

NORTH AVENUE & IL ROUTE 59

Districtwide Improvements

- 1 Formalize a Long-Term Economic Development Strategy
- 2 Conduct a Detailed Retail Market Assessment
- 3 Conduct Business Retention Meetings

Legend

- Yellow Arrow District Throughfares

2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

The Benefits of Illinois 59 to West Chicago

Throughout the strategic planning process, outreach participants and community stakeholders have repeatedly cited the positive impact Illinois 59 has on West Chicago. It is true that IL-59 is a net benefit to the community. However, from an economic development standpoint it is important to understand its competitive advantage clearly. There are limited opportunities for additional development on IL-59; most of the highway frontage is residential or open space, and the existing commercial nodes are the best positioned real estate for retail, restaurant, and office development. In general, the commercial nodes on IL-59, located at Roosevelt Road, Main and Washington Streets, Tower Station, and at North Avenue, are stable and feature relatively low vacancy. The economic development strategy here should be on reinvestment and repositioning these nodes to continue to be competitive.

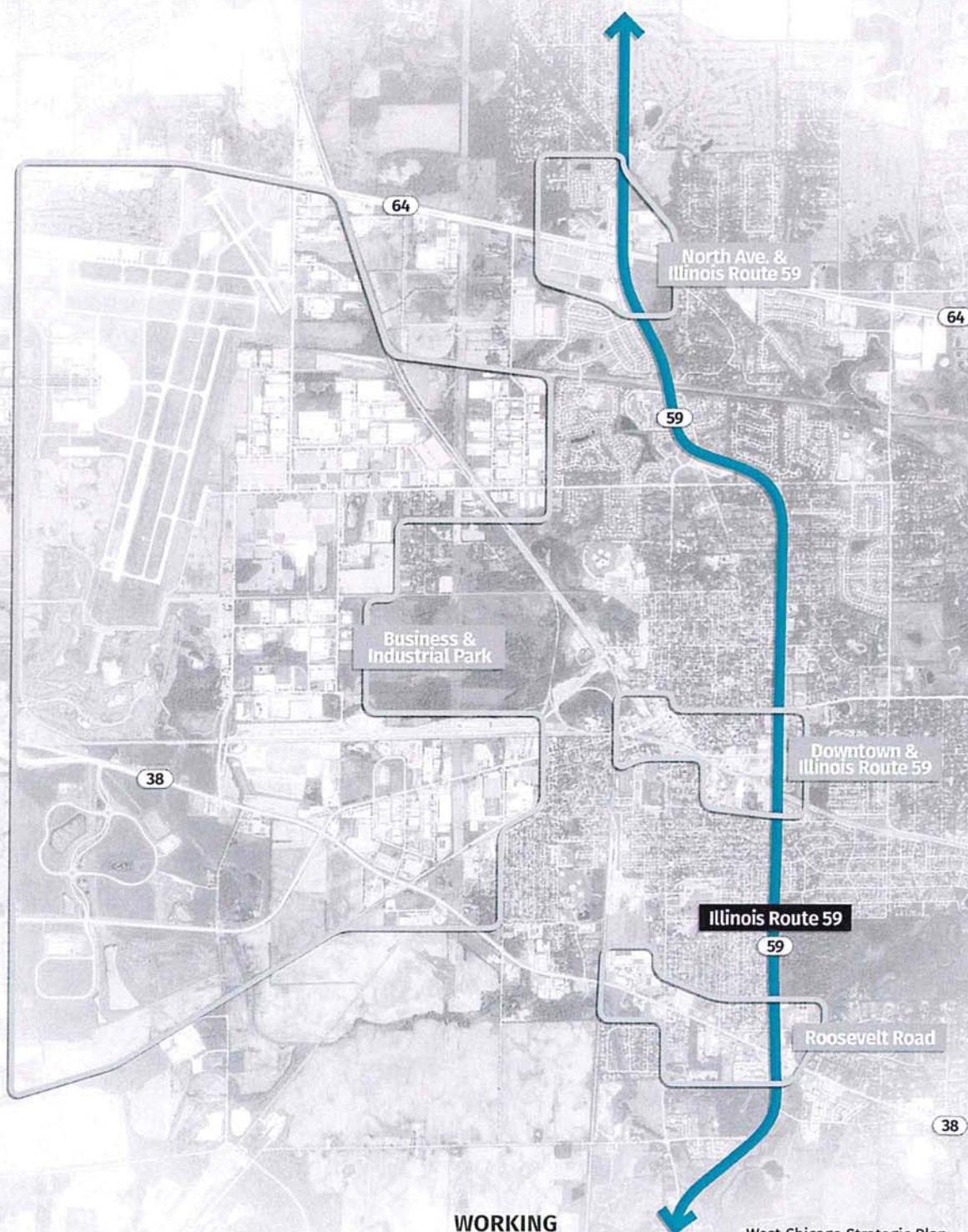
Beyond these four commercial nodes, the primary benefits of Illinois 59 are as a regional highway that efficiently moves motorists throughout the metro area. The highway corridor connects West Chicago to both I-90 and I-88, as well as to communities throughout DuPage County. Despite quick access to the heart of suburban Chicago, West Chicago still provides a quiet, small-town character surrounded by open space.

Illinois Route 59

Illinois Route 59 is similar to other commercial corridors in West Chicago in that its role as a major, regional Illinois state highway means it is designed to move high volumes of traffic great distances in the Chicago region. Route 59 serves western DuPage County, but it also largely functions to connect I-90 to I-88, generally Hoffman Estates to Naperville. There are dozens of municipalities and unincorporated areas along this stretch of highway, and none of them are differentiated from each other in any substantially memorable way. West Chicago does feature prominent and attractive gateway signs on 59, but otherwise the character of development has been consistent with the national chain and highway-oriented retail and fast food users seen in most other communities located on IL-59. Although close in relative proximity, Downtown West Chicago is just west of IL-59, and therefore many motorists traverse the community without ever knowing where they were.

Illinois Route 59 represents a tremendous economic development opportunity for West Chicago, primarily because the quality of existing development has been successful, but still leaves the capacity for potential improvement through redevelopment. There is a prominent retail district located at the intersection of IL-59 and North Avenue, which is addressed in the North Avenue section of this chapter. Further, Tower Station and Aldi serve as a neighborhood retail center in the middle of a primarily residential area. This shopping center features low vacancy and appears competitive, serving this established residential neighborhood.

The two critical nodes are the clusters of businesses oriented to Route 59 at Main Street and East Washington Street; ultimately these nodes are extensions of Downtown West Chicago and should be redeveloped as such. These areas should be denser, more mixed-use in nature, stitch into West Chicago's pedestrian and transit-oriented downtown district, and slow traffic on Route 59 enough to the extent the community character is apparent that a motorist is in the City – a distinctive and memorable place.



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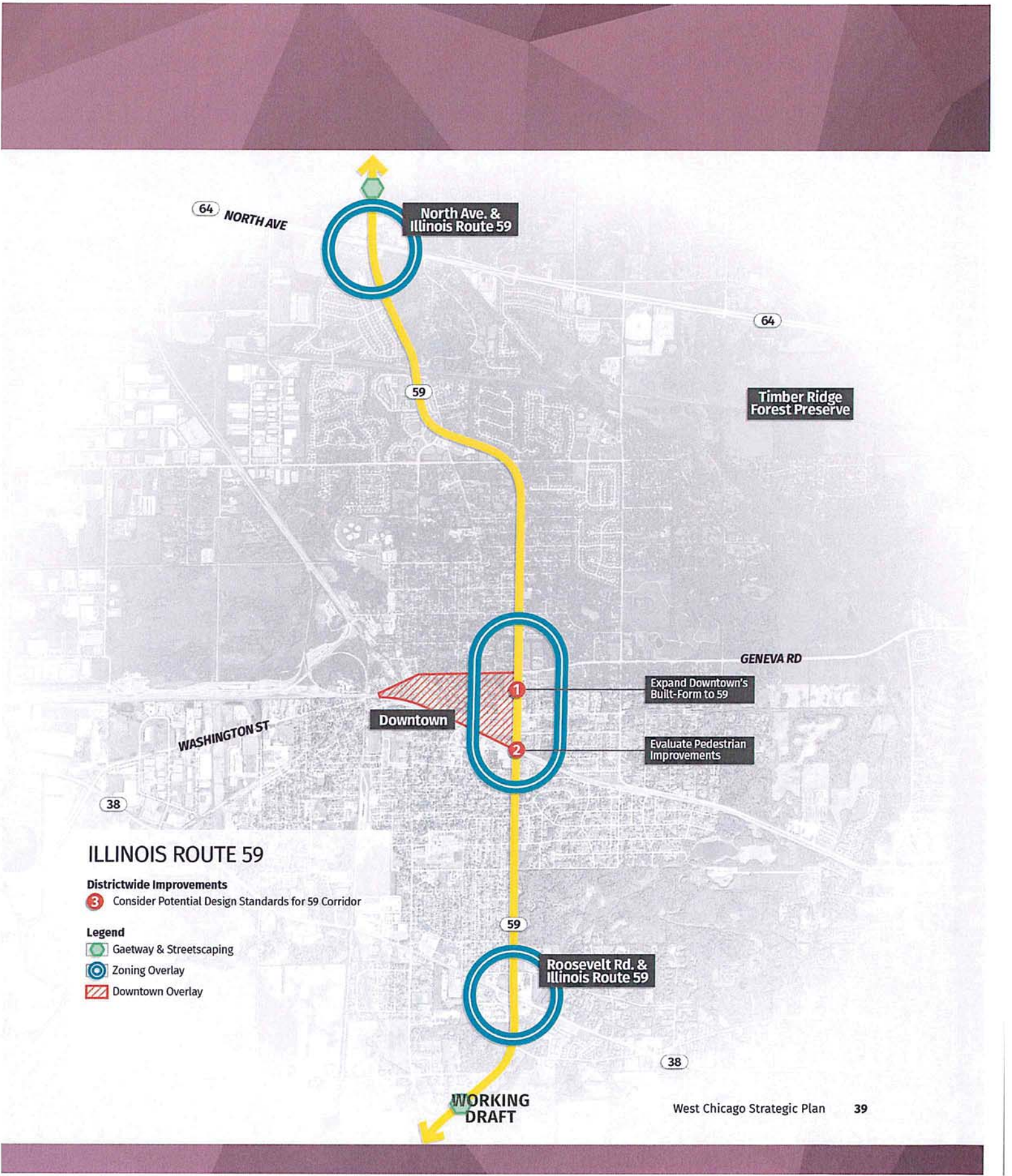
2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

The Benefits of Suburban Infill and Mixed-Use Development

Infill development promotes the better use of sites through reuse and repositioning of obsolete or underutilized buildings. Additionally, infill uses vacant land to contribute to community revitalization. This is often true in suburban communities, that originally developed at a lower density and in a manner that served the initial needs of residents. As suburban communities are changing and evolving today, the opportunity to redevelop and reposition real estate is timely. The benefits of mixed use infill development include environmental benefits of using land efficiently, confining growth into existing urbanized areas, and increasing walkability.

Action Items

- 1 Evaluate expanding Downtown West Chicago's larger neighborhood to extend to Route 59 and carry the district's multi-story, mixed-use, and pedestrian-oriented character to infill developments at those intersections.
- 2 Working with IDOT, evaluate opportunities to install pedestrian safety and traffic calming techniques at the West Washington and Main Street intersections over the long-term, and based on crash data and level of service.
- 3 Consider adopting urban design standards for the Route 59 corridor that are incorporated through overlay zoning districts to promote high-quality developments.



ILLINOIS ROUTE 59

Districtwide Improvements

- 3 Consider Potential Design Standards for 59 Corridor

Legend

- Gaetway & Streetscaping
- Zoning Overlay
- Downtown Overlay

2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Business & Industrial Parks

West Chicago is unique within the suburban Chicago region because it features a major airport as well as hundreds of acres of undeveloped office, industrial, and employment park real estate. Sometimes called “business parks” because of their flexibility, the former DuPage National Technology Park has transitioned into a more dynamic, mixed-use development that carries considerable opportunity for West Chicago. These “greenfield” sites are in close proximity to West Chicago’s existing industrial, manufacturing, and traditional employment centers, to the east.

One of the defining questions for West Chicago over the next generation is whether or not it can stimulate employment growth in these areas. Some businesses and employers that are in West Chicago today will leave. The long-term indicator for the City will be whether or not it replaces those businesses with new, growing employers. Although the location may lack certain advantages, such as immediate interstate access, it provides others like a local, qualified workforce. West Chicago needs to understand these industries, what factors matter to them when making an investment decision, and where the City fits in the regional Chicago marketplace.



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2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

What is an incubator? an accelerator? co-work space?

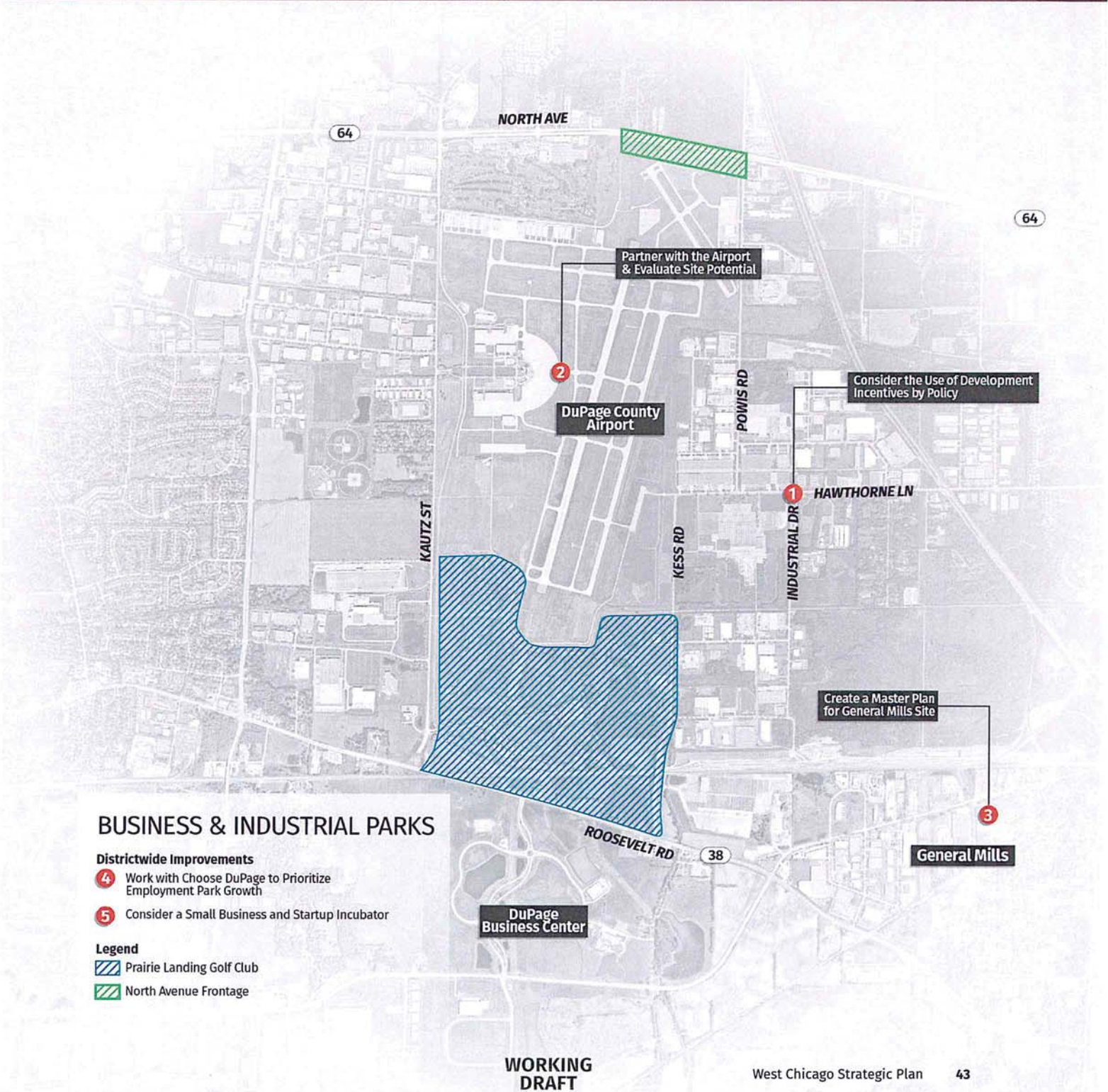
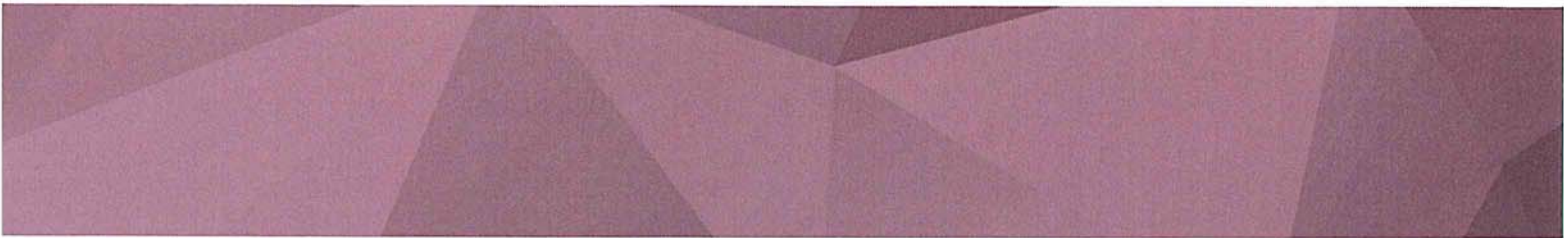
An incubator begins with companies that are in the early processes of starting a business. Some incubators have an application process while others work with companies and ideas they come in contact with. In most cases, startups accepted into an incubator program relate to a specific location to work with other companies in the incubator. Examples of regional incubators with networks already in the Chicago area are: Ideastlab, TechNexus, and Catapult Chicago.

An accelerator program usually has a set timeframe for an individual company. Many times, these companies spend time working with a group of mentors to build out their business and avoid problems along the way. Accelerators always have an application process, and top programs are typically very selective. Examples of existing accelerator programs in the Chicago area are: Y Combinator, Techstars, and Branderly.

Co-work spaces are typically more affordable and flexible working spaces for start-up businesses that might not have the capital to lock into an office lease. Typically, these spaces require a small monthly fee to cover the expenses of running an office, and include office furniture, open or flexible working spaces, high-speed internet access, break rooms, printers, etc. Some co-work spaces that are geared towards crafting have tools, scrap wood, laser-printers, welders, and circular saws, etc.

Action Items

- 1 Consider the use of development incentives and public financing tools to create a 5-year plan for roadway improvements and other needed infrastructure to stimulate new growth.
- 2 The City could host regular meetings with the DuPage Airport Authority and develop a formal investment strategy that identifies practices that leverage the benefits associated with the airport. As part of this endeavor, evaluate the North Avenue frontage for redevelopment.
- 3 The City should develop a long-range master plan to reposition the former General Mills site and proactively attract new investors and employers to the community. If necessary, this site could be segmented into smaller developable "pads" and marketed to smaller users.
- 4 The City could consider partnering with Choose DuPage, or other regional and local organizations, to elevate these industrial and office park development sites as a critical priority for the County's economic development programs more broadly.
- 5 The City could consider developing small business incubator and accelerator space within these industrial areas; these facilities may be developed in partnership with colleges and universities located in the western suburbs, as well as in partnership with Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. Such projects could be developed using a mixture of public, private, nonprofit, and university resources.





COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Enhance West Chicago's image within
DuPage County and the suburban
Chicago region including elevating
its distinct sense of place and
community character.

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Community Identity

1

Establish a formal community marketing plan that promotes West Chicago's unique attributes and elevates the City's image within DuPage County and the Chicago region as a railroad "hometown" independent of recent suburbanization.

2

Create a Citizen Corps of community ambassadors who engage a "marketing network" of actors that represent West Chicago on a daily basis through a wide variety of activities.

3

Continue and elevate ongoing efforts to track, monitor, and assess how West Chicago is presented in the regional Chicago media, while establishing a proactive Public Information Officer function to centralize a "Success Story Center" in the City and pursue earned media and press coverage opportunities.

4

Create a 10-year placemaking and infrastructure investment strategy that emphasizes physical improvements that elevate the appearance and image of West Chicago.

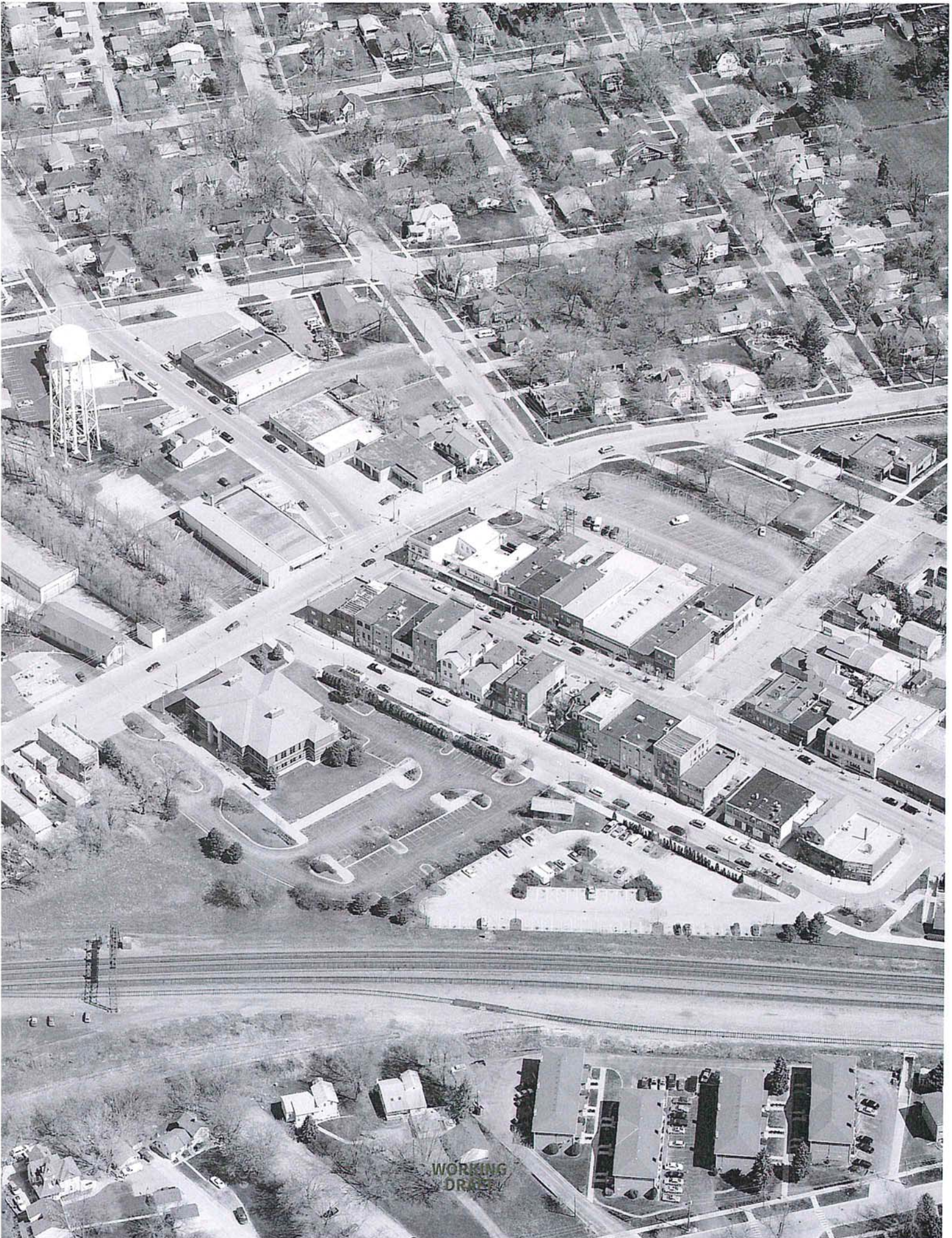


Introduction

West Chicago is a fantastic example of why so many people prefer small “hometowns,” but unfortunately it often seems lost in the wide swath of suburbs that define western DuPage County.

Regardless of which state highway a motorist may be traveling on, they may not know when they pass through West Chicago. Other people hear “West Chicago” and think of somewhere near Oak Park or in “the City”.

For those that rely on regional media and have never been to West Chicago, they may only hear about the negative things. And others just keep repeating the same stories about what life was like in West Chicago over two decades ago. West Chicago has a great story but, for a variety of factors, it just is not getting out in front of people as effectively as it could and that needs to change.



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1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Continue and elevate ongoing efforts to track, monitor, and assess how West Chicago is presented in the regional Chicago media, while establishing a proactive Public Information Officer function to centralize a “Success Story Center” in the City and pursue earned media and press coverage opportunities.

How are branding and marketing different?

Branding is a promise to customers, and in the City of West Chicago's case, visitors and citizens. A brand defines what the community stands for, and requires a community to identify their target audience and what they want so that the City can say why West Chicago is better than competing communities. The City of West Chicago has recently gone through a successful branding exercise that has resulted in a new logo and other public information material.

Marketing, on the other hand, is an integral part of your brand and helps to communicate the promise that the community wants visitors and citizens to know about. The marketing is what the City of West Chicago does to get their message or promise to existing and potential visitors and citizens.

The Approach

West Chicago is a great hometown community, but unfortunately some people are stuck in the past. Whether the issue is thorium contamination, or crime and gang problems, or lagging schools, or challenges associated with becoming a more diverse community, some Chicago area residents' perceptions of West Chicago are stuck in the 1990s. West Chicago has a compelling story to tell because it faced these challenges and largely solved them – that is a nationally unique narrative and one that reinforces the long-term commitment many residents have made to a community that has always been more of a small town than a suburb.

Over the next 10 years, the challenge for the West Chicago community is how to start to cut through the noise and effectively tell this story – as well as publicize its many other success stories. The approach needs to be proactive and it likely needs to be managed on a weekly, and even daily basis. The approach needs to engage local folks on the ground in West Chicago, as well as regional stakeholders and media outlets. Some of the approach needs to be more programmatic, such as pursuing earned media opportunities, and others need to be capital investments, such as elevating corridor streetscaping. But the ultimate outcome remains consistent – promote a positive narrative about West Chicago as a community, embracing its distinct character, and begin to slowly change outsiders' minds while increasing community pride with local residents.



Action Items

1. Consider budgeting for and hiring a consultant to develop a long-term marketing campaign to more effectively position West Chicago in the region.
2. Target marketing efforts to comparable communities and strategic demographics instead of focusing on neighboring and adjacent western DuPage County cities.
3. Customize the message for residential relocations, economic development efforts, and visitor and tourism programming, while maintaining a high-level of message consistency.
4. Engage community stakeholders, residents, and the public in the community marketing process and ensure a consistent message and voice in implementation.
5. Assess strategies to market West Chicago as a major bicycling and outdoor recreation hub of the western suburbs, blending the appeal of a small town/Main Street community centered in a “greenbelt” of high-quality open space.

2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Create a Citizen Corps of community ambassadors who engage a “marketing network” of actors that represent West Chicago on a daily basis through a wide variety of activities.

The Approach

The best approach to tell a story about a place is still word-of-mouth. A community is a large, multi-dimensional, complex thing to tell a story about – and it takes a lot of different people. Many communities have been successful building teams of “hometown heroes” and ambassadors who help represent and promote their town to a wider audience.

Residents love West Chicago and they want more people to recognize how great it is. There is an organic local culture waiting to be tapped to leverage West Chicago’s pride as one of its greatest marketing and corridor branding strategies. That approach can be implemented through a series of key stakeholder networks and targeted programs. Some of these efforts can be managed through existing community groups, like the realtors, and other new programs, like resident-led tours, may need to be launched from a Citizen Corps organized by the City of West Chicago.



Action Items

1. Create a Citizen Corps of community ambassadors coordinated by the City of West Chicago who are willing to volunteer their time to meet with individuals interested in relocating to West Chicago, including staffing a variety of functions, ranging from answering basic questions about the City to conducting community tours.
2. Create a network of DuPage and Kane County realtors to leverage as a resource and mine locally-specific analysis about housing trends, demographic profiles, and the characteristics that shape the regional homeowner market. Partner with interested realtors to promote and market West Chicago in a way consistent with the community's existing branding initiatives.
3. Coordinate with local employers to provide new hires, particularly those relocating, with materials that promote "living locally" in West Chicago and the community's amenities and quality-of-life. Potentially evaluate more incentive-based employer-assisted housing programs that promote living locally in partnership with the City.
4. Coordinate with the local schools to develop materials that articulate the unique benefits of West Chicago schools that differentiate them from other DuPage County institutions and distribute these materials as a part of both the Citizen Corps and employer-promoted programs.
5. Leverage community volunteers passionate and knowledgeable about bicycling and outdoor recreation to lead activity groups based out of West Chicago's parks and forest preserves.

3 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Track, monitor, and assess how West Chicago is presented in the regional Chicago media, while establishing a proactive Public Information Officer function to centralize a “Success Story Center” in the City and pursue earned media and press coverage opportunities.

The Approach

West Chicago has a great story to tell – someone needs to dedicate the time and resources to persistently tell it. People remember something that is repeated at a certain frequency over a certain period of time. There's a science to it and that exact messaging “sweet spot” varies depending on the complexity of the message and the audience to whom you are communicating it. Through the media – both traditional and social – the public is presented a certain narrative about West Chicago.

Although reactive, that narrative needs to be tracked and mapped. On the other hand, West Chicago needs to be relentlessly promoting its success stories and proudly holding up what residents take pride in for the whole Chicago region to take notice. These efforts need to occur at the individual level, the neighborhood level, and then more broadly through the regional media level. The collective impact of shaping West Chicago's narrative will incrementally impact that word-of-mouth aspect over time.

Action Items

1. The City should evaluate adding resources to ensure an adequate amount of personnel time is available for a proactive Public Information Officer function that tracks, monitors, and reports on West Chicago's press coverage and trending social media activity.
2. The City should continue to use the "Success Story Center" that acts as a clearinghouse for all organizations, businesses, and stakeholders in the community to first collect positive news about West Chicago, and then secondly leverage relationships with various media outlets in the pursuit of earned media opportunities.
3. The City could potentially consider establishing a Neighborhood Council of Advisors consisting of neighborhood groups, homeowners' associations, and other similar organizations to regularly engage as a part of a communications strategy. Further, these groups could be engaged by a variety of City personnel at regular meetings.
4. The City could evaluate introducing participatory budgeting techniques to the community, particularly leveraged through resident leaders via the Neighborhood Council of Advisors.

What is a neighborhood council?

A neighborhood council is typically a volunteer-based organization of neighbors, business owners, educators, and non-profit leaders, supported by the City to make their neighborhood stronger. Neighborhood council board sizes vary from 7 to 30 individuals depending on the needs of the community, and they hold regular meetings (i.e. quarterly) and take on tasks such as creating events and programs that respond to community needs, or advocating on behalf of the community on issues such as crime, roads, and economic development, among other things. Further, individual neighborhood groups can come together and meet with other neighborhood leaders from around the City through a city-wide Council. These approaches typically ensure that residential needs and goals are voiced from throughout the community.

4 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Create a 10-year placemaking and infrastructure investment strategy that emphasizes physical improvements that elevate the appearance and image of West Chicago.

The Approach

A community's image is often shaped through intangible aspects, like branding, marketing, advertising, word-of-mouth, and press coverage – but it is also shaped by physically visiting it and those memorable perceptions someone takes back with them. Infrastructure and a community's urban design (or built-environment) play a critical role in shaping opinions about a place. Planners call the opportunities to create neat, engaging, distinctive, and memorable locations in a community “placemaking” for that reason. The negative contrast is when a community is so unidentifiable you never knew you were there, or worse yet you took home a bad experience and discomfort.

West Chicago features a number of identifiable landmarks and memorable places, particularly Downtown and its historic core. The City has also made impactful investments in gateway monuments, streetscaping, and some neighborhood improvements. The City should pursue public-private partnerships as much as possible and lead a series of programs and efforts to accelerate the investment in signature placemaking projects that further distinguishes West Chicago as a readily identifiable and memorable small town community within the greater Chicago region.



Action Items

1. Conduct an assessment of the City's major corridors and produce a report that proposes streetscaping, infrastructure branding, wayfinding, and other placemaking improvements for further consideration, prioritization, and funding as part of capital improvements. This assessment should factor recent Illinois Department of Transportation design regulation changes and examine the potential for other signage, lighting, and traffic signal standards on state rights-of-way specifically.
2. Evaluate the community's sidewalk connectivity and street lighting coverage, and produce an assessment that prioritizes improvements to address public safety and community appearance.
3. Continue to support the creation of a public art program that contributes to both placemaking strategies throughout the City, as well as specifically within corridor branding efforts.
4. Evaluate coordinating economic development efforts with capital improvements to mark each commercial corridor in a distinctive manner.
5. Assess what facilities and infrastructure components are absent to elevate West Chicago as a hub for bicycling, trail use, and outdoor recreation within the western suburbs, and develop a capital improvement program to prioritize and fund their construction.
6. The City should lead a community-wide planning exercise to evaluate existing events, assess the potential to expand Railroad Days, and program new potential community events and festivals.
7. The City should engage Ball Horticultural Company to develop a community identity component around landscaping and botanical elements, including not only vegetation but also public art, events, and marketing.



INTERGOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

Maximize the community's
public resources by elevating the
intergovernmental partnerships
between stakeholders in West Chicago.

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Intergovernmental Partnerships

1

The City of West Chicago should lead a cultural change in the community's local political leadership to commit to ongoing, regular collaboration and resource coordination around a few shared annual priorities across all stakeholders and organizations.

2

The City of West Chicago should emphasize ongoing strategic planning activities and incorporate the efforts of all of its Boards & Commissions, as well as partner organizations throughout the City, in a manner that actively coordinates and calibrates long-range planning across the community.

3

The City of West Chicago should initiate an ongoing public policy dialogue and collaborative strategy with all of the local school districts to discuss and address community issues and strengthening their relationships.



The Rise of Shared Service Models

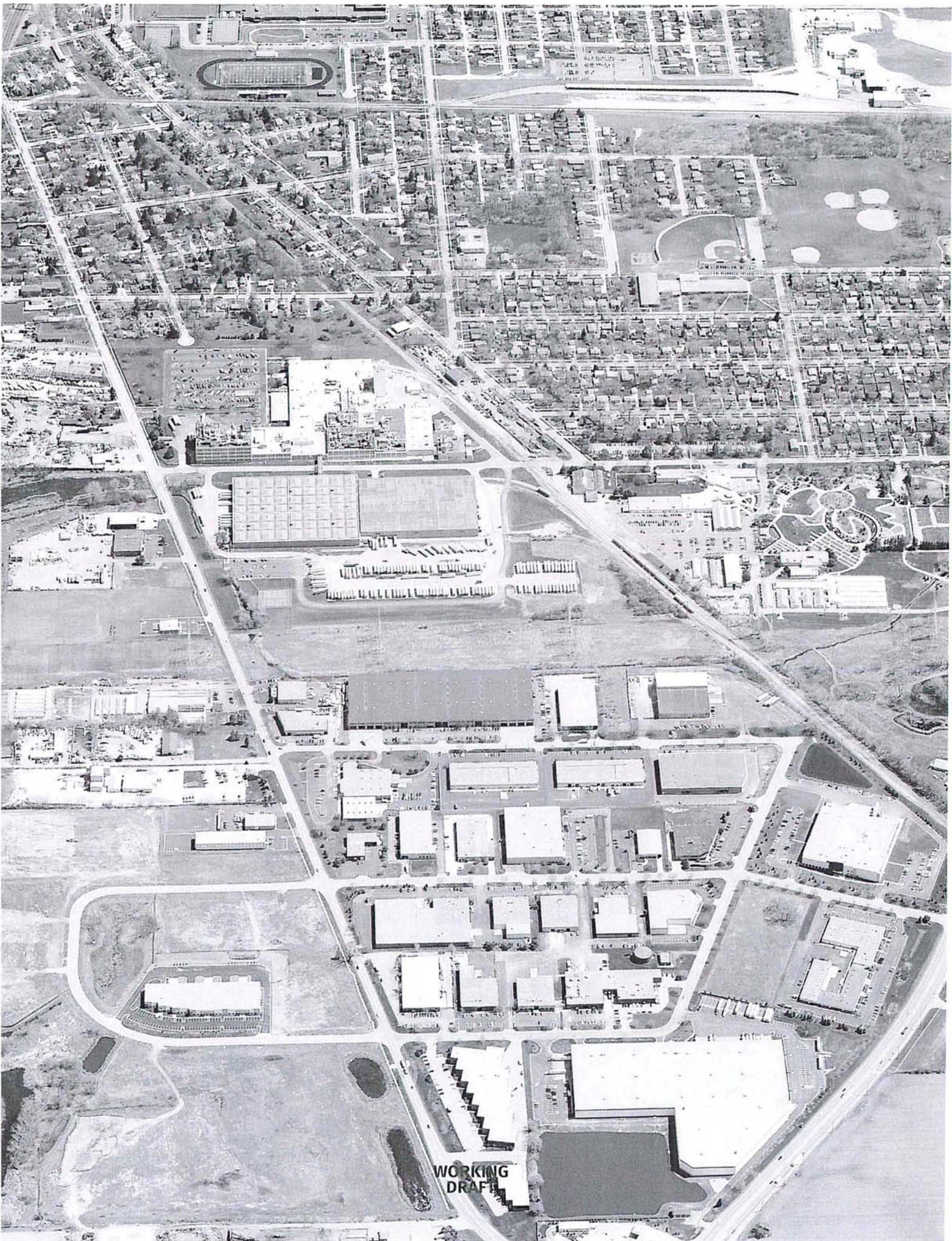
The shared service model is a way of organizing administrative or other functions to optimize the cost-effective, reliable services to constituents. Most communities consider consolidating things like emergency services, library services, water operations, resource recovery facilities, or municipal fueling stations, among others. The first step to identifying the greatest methods of initiating a shared service model, is for the City of West Chicago to perform a needs assessment and determine which existing functions can be provided more cost effectively or efficiently through a cooperation agreement. Then, finding a partner to share services with can be accomplished by contacting neighboring local governments, such as Geneva, Winfield, and Wayne to initiate a mutual partnership, and then to study jointly the feasibility of such an arrangement.

Introduction

West Chicago is fragmented by a series of overlapping political jurisdictions. Whether this is a “good thing” or “bad thing” is dependent on the community’s effectiveness in providing quality public services and maximizing its financial resources. West Chicago has the opportunity to push itself and its public leaders to go from “good to great”.

It is unlikely that any of the existing taxing bodies and public agencies will be consolidated or shifted – the public policy landscape in West Chicago is stable, predictable, and here to stay. Therefore, the City of West Chicago should leverage this existing strategic planning process to initiate a new era of close collaboration and partnership across all stakeholders in the City.

This governing philosophy can be achieved through shared planning, budget coordination, and enhanced civic engagement. Ultimately the City of West Chicago has no jurisdiction over these other taxing bodies and cannot control their decision-making or budgets; however, City leaders can initiate many of these efforts and make the first move to bring partners to the table. From that point, the West Chicago community, served by all of these other taxing bodies, needs to commit to pushing themselves to a new level of excellence in intergovernmental collaboration.



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1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

The City of West Chicago should lead a cultural change in the community's local political leadership to commit to ongoing, regular collaboration and resource coordination around a few shared annual priorities across all stakeholders and organizations.

The Approach

West Chicago has a history of successful collaborative projects and close coordination across its stakeholders, and outreach input placed an emphasis on continuing this legacy. While the track record may be primarily a success story, intergovernmental and community stakeholder relationships can always be strengthened and improved.

Part of the approach could be a more formalized, regular forum for interaction and joint planning. Although agencies will still need to hustle in response to timely events that impact them specifically, true long-range and proactive planning will flourish if it becomes routine to governance and operations. While the City of West Chicago does not control these other jurisdictions, City leaders have an opportunity to spark new initiatives and bring partners into new community discussions.



Action Items

1. The City of West Chicago should invite all of the taxing bodies with jurisdiction within the community to attend an “Annual Community Strategy Summit” that identifies the key community goals, objectives, and priorities for the year. This forum could help coordinate operations and finances between public partner agencies and identify opportunities for formal partnerships.
2. The City should continue to engage other taxing jurisdictions and public agencies to share costs and coordinate capital projects as much as reasonable and beneficial.
3. Any organization that chooses to participate should formally adopt a resolution committing to ongoing participation in an “Annual Community Strategy Summit” and any subsequent implementation meetings. This structure would establish a permanent forum for inter-governmental relations and coordinated planning, strengthening existing relationships within West Chicago, which goes beyond the existing quarterly meetings that are more informal.

2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

The City of West Chicago should emphasize ongoing strategic planning activities and incorporate the efforts of all of its Boards & Commissions, as well as partner organizations throughout the City, in a manner that actively coordinates and calibrates long-range planning across the community.

The Approach

The City of West Chicago has a wealth of both elected and appointed officials. They could be structuring routine interactions around joint planning exercises so every policymaker in the community is working from some version of the same playbook, albeit customized to their roles. While this is beneficial to setting the agenda, it is even more critical to budgeting and capital planning.

Further, the City could initiate efforts to take this expanded public policy dialogue out of the City of West Chicago and into the community, both engaging other taxing jurisdictions but also the public in strategic and financial planning. Ultimately that is beyond the City of West Chicago's jurisdiction and influence, but the City's leaders could initiate such an effort and make the case for its merits.



Action Items

1. The City could host an internal Boards & Commissions Planning Retreat with the City Council to discuss the annual strategic agenda, general public policy priorities, and community finances. This workgroup could review the City's Capital Improvements Plan.
2. After the Boards & Commissions' Planning Retreat, each individual board or commission could draft its own dedicated two-year strategic agenda to guide their efforts. These board and commission two-year plans should then be distributed to the entire organization, including all elected and appointed officials.

3 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

The City of West Chicago should initiate an ongoing public policy dialogue and collaborative strategy with all of the local school districts to discuss and address community issues and strengthening their relationships.

The Approach

Most studies still show that the primary reason a homeowner selects a community is because of the local schools. And despite all of the quality-of-life amenities a municipality can influence – housing stock, business districts, open space, community facilities, public services, and public safety – they virtually never have jurisdictional authority over the schools. Conversely, a school's environment is often largely shaped by all of these other community considerations.

In the post Great Recession environment of very tight public dollars and heightened community expectations, there is a strong argument for enhanced coordination and collaborations. Many of a community's issues must be simultaneously addressed by both entities and there are often jointly-designed policy responses available. The City and the local schools should commit to elevate their public policy collaboration and develop a model leadership framework for the entire Chicago region to demonstrate the positive impact when city and school leaders work closely together.

Action Items

1. Consider establishing a “2+2 Program” with representatives of the City Council, School Boards, and key staff members such as the City Administrator and Superintendents to discuss community public policy matters on a monthly basis. The membership of these informal workgroups can rotate as needed.
2. Both the City of West Chicago and the school districts should consider establishing ambassador or “envoy” programs where elected members are provided tours of each agency’s facilities, internal planning, regulatory frameworks, and service and programming provisions to elevate knowledge and awareness while strengthening working relationships.
3. The City of West Chicago and the school districts should discuss and evaluate opportunities to better leverage the student population for communication strategies as well as community engagement opportunities.

What is 2+2?

“2+2” is an informal term for the types of joint City/School District ad hoc committees that have been formed in a number of communities in the United States.

2+2 Programs include two elected board members from both the municipality and their school district, along with the City Administrator and Superintendent(s), who meet as a group to discuss community issues that impact both organizations; the outcome is to identify opportunities for a jointly-designed response. This program could be particularly effective in West Chicago, which is served by a number of different school districts.

ONE WEST CHICAGO

MANY PEOPLE, MANY CULTURES, ONE WEST CHICAGO

Broaden participation in community leadership, invest in long-term relationships, and form partnerships with all members of the West Chicago community to reinforce that there is One West Chicago, made stronger by its diversity.

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One West Chicago

1

Go to where the people are and redefine how the City engages with the community.

2

Ensure the process is accessible by customizing it to various cultures and circumstances.

3

Invest in ongoing relationships to ensure that old and new partners become fully forged alliances and are fully capable of achieving results.

4

Foster community capacity building and an asset-based philosophy to build the capacity for stronger partnerships in the future.

5

Use media strategically to provide useful and accessible information.



Introduction

West Chicago is a diverse community – it always has been and it will continue to be for the next generation. Further, West Chicago has a large, proud Latino community, featuring a lot of internal diversity itself. West Chicago needs to own its cultural heritage, its community history, and its diversity as one of its main assets. Many individuals have reported they chose to live in West Chicago because of its distinctive character and its ties to Hispanic heritage. Outreach efforts have proven West Chicago is already known for this identity – but now the community needs to proudly and proactively own it throughout the Chicago region and embrace it as its signature strength.

Unfortunately, initiating Hispanic outreach, or any specific ethnic group, cannot be done intermittently. In order to identify the needs and desires of the Hispanic community in West Chicago, a strong foundation needs to be built from knowledge of the community, partnerships, and a sense of trust for successful engagement. Once these foundations are built or at least initiated, the City and organizing bodies can begin to identify the goals of their engagement activities. Finally, they can begin to design activities that use best practice strategies to engage the Hispanic community.

This approach can be accomplished by engaging community members where they typically reside and spend time, and where they might feel more comfortable. This also addresses many transportation issues whereby members of the community don't need to worry about traveling far to participate.

It is also important to ensure that the process is accessible to all cultures and stages of life represented in the community. People of the Hispanic population come from different places and are of all walks of life. Messaging should recognize this to enhance the connection between residents, the government, and other service providers. The City could also invest in system navigators, that can help residents maneuver various systems and access a range of resources that may be helpful.

The most successful outreach efforts invest in creating sustained and trusted relationships to achieve its goals, and it is therefore important that relationship-building become a regular and integral part of the engagement process. While approaches may vary, it could be beneficial to build one-on-one relationships to connect with the Hispanic communities from which they come, and the primarily Hispanic population neighborhoods, represent an opportunity to identify liaisons or ambassadors.

Community capacity-building programs can help residents develop leadership skills and identify their unique “gifts” and “talents” in a way that benefits their neighborhoods and West Chicago. In turn, residents can produce community improvements and also build the capacity for stronger partnerships in the future.

This approach can be used in confluence with other strategies to ensure the process is accessible to all cultures and walks of life, invest in ongoing relationships, and build leadership skills of liaisons or ambassadors.

Finally, all efforts should be coordinated through ongoing public information and communications approaches that utilize community voices and leaders to provide useful and accessible information. Additionally, many ethnic media outlets are willing partners in collaborative events, forums, or fairs and could help promote events and provide popular hosts. Finally, social media may be a good tool for reaching out to some audiences who in turn may share relevant information with their families.



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1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Go to where the people are and redefine how the City engages with the community.

The Approach

West Chicago is a very diverse community that features a variety of cultures, religions, and organizations. The City of West Chicago should seek the participation of all members of the community by making it as convenient and comfortable for them as possible.

The City should consider holding community meetings such as commission, committee, and group meetings, where the people of West Chicago reside and spend time much of their time already. These locations could include the ARC Center, schools, and churches where the community might feel more comfortable engaging. This also addresses many transportation issues of participation, whereby the people of West Chicago feel it is less of a burden and more of an opportunity to participate and engage.



Action Items

1. Meet with school administrators and faculty to promote community engagement including presentations at PTO meetings and open houses aligned with existing, ongoing school-based outreach efforts.
2. Go door-to-door or store-to-store and talk to Hispanic families about engagement and leadership opportunities.
3. Hold regular and consistent neighborhood meetings at convenient locations such as the ARC Center, schools, and churches.
4. Leverage neighborhood groups and residential leaders in primarily Hispanic areas as a method to better engage this part of the West Chicago community in City deliberations and community affairs.
5. Lead a broad coalition of community organizations to develop formal recruitment and educational materials about serving the West Chicago community through public, business, and nonprofit leadership roles.

2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Ensure the process is accessible by customizing it to various cultures and circumstances.

What are community ambassadors or liaisons?

Forming a network of community ambassadors could be a worthwhile effort and ensure the sustainability of these outreach efforts over the long-term. In order to form a successful network of community ambassadors, the City of West Chicago should seek out members of the community who already have an existing network of relationships with their neighbors, community groups, and/or faith-based groups. This could include business owners, formal or informal neighborhood groups, youth groups, and/or high school leadership.

Ambassador responsibilities could include communicating with others about opportunities to engage with the City, helping them find the resources to navigate governmental process, and can be an ally and resource for them in interacting with the City. In return, the City should consider what they offer these ambassadors or liaisons as an incentive to participate.

The Approach

One of the biggest draws for people to the City of West Chicago is the true diversity of its people. It is important to ensure that outreach processes are accessible to all cultures and stages of life represented in the community. People of the Hispanic population come from different places and are of all walks and stages of life.

Messaging can and should be understood of this to enhance the connection between residents and the government or other service providers. The City could also invest in system navigators, that can help residents maneuver various systems and access the range our resources that may be helpful in achieving a myriad of goals.