



ENVISION

FORD HEIGHTS ILLINOIS

Village of Ford Heights Strategic Plan

August 2020



Village of Ford Heights

Envision Ford Heights Strategic Plan

The Village of Ford Heights thanks the residents, business officials, community organizations, regional partners, and elected officials who participated in the creation of this report.

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About Envision Ford Heights

Envision Ford Heights, is an action-oriented community planning and revitalization effort aimed at identifying, reactivating, connecting, and leveraging the Village’s community assets and strengths.

PREPARED BY

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About Antero Group

Antero Group is a full-service civil engineering, urban planning and design, and strategic consultancy based in Chicago. We envision a world where sustainability, resilience, and equity are business as usual. Our mission is to help communities thrive by designing projects, policies, and programs that transform the built environment.

August 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Envision Ford Heights is the Village of Ford Heights' first comprehensive community planning and revitalization effort. Envision Ford Heights is aimed at identifying, reactivating, connecting, and leveraging the Village's community assets in ways that create long-term economic opportunities and that enhance the livability and resilience of Ford Heights and surrounding Southland communities.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Village of Ford Heights is a small south suburban community in Cook County located about 28 miles south of downtown Chicago (Figure 1.1). Like other south suburban (“Southland”) communities, Ford Heights’ approximately 2,700 residents face a variety of interrelated community, economic, and environmental challenges. These challenges include population loss, a shrinking tax base, difficulties in attracting and retaining businesses, crumbling infrastructure systems, blighted housing, crime, and flooding. Although serious, these challenges represent only part of the story that is currently unfolding in Ford Heights.

Driven by a new vision for the future of the community, Ford Heights—under the leadership of Mayor Coulter and the Village Board—has taken significant steps towards envisioning and realizing “Ford Heights 2.0”. In January 2018, Mayor Coulter launched Envision Ford Heights, an action-oriented community planning and revitalization effort aimed at identifying, reactivating, connecting, and leveraging the Village’s community assets and strengths.

The Envision Ford Heights Strategic Plan is the outcome of two years of community planning, outreach, stakeholder engagement, project development, and implementation efforts. The goals of this planning effort were to:

- ▶ Engage a diverse set of community stakeholders in a collaborative planning effort;
- ▶ Provide a snapshot of the community’s demographics and existing conditions;
- ▶ Articulate a shared vision for the future of the community; and,
- ▶ Identify guiding principles, goals, and strategies that will put Ford Heights on a path towards economic and community revitalization.

Through the Envision Ford Heights planning process, Village staff and elected representatives worked with local and regional partners to advance an array of high priority projects and initiatives. The list below outlines some of the early wins that were catalyzed through this effort.

This Strategic Plan outlines a clear path forward for advancing and sustaining these early wins. More specifically, this plan articulates a shared vision for the future of Ford Heights and provides guiding principles, goals, and strategies for realizing Ford Heights 2.0. Implementation of these strategies will put Ford Heights on a path towards economic revitalization and enhanced community resilience.

Figure 1.1. Regional Context Map



EARLY WINS

Since launching *Envision Ford Heights*, the Village has worked with local and regional partners to achieve the following:

- ▶ Convened the Ford Heights Advisory Team;
- ▶ Began hosting “Evening with the Mayor” community outreach events;
- ▶ Engaged over 150 residents through community outreach activities;
- ▶ Collaborated with the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD) to advance the Deer Creek Flood Control Project;
- ▶ Initiated a village-wide Capital Improvement Plan (CIP);
- ▶ Initiated the Ford Heights Green Streets Project in the Sunnyfield neighborhood;
- ▶ Advanced several large-scale economic development projects;
- ▶ Achieved compliance with MWRD’s Infiltration and Inflow Control Program (IICP);
- ▶ Implemented the Streetlight Improvement Program;
- ▶ Participated in ongoing South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (SSMMA) Transportation Committee meetings;
- ▶ Participated in Cook County’s Brownfields Assessment Program;
- ▶ Participated in the Lincoln Highway / 394 Enterprise Zone development efforts;
- ▶ Secured funding through the Chicago Metropolitan for Agency’s (CMAP) Local Technical Assistance (LTA) program to implement a Comprehensive Plan;
- ▶ Completed a Pavement Management Plan (PMP);
- ▶ Defined the Ford Heights Water Main Improvement Project;
- ▶ Secured funding to complete a Feasibility Study for the Lincoln Highway Corridor Improvement Project;
- ▶ Submitted a Surface Transportation Program (STP) application for the Cottage Grove Avenue Sidepath Project;
- ▶ Supported Sauk Village’s application for the Old Plank Road Trail Extension Project;
- ▶ Hosted Columbia University and University of Illinois at Chicago studio class; and,
- ▶ Supported the Cook County Forest Preserves’ Strategic Land Acquisition Plan.

WHAT WE HEARD

The Envision Ford Heights planning process engaged a broad range of residents, business owners, village staff, elected representatives, developers, and other local and regional partners. It was clear from the beginning that gathering feedback from “grass roots” and “grass tops” stakeholders will be critical for developing a plan that is both inspiring and actionable.

Towards that end, the Village engaged residents and other stakeholder through the following means:

- ▶ (8) Ford Heights Advisory Team Meetings;
- ▶ (2) Evening with the Mayor events;
- ▶ (2) Community Workshops;
- ▶ Community Survey;
- ▶ (2) Presentations to Village Board;
- ▶ Various topic-specific working group meetings; and,
- ▶ Interviews and informal conversations with key stakeholders.

Outcomes from these activities included the following:

- ▶ 150+ residents engaged;
- ▶ 20 Community Surveys collected;
- ▶ 30+ local, regional, and state partners organizations engaged;
- ▶ Elevated Ford Heights to the County and State level agendas.

Figure 1.2. illustrates some of the Envision Ford Heights community and stakeholder outreach activities. Key takeaways from these efforts are listed on page six.

Figure 1.2. Envision Ford Heights Outreach Activities



KEY TAKEAWAYS

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Residents are generally proud of living in Ford Heights. However, they have a keen understanding of economic, political, and community challenges that are “holding the community back.”▶ Lincoln Highway is Ford Heights’ only commercial corridor, but it does not reflect the image that residents and Village leaders want to communicate.▶ Ford Heights experience severe flooding due to Deer Creek and other factors, such as limited and degraded stormwater infrastructure systems.▶ Ford Height’s high tax rates is a key barrier to attracting and retaining businesses.▶ There is a proliferation of vacant and blighted property in the community.▶ The Village’s poor streetlighting is key safety concern, especially along Lincoln Highway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Residents envision a future in which Ford Heights is more economically vibrant, safer, and connected to the region.▶ Residents have an entrepreneurial attitude, as evidenced by the many local vendors who set up at the Village’s summer festivals.▶ Ford Heights’s access to I-394 creates opportunities for attracting transportation, distribution, and logistics (TD&L) companies.▶ Ford Heights can mitigate flooding in ways that expand outdoor recreation and catalyze economic development opportunities.▶ The Village is open to creative strategies for reactivating vacant lots and redeveloping larger parcels.▶ Residents were very receptive to the idea of creating a new forest preserve and other parks and recreation facilities.

Additional topic-specific takeaways are provided in chapter two.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This plan is organized into five chapters that can serve as a springboard for future community revitalization efforts.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.

Chapter One provides the context for this planning effort. It provides an overview of the Envision Ford Heights planning process, provides a list of early wins, and summarizes what the Village heard through the community outreach and stakeholder engagement activities.

CHAPTER 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS.

Chapter Two seeks to answer the question of *Where are we?* Chapter Two begins with a brief history of Ford Heights and provides an overview of the community’s demographics, infrastructure systems, and existing assets.

CHAPTER 3: THE PLAN.

Chapter Three outlines Ford Height’s Strategic Plan. This chapter articulates a shared vision for the future of the community. It also provides guiding principles, goals, and strategies that the community can put into action through forthcoming planning, development, and capital improvement activities.

CHAPTER 4: VISION TO ACTION.

Chapter Four provides a framework that Ford Heights and their partners can use to coordinate forthcoming planning, community engagement, and implementation activities. It also includes a quick reference implementation matrix.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.

Chapter Five provides some closing remarks.

BE SURE TO LOOK FOR THESE CALL-OUT BOXES, which contain key definitions, highlights, takeaways, and other useful quick reference information.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

This chapter provides a brief history of Ford Heights and describes the community's existing conditions. This baseline assessment of the Village's demographics, economy, and infrastructure systems was used to inform the planning goals and strategies outlined in Chapter Three. Key takeaways from community outreach activities and recommendations from the Ford Heights Advisory Team are provided in call-outs below.

HISTORY

The Village of Ford Heights is a small south suburban community in Cook County located about 28 miles south of downtown Chicago at the intersection of IL-394 and U.S. Route 30/Lincoln Highway. Like other south suburban communities, the Village’s approximately 2,700 residents face a variety of interrelated and long-standing community, economic, and environmental challenges. These challenges include population loss, a shrinking tax base, difficulties in attracting and retaining businesses, crumbling infrastructure systems, blighted neighborhoods, crime, and flooding. Although serious, these challenges represent only part of the story that is currently unfolding in Ford Heights.

The Village of Ford Heights is in the midst of a significant community revitalization effort. Once labeled the “poorest U.S. suburb,” Mayor Coulter and the Village Board of Trustees have implemented a series of strategic actions that are aimed at putting the community on a path towards economic revitalization, or “Ford Heights 2.0”¹

¹ Johnson, 1987

The Village of Ford Heights was established on a subtle rise of land between Cottage Grove and Deer Creek, as shown in **Figure 2.1**. Black and white farmers alike began to arrive in the 1840s and primarily grew onions and fruit orchards. In 1949, the area was incorporated as East Chicago Heights to accommodate the growing African American population. This also spurred the development of multiple public housing units. However, the area’s small and low-income population and limited commercial activity meant that the young municipality had a limited tax base with which to invest in infrastructure and support basic municipal services and initiatives.

In 1987, East Chicago Heights changed its name to the Village of Ford Heights amid an effort to annex the unincorporated land containing the proposed Ford Stamping Plant. Unfortunately, this effort was unsuccessful, and the land was ultimately annexed by neighboring Chicago Heights shortly thereafter.

Today, the Village still lacks economic drivers and anchors. However, the Village is taking significant measures to recover from legacy and current challenges, such as crime, limited municipal capacity, and crumbling infrastructure systems. The development of this Strategic Plan is one step—among others—that will help put Ford Heights on a path towards economic recovery and enhanced community resilience.

Figure 2.1. A 1938 Aerial Image of Ford Heights

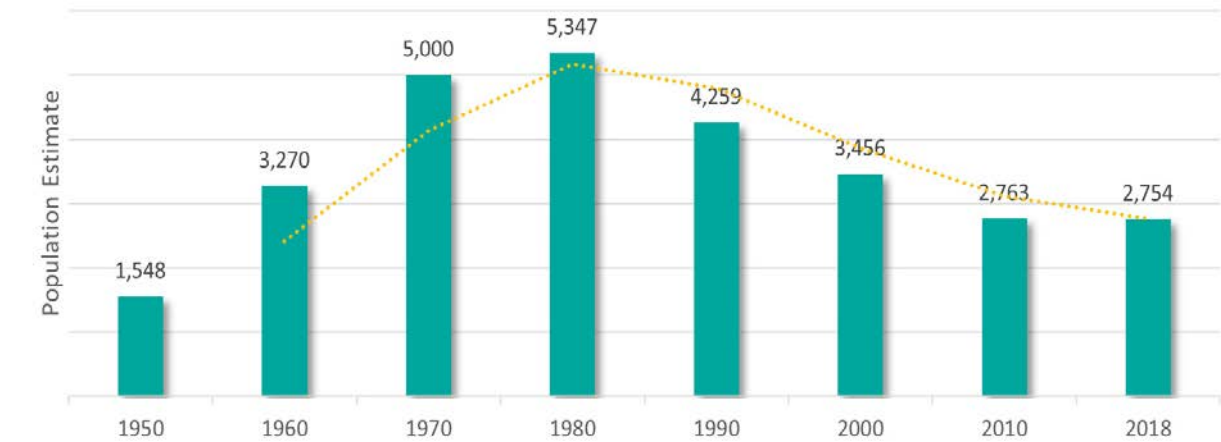


Source: Illinois Geospatial Data Clearinghouse (2015)

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ford Heights’ current population is estimated to be 2,754. Today, the Village has approximately 50% less residents than it did in its peak in 1980 (5,347 residents). The out-migration of people from Ford Heights was likely driven by a combination of factors including the decline in steel manufacturing, the Great Recession, and the limited availability of jobs in the area. Based on the most recent American Community Survey estimates, it appears that the Ford Heights’ population may be stabilizing, however, the full impacts of COVID-19 pandemic remain to be seen.

Figure 2.2. Population Change in Ford Heights, IL from 1950 to 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2018)

On average, Ford Heights has a young population. Approximately 37% of residents are under the age 19 and less than 10% are over 65. The median age for the community is 29, which is younger than both Cook County and the Chicagoland region. Improving and expanding the educational, recreational, and workforce development opportunities for Ford Heights’ youth was a priority that was identified through the Village’s outreach activities.

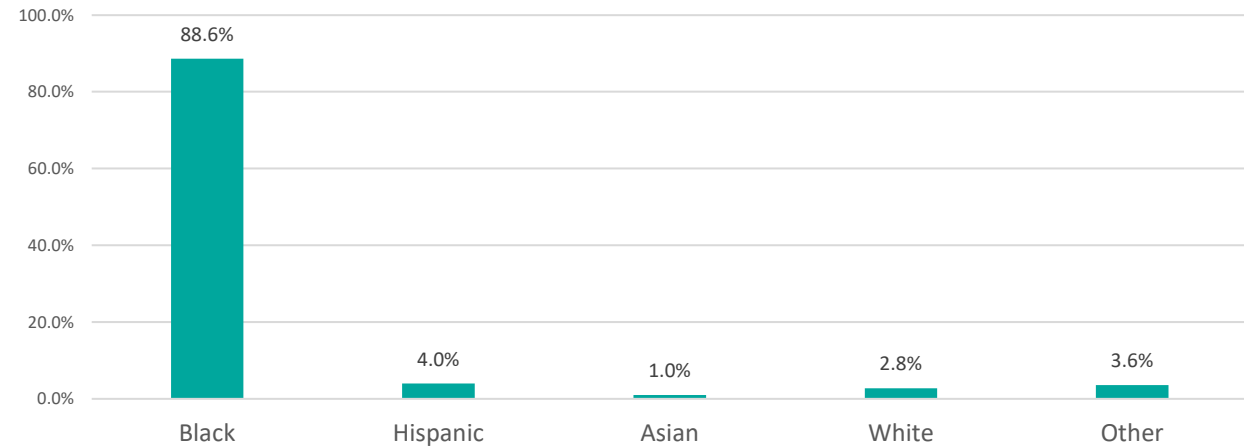
Figure 2.3. Age Cohorts, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2018)

Ford Heights is predominately Black (88.6%) with 4% Hispanic or Latino, 3.6% Other, 2.8% White, and 0.6% Asian, as shown in **Figure 2.4**. This demographic distribution has been somewhat consistent to the area throughout its history.

Figure 2.4. Race & Ethnicity, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2018)

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: DEMOGRAPHICS

Key takeaways from community stakeholders and recommendations from the Advisory Team:

- ▶ The Village’s decreasing population is a concern amongst residents and regional partners alike.
- ▶ Residents would like to see more safe and accessible facilities and programs for youth and teenagers in the community.
- ▶ The Village should support elderly residents’ ability to “Age in Place.”
- ▶ The Village should partner with Cottage Grove Upper Grade Center, Boys & Girls Club of America, CEDA, Cornerstone Community Development Corporation, Ford Heights District 169, and local churches and community organizations to provide services and programs for youth and elderly in the community.

ECONOMY

Ford Heights’ local economy reflects a community that has been hard hit by a combination of chronic economic challenges and acute shocks. First, the decline in steel and related manufacturing activities in the Southland between the 1970s and 1990s resulted in a significant loss of jobs, population, capital investment, and revenue. Ford Heights’ economic challenges were later exacerbated by the Great Recession, which put additional stress on the Village’s shrinking population, business community, and tax base. Most recently, the Village is navigating the uncertain economic and fiscal conditions created in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

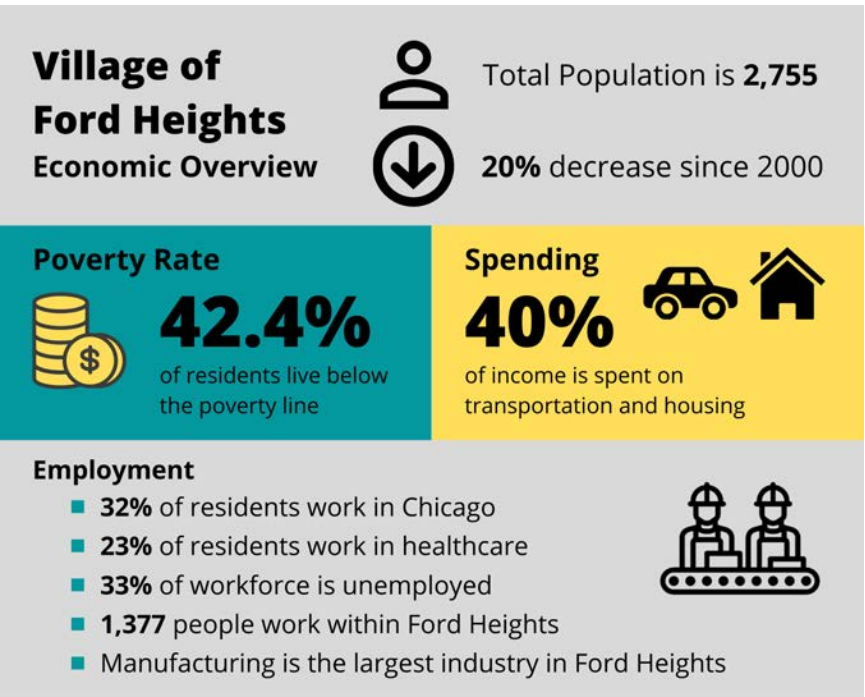
Today, the Village has approximately 2,700 residents, a 50% decrease from the Village’s peak in 1980. The median income of Ford Heights residents is \$29,063, and over 46% of Ford Heights population lives below the poverty line (i.e., \$30,718).

Additionally, 35% of Ford Heights’ households do not have access to a vehicle. Therefore, residents’ access to transit, carpooling, and alternative modes of transportation is critical.

Approximately 23% of Ford Heights’ workforce is employed in the health care industry. Nearly 33% of residents are unemployed. 32% of Ford Heights’ workforce commute to Chicago. Of the 1,377 people who are employed in Ford Heights, 1,064 (72%) work in the manufacturing industry.

Figure 2.5. below visualizes the economic characteristics of Ford Heights today. Simply put, Ford Heights is faced with a combination of chronic and acute economic challenges. However, the implementation of the strategies in this plan can help drive improved economic conditions through the creation of temporary and permanent jobs in addition to much needed infrastructure improvements.

Figure 2.5. Economic Overview



Sources: Data USA (2018), CNT’s Housing and Transportation Index (H+T®), CMAP Community Snapshots (2019)

Like other Southland communities, Ford Heights also faces significant challenges when it comes to taxes, fiscal capacity, and private investment. First, Ford Height’s declining tax base impacts the community’s ability to maintain infrastructure, deliver municipal services, and invest in public initiatives that contribute to a strong economy. Second, the limited number

of businesses in the area and Cook County’s property tax classification system contribute to a high tax burden in Ford Heights and surrounding communities. This dynamic contributes to a comparatively high cost of doing business in the Southland, which has been cited by stakeholders as a significant obstacle to attracting and retaining businesses in the region.

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: ECONOMY

Key takeaways from community stakeholders and recommendations from the Advisory Team:

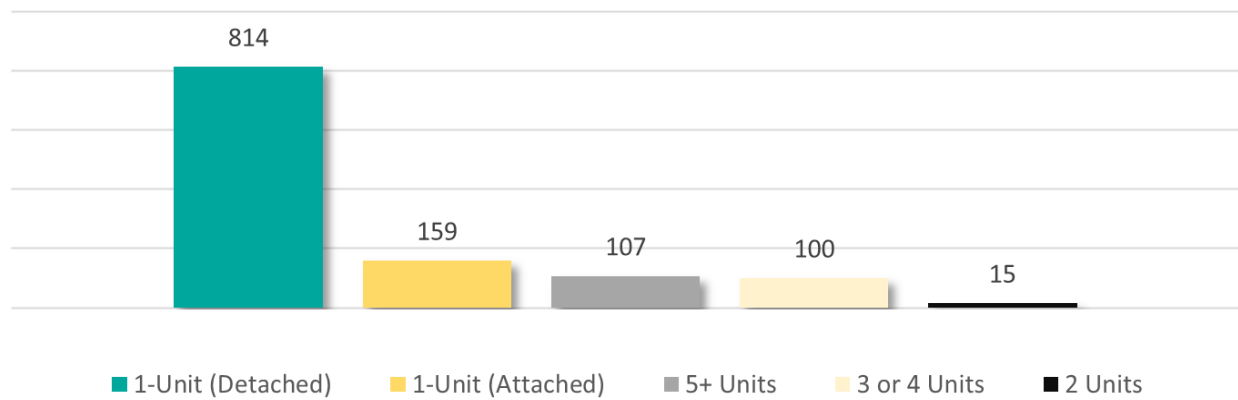
- ▶ Ford Heights is faced with an array of interrelated economic challenges such as population decline, a shrinking tax base, high tax rates, difficulties in attracting and retaining businesses, and others.
- ▶ Residents expressed a desire to see new businesses along Lincoln Highway.
- ▶ Ford Heights’ and Cook County’s high tax rates have been cited by stakeholders as a key reason why Ford Heights is often overlooked by businesses, site selectors, and developers.
- ▶ Ford Heights has access to several key transportation corridors, including IL-394, U.S. Route 30/Lincoln Highway, Cottage Grove Avenue, Joe Orr Road, and Torrence Avenue. The Village’s access to these corridors can potentially support a strong TD&L cluster.
- ▶ The Village should prioritize redevelopment of the sites identified in Cook County’s Strategic Plan for the Lincoln Highway Industrial Corridor.
- ▶ A solar farm has been proposed along Torrence Avenue.
- ▶ A 200-acre commercial and industrial development has been proposed for the area immediately on the east and west sides of I-394. Development of the proposed I-394 Logistics Center can potentially create between 800 and 1,000 jobs.
- ▶ The Village should continue to work with Cook County to complete Brownfield Assessments for high priority parcels along Lincoln Highway and I-394.
- ▶ The Village should partner with Cook County, HUD, Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation (CSEDC), the South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative (SSEGI).

HOUSING

Ford Heights has approximately 1,195 housing units. Single-family detached homes are the most prevalent housing type (68%), followed by single-family attached homes (13%). The remaining 19% of Ford Heights’ housing stock includes properties with three to five units and duplexes, as shown in **Figure 2.6**.

Ford Heights has a vacancy rate of 23%, which is more than twice the average vacancy rate of Cook County overall (i.e., 10.3%). Homeownership has proven a historical challenge for Ford Heights residents. Only 36% of residents own their homes while 64% rent. The homeownership rate in Ford Heights is over 20% lower than the average for Cook County.

Figure 2.6. Housing Type, 2018

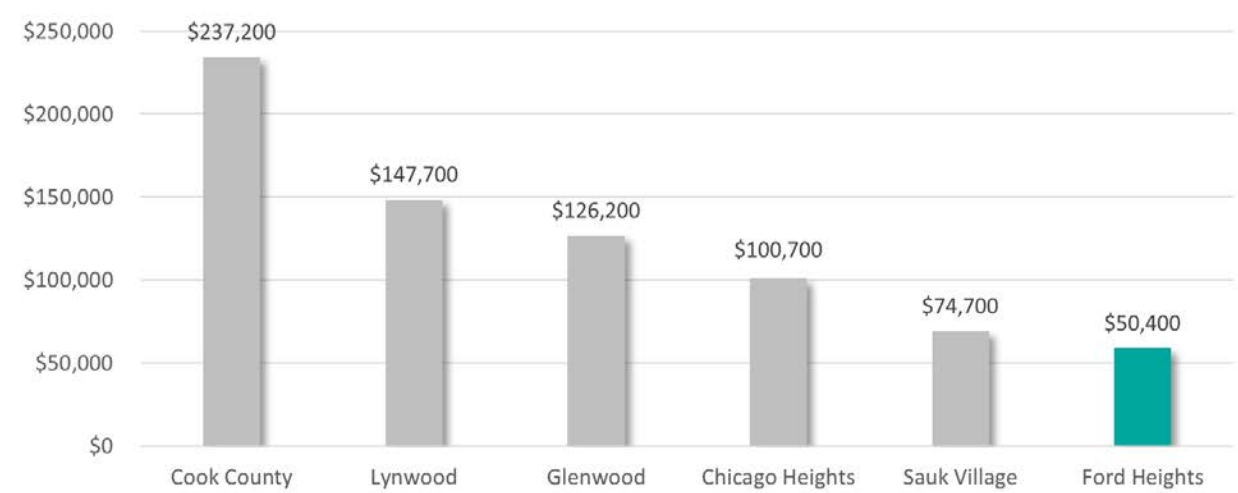


Source: American Community Survey five-year estimates. *Excludes mobile, boat, RV, van, etc. (2018)

The estimated median household value in 2018 was \$50,400, more than 3 times lower than the median household value for Cook County and \$10,000 less than the previous year (\$62,900 in 2017).

Ford Heights’ median household value is also lower than its neighboring communities of Lynwood, Glenwood, Chicago Heights, and Sauk Village, as shown in **Figure 2.7**.

Figure 2.7. Median Household Value, 2018

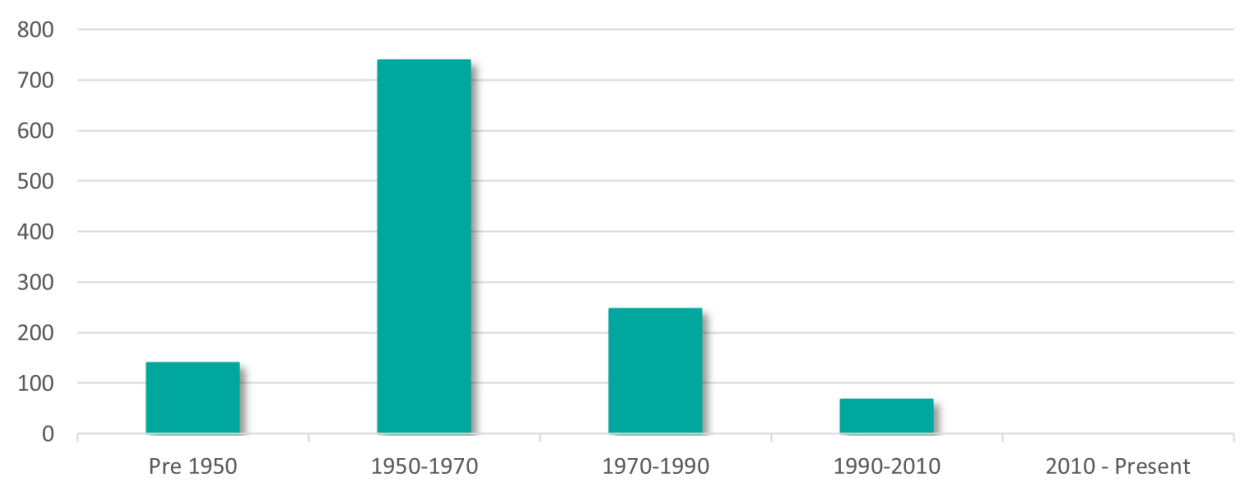


Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2018)

64.5% of Ford Heights’ housing stock was built between 1940 and 1969. The Sunnyfield Housing cooperative was built in 1964, and the Vera L. Yates homes, which are managed by the Housing

Authority of Cook County were constructed in the early 1970’s. **Figure 2.8.** illustrates the age of Ford Heights housing stock. Very little new construction has taken place within the last 10 years.

Figure 2.8. Age of Housing Stock, 2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Data (2018)

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: HOUSING

Key takeaways from community stakeholders and recommendations from the Advisory Team:

- ▶ The Village should develop a Housing Marketing Analysis to determine current market demand and to identify housing trends and needs.
- ▶ The proliferation of vacant and blighted properties in the community has created public health hazards and negatively impacts property values and neighborhood aesthetics. The Village should develop and implement a program to demolish and reactivate blighted properties.
- ▶ The Village has ample developable land, which could potentially support residential infill development. For example, the Village owns nearly 50 acres of contiguous vacant land near the center of the community. This area could be redeveloped as a mixed-use New Town Center and include new single- and multi- family housing, senior housing, veterans housing, park space, and commercial development.
- ▶ Residents from flood-prone areas in the Golden Meadows neighborhood could potentially be relocated to new housing within the New Town Center through a phased buy-out and relocation program.
- ▶ Cook County Department of Planning and Development and the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) are in the process of rehabilitating the Sunnyfield Housing Co-Op (“Sunnyfield”).
- ▶ The Village should explore partnership and funding opportunities through the Cook County Department of Planning and Development, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), HACC, CMAP, the Metropolitan Mayor’s Caucus, Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC), and others.



FORD HEIGHTS' HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS

- ▶ There are 1,195 housing units in Ford Heights
- ▶ 68% of properties are single family detached homes
- ▶ Approximately 23% of properties are vacant
- ▶ The median household value is \$50,400
- ▶ 64.5% of homes were built between 1940 and 1969
- ▶ Ford Heights has two public housing developments, the Sunnyfield Housing Cooperative and the Vera L. Yates Homes

FORD HEIGHTS' HOUSING CONCERNS

- ▶ There are 895 tax delinquent properties
- ▶ 275 properties are classified as "vacant"
- ▶ The Village has identified 20 blighted structures
- ▶ Blighted properties present environmental hazards
- ▶ Blighted properties impact the aesthetic of neighborhoods and decrease properties values
- ▶ 200+ homes are at risk of urban or riverine flooding



TRANSPORTATION

The Village’s transportation networks are critical for local and regional mobility. However, the poor condition and limited connectivity of these transportation networks present several challenges for the Village.

Ford Heights benefits from direct access to I-394, U.S. Route 30 (Lincoln Highway), Cottage Grove Avenue, Joe Orr Road, and Torrence Avenue. Lincoln Highway is a critical east-west thoroughfare in the Southland region that connects Ford Heights, Sauk Village, Chicago Heights, Olympia Fields, Matteson, and other south suburban communities. However, the current condition of the Lincoln Highway corridor in Ford Heights is characterized by deteriorating infrastructure, vacant and blighted buildings, and environmental concerns. In 2019, the Village was awarded an Invest in Cook grant through Cook County to develop a Feasibility Study for the Lincoln Highway Corridor Improvement Project. This project would improve the multimodal connectivity along Lincoln Highway and enhance the aesthetics of the corridor.

In terms of transit, Ford Heights is served by Pace Bus Route 357. The bus generally travels east and west along Lincoln Highway and makes a loop around the center of the Village. Accessing bus stops is a challenge for some residents, especially the elderly and mobility impaired, due to gaps and deficiencies in the sidewalk network.

The pedestrian network helps connect residents to Village Hall, schools, churches, and other community assets. However, gaps in the sidewalk network, degraded sidewalk conditions, dangerous crosswalks, and poor pedestrian-scaled lighting present mobility and safety challenges. Over 50% of Ford Heights’ local roads do not have sidewalks on either side of the road. Where sidewalks do exist, many are in need of repair or replacement. Improving pedestrian safety through improved lighting, crosswalks, and sidewalks is a key priority for Village residents and elected officials.

There are currently no existing bike facilities in the Village. However, bikeways (e.g., bike lanes, trails, sidepaths) have been proposed through previous planning efforts, including:

- ▶ Cottage Grove Avenue Sidepath Project;
- ▶ Joe Orr Road Bike Lane Project;
- ▶ Torrence Avenue Bike Lane Project;
- ▶ Old Plank Road Trail Extension Project; and,
- ▶ Deer Creek Greenway and Trail Project.

These bikeway projects—coupled with improvements to the other transportation networks—would help enable safe, convenient, and comfortable travel and access for all road users regardless of their age, ability, or mode of transportation. A more detailed description and analysis of the Village’s transportation networks will be provided in the Village’s forthcoming Capital Improvement Plan.

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: TRANSPORTATION

Key takeaways from community stakeholders and recommendations from the Advisory Team:

- ▶ Residents identified several pedestrian safety concerns, including dangerous road crossings, limited pedestrian-scaled lighting, and sidewalk gaps.
- ▶ In general, crossing Lincoln Highway is perceived as being unsafe and uncomfortable for pedestrians. More specifically, the pedestrian crossing at Cottage Grove Avenue is a key priority because this crossing is frequently used by Cottage Grove Upper Grade Center students.
- ▶ The sidewalk network along the eastern edge of Cottage Grove Avenue is incomplete. This forces pedestrians to walk along the road shoulder.
- ▶ Speeding on Lincoln Highway and the Village’s local roads is a concern. Some residents expressed an interest in speed bumps, speed tables, and other traffic calming measures.
- ▶ The Village does not currently have any existing bike facilities such as bike lanes, sidepaths, and trails.
- ▶ The Village should adopt a Complete Streets Policy, which will make the Village more competitive when applying for transportation grants, such as the Surface Transportation Program (STP).
- ▶ The Village should promote transit-friendly development and implement transit access improvements along Pace Bus Route 357.
- ▶ The Village should explore partnership opportunities with the SSMMA, CMAP, Active Transportation Alliance, Elevate Energy, ComEd, and others.

WATER AND SEWER

Much of the Village’s existing water and sewer infrastructure is nearing the end of its useful life and is in need of incremental repair or replacement. Bringing the Village’s water, sanitary, and stormwater infrastructure update to a state of good repair will require a significant investment.

The Village maintains approximately 11 miles of water main infrastructure. Most of this infrastructure dates back to 1949 and is in need of replacement. Water main breaks are becoming increasingly frequent and represent a significant financial burden; the Village responded to 15 water main breaks in 2019 alone. According to Public Works staff, it costs the Village \$6,000 to \$8,000 to repair a break. While bringing the existing system up to a state of good repair is the priority, the Village is also exploring potential water extension projects, such as extending water service to parcels west of I-394.

The Village maintains 48,742 linear feet (LF) of separate sanitary sewers and 171 sanitary sewer manholes. Ford Heights’ sanitary sewer system is designed to receive and convey only domestic and industrial wastewaters together (with a limited amount of groundwater infiltration). However, stormwater runoff and excessive groundwater infiltration has been entering and overloading Ford Heights’ sanitary sewers through deficiencies in the sewer systems such as open pipe joints, cracked or broken pipes, leaking manholes, and illegal connections. This problem is commonly referred to as Inflow and Infiltration, or I&I. Sewer overloading arising from such deficiencies may cause health hazards, financial losses, and inconvenience to area residents.

The Village maintains 35,183 LF of storm sewers, 194 storm manholes, and 99 inlets and catchbasins. The Village also maintains ten outlet structures with flap gates along Deer Creek, which convey stormwater flow from the Golden Meadows neighborhood to Deer Creek. On February 20, 2018, Deer Creek overtopped its stream banks and flooded the residential neighborhood between Kennedy Lane and Woodlawn Avenue, impacting approximately 270 structures. Some residents had to be evacuated by boat, as shown in **Figure 2.9**.

In 2002, the Village of Ford Heights entered into an agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for the construction of the Deer Creek Flood Reduction Project. Per this agreement, the Village is responsible for the ongoing operation, maintenance, repair, replacement, or rehabilitation of the flap gates. However, the Village has been unable to maintain the flap gates due to fiscal and capacity constraints.

Approximately 7% of the Village falls within FEMA’s 1% annual flood hazard area (also known as the 100-year floodplain), and a significant portion of the community experiences urban flooding. Mitigating these flooding risks in a way that also provides other community benefits is a key priority that was identified through this planning effort. A more detailed analysis of the Village’s water and sewer networks is provided in the Village’s forthcoming Capital Improvement Plan.

Figure 2.9. Images from the 2/20/18 Flooding Event



Source: Village of Ford Heights (2018)

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: WATER AND SEWER

Key takeaways from community stakeholders and recommendations from the Advisory Team:

- ▶ The Village has initiated a capital improvement planning effort to analyze the existing conditions of Ford Height’s water, sanitary, stormwater, and other infrastructure systems.
- ▶ Flooding is a key community concern amongst residents, especially those who live near Deer Creek or in the Sunnyfield area. Flooding in Ford Heights is caused by a variety of factors, including elevated water levels in Deer Creek during and after rain events, degraded stormwater infrastructure (e.g., Deer Creek Flap Gates, clogged catch basins), and areas with insufficient infrastructure (e.g., no drainage infrastructure, undersized pipes).
- ▶ The MWRD is currently in the process of developing alternatives and completing Design Engineering for the Deer Creek Flood Control Project.
- ▶ The Village initiated an effort to get into compliance with the MWRD’s Infiltration & Inflow Control Program (IICP), but ongoing sewer televising, cleaning, and other activities are required to stay in compliance.
- ▶ Much of the Village’s water and sewer infrastructure is in need of incremental replacement. Additional information is needed to determine which portions of the system need to be repaired, including an updated Water Atlas and Sewer Atlas.
- ▶ The Village should continue to collaborate with the MWRD, USACE, FEMA, ILEPA, and other government agencies.

PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS

Ford Heights currently has four official park facilities, but other open spaces are also used for recreation. For example, an open field next to Tidye A. Phillips Elementary School is used for Sheriff Thomas J. Dart’s Summer Sports Program, which includes volleyball, flag football, and kickball. In 2017, Ford Heights was gifted with Excell Walker Field, a regulation-sized Little League baseball diamond that is now home to Ford Heights’ growing youth baseball program.

Approximately 2-acres of the Village’s 1,245.6 acres total land area (0.1%) is allocated for parks and natural areas. The condition of Ford Heights’ parks is shown in **Figure 2.10**. on the following page.

Ford Heights has approximately 0.6 acres of accessible park space per 1,000 residents. This is 83% less accessible park acreage than Cook County overall, which has 3.6 acres of accessible park space per 1,000 residents. Moreover, according to the Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore® ranking tool, only 35% of Ford Heights residents live within a 10-minute walk from a park, compared to 54% nationally. Taken together, these data indicate a need for improving the Village’s existing park facilities and creating new parks and natural areas.

TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS

- Key takeaways from community stakeholders and recommendations from the Advisory Team:
- ▶ Residents expressed a desire for safe and accessible park facilities for the youth and teenagers in the community. Currently, there are no indoor recreation facilities.
 - ▶ Most of the Village’s parks are in poor condition due to deferred maintenance. The Village should develop a Park Improvement Plan to identify and prioritize specific park improvement projects and ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) activities.
 - ▶ Walking is a popular activity amongst seniors in the community.
 - ▶ Village residents, staff, and other stakeholders expressed a desire for more outdoor recreation opportunities. The Village is interested in working with the Forest Preserves of Cook County to explore the feasibility of a new forest preserve along Deer Creek.
 - ▶ The Village should complete the construction of the Ford Heights Recreation Center along Cottage Grove Avenue.
 - ▶ A ski hill, hiking trails, mountain bike course, and other outdoor recreation facilities have been proposed for the closed landfill site that is located north of Lincoln Highway between I-394 and Torrence Avenue.

Figure 2.10. Park Facilities in Ford Heights



Figure 2.11. Excell Walker Field

In 2017, Kansas City Royals pitcher Jason Hammel, Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, Mayor Coulter, Park District President George “Kirby” Green, and other community members gathered to dedicate Excell Walker Field, a regulation-sized Little League field. This project was funded with \$215,000 in donations, including a \$153,000 grant from the Baseball Tomorrow Fund, a \$47,000 Cubs Charities Diamond Projects grant. Other contributions included free labor from Chicago-based McHugh Construction and 110 tons of biosolids from the MWRD. This project illustrates what can be achieved when philanthropies, private companies, government agencies, and communities work together towards a shared vision.

Three photographs showing the dedication of Excell Walker Field. The top left photo shows three men shaking hands, one wearing a 'FORD HTS. STRONG' shirt. The top right photo shows a view through a chain-link fence. The bottom photo shows bleachers at the field.



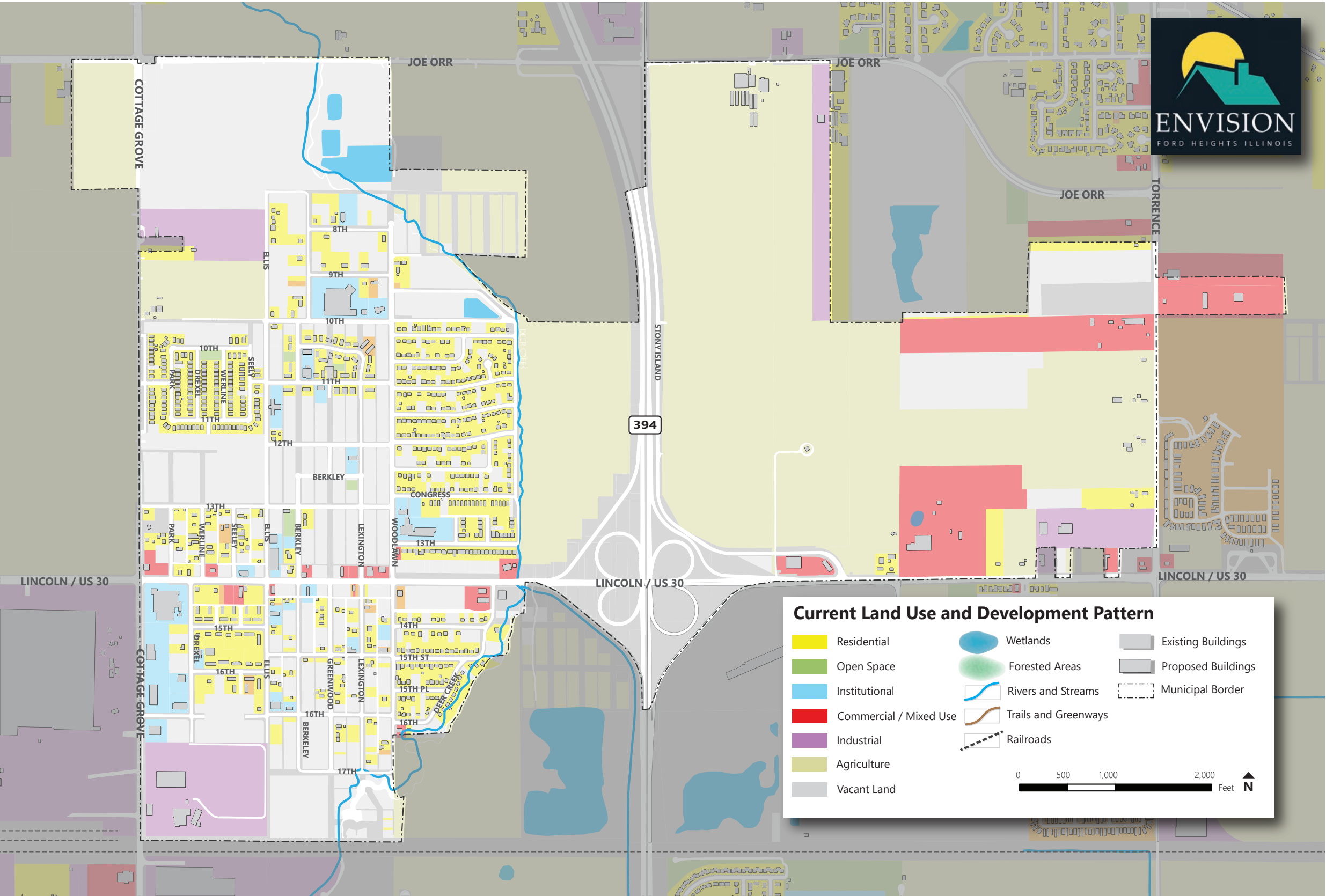
THE PLAN

This chapter articulates a shared vision for the future of Ford Heights and describes the goals and strategies that will put Ford Heights on a path towards realizing that vision. The vision is presented as a map and description comparing Ford Heights today versus the future.

TODAY,

Ford Heights is a small south suburban community in Cook County of about 2,700 residents. Like other Southland communities, Ford Heights is faced with a variety of interrelated community, economic, and environmental challenges. These challenges include population loss, a shrinking tax base, difficulties in attracting and retaining businesses, crumbling infrastructure systems, blighted neighborhoods, crime, and flooding. Although serious, these challenges represent only part of the story that is currently unfolding in Ford Heights.

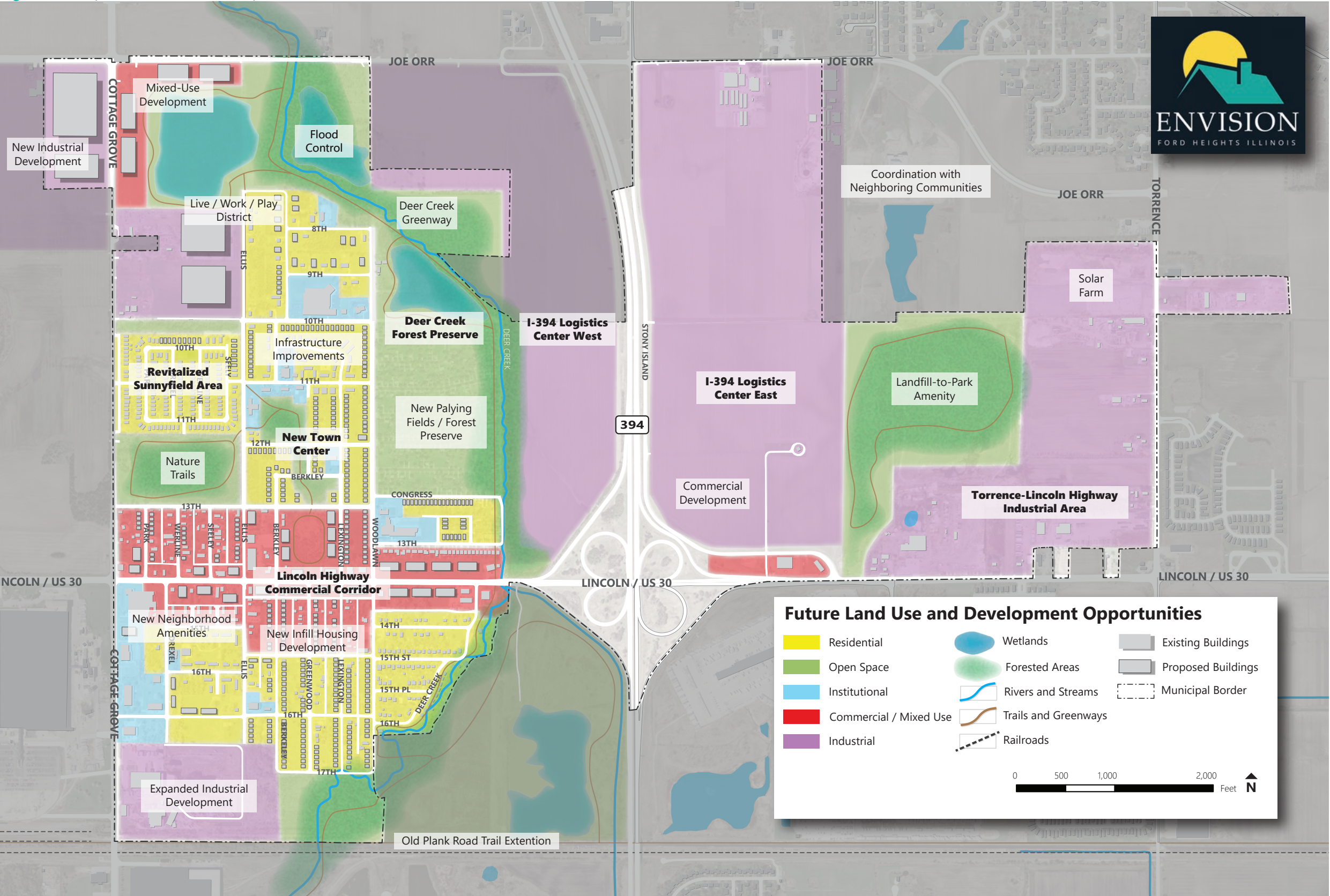
Figure 3.1. Existing Land Use and Development



IN THE FUTURE,

Ford Heights will be a safe, vibrant, and green community that is home to 4,000 residents and a robust business community. Ford Heights’ residents, business owners, elected representatives, and other stakeholders are engaged in ongoing collaborative efforts aimed at revitalizing the community and region. These efforts range from large-scale initiatives, such as the public-private partnership that catalyzed the development of the I-394 Logistics Center to smaller neighborhood initiatives. Existing community assets, such as the Sunnyfield neighborhood, the New Town Center, Cottage Grove Upper Grade School, and other schools, churches, parks, and municipal facilities, provide residents and visitors safe places for people of all ages to live, work, play, and worship. Ford Heights can attract and retain new business enterprises, which create equitable economic opportunities for people from all walks of life. The Village’s infrastructure systems are in a state of good repair. Deer Creek, which was once considered a liability, is restored in a way that supports a wide array of community benefits. In fact, Deer Creek is now part of a new forest preserve that provides residents access to outdoor recreation and educational opportunities. Ford Heights’ streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. In sum, Ford Heights is a safe, vibrant, and green community for people of all walks of life.

Figure 3.2. Proposed Land Use and Development



ENVISION FORD HEIGHTS—
GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS



COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Ford Heights’ residents, leaders, and regional partners are engaged in ongoing collaborative efforts aimed at revitalizing the community and region.



EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

Ford Heights’ community assets and new enterprises are strengthened and leveraged in ways that create sustainable prosperity for all.



RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURES

Ford Heights’ physical and natural infrastructure systems are in a state of good repair and support a wide array of community benefits.



HEALTHY PEOPLE + PLACES

Ford Heights’ residents and neighbors have access to healthy built, social, and natural environments.



SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

Ford Heights’ streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists.



COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Ford Heights’ residents, leaders, and partners are engaged in ongoing collaborative efforts aimed at revitalizing the community and region.

CP-1. CONTINUE TO CONVENE THE FORD HEIGHTS ADVISORY TEAM

The Ford Heights Advisory Team is comprised of local and regional stakeholders with interest in revitalizing the community and the greater Southland region. This team has been instrumental in providing strategic direction to the Village and connecting village staff to funding opportunities for various priority projects. The Village should continue to convene this Advisory Team on a regular basis.

CP-2. ENGAGE COMMUNITY RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES THROUGH ONGOING ENVISION FORD HEIGHTS ACTIVITIES

The Village should engage community residents and business owners in ongoing planning and community revitalization efforts. The Village staff and leaders should use the Village’s website and social media accounts, surveys, the “Evening with the Mayor” dinners, and other community events to engage stakeholders (Figure 3.3). The goal of these online and in-person engagement strategies should be to keep residents and business owners informed of the Village’s ongoing initiatives, programs, and available resources.

CP-3. CONTINUE TO PARTICIPATE IN REGIONAL PLANNING, COORDINATION, AND IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS

There are several regional planning efforts that could shape future developments in Ford Heights. The Village should continue to participate in regional planning, coordination, and implementation initiatives, such as SSMMA Transportation Committee meetings, CMAP meetings, Lincoln-394 Enterprise Zone meetings, and project-specific collaboratives. Ford Heights staff and elected representative should aim to

align local planning and development efforts with regional priorities, such as those identified in ON TO 2050, Connecting Cook County, and others. Doing so will make the Village more competitive when applying for grants and technical assistance opportunities.

Figure 3.3. An Evening with the Mayor Discussion



ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2018, the Village held its first “Evening with the Mayor” community event. The Village promoted the event through flyers, advertisements in local newspapers, and word of mouth. Attendees enjoyed a free dinner, which was provided by the Village, while learning about the *Envision Ford Heights* planning process and participating in a series of collaborative planning exercises. The Village plans to make this a regularly-occurring event.

CP-4. DEVELOP A CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Village is in the process of completing its first Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The Village Board of Trustees should adopt this CIP and implement the high-priority projects that are identified through this planning effort. The Village should also use the CIP to inform annual capital improvement and budgeting processes. The CIP should be updated every five years to ensure that projects reflect current infrastructure needs

CP-5. DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Village of Ford Heights received a Local Technical Assistance (LTA) award from CMAP to develop a Comprehensive Plan. The comprehensive planning process should build upon and refine the goals and strategies identified through Envision Ford Heights. The Village should continue to engage residents, business owners, and the Ford Heights Advisory Team through the comprehensive planning process.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN VS. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

A Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) outlines a community’s necessary capital projects (e.g., roadway resurfacing, sewer repairs), equipment purchases, and major studies. The CIP provides a working blueprint for sustaining and improving a municipality’s infrastructure and utility systems. A CIP typically has a five-year time horizon, and aids municipalities in coordinating strategic planning, budgeting, and construction activities.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

A comprehensive plan serves as the primary land use document used to guide long-range growth and development efforts in a community. Comprehensive plans address topics such as economic development, housing, transportation, stormwater, open space and natural resources, and others, and are implemented through the Village’s Zoning Ordinance and other associated policies and land use documents.



EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

Existing community assets and new enterprises are strengthened, connected and leveraged in ways that create sustainable prosperity for all.

ED-1. UTILIZE TAX AND DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES TO UNLOCK PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN THE AREA

Ford Heights should utilize existing tax relief and development incentive programs such as Cook County’s Class 8 incentive, Opportunity Zones, Enterprise Zones, TIF, HUB Zones, EB-5, and others, which can help unlock private investment by creating a more competitive tax environment. Development incentives should be utilized in a way that creates an economic engine for long-term economic growth that will drive a mutually reinforcing cycle of business and community investment. The Village should also establish criteria to ensure that economic development incentives fit with local and regional economic goals.

ED-2. IMPLEMENT A PROPERTY DEMOLITION AND REACTIVATION PROGRAM

Vacant and blighted properties decrease property values, erode the health of local housing markets, pose safety hazards, and reduce local tax revenue. With a current vacancy rate of nearly one in five residential properties, a 40 percent vacancy in the business district, and with more than 646 properties listed as tax delinquent, the impact of blight on the Ford Heights is significant. Ford Heights should continue its efforts to demolish blighted structures and implement a Property Demolition and Reactivation Program. The Village should use this program to transform vacant and blighted properties into community assets, such as new housing, community gardens, stormwater parks, and other uses. This can be accomplished through creative placemaking strategies, the creation of new open spaces,

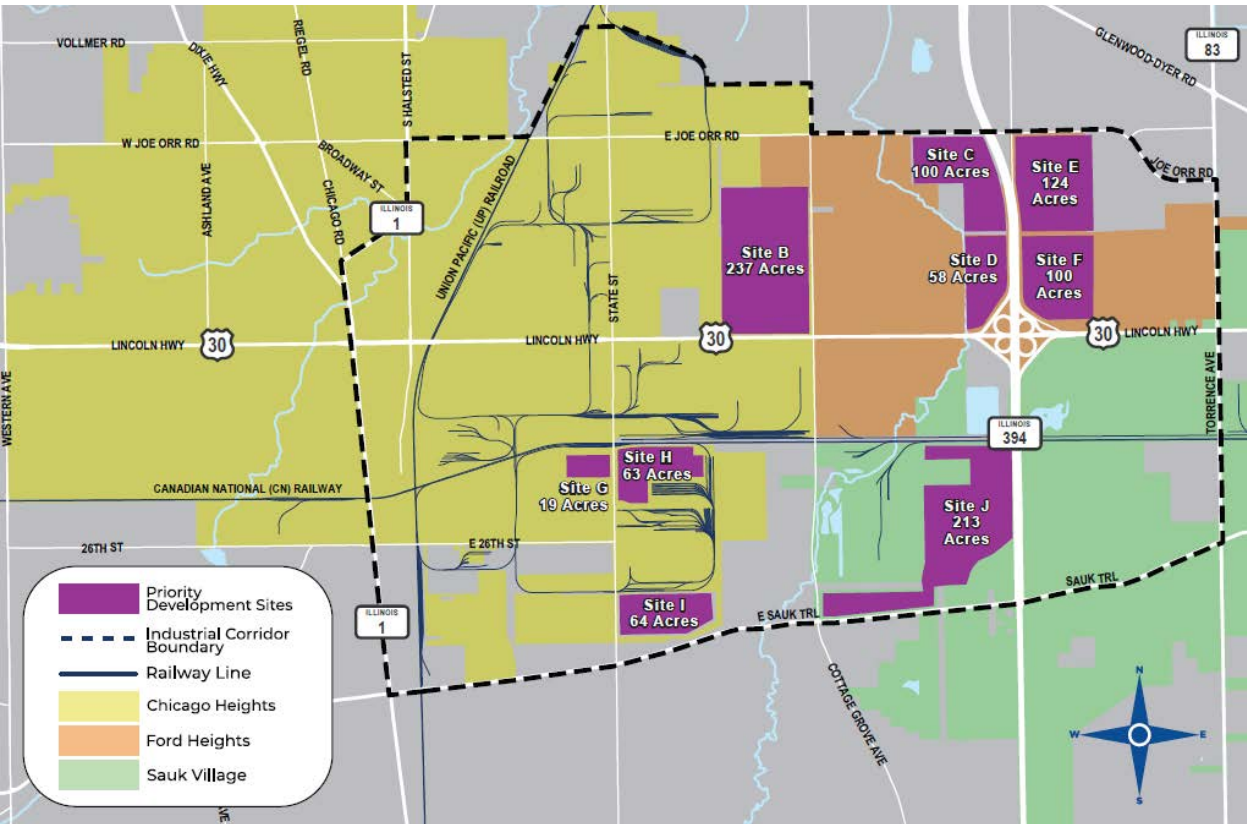
and assembling smaller parcels into larger assemblages that are more conducive to development.

ED-3. PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE LINCOLN-394 ENTERPRISE ZONE

The Lincoln-394 Enterprise Zone was established in 2017 and is designed to stimulate economic growth and neighborhood revitalization in key opportunity areas in Ford Heights, Chicago Heights, Sauk Village, and other surrounding communities. In Ford Heights, the development of proposed I-394 Logistics Center and others could be accelerated through a combination of local and state tax incentives, regulatory relief, and improved governmental services. The Village should promote development within the Lincoln-394 Enterprise Zone, especially the four Priority Development Sites in Ford Heights that were identified through Cook County’s Lincoln Highway Logistics Corridor Strategic Plan, as shown in **Figure 3.4** on the following page. In addition to supporting business retention and expansion (BR&E) along I-394 and Lincoln Highway, the Lincoln-394 Enterprise Zone can also support businesses along Torrence Avenue.

A LINK TO THE LINCOLN-394
Enterprise Zone map and additional information is available at:
ssmma-gis.maps.arcgis.com

Figure 3.4. Lincoln Highway Industrial Corridor Map



Source: Cook County's Lincoln Highway Logistics Corridor Study (2018)

ED-4. REVITALIZE THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY CORRIDOR

In addition to leveraging the 394-Lincoln Enterprise Zone to support TD&L development, the Village should also revitalize the Lincoln Highway Corridor and promote new commercial and retail development. The high volume of daily traffic, coupled with the availability of affordable land on both sides of Lincoln Highway, could potentially support suburban infill and transit-friendly development. The Village can revitalize the corridor by demolishing blighted commercial and residential properties, completing Phase I Environmental Site Assessments on targeted properties, implementing streetscape improvements (e.g., improved lighting, corridor banners, landscaping), and by partnering with Cook County, SSMMA, IDOT, and other partners implement multimodal transportation improvements along the corridor.

ED-5. REDEVELOP THE NEW TOWN CENTER AND REVITALIZE FORD HEIGHTS' RESIDENTIAL AREAS

The Village should redevelop the Village-owned land near the center of the community as a mixed-use New Town Center. This district could include new single- and multi- family housing, senior housing, new parks, and commercial development along Lincoln Highway. The New Town Center can be anchored by a new Village Hall and community center. Development of the New Town Center should be informed driven by a Housing Market Analysis that can be completed as part of the Village's forthcoming Comprehensive Plan. The New Town Center can also provide affordable housing for people who may want to relocate out of flood-prone areas near Deer Creek.



RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURES

The Village's physical and natural infrastructure systems are in a state of good repair, well-maintained and support a wide array of community benefits.

RI-1. PRIORITIZE THE MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS

The Village and their partners should prioritize the maintenance and repair of existing infrastructure systems through ongoing Public Works activities and forthcoming capital projects. Routine and rehabilitative maintenance activities can improve infrastructure performance. For example, clearing clogged stormwater catch basins of dirt and debris can improve local drainage without the need for expensive new capital improvement projects. As the Village finalizes the CIP, Village staff and their partners should prioritize the maintenance and repair of the existing infrastructure.

RI-2. ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATORY AGENCIES

The Public Works Department should complete maintenance activities that help the village achieve and maintain compliance with federal, state, and local regulations as well as project-specific intergovernmental agreements (IGA). For example, the Village should implement an ongoing sewer improvement program that complies with the MWRD's Infiltration and Inflow Control Program (IICP) program. Similarly, the Village should repair the flap gates and other stormwater management facilities along Deer Creek to achieve compliance with the IGA that the Village has with the Army Corps of Engineers. Maintaining compliance with regulatory and partner agencies will not only improve infrastructure performance but ensure that the Village remains in good standing with these agencies and has access to future funding opportunities.

RI-3. DEVELOP A PROCESS FOR PRIORITIZING AND DELIVERING CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Ford Heights' forthcoming CIP will identify necessary capital improvement projects for the Village's transportation, water and sewer, parks, public housing, and municipal facilities and vehicle fleet. The CIP will include information that Village leaders can use to prioritize and phase projects such as the project scope, purpose, cost, and a preliminary priority ranking provided by Village staff. The Village should clearly define how capital projects will be phased and prioritized. For example, roadway resurfacing projects should be phased based on the Village's Pavement Management Plan. Similarly, water infrastructure projects (e.g., water main repair and replacement) should be prioritized based on a Water Leak Detection Survey.

RI-4. SECURE AND LEVERAGE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, FUNDING, AND OTHER CAPACITY-BUILDING RESOURCES

The Village should continually improve the capacity of staff and elected representatives to provide municipal services and govern. This could be accomplished by continuing to apply for technical assistance and other types of capacity-building resources. Such resources will equip Village staff and leaders with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to perform their duties. There is a wide array of civic organizations, professional associations, and government agencies that provide capacity-building resources. A list including many of these organizations and agencies is provided in the call-out on the following page..

ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE CAPACITY-BUILDING RESOURCES

The following is a list of civic organizations, professional associations, and government agencies that provide capacity building, funding, technical assistance, and other types of resources:

- ▶ Active Transportation Alliance
- ▶ American Institute of Architects (AIA)
- ▶ American Planning Association (APA)
- ▶ American Society for Civil Engineers (ASCE)
- ▶ Chicago Community Trust
- ▶ Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP)*
- ▶ Chicago Region Trees Initiative/The Morton Arboretum (CRTI)
- ▶ Chicago Southland Economic Development Corporation (CSEDC)*
- ▶ Chicago Wilderness
- ▶ Cook County*
- ▶ Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- ▶ Enterprise Community Partners
- ▶ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)*
- ▶ Forest Preserves of Cook County*
- ▶ Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC)*
- ▶ Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)*
- ▶ Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT)*
- ▶ Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (ILEIPA)
- ▶ Illinois Housing Development Authority (IDHA)
- ▶ Illinois Municipal League (IML)
- ▶ Kresge Foundation
- ▶ Metropolitan Mayor’s Caucus
- ▶ Metropolitan Planning Council*
- ▶ Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD)*
- ▶ Openlands
- ▶ Regional Transportation Authority (RTA)
- ▶ South Suburban Economic Growth Initiative (SSEGI);
- ▶ South Suburban Land Bank Authority (SSLBA)
- ▶ South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association (SSMMA)*
- ▶ The Conservation Fund*
- ▶ The Nature Conservancy
- ▶ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)*
- ▶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*
- ▶ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- ▶ U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC); and others.

*Indicates organizations that were engaged through Envision Ford Heights or are active in the community.

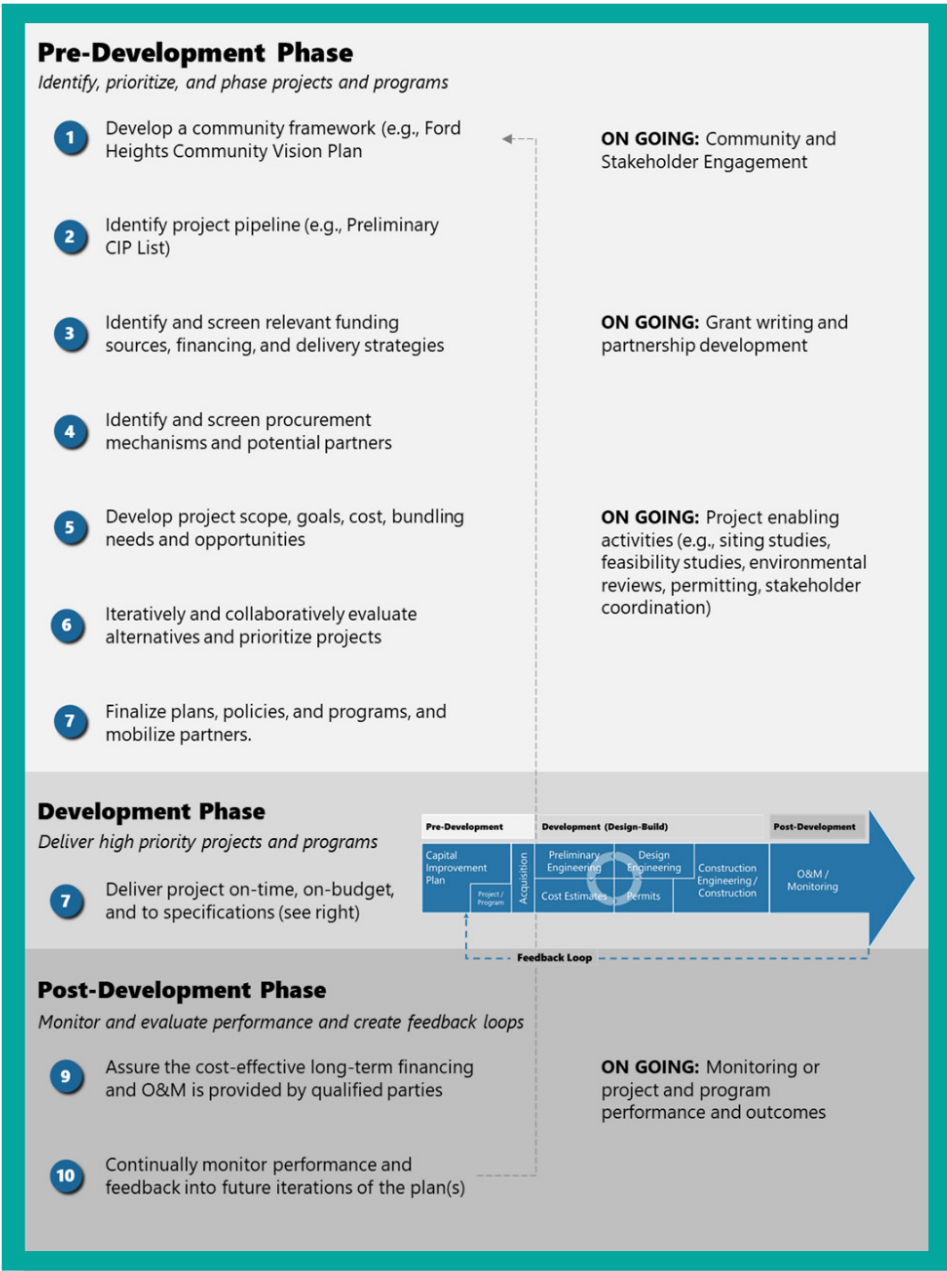
RI-5. ADOPT AND ADHERE TO BEST PRACTICES FOR PLANNING AND DELIVERING CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

The Village should adopt and adhere to best practices for planning and delivering capital improvement projects. Specific standards that the Village may want to consider, include the following:

- ▶ Greenest Region Compact, Metropolitan Mayor’s Compact (GRC);
- ▶ Livable Communities, AARP;

- ▶ EcoDistricts Certified™, EcoDistricts®;
- ▶ Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), USGBC; and,
- ▶ High Road Infrastructure Handbook, Natural Resources Defense Council.

These standards should be institutionalized in the Village’s pre-development, development, and post-development project phases, as shown in the call-out below.





HEALTHY PEOPLE + PLACES

Ford Heights' residents and neighbors have access to healthy built, social, and natural environments.

HP-1. EMPOWER RESIDENTS AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO LEAD AND SUSTAIN COMMUNITY-DRIVEN INITIATIVES

Ford Heights has been successful in securing resources for large-scale infrastructure projects and initiatives. Equally important, however, are community-driven initiatives that can improve Ford Heights at the block and neighborhood level. Community driven initiatives help build stronger relationships between neighbors, cultivate a sense of community pride and ownership, and equip residents with tangible and intangible skills. Moving forward, the Village should empower residents and local organizations to lead and sustain community-driven initiatives. Some ideas for community action are provided in the call-out below.

IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

Here are a few ideas for community action that we heard through Envision Ford Heights:

- ▶ Organizing a neighborhood cleanup and volunteer day;
- ▶ Turning vacant lots into a community garden;
- ▶ Planting a flower, butterfly, or rain garden;
- ▶ Painting a mural at a school;
- ▶ Hosting a volunteer day;
- ▶ Hosting skillshare and training opportunities at the Municipal Hall; and,
- ▶ Working with corporate sponsors to improve parks, housing, and other facilities.

HP-2. EXPLORE A VOLUNTARY BUY-OUT PROGRAM FOR FLOOD-PRONE PROPERTIES

It is nearly impossible to eliminate all risk of flooding in Ford Heights. However, it is possible to buyout and relocate people to "higher and drier" ground within the community. Ford Heights' residents, elected representatives, and other local and regional partners should explore the feasibility of a voluntary buy-out and relocation program, such as one that has been proposed for the Golden Meadows neighborhood. This program would include the following actions:

- ▶ Buyout residential property owners within the Golden Meadows neighborhood over several phases;
- ▶ Develop new housing and rehab housing in less flood-prone areas in Ford Heights, such as the proposed New Town Center;
- ▶ Provide incentives assistance for residents seeking to relocate within Ford Heights;
- ▶ Demolish structures and convert land to open space and natural areas that provide flood control, recreational, and other community benefits.

This program could be supported the MWRD's Buyout Program, Cook County's Demolition Program, and other resources available through Cook County, HUD, and other partners.

HP-3. IMPROVE RESIDENTS' ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

Limited access to healthy foods and Ford Heights' status as a "food desert" were key community concerns that were identified through Envision Ford Heights. The Village could increase the resident's access to healthy food by working to attract a grocery store to the community. The Village could also work with nutrition-focused nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and businesses to increase access to fresh food, build public awareness of the benefits of good nutrition, and create educational and job opportunities for area residents. Smaller, lot-sized community gardens and larger urban farms can also be used to increase access to healthy food while reactivating vacant lots. Larger aquaponic and hydroponic operations can be potential tenants in the proposed I-394 Logistics Center.

HP-4. IMPROVE AND EXPAND THE COMMUNITY'S PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS

Parks are vitally important to establishing and maintaining a high quality of life within a community. In fact, parks have been cited as one of the most important factors in creating a livable community. Parks contribute to the health of residents, provide recreational opportunities for youth, and support a range of other community and economic benefits. Ford Heights should continue to seek out creative strategies for improving the community's existing park facilities and programming. The Village should complete an inventory of existing park facilities through the CIP and identify improvement needs. The Village should also continue to collaborate with the Forest Preserves of Cook County to explore the feasibility of creating a new forest preserve along Deer Creek. Together, Ford Heights parks and natural areas are part of the region's green infrastructure network. Green infrastructure provides many critical functions that promote the health and vitality of communities and the region

overall. A list of some of these benefits of green infrastructure and drawings of proposed open space amenities are provided on pages 42 and 43.

HP-5. ENHANCE RESIDENTS' ABILITY TO AGE IN PLACE

The Village should enhance residents' ability to age in place through policies, programs, and projects that improve residents' mobility, support accessible housing, and improve residents' access to healthcare and social services.

More specifically, adherence to the following neighborhood design factors will help make Ford Heights more livable for older adults and people of all ages:

- ▶ **Compactness.** Compact neighborhoods help make a community walkable, decreases automobile dependence, and support a socially vibrant public realm.
- ▶ **Mixed-Use.** Mixed-use neighborhoods help older adults live closer to or within walking distance of work, community activities, and the services they need.
- ▶ **Housing Diversity.** The availability of diverse housing options helps ensure that appropriate housing is available for each stage of life.
- ▶ **Transportation Options.** The availability transit, paratransit, and other transportation services will help ensure that older adults remain independent, mobile, and engaged in their community.

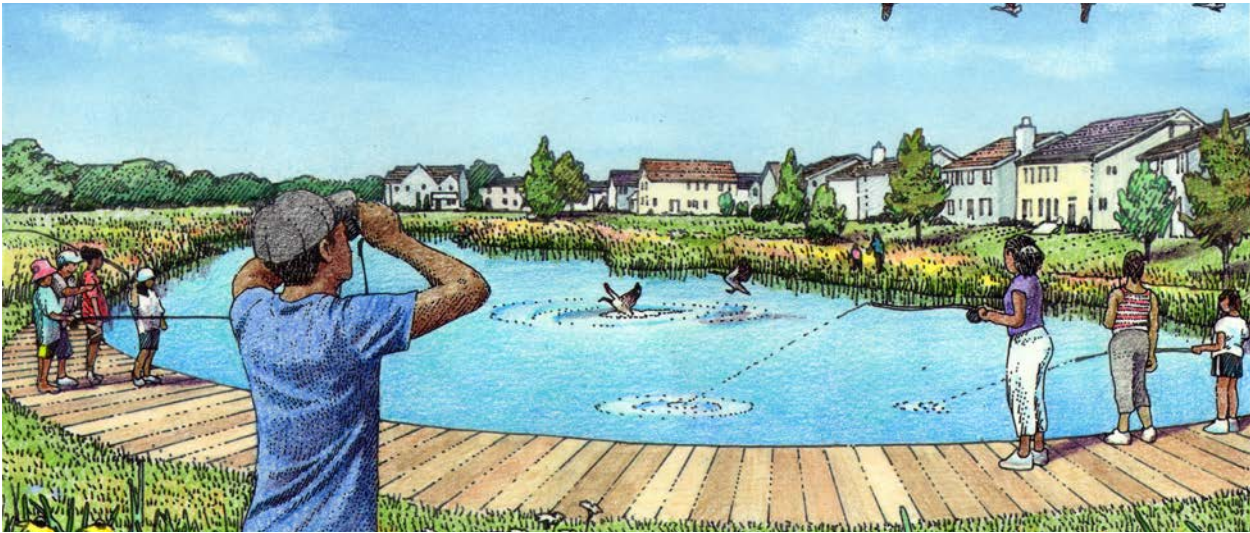
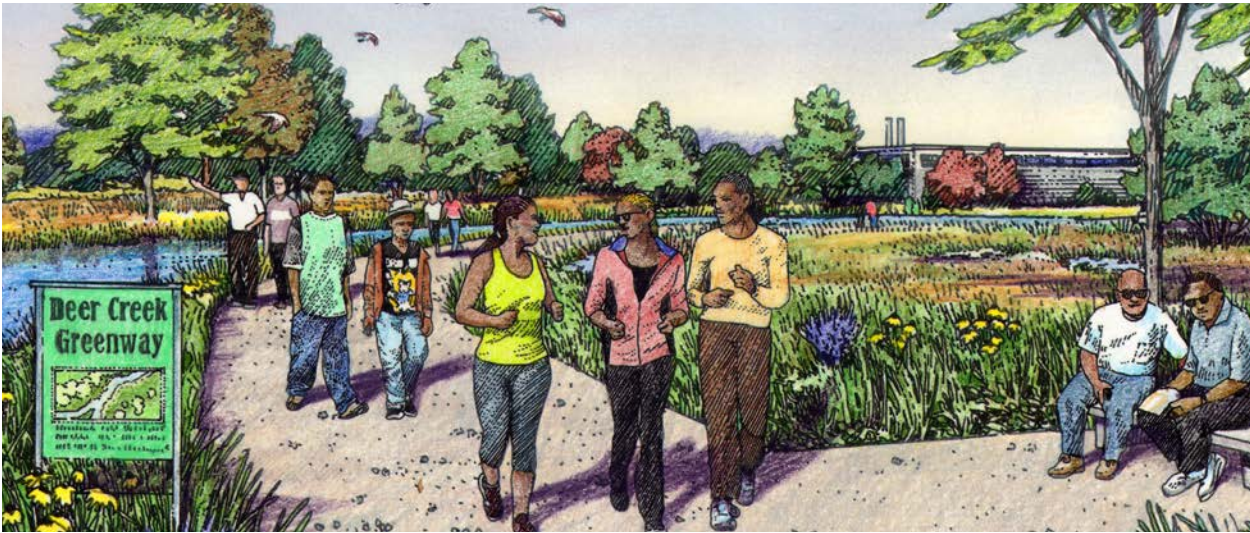
BENEFITS OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Green infrastructure can support a wide range of environmental, social, and economic benefits, including:

- ▶ **Habitat and Biodiversity.** Green streetscapes enhance urban biodiversity as native species provide habitats for birds, insects, and other species. Native vegetation is better suited to the rainfall of the local area. Enhancement of biodiversity in cities can increase environmental awareness among residents.
- ▶ **Water Quality.** Green infrastructure improves stormwater quality by reducing the load of sediment, unwanted minerals, and other contaminants that are carried with runoff from impermeable surfaces.
- ▶ **Stormwater Management.** Retaining runoff in landscaped areas and slowing the rate of flow from the catchment area reduces the risk of erosion of the soil bed. Slower flow rates also reduce stress on downstream waterways, such as Deer Creek.
- ▶ **Natural Hydrology.** Where local soils are suitable, rain gardens can be used to treat stormwater before it permeates the groundwater.
- ▶ **Passive Irrigation.** Directing stormwater to irrigate the planting reduces the need for manual watering and increases soil moisture.
- ▶ **Amenity and Landscape Design.** Landscape design contributes to community’s character and identity. Planting complements the built environment, softens the appearance of hard surfaces, and provides a visual screen.
- ▶ **Urban Cooling.** Trees and green infrastructure provide significant reductions in urban temperatures. Large trees with good soil moisture can reduce local temperatures through shading and evapotranspiration. Trees can reduce air temperatures in parks and green areas by as much as 35.6–46.4°F, and they have been linked to the prevention of unnecessary loss of life during heatwaves.
- ▶ **Outdoor Activity.** Green cover encourages outdoor activity, including walking, cycling, and other recreation activities.
- ▶ **Air Quality.** Vegetation improves air quality and reduces greenhouse gases. Trees remove carbon dioxide, nitrous oxides, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and ozone from the atmosphere. The most effective species in trapping pollutants are those with large leaf surface areas and high transpiration rates.
- ▶ **Energy.** By reducing local temperatures and shading building surfaces, green infrastructure reduces the cooling demand of buildings, thus cutting energy needs.
- ▶ **Lifespan of Infrastructure.** Green infrastructure complements grey infrastructure such as catch basins and drainage pipes and lengthens the lifespan of grey infrastructure.
- ▶ **Water Systems.** The impacts on drainage systems and the cost of managing erosion in waterways can be significant. Streets with green infrastructure slow the rate of runoff, reducing the pressure on these systems, and lowering maintenance costs.
- ▶ **Property Values and Marketability.** Street trees and green infrastructure enhance aesthetic qualities and provide a significant neighborhood amenity. Properties on tree-lined streets are valued at up to 30% more than those on streets without trees.

Source: *Global Street Design Guide* (NACTO)

Figure 3.5. Drawings of Proposed Open Space Amenities in Ford Heights



Source: *Forest Preserves of Cook County* (2019)



EQUITABLE MOBILITY

Ford Heights' streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists of all ages and abilities.

EM-1. IMPLEMENT THE STREET LIGHTING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Improving Ford Heights' street lighting was one of the highest priorities identified through Envision Ford Heights. Residents reported that Ford Heights' dark streets cause safety concerns and limit mobility. In response to this concern, the Village has been working with ComED to replace 138 existing streetlights with more energy-efficient LED lights. The Village should continue to work with ComED, Elevate Energy, and other partners to replace remaining streetlights and secure additional funding to install new smart streetlights in high priority locations, including:

- ▶ Lincoln Highway from Cottage Grove Avenue to Torrence Avenue;
- ▶ Ellis Avenue from 10th Street to 16th Street;
- ▶ Veterans Projects area; and,
- ▶ The residential streets south of Lincoln Highway, west of Woodlawn, and east of Deer Creek.

EM-2. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A ROADWAY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Village should develop and implement a Roadway Improvement Program that gradually brings Ford Heights' local streets and roads to a state of good repair. Moving forward, the Village should:

- ▶ Adopt a Complete Streets policy, which will make Ford Heights more competitive when applying to certain grants, such as STP, ITEP, CMAQ, and others;

- ▶ Complete the CMAP-funded Pavement Management Plan (PMP) and incorporate the outputs of this plan into the Village's overall CIP;
- ▶ Develop and follow a standard process for prioritizing annual roadway improvement work (e.g., maintenance, resurfacing, reconstruction), procuring contractors, and delivering projects; and,
- ▶ Continue to apply for grant funding to implement roadway improvements on local roads and to advance larger-scale projects, such as the Lincoln Highway Corridor Improvement Project.

EM-3. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT BIKE AND PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Village should develop and implement Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Program that complements the Roadway Improvement Program. Moving forward, the Village should:

- ▶ Develop a community-wide Sidewalk Assessment;
- ▶ Develop a shared-cost sidewalk program in which the Village shares the cost of sidewalk repairs with property owners;
- ▶ Advance the various bikeway projects that were proposed in the SSMMA's Complete Streets and Trails Plan and the Northeastern Illinois Greenways and Trails Plan;
- ▶ Prioritize ongoing sidewalk repair work based on the Sidewalk Assessment and CIP; and,
- ▶ Implement targeted crosswalk improvements and traffic calming projects.

What is a Complete Street?

Complete Streets are streets for everyone. Complete Streets provide safe access for all users, including pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities.

– Smart Growth America

Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. In addition to improving mobility, Complete Streets have been shown to improve road safety, support economic development, create a unique sense of place, build community cohesion and social equity, and improvement public health.

Bedford Park's unique transportation demands and physical constraints means that Complete Streets in this heavily industrialized community will have a different composition than Complete Streets in other parts of the region, but the goal remains the same: make streets safer and more accessible for all users.

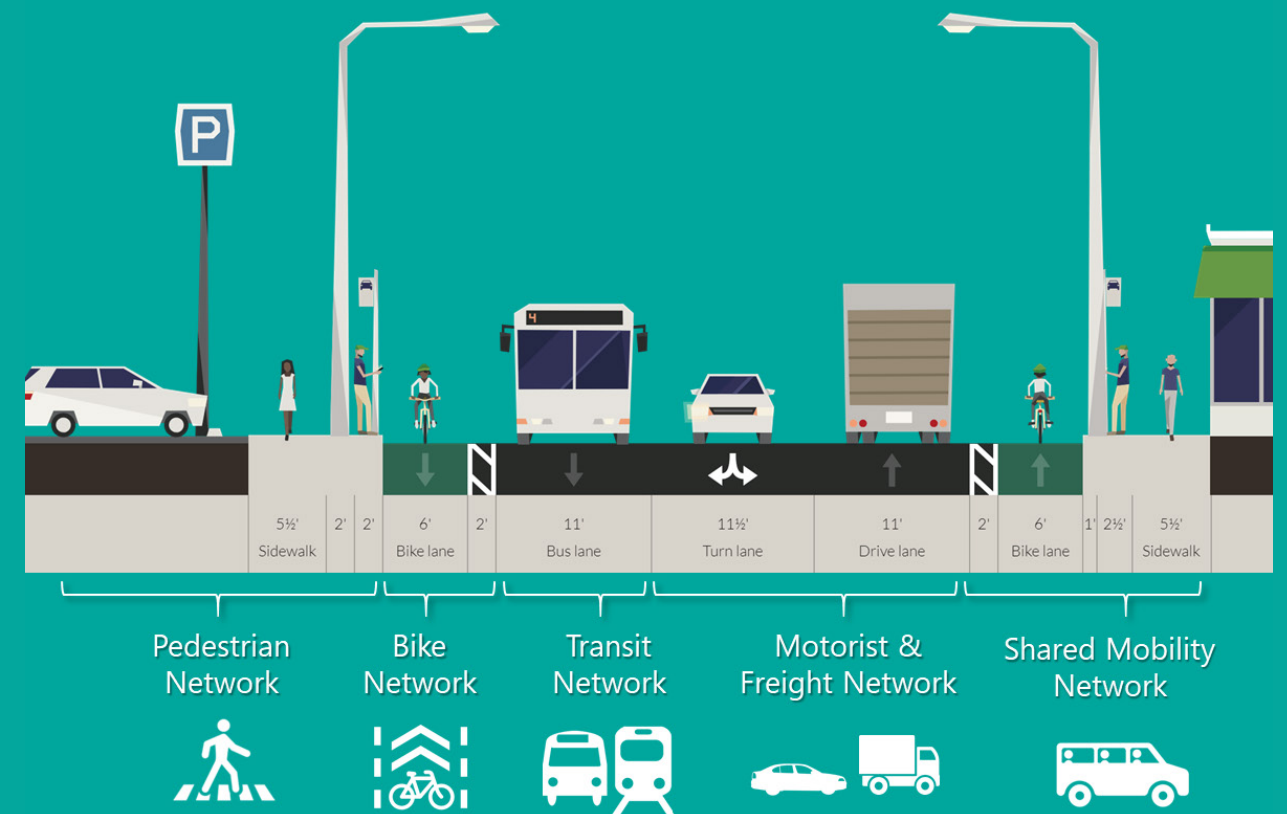


Image created using Streetmix.net
licensed under Creative Commons.

EM-4. ADVANCE THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Village should advance the Lincoln Highway Corridor Improvement Project to improve the multimodal functionality of the corridor, improve safety, and catalyze commercial and retail development along the corridor. This project could include the following improvements, among others:

- ▶ Roadway resurfacing and pavement markings;
- ▶ High visibility pedestrian crossings;
- ▶ Improved roadway signage;
- ▶ Installation of smart street lighting;
- ▶ Improved sidewalks and pedestrian amenities (e.g., benches, trash cans); and,
- ▶ Improved landscaping and corridor branding.

These roadway and streetscape improvements should be coordinated with Village’s demolition and development efforts to promote a broader revitalization of the Lincoln Highway Corridor.

EM-5. IMPROVE RESIDENTS’ ACCESS TO TRANSIT AND SHARED MOBILITY SERVICES

The Village should work with the RTA, Pace, and other mobility providers to improve residents’ access to transit and other shared mobility Services. Moving forward the Village should:

- ▶ Implement sidewalk and crosswalk projects that improve residents’ access to bus stops;
- ▶ Promote transit-friendly development along Lincoln Highway, and within the proposed New Town Center; and,
- ▶ Launch a program that improves residents’ access to shared mobility services, such as Uber, Lyft, Via, and others.

Implementation of the strategies and actions listed above will enable Ford Heights and their partners to design and operate streets in a way that provides equitable mobility and safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists of all ages and abilities.

Current conditions of selected streets in Ford Heights are shown in **Figure 3.6**.

Figure 3.6. Current condition of selected streets in Ford Heights



Source: Village of Ford Heights

FROM VISION TO ACTION

This chapter provides a framework that Ford Heights and their partners can use to coordinate forthcoming planning, community engagement, and implementation activities. It also includes a quick reference implementation matrix.

The previous chapter outlined a vision for the future of Ford Heights. It also provided specific strategies and actions that Village staff, elected representatives, business owners, and other local and regional partners can take to put Ford Heights on a path towards community revitalization. This chapter provides a framework that Ford Heights and their partners can use to coordinate forthcoming planning, community engagement, and implementation activities (**Figure 4.1**). It also includes a quick reference implementation matrix (**Table 4.1**).

This Strategic Plan can be considered as part of an ongoing planning and action cycle. This cycle is ongoing and iterative, and includes the following steps:

- ▶ Developing a vision and guiding principles;
- ▶ Outlining goals and strategies;
- ▶ Securing funding, technical assistance, and other resources;
- ▶ Designing and implementing specific projects and programs; and
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluating efforts.

The following implementation matrix includes the five guiding principles and goals and the corresponding strategies. The following information is provided for each strategy:

- ▶ **Phasing:** Short-Term (0-1 year); Medium-Term (1-3 years); Long-Term (3+ years); Ongoing
- ▶ **Current Status:** Proposed; In-Progress; Forthcoming
- ▶ **Lead(s) / Partner(s):** A list of internal leads and partner organizations that may be involved with implementing a strategy

This Strategic Plan should be used as a guide for the Village’s future implementation efforts.

Figure 4.1. The Envision Ford Heights Planning Process

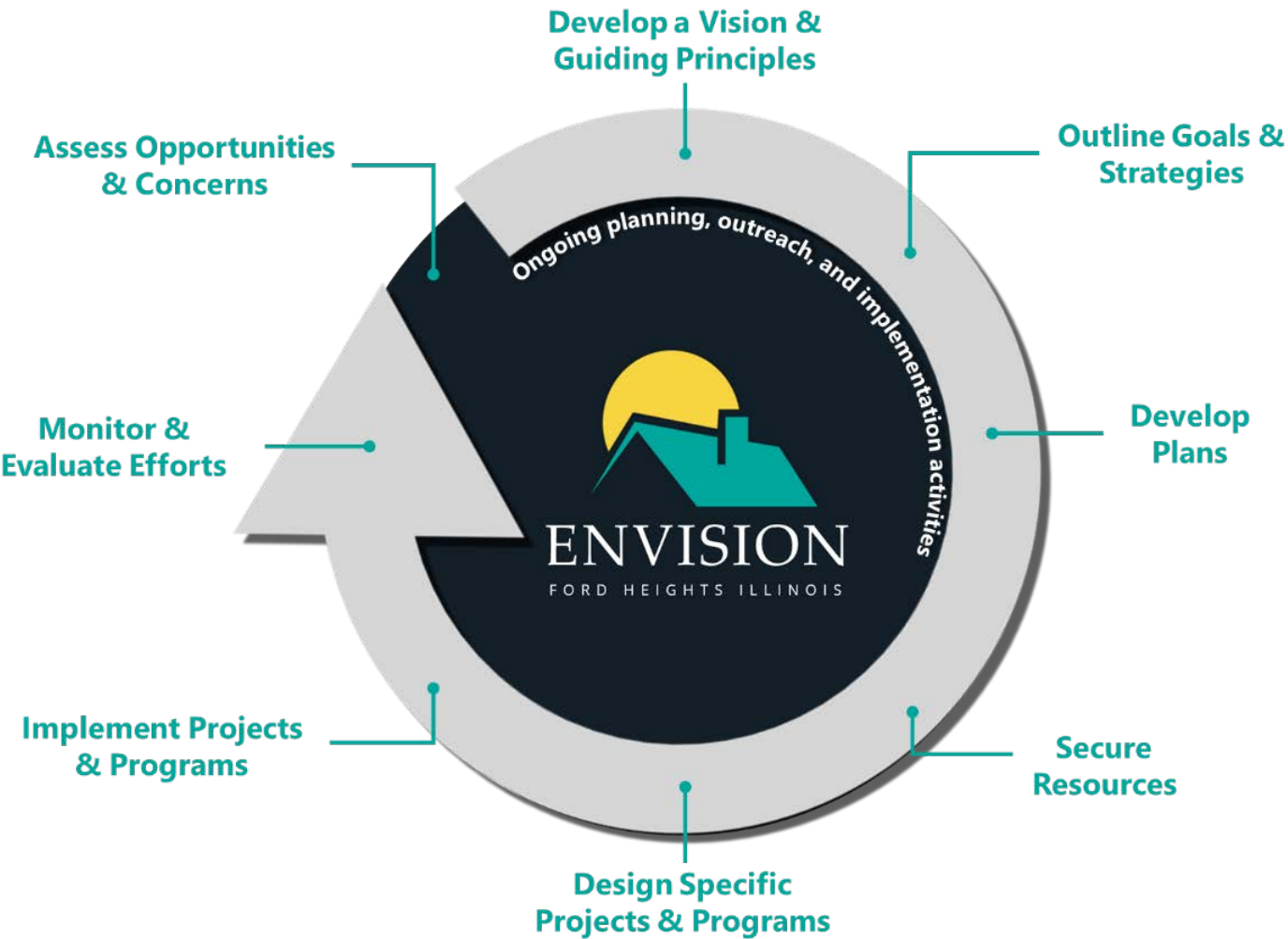


Table 4.1. Envision Ford Heights Implementation Matrix¹

GOALS/STRATEGIES		PHASING	CURRENT STATUS	LEAD(S) / PARTNER(S)
CP	COLLABORATIVE PLANNING			
	Goal: Ford Heights’ residents, leaders, and regional partners are engaged in ongoing collaborative efforts aimed at revitalizing the community and region.			
CP-1	Continue to convene the Ford Heights Advisory Team	Ongoing	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office
CP-2	Engage community residents and businesses through ongoing Envision Ford Heights activities	Ongoing	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office; residents, business owners
CP-3	Continue to participate in regional planning, coordination, and implementation efforts	Ongoing	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office; SSMMA; CMAP
CP-4	Develop a Capital Improvement Plan	Short-Term	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office and Public Works; Cook County
CP-5	Develop a Comprehensive Plan	Medium-Term	Forthcoming	VoFH Mayor’s Office and Public Works; CMAP
ED	EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT			
	Goal: Ford Heights’ community assets and new enterprises are strengthened and leveraged in ways that create sustainable prosperity for all.			
ED-1	Utilize tax and development incentives to unlock private investment in the area	Ongoing	Proposed	VoFH Mayor’s Office; Cook County; SSMMA; CSEDC; SSEGI
ED-2	Implement a Property Demolition and Reactivation Program	Long-Term	Proposed	VoFH Mayor’s Office; Cook County; HUD; MWRD
ED-3	Promote development within the Lincoln-394 Enterprise Zone	Ongoing	Proposed	VoFH Mayor’s Office; Cook County; SSMMA; CSEDC; SSEGI
ED-4	Revitalize the Lincoln Highway Corridor	Medium-Term	Proposed	VoFH, Cook County (DOT), SSMMA
ED-5	Redevelop the New Town Center and revitalize Ford Heights’ residential areas	Long-Term	Proposed	VoFH Mayor’s Office, Cook County, SSLBA
RI	RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURES			
	Goal: Ford Heights’ physical and natural infrastructure systems are in a state of good repair and support a wide array of community benefits.			
RI-1	Prioritize the maintenance of existing infrastructure systems	Ongoing	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office, Public Works, Water Department
RI-2	Achieve and maintain compliance with regulatory agencies	Ongoing	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office, Public Works, Water Department
RI-3	Develop a process for prioritizing and delivering capital improvement projects	Short-Term	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office, Public Works, Water Department
RI-4	Secure and leverage technical assistance, funding, and other capacity-building resources	Ongoing	In Progress	VoFH Mayor’s Office, various partners
RI-5	Adopt and adhere to best practices for planning and delivering capital improvement projects	Ongoing	Proposed	VoFH Mayor’s Office, Public Works, Water Department
HP	HEALTHY PEOPLE + PLACES			
	Goal: Ford Heights’ residents and neighbors have access to healthy built, social, and natural environment.			
HP-1	Empower residents and local organizations to lead and sustain community-driven initiatives	Ongoing	Proposed	Community organizations, schools, churches,
HP-2	Implement a voluntary buy-out program for flood-prone properties	Long-Term	Proposed	VoFH Mayor’s Office, Cook County, MWRD, HUD
HP-3	Improve residents’ access to healthy foods	Short-Term	TBD	VoFH Mayor’s Office, businesses, Cook County, CMAP
HP-4	Improve the community’s parks and natural areas	Medium-Term	Planning	VoFH Mayor’s Office
HP-5	Enhance residents’ ability to age in place	Ongoing	Proposed	VoFH Mayor’s Office; AARP
SM	SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY			
	Goal: Ford Heights’ streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists.			
SM-1	Implement the Street Lighting Improvement Program	Medium-Term	In Progress	VoFH Public Works; Cook County, ComEd, Elevate Energy
SM-2	Develop and implement a Roadway Improvement Program	Ongoing	Proposed	VoFH Public Works; Cook County, SSMMA, IDOT
SM-3	Develop and implement Bike and Pedestrian Improvement Program	Ongoing	Proposed	VoFH Public Works; Cook County, SSMMA, IDOT
SM-4	Advance the Lincoln Highway Corridor Improvement Project	Medium-Term	Proposed	VoFH Public Works; Cook County, SSMMA, IDOT
SM-5	Improve residents’ access to transit and shared mobility services	Medium-Term	Proposed	VoFH Public Works; Cook County, SSMMA, IDOT, RTA, Pace

¹ This matrix provides a summary of the planning priorities, goals, and strategies outlined in the Envision Ford Heights Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSION

Realizing Ford Heights 2.0 will require coordinated action across the local, regional, state, and perhaps even federal levels. This Strategic Plan articulates a shared vision for the future and outlines guiding principles, strategies, and actions for realizing that vision. This plan should be used as a springboard for ongoing planning, community engagement, and implementation efforts.

In closing, it is no secret that the Village of Ford Heights is faced with a number of interconnected community, economic, and environmental challenges. However, Ford Heights is also home to residents and leaders who care deeply and are committed to revitalizing their community. Ford Heights is also not alone in this endeavor. Ford Heights 2.0 can be achieved through collective action and through building upon the community's assets and strengths.

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