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Planning Study Objectives

Identify strategies to direct future development, strengthen the sense of place and community, and protect the character and integrity of the land

The City of Waukegan and the residents of River Road corridor have come together to prepare a document that will guide the City and the Community in directing future development in the area. The last Comprehensive Plan for the City of Waukegan was prepared in 1987. Some parcels of the River Road corridor have been annexed after 1987. In connection with the approval of the proposed River Glen development at the intersection of River Road and IL 120, the City of Waukegan agreed to a moratorium on all development of other lands within the River Road corridor area until an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Waukegan is put in place.

The Plan put forth in this document will be used as the basis for the City of Waukegan to prepare an ordinance that will be brought before the City Council. Once the ordinance is adopted, this River Road corridor guidelines document will become an amendment to the current 1987 Comprehensive Plan. This new amendment to the Waukegan Comprehensive Plan shall be used to guide the review of future developments by the City of Waukegan, so that such proposed developments will be compatible with the existing neighborhood character of the River Road corridor, with the exception of the River Glen cluster development.

This planning document respects previous studies and discussions and further refines and provides direction to the community and the City of Waukegan to direct future growth in a sustainable manner.

The following references were used to prepare this document:
- The City of Waukegan Comprehensive Plan, 1987
- Guiding Principles for the River Road corridor, 2006
- North River Road Planning Area Ecological Assessment, 2005
- 2013 Ordinance 13-O-100 Zoning Calendar 2412
- City of Waukegan Zoning Ordinance, 3.11-11 Residential Cluster Developments

Located on the western edge of the City of Waukegan, River Road corridor has unique qualities:
- Proximity to downtown Waukegan, Libertyville and Gurnee
- Large areas of preserved land
- A mix of rural and suburban communities that give River Road its distinctive character

The key objectives to this River Road Conservation and Community Development Plan are:
- Define a holistic strategy for the area
- Define key planning principles
  - Land and development patterns
  - Open space and natural systems
  - Access and connectivity relative to traffic, safety and leisure
- Understand the logical areas for potential development
- Advance environmental objectives for a high quality of life and conservation of open space

The following pages record existing conditions based on current maps from Lake County and the City of Waukegan. In order for the recommendations to have most impact it is suggested that the existing conditions maps are updated every few years to keep the information current. The River Road corridor is defined as the area which is East of Des Plaines River, West of Hanlon Road between IL 120 and IL 137. It is further intended that this River Road Conservation and Community Development Plan be used as a guide for any future development in the City of Waukegan on lands which are proposed to be annexed to the City of Waukegan and located adjacent or near the River Road Corridor.
Existing Site Conditions

Existing Site Aerial 2016
(Red dashed line indicates the boundary of the River Road Corridor)

Neighboring Communities
Current Zoning

Land in this area is predominantly zoned as R1, ER-1 and ER-2.

Streets and Access

The River Road corridor is bound by Highway 120 to the north and Highway 137 to the south. These are both fast-moving, east-west connections and pose public safety concerns for the residents.
Wetlands and Water

The River Road corridor includes rich natural resources such as wetland areas, rivers, streams and other small water bodies. These environmental assets, as well as the Forest Preserve, come together to produce an ecologically diverse place. The trails and pathways that run along the river corridor and Independence Grove to the southwest help to activate the area and attract residents.

Forest and Woodland Areas

Within and adjacent to the community are significant areas of Forest Preserves including the Independence Grove and the Liberty Prairie Nature Preserve.
Agricultural Lands

Within the River Road corridor site boundary, there are large tracts of agricultural land dispersed throughout the development. These tracts of land along with other open spaces act as buffers separating developments within the community.

Conservation Easements

Within the River Road corridor there are a number of conservation easements as well as fee simple ownership parcels as per the National Conservation easement database.
Neighborhoods and Settled Areas (Estates)

Within the River Road community there are a number of estates which have been passed down from generation to generation as well as plotted housing developments.

Existing and Proposed Development Areas
Composite Map of River Road corridor Study Area
Community Outreach: What we heard

To understand the planning needs in the River Road corridor, the design team met with the Mayor, the Alderman, and multiple times with the community, to identify the qualities of the neighborhood that most define its character. Discussions focused on the following big themes:

The rural character of River Road: Residents emphasized the importance of the area’s rural character and the importance of preserving this character along River Road – in particular by focusing new development efforts in areas buffered from the roadway.

The integrity of existing forests and open land: Residents said they want to preserve the integrity of the area’s natural character, including agriculture, horse farms, ecologically sensitive open space including forests, recreational opportunities, with long views and sight lines, as well as to establish trails.

Preserve heritage and working farms: Residents of the community are keen to preserve the working farms in order to continue the overall character of the community.

The impacts of potential development: Residents expressed concerns about density and cluster development and the potential congestion and safety impacts that could accompany excessive new development. Particular considerations focused on how to accommodate increased traffic without overwhelming the capacity of River Road.

Standards to accompany future growth: Residents want to ensure responsible growth that balances development trends and market expectations in with coordinated utility, zoning, traffic demands and regional collaboration considerations.

Principles to inform future development: Residents emphasized the need to state clear standards to guide development and ensure that the character of the community is preserved over the long term. Based on these meetings, a set of recommendations has been developed as Principles.

The residents of the River Road corridor also emphasized certain additional goals:

- Maintain current zoning as far as possible and if changes are required these should be aligned with other community goals
- Maintain property values
- Maintain the single family uses and density as currently exists in the River Road corridor, and no cluster developments, such as the conditionally approved River Glen development, should be allowed in the remaining portions of the River Road corridor.
Planning Principles and Recommendations

The River Road corridor along the Des Plaines River corridor is a community with a rich rural history shaped by impressive natural resources. As parcels of land are developed, the area should preserve and celebrate its natural character.

The challenge for future residential development will be to build neighborhoods that strengthen the community’s unique sense of place, while protecting the character and integrity of its natural setting. To help facilitate responsible growth that promotes stewardship of nature, several planning principles have been identified to serve as recommendations to guide future development.

By embracing these principles, the River Road corridor can advance environmentally sensitive planning and sustainable development practices, while maintaining current zoning and land use requirements.

1. Encourage responsible development patterns
2. Identify a comprehensive access strategy
3. Protect important natural features
4. Maintain the rural character and scenic resources along River Road
5. Connect neighborhoods to the Des Plaines River
Encourage responsible development patterns

The River Road corridor benefits from a rural community with multi-acre estates, horse and vegetable farms, forest preserves and protected areas. As parcels of land are developed, the new development can reinforce the bonds of community through compatible design that supports the positive qualities of existing residential neighborhoods. Environmentally sensitive design, development patterns that are in line with existing zoning, and community-driven decision-making can help ensure continuity with the character of existing neighborhoods.

- Developing around existing residential neighborhoods
- Promoting environmentally sensitive neighborhood design that celebrates the location along a scenic and ecologically valuable waterway
- Fostering sustainable and resilient design within developments that is sensitive to stormwater management, flood zone protection, and wildlife and natural habitat preservation
- Embracing accessibility to open space amenities
- Maintaining housing types in future development that reflect continuity with the character of existing neighborhoods
- Promoting contextually sensitive design in terms of scale, materials, and amount of new development
- Aligning future development plans, including any planned development proposals, on unincorporated land with overall community goals as reflected in this document
- Maintain existing density per current zoning without further cluster developments per Waukegan’s cluster development ordinance. The River Glen development has failed since its conditional approval in 2013 with its associated higher density housing per the cluster development ordinance.
An environmentally sensitive location, River Road is an “infrastructure-light” area that must also accommodate vehicular access to development and accessibility to open space assets. As future development is proposed in this area, mitigating traffic impacts associated with future development will be an important component of maintaining the functionality and scale of River Road. This includes any future off-site access changes that should be coordinated with community goals.

- Mitigating traffic impacts through additional vehicular access to new developments from O’Plaine Road and the public portions of Hanlon Road
- Providing additional secondary local streets for additional vehicular access
- Maintaining the function and scale of River Road while limiting traffic increases
- Leveraging a vegetative canopy and open space buffering to reduce the impacts of vehicular traffic such as light pollution on sensitive natural habitats and existing neighborhoods
- Keeping open space buffering for foot traffic through grassed filter strips or other techniques
- Ensuring pedestrian and bicycle access from River Road to open space assets
- Creating overland paths throughout new development
- Coordinating further analysis with the objectives of future development plans and the allocation of priorities that support sustainable development and the rural character of the River Road corridor.
Protect Important Natural Features

The character of the River Road corridor is defined by its rich natural environment. Growth should respect the integrity of its ecological systems through continued conservation, enhancement and renewal of key environmental resources as documented in the North River Road Planning Area Ecological Assessment, 2005, also known as The Guiding Principles of the River Road corridor.

- Encouraging innovation in site planning
- Promoting carefully designed development that is sensitive to preserving the environment
- Protecting important environmental resources as well as any land of ecological or scenic significance
- Locating development so as to foster the preservation of nature
- Embracing natural features as intrinsically valuable and promoting them as an irreplaceable community asset
- Enhancing the integrity of prairie, wetland, forests, and other environmentally sensitive land
Maintain the rural character and scenic resources along River Road

The rural character of the River Road corridor is a regional asset to be seen, experienced and protected. Protecting and enhancing important scenic resources and views along the River Road corridor — as well as scenic vistas from the corridor to the Des Plaines River — is an important component of preserving the rural experience.

• Maintaining the rural appearance of River Road
• Encourage development patterns that contribute toward view corridors
• Keeping the experience of River Road natural as far as possible
• Preserving protected natural features including but not limited to existing trees, forest and woodlands, and maintaining a landscape buffer around developments of different types, and immediately adjacent to River Road
• Protecting vegetation to ensure the healthy maintenance of infiltration, insect, sedimentation and nutrient cycles
• Providing additional landscape buffering and screening between development and key scenic resources and view corridors
The communities along the River Road corridor enjoy the backdrop of 450+ acres of protected open lands that form the basin of the nearby Des Plaines River waterway, as well as additional ±330 acres of privately owned and permanently conserved open space in the area. Through efforts by the City of Waukegan, the Lake County Forest Preserves, and Openlands, conservation easements have been established to ensure the protection and preservation of these areas. Even so, ensuring the preservation of the River Road corridor as one of the area’s most valuable natural, ecological, and recreational assets calls for additional sensitivity in balancing the relationship between development and the waterway openlands.

- Recognizing the Des Plaines River corridor as an asset for all residents of Lake County
- Connecting existing trails, greenways, and waterway trails between River Road and the Des Plaines River, and creating overland paths and marked routes through existing neighborhoods and future developments
- Where possible, strive for connectivity of open spaces to benefit natural systems and wildlife utilizing existing conserved lands
- Buffering development from ecologically sensitive open spaces and waterbodies by naturalizing flood areas and ensuring generous development setbacks
- Promoting an urban stream buffer comprised of stormwater depression areas, grass filter strips, and forested zones, to ensure overland debris collection, to diffuse runoff, and to retain surface flow pollutants
- Ensuring active management and access to all stream buffer areas in future developments
- Fostering land use and physical development patterns that minimize negative impacts on water quality, including the maintenance of high-quality green development practices that minimize stormwater runoff and other forms of pollution
- Promoting sustainable stormwater management and flood protection by limiting the overland flow of stormwater runoff, providing adequate short- and long-term infiltration zones away from waterbody edges, and grading soils to prevent the accumulation of excess sedimentation
- Facilitating appropriate drainage including the elimination of direct drain flows into waterbodies
Illustrative Map showing existing natural features and sight lines.

Libertyville

CITY OF WAUKEGAN
Existing neighborhoods
Existing settlement
Existing agriculture
Existing waterway
Existing forest
Open fields
Conservation easement
Fee simple ownership
Existing trail
Study Area
View corridor
Future access

Park City
North Chicago
Green Oaks