MPC and SSMMA have identified the following as common issues in the sub-region and the recommended strategies are based on the same:

- The biggest problem for the sub-region are the ever-increasing number of foreclosed properties due to tax abatement and delays in mortgage payment
- Lowered property values, due to both, foreclosed properties and age of the structure, have led to less money available to support schools, upgrade amenities and spur economic development
- The economic and racial diversity has segregated southern suburbs and is continuing to do so

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- Evident lack in retail stores serving everyday needs, like grocery stores, has made the situation worse.

- Finally, the high taxation in Cook County compared to surrounding counties is forcing both businesses and residents to leave for more lucrative locations.

The Homes Plan, based on the housing and demographic analysis, has suggested development strategies for Park Forest and housing development, redevelopment and renovation is the core of those strategies. With housing recommendations, the Homes Plan also suggests the village to focus on its existing advantages like close vicinity to Chicago, readily available public transportation, and existing housing stock. For redevelopment and reinvestment, the Plan puts most emphasis on the Eastgate neighborhood and the downtown. The major recommendation from the plan are:

- Using regulatory changes to encourage mixed-use and commercial development all around Park Forest and new development in the Downtown area.

- Stabilizing Eastgate neighborhood, which is identified as the biggest challenge in the village, by using its locational advantages like proximity to downtown and the forest preserve.

- Coordinate residential rehabilitation program.

- Promoting energy efficiency and introducing tax incentives for both residents and investors for the same.
EXISTING CONDITIONS

Demographic Trends

Park Forest, in 2010 experienced a decrease of 6% between 2000-2010 from 23,462 to 21,975. But the ACS 2010-2014 data has shown an increase of approximately 500 residents in four years.5

The ACS 2015 5-year estimates show an increase in the African American population from 59.8% to 67% and a decrease in the white population from 33.4% to 29%.6

Population by Race

Graph 1 Population percentage by race. (Source: ACS 2015 5 year estimates)

The median household income is $48,319 as per the 2010-2014 American Community Survey, and about 4% of families and 11% of individuals live below the poverty line.7 Approximately 87% of the Park Forest’s residents age 25 or older have completed high school, and 25% have a bachelor’s degree or higher.8 As per the CMAP’s Home’s Plan the employment base in Park Forest is dominated by health care and social assistance workers and educational services.

6 ibid
7 ibid
Housing Trends

The Village of Park Forest has a unique mix of housing typologies. Out of the total 9,765 dwelling units approximately two-third are single family dwellings with remaining town houses and multi-family units. And one-half of these units are cooperatives.

From the owner/renter house-holder age group distribution shows that there are negligible number of millennials living in Park Forest. Discussions with village officials and residents have showed village’s interest in attracting more millennials to the area, hoping it’ll spur economic growth.

The ACS 2005-2009 census shows that of all workers employed in Park Forest, the largest segment (or 12.9%) lives in Chicago, while approximately 11.6% also live in the village.

The age wise householder population distribution, between ACS 2005-2009 and ACS 2010-2014 shows that the number of owner have decreased in all the age groups except seniors. In the 25-44 age group the homeowner population has gone down by approximately 30%, while the renter population in the same age group has increased by 31%. If only considering this data, it can be statistically assumed that 30% of population between the age group of 25-44 has shifted from being homeowners to renters. And in the 45-64 age group homeownership has decreased by 10% and renter population has increased by 17%. It is

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10 ibid
clear from this comparison that Village of Park Forest residents are either willingly or forcibly shifting from homeowners to being renters.

The housing typology by owner/renter also shows that there are not a lot of housing options being offered to residents by the village. Most of single family homes are owner-occupied whereas most of the multi-family home are renter occupied.

Although it is evident from the data that Park Forest residents are shifting from homeownership to renting, the income data shows renters are more cost-burdened in comparison to homeowners. Homeownership in Park Forest is more affordable than renting which is not like the rest of the CMAP region.
Graph 5 Percentage of renter occupied households paying more than 30 percent of income on monthly owner costs

Compared to the rest of the CMAP region, Park forest’s affordability trend seems to be the exact opposite.

Graph 6 Housing by Tenure
Conclusion

Park Forest housing trends, as can be observed, are very different from the rest of the CMAP region. The trends leave the village and the planning authorities with the following questions (these questions came up in FGDs with village officials and members of SSMMA):

- With a significant increase in single-family renters, it is logical to ask if these residents are choosing to rent by choice or by necessity?

- How can the village, SSMMA, and CMAP help aspiring homeowners, overcome barriers to homeownership?

- Because percentage of residents who earn $100K+ is much lower in Park Forest than in the CMAP region, how can the village attract more high earners? Would variety in housing typology make it happen or are there other factors at play?

- How can the village contribute in reduce housing cost burden? Would doing so integrate renters as well as homeowners become long term resident?
PROJECTED FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS

The CMAP’s Homes Plan used analytical tools developed by a national market research firm, Nielsen, to gain a better understanding of the future housing needs of Park Forest. The model uses existing demographics, housing typologies and income level in accessing the future needs by housing and tenure type and housing size. Based on this model and the CMAP’s 2030 forecast for the village, the following observations and predictions were made:

- The biggest future needs will be for subsidized housing for those earning $15,000 or less, most likely senior citizens. The village’s data shows a constant growth in the number of annual housing choice vouchers in Park Forest. From the February 2017 data it can be seen that there are 156 Park Forest Vouchers and 468 portable vouchers being used in Park Forest, thus highlighting the demand for subsidized housing in the village.

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_Table 1 Housing Vouchers in Park Forest over the years_

- There will be high demand for market rate affordable housing for people in the income range between $15K-$50,000, the moderate-income range.

- Since there are very few renters and homeowners in the high-income range ($75K-$150K), there is opportunity to create new housing for the said income range. This will not only bring diversity but also commercial investment in Park Forest.

- To achieve a balanced mix in housing typologies, CMAP suggests an increment of 16% standard and large-lot single family homes; 17% townhome; and 34% multi-family homes.

- The village can also benefit from incorporating and encouraging more co-operatives, especially for low-income group.

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Eastgate Neighborhood

INTRODUCTION

Eastgate neighborhood is a relatively isolated single-family isolated residential area bordered by Chicago Heights and the Sauk Trail Woods Forest Preserve. The neighborhood contains 336 homes that were built during the Village’s initial development in the early 1950s. Many of the homes are no bad to fair condition and neighborhood is plagued by increasing incidences of crime and code enforcement concerns. The neighborhood is served by the Norwood Square shopping center and the limited convenience retail at the northeast corner of Western Avenue and 26th street.

The neighborhood is degrading with every passing year and even before CMAP categorized Eastgate as a potential site for urban redesign and redevelopment, the Village has been trying to improve the quality of life in Eastgate neighborhood, but sadly with little positive outcomes. There are a lot of blighted properties and foreclosed in the neighborhood and village is trying to acquire all of them to put them on market for redevelopment. The vision for Eastgate is similar in both, the Strategic Plan prepared by HNTB and the guidelines laid out by the Homes Plan.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

As said earlier, all the home in the Eastgate neighborhood are more than 50 years old, and are dilapidating. Crime both from within Park Forest as well as spillovers from Chicago Heights is making the difficult situation worse. There is barely any sense of community and participation between the residents of the
neighborhood. In spite, of an elementary school, public park and a bike trail in the Sauk Trail Reserve, one can hardly see any activity in the community.

Map 2 Ownership and Occupancy Map – Eastgate Neighborhood, Village of Park Forest

Almost half of the homes are renter-occupied and few owner-occupied with rest being vacant due to foreclosure or absentee owner. This is one of the major reason why the properties in the community are losing value and the community is not taken care of. On interviewing Eastgate residents, maintenance by renters/residents was mentioned as one of the biggest problems in the neighborhood. Almost 25% of the houses vacant and dilapidated.

Out of the vacant houses, two-third are village owned and the Village has received grant funds that have allowed for the demolition of many the vacant, blighted houses in the neighborhood. At present, 63 houses have been demolished/deconstructed in Eastgate. A total of 41 vacant lots in the neighborhood are owned by the Village or the South Suburban Land Bank, with another 27 likely to be publicly owned by the end of 2017.
Map 3 Vacant Properties Map – Eastgate Neighborhood, Village of Park Forest

Map 4 Foreclosed and Blighted Properties Map – Eastgate Neighborhood, Village of Park Forest
The windshield survey of the neighborhood did tell a story very different from the trends mentioned by village officials and those reflected by the data. Most of the homes either need critical repair or demolition. Only a very few homeowners have done significant repairs to their homes. Most of the homes are single-family homes without fenced yards or garages. Few residents have constructed either single or double capacity garages, rest make do with a drive way. The yards were unkept and there was visible loitering both around the yards and on the sidewalks.

Sidewalks and streets around the neighborhood were broken and needed fixing and maintenance. Parking garages, if any and work sheds were mostly in dilapidating condition. For most of the houses roofs were still intact but siding/walls needed significant maintenance. The homes that were occupied, seemed to have the potential to sustain if given repair and renovation. But the structure of the houses that were foreclosed or vacant was in a bad shape and needs demolishing.

There was a stark difference between the streets where majority homes were owner occupied and between the streets that either had foreclosed homes or were renter occupied.

From the windshield survey as well as the housing data it can be said that Eastgate as a neighborhood needs attention both from the Village as well as from its residents. The village has conducted a few outreach events to understand the perception of Park Forest residents regarding the Eastgate neighborhood and have also conducted workshops with Eastgate residents for discussing future goals with regards to the community.

In June 2015, the Village conducted a neighborhood workshop in Eastgate to get the residents’ thoughts about interim uses for the growing number of vacant lots. The two most popular uses suggested were additional park space and community gardens.
OUTREACH PROCESS AND RESULTS

Over a span of 4 months, different outreach activities were performed to understand and get feedback from a variety of stakeholders. CMAP’s Outreach guide for the Homes Plan was referred to and interviews, informal discussions and focus group discussions were conducted with different groups to achieve the following objectives:

- Provide residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to provide input and feedback that can be used to make changes to the plan
- To inform residents and stakeholders about local, regional and national housing and demographic trends
- To get input from the community in making future decisions, thereby strengthening the community engagement and the outreach process

For the same stakeholders and residents from different groups were identified based on availability, and their role in the community.

Focus Group Discussions

The Focus Group Discussions were conducted over a span of two days in early March and the feedback received brought interesting observations to light. The groups were so divided that each had approximately 5-8 participants of similar interest, meaning residents, officials and real-estate professionals were all in separate groups. But each group was also diverse in the sense that, residents were a mix of homeowners, renters and landlords; village officials were from different departments like economic development, plan commission and recreation and parks department; real-estate professionals group was a mix of brokers, multi-family apartment managers and developers who practiced in or around the village. Each group discussion lasted for 90mins and conducting and note taking were done by separate people. The questionnaire was designed to get feedback on following topics:

- Strategic plan for the Village and present vision by the officials
- Demographic and housing trends both for Park Forest and the CMAP region
- Advantages and disadvantage of Park Forest
- Where in the village is the utmost need for redevelopment and reinvestment?
- Future needs and strategies for redevelopment and investment

List of participants attached as Appendix
Questionnaire attached as Appendix
Residents

Residents were very active during the discussions. Most had a lot to comment and suggest, regarding the existing plan and the future steps. The biggest concerns that came out were the exceptionally high taxes, lack of amenities and commercial development. There were also concerns regarding the school district and the lack of recreational activities for families. Affordability was talked about both by home-owners and renters but mostly renters. For homeowners, the biggest issue was the increasing number of vacant homes and unmaintained lots by renters which is affecting home values.

Other than the issues, residents especially longtime residents, seemed to be very fond of Park Forest and had a lot to share when asked about the advantages of Park Forest. For most residents Park Forest was their safe space, the feeling of a community was important for them and they felt secure in the village. On the other hand, renters, who were new to the area, felt disconnected and overburdened. Proximity to the city and readily available public transit was another advantage mentioned with the walkability aspect. Though lack of amenities was mentioned by all the groups, residents and officials pointed out to amenities like the aqua center, art exhibits and classes in downtown, etc. that are unique for the area but are not marketed well enough. Park forest being a veterans’ town was also seen as a plus by most.

The village’s vision for future development was discussed and residents were asked as to what areas can benefit from reinvestment and redevelopment. To that all answered Eastgate neighborhood and the downtown area. Per the residents both these areas need mixed-use development with different living options. Both renters and homeowners seemed to agree that the village needed more focused efforts towards building the feeling of community and affordable housing options for attracting long-term homeowners and renters. Another suggestion was to build better schools and attract starter families as well as have more trendy commercial development to attract millennials as both these groups can be potential long-term residents. For community engagement residents suggested to have more activities within the community and common spaces where residents of all age groups could come together. Another suggestion for increasing accountability and responsibility for rental properties was to introduce rental association, rental/landlord educational seminars, and welcome associations for both new homeowners as well as renters.

Real Estate Professionals

The biggest challenge brokers and developers mentioned was the low home values and lack of commercial development in the area. As per their experiences with clients, the existing commercial development in Park Forest is concentrated only in the downtown area which is also no attractive enough to lure new buyers.
and renters. High taxes were another big challenge mentioned by developers as there wasn’t much scope for profit. Stringent zoning regulations and home renovation guidelines also limited the involvement of both developers and brokers in Park Forest.

Since there has been a drastic increase in renter population, this group was also asked why their clients were choosing to rent than to own, to which the most common answers were – easy living with minimum responsibility, affordability and mobile generation for millennials. Per the professionals Park Forest is not offering what starter or mid-level families are looking for, example – single family apartments with scope for remodeling and expansion, two-car garage, commercial development and good schools. Out of which large-lot single family homes and good schools seem to be the amenities for which most families can compromise on other aspects.

**Village Officials**

The responses of village officials were particularly interesting as they were as passionate as the residents for developing a stronger community but were also practical and wanted to incorporate demands of developers. The officials mentioned similar concerns as residents but also added decreasing population, aesthetics, foreclosure rate, lack of diversity both age wise and income, petty crimes and lack of job opportunities in the village.

*Image 6 Word Cloud of problems mentioned by Village officials*
As per the officials following are the strategies the village has either adopted or is moving towards adopting, to address the above discussed problems:

- Lack of affordable housing as well as high-income housing options by bringing in a variety of homeownership and renting options

- The officials want to work with the positive characteristics of the village and market them in such a way that it attracts both investment and long-term residents. They do not want to carry forward the image of Park Forest as a starter/retired community but would like to offer something for every age and income group.

- The village has already started working on improving community engagement by introducing initiatives like community gardening on village owned plots with $250 yearly maintenance expenditure paid by the village.

- The village is currently working on a major revision to its zoning and subdivision ordinances and is planning on incorporating changes like permitting accessory dwelling units within single-family houses to provide living quarters for family members, students, home helpers, and others; zoning district for mixed housing type; and live/work dwelling units in commercial zones.
Tentative Policy Recommendations and Case Studies

Based on existing trends, population and future needs projections, feedback from stakeholders and CMAP’s Home Plan’s suggestions\textsuperscript{16} the following are the tentative proposals for the Eastgate neighborhood:

**REHABILITATION:** The neighborhood already has a standing stock of large-lot single-family homes, the village can advantage from this by reusing with the help of renovations. After a structural study of the houses, buildings eligible for renovation can be selected. For doing so, different methodologies and case examples can be used:

- Providing reconstruction subsidies or low-income loans, case study – Oak Park Single Family Rehabilitation Loan Program.
- Oak Park’s Housing Programs Division administers a federal program that offers single-family rehabilitation loans and helps homeowners bring their properties into code compliance, eliminate health/safety hazards, energy efficiency and weatherization, accessibility for income qualified zones\textsuperscript{17}. Park Forest can benefit from a similar approach.

Establish Community Land Trust for renovating foreclosed homes and selling/renting them below market value. Case study - Community Partners for Affordable Housing (CPAH) - Highland Park, Lake Forest, and Evanston.

- With identification of federal and state funding sources, Park Forest can establish a trust fund that would not only help renovate foreclosed homes in Eastgate but also other neighborhoods. This would also help the affordability issue. With the help of homes developed through land trust, Park Forest can have a steady supply/stock of affordable renting units.

**REDEVELOPMENT:** Encouraging new mixed housing type development in the neighborhood to increase density, offer more options to prospective homeowners and renters and spur economic growth. This can be done on the village acquired foreclosed lots. Small courtyards of group houses, multi-family apartment buildings and small-lot single family houses can be developed on multiple vacant lots or allow for accessory dwelling units for existing large-lot single-family homes.

Since the 2030 projections highlight need for low income housing options for both seniors and millennials, small lot density bonuses can be offered to encourage new development. Case study – Plainfield Smaller Lots Density Bonuses.

- The Village of Plainfield has experienced tremendous residential growth in recent years, as the community’s population grew from 13,038 in 2000 to approximately 40,000 in 2010. This has been possible because of the new density bonus program adopted in 2005 as part of the Village’s Residential Design Guidelines for Annexations and Planned Unit Developments. Since the Village has already discussing about a new zoning ordinance with increased density, this would be a good time to add bonuses to attract investors and build more affordable/high density neighborhoods.

\textsuperscript{16} CMAP’s Recommendations Guide for the Homes Plan.
\textsuperscript{17} CMAP. 2012. Homes for a Changing Region Plan. Phase 3: Implementing Balanced Housing Plans at the Local Level. Year Five: Bellwood, Berwyn, Forest Park, Maywood, and Oak Park
Developing an inclusionary zoning ordinance, case study – Highland Park Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance

- The Highland Park Inclusionary Housing ordinance requires developments over five units to include affordably priced homes. The policy requires that developers of buildings with five residential units or more provide 20 percent of the total units for sale or rent at affordable rates to income-qualified households. The ordinance provides for fee waivers and a density bonus to offset the cost of compliance with the ordinance. With Park Forest’s high taxes, a similar approach can help attract developers and investors.

Mixed-use zoning in single-use Eastgate neighborhood, case example – Libertyville municipal recommendations.

- Reducing minimum unit sizes to 1,000 square feet or less per unit will enable developers to build more affordable dwelling units. Since developers and brokers find the Park Forest zoning ordinance and building byelaws to be very stringent, a reduction in minimum unit size would come as refreshing change and might help attract more affordable development.

CRIME PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: introducing the idea of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), for transparency and “eyes on the street”, case example – Oak Forest Municipal Recommendations

- This will also involve introducing more green spaces and community gardening spaces

- Community organizing initiatives like gardening and partnering with organization like the Illinois Extension and local churches. Since this development is focused on bringing diversity in the community programs like the 4H’s Junior Master Gardener can incorporate seniors within the community as mentors for groups of children. The Algonquin elementary school can also be incorporated in the gardening program.

- The Sauk Trail Forest Reserve and the bike path can also be better used if made more accessible and biking clubs for all age groups can be introduced.
With the said proposals, specific to Eastgate, there will also be a need for additional zoning and development changes around the village to compliment the development in the neighborhood.

**RENTAL STOCK:** Maintaining the rental stock and assisting landlords in management and renters in knowing their rights.

Creating/expanding building code inspection, registration and licensing programs, case study – Hanover Park Rental Licensing Program.

- Hanover Park has one officer dedicated to single-family rental properties and three officers dedicated to multifamily rental properties. Officers are assigned designated areas to survey properties for any maintenance violations. The owners of single-family properties pay $100 to apply for a rental license that includes the first and second inspection (if needed). Owners of a multifamily building pay a license fee of $75 per rental dwelling unit, which also includes two inspections. Owners cannot become landlords without qualifying the said inspections. The FGDs with renters brought to light the poor conditions of Single-family rental properties. A program like this, can help improve living standards for renters and increase owner liability.

Landlord/renters education programs, case example – Arlington Height municipal recommendations.

- Since there is a high foreclosure rate and most of the foreclosed homes in Eastgate are already occupied by the Village, these properties can be renovated/rehabilitated and can be rented by the village. For this to work and based on some of the experiences of owners, a landlord/renter education program would help build rapport as well as stability between the two.

**ADDRESSING FORECLOSURE:** offering homeownership counseling and foreclosure prevention services and partnering with financial institutions in creating opportunities for homebuyers. The homeownership versus renting highlights that most of the people owning homes are overburdened and are moving towards foreclosure. Both, homeownership counseling and increased renting opportunities can help residents step out of the foreclosure cycle.

**ECONOMIC GROWTH:** promoting location efficient mortgages to facilitate a more compact, pedestrian friendly and livable downtown, as well as other community shopping districts.
CONCLUSION

The redevelopment/rehabilitation strategies suggested, would only work if Park Forest is made more attractive for developers. This would only happen with better amenities and a more promising economic growth. Both, the Eastgate redevelopment and Downtown redevelopment needs to happen parallelly, in different phases. Because, funding would be an issue for taking up large redevelopment projects, starting with rehabilitation and a zoning ordinance for higher density and smaller lots would be the ideal start. This can be followed by urban design and landscape developments in the neighborhood that would again, improve the existing image of Eastgate and would also help in attracting investors and residents to the neighborhood. Since Eastgate is close to the Downtown, train station, forest reserve and has an elementary school, it already has a structure for a neighborhood with good amenities. But, the said amenities need to be better connected to the neighborhood with walkways, bike paths and of course with better marketing. Community gardens, and open spaces would help build a stronger community and would make the neighborhood more livable. Along with the rehabilitation and landscaping, the Village would also need to help owners and renters be more responsible and liable towards the properties which would help maintain the improvements.

Once the basic rehabilitation and landscaping measures have been taken, the Village can focus on redevelopment strategies and attracting investors. Small business loans, affordable homeownership, flexible zoning regulations, etc. would all help in inviting residents and investors.

Once the rehabilitation/redevelopment process begins, the given strategies and proposals can be modified based on yearly reviews. Most of these strategies have been successful in surrounding villages, and Park Forest can benefit from them similarly. But with yearly reviews it can be assessed whether or not these strategies are working for the Village and can be modified accordingly.
References


Organizations

- Village of Park Forest
- South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association
- Chicago Metropolitan Mayors and Managers Association
# Appendix A | Focus Group Roster

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>March 8</th>
<th>March 9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:30 am – Noon</td>
<td>Brian Ross, Co-op Manager</td>
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<td>1:00 pm – 2:30 pm</td>
<td>Torri Clark, Landlord</td>
<td>Sharlene Stanley, US Bank</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tselane Morgan-Hatter, SSLBDA</td>
<td>Suzanne Hamilton, Realtor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Deborah Moore, NHS</td>
<td>Ouida Neal, Realtor</td>
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<td>Diane Abell, Realtor</td>
<td>La’Dweena Smith, Realtor</td>
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<td>Eduardo Villar, Landlord</td>
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<td>Sandra Wells, NHS South Suburbs</td>
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<td>Christina Honore, First Midwest Bank</td>
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<td>1:30 pm – 3:00 pm</td>
<td>Andrea Ramirez-Justin, Old Plank Trail Bank</td>
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<td>3:30 pm – 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Larrie Kerestes, Village Community</td>
<td>Amy Bashiti, IHDA</td>
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<td>Development Director</td>
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<td>4:00 pm – 5:30 pm</td>
<td>Karyn DeCuir</td>
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<td>Allison McCray</td>
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<td>Vera Barber</td>
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<td>Sabrina Jeffries</td>
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<td>Sharon Newman</td>
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<td>Mary Bruce</td>
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<td>7:00 pm – 8:30 pm</td>
<td>Julie Furgason</td>
<td>Emmanuel Okorie</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cerritha Price</td>
<td>Erika Pitts</td>
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<td>Vernita Wickliffe-Lewis</td>
<td>Diana Cruz</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Glenn John</td>
<td>Tahtia Smalling</td>
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<td>Mae Brandon (Trustee)</td>
<td>Kesha Eason</td>
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Appendix B | Focus Group Questions

Proposed Focus Group Questions

General Questions, can be asked of all Focus Groups

- What questions/comments do you have about the market analysis and conclusions drawn from the Plan Commission?
- What do you see as the main housing issues in the Village of Park Forest? (I know most people are going to say “taxes”, so we must press for other issues as well.)
- What are the advantages of living in Park Forest?
- What areas of Park Forest could benefit most from rehabilitation and reinvestment?
- What strategies would you suggest for addressing these issues?
- What is your vision for the future of housing in Park Forest?
- What strategies would you support to achieve this vision?
- Why do people move to Park Forest?

Professionals

- (If appropriate based on discussion regarding housing issues.) What new products/services might be available to meet the identified needs?
- Why are people choosing to rent rather than to own?
- Why do renters choose to live in your homes?
- What are the amenities/services that attract renter?
- What types of households are buying homes?
- Are people generally able to find the type of home they want in Park Forest (including both renters and homeowners)?
- The Village is revising its Zoning Ordinance to permit new housing types, such as accessory dwelling units, smaller lots and houses, mixed use housing/commercial. Do you see a need for these housing types?
- What is the best way to market Park Forest homes and Park Forest in general to reach the desired audience?
- What is the best way to attract market rate housing developers and investors to the community?

Residents

- Do you feel you spend more than 30% of your income on housing? If that would be reduced to an affordable amount what do you think you’d invest the saved income on?
- If you were to move again, what would you be looking for in a house? Do you think you would be able to find it in Park Forest?
- The Village is revising its Zoning Ordinance to permit new housing types, such as accessory dwelling units, smaller lots and houses, mixed use housing/commercial. Do you see a need for these housing types?
- What is the best way to market Park Forest homes and Park Forest in general to reach more people like you?

Eastgate

(Questions relevant to the Eastgate Neighborhood, could be asked in any of the focus groups)

- What type of development would you like to see in the neighborhood?
- What amenities and services do you think would make the neighborhood more accessible and attractive?
• What features/parts of the community as residents and community members would you like to preserve? And which areas could benefit from revitalization?

**Follow-up Questions for Residents, Landlords, etc**

• How can we get more people interested in community meetings and community projects?
• What made you interested in the first place?
• If we wanted to do a follow-up questionnaire what would be the best platform?
• What would you like to see/discuss in the next meeting? How often can you come to these meetings? When would be a good time to organize a follow-up meeting?
Appendix C | Focus Group Discussion Notes

March 9th 2017

1:00pm to 2:30pm

Session with Realtors

Ques. Housing Issues in Park Forest?

- Taxes
  - Been active in PF since 2005, brought 5 different investors, but flipping didn’t happen. Taxes were much better before, now it’s almost 3 times. Thus, taken out all investors out of Park Forest.
  - $50 in tax bill equals $10,000 in purchase cost.
  - Brand new rehab properties, should be selling at $110,000, are not even going at $90,000. Cannot get appraisals done.
- Buyers want something new!
- Nice, safe town with decent schools, that’s why renters come here. Most people don’t qualify for buying because of the taxes.
- Seen the neighborhood change, influx of renters, who do not care for the property or at times even their children. Issues to seniors.
- No downtown. NO attractions! No place to even promote smaller businesses or community activities.
- How do we attract more businesses in the area? What incentives can we offer? TIF?
- Driving through the area doesn’t excite you! Lack of visible commercial.

Ques. What do people who live here feel about the place?

- They love the place. They remember the old village and still feel very safe and secure in the village
- Wrong publicity makes others judge.

Ques. What’s the perspective of people, both external and internal. How do you market Park Forest?

- Get a lot of home for your money.
- Nice area and nice schools
- The south side, people are not maintaining homes well. Surrounding properties affect the buyer’s decision. If a homeowner complains about a neighboring property looking shabby, the village helps the other person to improve/maintain their house.
- Residents love the place. Outsiders always talk about the high taxes and low commercial.
- South and East could use maintenance and upliftment

Ques. What area could benefit from rehab and reinvestment?

- Co-op were renovated, and now look nice.
- Sauk Trail, knock down all the homes and build businesses.
- Park Forest was planned with a very short-sighted view.
- Wayfinding signs can help travelers find commercial and attractions.

Ques. Do people know Park Forest Exists, outside Park Forest?

- Poor visibility
Ques. Why are people choosing to rent and not buy?

- Lousy credit history.
- Have repair credit seminars, but would not help a lot.
- US Bank people try and give renters/prospective home buyers alternate options.
- Make it attractive, people will buy.
- Better housing stock.

Ques. Are people able to find the home they want in Park Forest?

- Yes and No.
- Few options for Town Homes, Co-op, old properties being renovated.
- A lot of houses are still foreclosed compared to a lot of towns in the region
- It has an older housing stock, no basements is also a problem.
- No new housing stock.
- How can we bring in developers in the village and develop the vacant lots.
- Schools are an issue in the village.

People are coming from the city (Chicago) as its getting scarier day by day.

Eastgate 163 and 224 school district which is poor! Nobody would purposely want to go that school district.

Ques. Why are people walking away from their houses?

- Because of the taxes.

Ques. What do people look for in houses?

- Good to first time home buyers. Usually young families. Few perpetual renters, who have fear of commitment. First time home buyers’ seminar help with this.
- A lot of people just want Michigan water (Chicago water)
- 1960s houses are compartmentalized. Huge transformations can be made!
- Open floor plan as oppose to big houses.

Ques. Do you ever discuss renovation with buyers?

- Yes, but not a lot of people take that step. Mostly only developers can afford to do that.
- US Bank doesn’t offer co-op loans anymore.
- Home improvements are suggested. Small renovation loans of $2-3K are offered by the US Bank.

Ques. How can we make people stay in Park Forest?

- They need bigger houses. All kids need separate bedrooms. People move for more space.
- For seniors, safety is an issue.
- But the police department is amazing.
- Isolated crime incidents are blown out of proportions.
- Ranch homes were helpful for baby boomers taking care of their parents.

Park Forest has been built on a wetland, thus no basement.
Ques. What is your vision for the future of Park Forest?

- Modern homes
- More floor space
- Better school systems
- Build up the downtown area, which right now is an eyesore.
- Developers need enough vacant space. If you want to get developers home, you need to get rid of a few ordinances, sprinkler ordinance!!! Investors don’t want to build because of that. Ordinance get in the way of new construction, especially single family homes.
- No, for multi-family homes. Condos only go for very young and very old. Maybe a small project but not a large-scale project! This is a family town; people have multiple children.
- Mixed use not the way to go.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (Granny Apartment)? These houses are not built for that. There certainly is a need.

First time buyers are buying houses, and not necessarily these are young parents.

Ques. Any thoughts on strategies to attract new/existing home buyers?

- Give people exemption/discount/incentives to current residents to stay here.
- Converting renters to homeowners.
- Have good schools, educate children so that they can educate their parents.
- Websites and social media an important connecting method. Having webinar series.
- Park Forest first time buyer is not a 20-30 person but some 30-40 years of age.
- The PF housing website should have insights on how to improve credit to become home owners.
- Increased outreach services by the village to the people.
- Update ordinances and policies as per the changing times.

March 9th 2017

3:30pm – 5:00pm Session with Village Officials

Ques. Any thoughts on the data analysis and overview of trends. What jumped out?

- Disparities in CMAP and Village region
- Eastgate neighborhood.
- Percentage of income going in housing is so high.

Ques. Main housing issues in Park Forest?

- Tax rate – 38% (Property tax rates are much higher compared to neighboring towns)
- School system.
- Earlier this was mostly a place for older residents, kids were gone and schooling wasn’t most important. But now with starter families and first time home buyers, schools are important.
- Eastgate is an issue, Crime! Getting rid of the blight is also getting rid of the people which again increases crime and decreases maintenance.
- Old housing stock.
- How do co-ops affect Park Forest? A lot of exemptions. Co-ops should be a part of the plan, how do co-ops affect property tax?
- Has there been a drain in the property tax income?
- Accessory Dwelling Units?
Ques. Do you think people can find what they are looking for in Park Forest? (Housing)

- Depends on what stage they are in. Not for families with school children.
- We are very divided, two counties, 4 school districts, its very complicated.
- Who should Park Forest be marketing to? Younger and smaller families – co-ops and smaller homes. Ranch style homes are good for seniors. Biggest problem is the families with teenagers, families mostly with highest paid income are moving out of Park Forest.

Ques. Biggest advantage/disadvantage of Park Forest?

- Community is an advantage
- PF is very welcoming.
- Residents who are engaged, there is a sense of community, but for others there’s nothing and they feel like outsiders.
- Because there are no blocks, residents cannot define their specific community.
- Green neighborhood – positive.
- Distance is negative – towards the south.
- Accessibility – positive (Metra, nature reserve, transit, shopping, retail, etc)
- It is very walkable.
- If you know PF its nice, if not you won’t like it or even ever think of coming here.

Ques. How can we get a sense of community in the renters?

- Everything is about MARKETING
- Engage home owners and renter with the help of marketing and form a community with them.
- Neighborhood ambassador aspect.
- Stronger Website
- Park Forest is not changing, it has changed! How do we work around it? How can we change everything suddenly now?
- Strategies need to go to the streets.
- Millennials – involve them!

Ques. What role do different organizations play for engaging the current residents? (realtors, Landlords, Bankers, housing professionals)

- Brokers might be doing everything out of self-interest. Selling houses and not communities...maybe they are not wanting to sell PF houses to new buyers.
- How can we make the message more powerful?
- Maybe the initial strategy, which was having starter homes, have resulted in people leaving once they can afford a bigger house. Move out of PF and not within.
- Try to turn realtors into boosters.

Ques. What areas of Park Forest can benefit from rehabilitation and reinvestment? And what strategies?

- TOD, downtown
- Connect Matteson with downtown.
- Develop North St. and South St. (which is the industrial park)
- A new commercial hub!
- Involve churches
- Developing commercial nodes, with parks, and other recreational spaces.
Illinois population in general is decreasing! (2010 Census happened at a very bad time)

Ques. What is your vision for the village?

- Cusp of new housing, maybe even tiny homes. Housing available to homeless individuals, service men, co-op courts, small community of homes. That’ll help in developing a sense of community between residents.
- Smaller homes make more sense; big houses are silly!
- PF has a lot of opportunity for being innovative, the government is very active. So much is happening.
- Give millennials a place to be active
- Park Forest – focus it to be an over 55 (age of residents) community. There’s not a lot that can be done about the schools. Vibrant over 55 community. It could have more diversity but concentrate on 55 and above age group. Live and work in your neighborhood kind of a motto! Focus on what you have rather than bringing in new of everything!
- Employer assisted housing or have residency requirements for employees.
- Mixed use developments for seniors gives them easy access.

Eastgate was always this negative area. Develop it as a wind farm, have a lake and give incentives for sustainable living. Policing is so difficult!

Ques. What would make you move to Park Forest? (under the age of 45)

- Walkability
- Variety of cultural experience at a walkable distance.
- Being close to work
- Provide the residents with a lifestyle

March 9th 2017

7:00pm – 8:30pm

- Property tax might make people leave Park Forest.
- DuPage County Worker, lives here: shares the house with her sister. Has mold, rats, and a slum lord.
- Check Park Forest’s connections with Governor State University!
- Ques. Any comments or questions on the data analysis?
- What do you mean by another zoning district in the downtown area? (Ans. For ease of development)
- Urban Residential district – mix of residential type.
- Vacant houses in Eastgate.

What is done with the house/land that is demolished/vacant? We list those houses for sale. Either sell them as side lots or develop new properties. Slower approach in Eastgate as Eastgate has more needs and would require a more overall solution.

(Tax delinquency and Water bill outstanding for 2 years = Abandonment)

Ques. What do you see as the main housing issue?

- Abandoned Properties, number of foreclosures.
- Property owners that don’t keep up their properties (especially landlords)
- Enough variation in the housing stock especially higher income households
- Renter vs. landlord issues
- Renters also don’t take care of properties as its not theirs.
- Room size
- Addition to layout
- Flooding which creates the mold problem.
- Want to do community gardening
- Plumbing in the old pipes, people a lot of times have their front yards dug up.
- No newer housing stock
- Affordable new housing
- Zero aesthetics
- Old houses with no room for improvement as has no infrastructural capacity. It is very discouraging.
- The roads end abruptly in the co-ops
- High number of SF rentals
- The village is not self-contained, need to go all around different towns for various basic needs
- Eastgate – poor neighborhood, build back up again.
- Bad condition of rental housing, landlords are renting foreclosed houses
- If property owners don’t speak up, how will the village know?!
- Most of the infrastructure is poor because of the old age of the house
- Fixing poor existing infrastructure stops you from making other improvements
- No organization or association for renovation or revamping the houses
- Renters don’t maintain houses, gardens, yards
- Renters not taking care of the property
- Renters not respecting anybody on the block
- Teenagers fighting on the road
- Would like to know about home improvement solutions

This Dave guy, replaces any damage done by wind, etc.

CEDA – weatherization

Ques. Strategies that village can use to solve these issues?

- The village works – if you complain and let the village know – they will take care of the problem. Village’s code control is very effective.
- Need for neighborhood, house maintenance education
- Have welcome associations and set the rules straight right at the beginning
- Diligently take care of your property and inspire others
- Kids and adults both used to get out on the streets, that helps build a community.
- More neighborhood block parties including both home owners and renters.
- Educating residents
- More need for financing options – village to set up not for profit unit that can fund developmental building/construction.
- Co-ops to assist with stuff
- Have a new layout for the village? Something more metropolitan and not this old.
- Mixed use development
- How can the downtown be made more attractive?
- Why are stores not working in the downtown??? What are we doing wrong?!
- Bike lanes
- More diversity in terms of race
- Sell Park Forest as a diverse community, build on the legacy of the village.
- How can the village market to the artist community?
- Partner with different schools and universities.
- Community level beautification projects
- How is the cable network for the village?
- More accountability for landlords, stringent inspections
- Neighborhood Education
- Home buying programs
- Bring out the historic nature of this community through ART and CULTURE

Ques. What is your vision for future of housing in Park Forest

- Get rid of the term affordability
- Quality schools draws families
- Make elected people accountable for the education system
- Sustainability
- Job Opportunities
- Multi-cultural and diverse community
- Good aesthetics
- Updated housing stock – keep rehabbing it
- More businesses
- Bowling center, etc, to bring the community together
- Great place to raise your family
- Artist community
- More businesses
- Ice cream store (Seasonal) with the central park
- A walking community
- Perfect family community (change from senior to all family community)
- Self-sustaining village
Appendix D | Project Poster

Eastgate Neighborhood Redevelopment Plan

Village of Park Forest

Village of Park Forest is a southern suburb of Chicago and falls under the management of Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), along with Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) and South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (SSMMA).

- Fully planned postwar II suburb developed by American Community Builders
- Single-family homes, Townhomes, Multi-family homes and Cooperatives
- No new significant development in the past 30 years.

Over Burdened Renters Over Burdened Owners

Renters

2002 2008 2014
1,357 1,023

Owners

2,087 1,375

Issues Highlighted by Stakeholders

Escalating Suburban Vacant Homes

No Recreation

Lack of Housing Options

Poor Marketing

Old Construction

Rehabitation

The neighborhood already has a standing stock of large-lot single-family homes, the village can advantage from this by renting the Help of renovations.

- Providing reconstruction subsidies or low-income loans
- Establishing Community Land Trust for renovating foreclosed homes and selling/renting them below market value

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Introducing the idea of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), for transparency and "eyes on the street"

- Introducing more green spaces and community gardening spaces
- Partnering with organizations like Illinois Extension and local churches for building community and organizing events
- Bike clubs for all age groups. Steak-Tail Forest Reserve

Saubhargh Jain - Master of Urban Planning

Advisor: Dr. Andrew Greenlee
Capstone Chair: Village of Park Forest
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

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