

Greenways Plan

City of Highland Park

Adopted 1995

Updated 2003

City of Highland Park
Department of Community Development

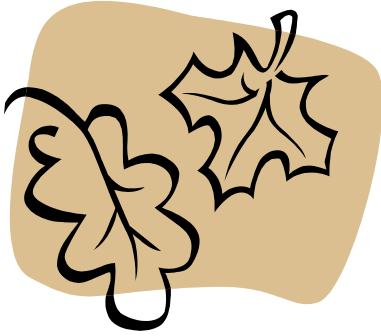
Planning Division

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Note on Greenways Plan Update¹

The following is an updated version of the City of Highland Park Greenways Plan. The Greenways Plan was adopted by the Highland Park City Council in 1995 and is an element of the City of Highland Park Master Plan. The Plan presented herein updates information relative to the City of Highland Park's on-going implementation of the Greenways Plan. Otherwise, Plan policies and recommendations remain the same and have not been changed.

The attached Greenways Plan map is updated to reflect current pedestrian and bike trail improvements and planned system expansion.

For additional information regarding the Greenways Plan, please contact:

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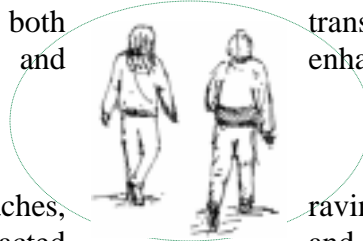
¹ Selected Plan illustrations by Larry Shure.

INTRODUCING THE GREENWAYS PLAN



Preface

The City of Highland Park is pleased to present the Greenways Plan for trails, sidewalks and other facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists. This brochure summarizes the information and recommendations contained in the Plan that was adopted by the City Council in August, 1995. For more detailed information, call the Department of Community Development at 432-0867. Many hours of work were put into this Plan by the "Greenways Committee" which was made up of 13 residents who provided a balanced view of the need for various types of greenways since it included bicyclists, walkers, runners, and in-line skaters. This Committee met frequently from January, 1994 to June, 1995 to create the Greenways Plan. The Committee was assisted by staff from both the City and Park District of Highland Park. The activities, comments, complaints and desires of nearly 1,100 families were gathered through a survey published in the Highlander in 1993. This survey found that most of the respondents walk, jog, skate, and ride bicycles primarily for recreation, but some also do it for transportations to school, work and shopping. This is important because relying solely on cars for transportation creates pollution, congestion, accidents, parking shortages, and deterioration in the community's quality of life. The Greenways Plan can help to ease these problems by connecting open spaces, neighborhoods and business areas with trails, sidewalks, and bicycle routes. These facilities will make it easier to walk or ride around town and offer safe and scenic places for recreation close to home. Many Highland Parkers said they want new places to walk, run, skate, and bike. They also want to protect the community's natural environment and character. This Plan responds to these desires by proposing greenways that offer both transportation and recreational benefits while respecting and enhancing the environment.



Introduction

Highland Park's beautiful beaches, wetlands, and prairies have attracted ravines, lake bluffs, forests, and delighted residents since the area was first settled nearly 150 years ago. These abundant natural features provided an unmatched environment for the development of houses, businesses, churches and synagogues, schools, parks, golf courses, and other facilities during the past century. These natural and man-made features have created an "American Suburb at its Best" as described in Philip Berger's 1982 book on Highland Park. Not surprisingly, the residents are justifiably proud of this community and its unsurpassed beauty.

Highland Park residents frequently participate in many types of recreation with walking and bicycling being the most common activities. Over 75% of the respondents to the Highlander survey walk daily or a few times each week, and nearly 60% bicycle a few times each month which is well-above national averages. Despite this high level of activity, the City has not recently planned to meet the needs of these residents. The Bikeway System Plan, adopted in 1976 as part of the Comprehensive Master Plan, has become outdated as new development has occurred and traffic volumes have increased.



Moreover, the 1976 Comprehensive Master Plan did not focus at all on the needs of pedestrians. Since the 1976 Plan did not address pedestrians, and only a few of its recommendations for bicyclists have been built, the Greenways Plan is needed to update the Comprehensive Master Plan.

In June, 1993, the City Council called for the “development of a local greenway/trail system.” This Greenways Plan is intended to increase enjoyment, safety and access for both walkers and bicyclists, and especially children and senior citizens. Although the Plan focuses on recreational walking and biking, it also encourages more residents to walk or bike to work, school and shopping. As traffic and bicycling as a practical alternative to driving cars whenever possible.

This Plan is based on a comprehensive assessment of the existing sidewalks, paths, trails, streets, open spaces and other facilities that make up Highland Park’s “greenways”. It includes a map and list showing proposed improvements, and other recommendations. As an amendment to the 1976 Comprehensive Master Plan, this Plan will help to identify when and where new trails, paths or sidewalks should be built. It will support requests for federal or state grants to supplement the local funds needed to achieve these recommendations. With the adoption of the Plan, the City recognizes that walking and bicycling are the best ways to enjoy Highland Park’s natural and man-made beauty.

What is a Greenway?

As defined in the Regional Greenways Plan adopted by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission in 1992, a “greenway” is a “corridor of land that provides one or more of the following benefits:

1. Protection and management of natural and cultural features;
2. Provision of recreational opportunities;
3. Enhancement of the quality of life and the aesthetic appeal of neighborhoods and communities.”



For this Plan, the City has added the following fourth benefit:

4. Provision of alternative transportation facilities, such as trails, paths, and sidewalks to supplement the existing street system and reduce dependence on motor vehicles.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Greenways Plan is to develop a community-wide system of facilities that will provide opportunities for recreation and fitness activities; protect important natural habitats; promote conservation of open spaces, parks, forests, and wetlands; connect neighborhoods, parks, schools and business areas with facilities to provide a safe, enjoyable alternate form of transportation; educate the community about the opportunities for, and benefits of, walking, running and bicycling; and encourage residents to participate in these activities. The Greenways Plan also shares the following vision from the 1994 Illinois State Trails Plan:



“Recreational trails should provide people with opportunities to enjoy physical and social activity...they should provide opportunities to experience natural, cultural and scenic amenities...they should reflect landscapes typical of different regions...they should be accessible to the citizens...they should be economic assets to communities...they should accommodate the needs of landowners...and they should contribute to the quality of life in Illinois.”

Goals and Objectives

Although walking and bicycling are an important part of an active Highland Park lifestyle, it can be difficult to enjoy these activities due to problems with streets, trails, and sidewalks, poor access, and little coordination, education, or encouragement by the City. The following goal and objectives were drafted by the Greenways Committee to guide the City’s planning to solve these problems in order to achieve the mission stated above.

Goal

The Greenways Plan envisions the development of a comprehensive, connected system of greenways, including both on-street and off-street routes, that will make walking and bicycling safer, more enjoyable, and more viable forms of transportation and recreation in Highland Park; that will preserve natural areas and air quality; and that will meet the needs of bicyclists, runners, and walkers of all ages and abilities.

Objectives

Connections-To provide connected routes, trails and sidewalks linking all neighborhoods, parks, schools and shopping areas to each other and adjacent communities; To coordinate with other public and private agencies in promoting safe access within Highland Park and nearby communities by creating a regional network of routes; and To ensure access for recreational and utilitarian trips in making land use transportation planning decisions.

Safety- To create streets, sidewalks, and paths that are safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers while fostering a community attitude that supports shared use of these facilities; To actively enforce the rules of the road so that pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists adhere to state and local traffic laws; and To minimize conflicts between different types of greenways users, drivers, and residents.

Utility- To encourage greater use of non-motorized types of transportation; and to promote using greenways as a healthy alternative to driving cars that will reduce congestion, pollution, and noise while improving the community’s quality of life.

Aesthetics- To maintain existing facilities while building new facilities consistent with the community’s high aesthetic standards; and to maintain greenways that protect open spaces in harmony with the natural environment.

Ordinances- To adopt and enforce regulations and policies to insure the design, construction and operation of a safe, comprehensive system of greenways; To construct



sidewalks or paths in new developments; and To protect significant natural areas as greenways in accord with this Plan.

Information- To create a public information program to identify destinations and routes; To create educational materials with the Park District and School Districts to inform pedestrians, bicyclists, and rivers on ways to safely and courteously share streets, sidewalks, and trails; and To promote walking and bicycling for recreation, shopping, and commuting.

Finances- To use federal, state, private and local funds to build and maintain the greenways recommended in this Plan while using non-local funds as much as possible; and to fund greenways in the Capital Improvements Plans of both the City and Park District.

Background

For many years after Highland Park was incorporated in 1869, new subdivisions and streets were built with few plans or regulations to guide their design. As a result, many existing streets are narrow, winding and have no sidewalks. Although this pattern of development created quiet, tree-lined streets, it is now difficult or impossible to walk or ride bikes along many streets without being exposed to traffic. The City has tried to solve this problem in the past by providing facilities to improve safety and access for pedestrians and bicyclists. For example, the City adopted an ordinance in 1949 to regulate subdivisions and land development that required new streets to be built with sidewalks. In the 1960's, the pedestrian bridge south of Deerfield Road interchange was added at the City's request when the Illinois Department of Transportation built the Skokie Highway (US 41). In the late-1960's, the City acquired a strip of abandoned railroad right-of-way to build the Green Bay Trail between Lake-Cook Road and downtown Highland Park. This was the first off-street path for pedestrians and bicyclists built in Lake County.

Another significant action occurred in 1976 when the Comprehensive Master Plan was revised to include a Bikeway System Plan that called for bicycle routes on streets and new trails through Walters Field, Sunset Woods Park, Bob-O-Link Golf Club, and Northmoor Country Club. Although the 1976 Plan included a detailed schedule to build these projects, the City and Park District have been able to build only a few of them in the past twenty years. In 1977, the City leased a strip of land from Commonwealth Edison and built an asphalt pedestrian/bicycle path between Lake-Cook Road and Park Avenue West. In 1994, Lake County announced plans to extend this path from Park Avenue West to Route 176 in Lake Bluff by 1998. Other actions that have improved safety and access include new sidewalks, new ramps at intersections, pedestrian-activated crosswalk lights at traffic signals, and improved snow-removal operations. The City also coordinates its snow-plowing activities with District 112 to improve safety for children walking to school.

The Park District has also provided many facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists. Paths have been built in the Heller Nature Center, Centennial Park, Olson Park, Sunset Woods



Park, Fink Park, Rosewood Park and others. In 1994, the Park Board adopted a new Comprehensive Open Space Master Plan that will help provide even more facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists in Highland Park.

In conclusion, it is clear that many improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists have been made over the years. Even though few of these resulted from a long-range plan, Highland Park is well-ahead of most older suburbs in providing such facilities. These parks, open spaces, trails, and sidewalks provide an excellent foundation for building the complete system recommended in this Greenways Plan.

PROPOSED GREENWAYS ROUTES

Using various criteria and design standards, the Greenways Committee chose routes and specific projects to achieve the goal and objectives of the Greenways Plan. Five corridors, which run primarily in a north-south direction along the community's natural topographic and drainage features, were chosen as a framework for the Plan, including the Lakefront, Green Bay Trail, Skokie River, Skokie Valley Trail (a.k.a. Com Ed Trail), and Middlefork River. In addition, the Plan identifies a number of east-west-connections between the major greenways and other routes to complete a network throughout the community. All of these proposed routes are shown in the attached map.

Major Greenways

The following major greenways are natural corridors that contain most of Highland Park's open spaces, parks and trails.

Lakefront Greenway

Containing both public facilities and private land, this greenway has significant natural features near Lake Michigan and consists of four proposed routes. The Committee recognized this greenway because it provides scenic, environmental, and wildlife habitat benefits to the community. Access to the public facilities along Lake Michigan should be preserved and enhanced when possible by a long-term strategy using voluntary measures, such as conservation easements and other methods. The redevelopment of Fort Sheridan is an ideal opportunity to provide more public access to the lake and connections to the Green Bay Trail. The Greenways Plan recommends that the City work to protect the natural environment at Fort Sheridan, redevelop it as a pedestrian-friendly area, and build new trails for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Green Bay Trail Greenway

This is the most heavily used greenway in Highland Park. It includes three recommended routes: two segments of the Green Bay Trail and Green Bay Road. The Plan recommends that the Trail be maintained to make it consistently 10 feet wide and to remove hazards, such as encroaching fences, bushes and tree limbs. Lake County recently received funds to build two new sections of the Green Bay Trail by 1998. One segment includes a new bridge over Vine Avenue to



connect the existing trail to Bloom Avenue. The second segment is in Highwood and will connect to the Lake Forest Bike Path at Old Elm Road. These improvements will significantly improve the Trail's usefulness and safety.

Skokie River Greenway

This corridor includes seven recommended routes to connect various natural areas and open spaces along the Skokie River, including six golf course, five parks, and the North Shore Sanitary District grounds. Although the Chicago Botanic Garden is not in Highland Park, it is considered part of this greenway because the Highlander survey listed it as one of the most popular destinations for pedestrians and bicyclists from Highland Park. The Greenways Plan recommends the construction of an off-street pedestrian/bike trail in phases along the Skokie River. Some of these segments will be built soon including trails in Centennial Park, Fink Park, and the Highland Park Country Club. Other segments may be built in the next few years including a trail from Park Avenue West to Central Avenue and one from Centennial Park to Old Elm Road. Although the Plan includes trails through Sunset Valley Golf Course and Bob-O-Link Golf Club, the City recognizes that it may not be possible to provide public access for these trails for years. Because these routes are long-term proposals, however, the Plan strongly advocates that the City develop these trails when possible. In addition, the Plan supports the preservation of these golf courses as open natural areas which benefit both the community's residents and wildlife.

Skokie Valley (Com Ed) Trail Greenway

Located along Com Ed's electric lines west of US 41, this corridor primarily provides pedestrian and bike access to other routes and destinations because it has few natural areas or open spaces to benefit wildlife and the community. It includes five proposed routes. In the late 1970's, the City leased land from Com Ed and built a 10-foot wide off-street pedestrian/bicycle trail between Park Avenue West and Lake-Cook Road which Com Ed uses for its maintenance vehicles. The Plan recommends the continuation of this lease. In 1995, Lake County received a state grant to extend this trail from Park Avenue West to Route 176 in Lake Bluff where it will meet the North Shore Bike Path. Once this trail is completed, it will provide pedestrians and bicyclists in the North Shore with excellent access to the Chicago Botanic Garden and the regional trail system in Lake County. The Greenways Plan recommends an extension of this trail over Lake-Cook Road to Northbrook and new access tunnels at Berkeley Road and the Heller Nature Center.

Middlefork River Greenway

This corridor contains a few publicly-owned facilities and a large amount of privately-owned land near the Middlefork River and eight proposed routes. Because this area contains significant natural features, including the River, floodplain, prairie remnants, and extensive vegetation including many large trees, it provides significant scenic, environmental, and wildlife habitat benefits. Access to the publicly-owned facilities should be preserved and enhanced when possible. As redevelopment of land in this area occurs, more trails and sidewalks should be built for access along the River and Ridge



Road and to Deerfield. The City should work with developers to protect this area's environment and build the proposed trails and sidewalks.

On-street Bicycle Routes

As shown on the map, the Greenways Plan designates many streets as "Bicycle Routes" to improve access to all parks, schools, neighborhoods, and shopping areas in the community. It is impossible to connect all parts of Highland Park with off-street trails because there is simply not enough vacant land in the proper locations. Therefore, it is necessary for bicyclists to use the streets for access. These bike routes were chosen based on the 1993 survey findings and the knowledge of the Greenways Committee members. Few improvements are needed to most of these routes besides properly identifying them with Bicycle Route signs.

Off-street Trails

The Highlander survey found that most pedestrians and some bicyclists prefer to use off-street trails instead of sidewalks and streets when possible. The Plan recognizes this by recommending the development of some new trails. Because Highland Park is a mature community with little vacant land, however, it is impossible to build an extensive system of off-street trails. There are still opportunities to provide some of these facilities. All of these recommended trails are shown on the attached map and some are described below but are not listed by priority.

Painters Lake/Deerfield High School Trail

In 1994, the City Council approved the Painters Lake Subdivision west of Ridge Road next to the Middlefork River and Deerfield High School. By September, 1996, this development will provide a key trail connection for pedestrians and bicyclists between Ridge Road and Deerfield High School. Another trail is expected to be built by 1999 along the River from the High School north to Lake County's Prairie Wolf Slough Forest Preserve on Route 22.

HPCC Trail

The City's 1976 Comprehensive Master Plan recommended the construction of a pedestrian/bike trail on the Highland Park Country Club (HPCC) between Half Day Road and Park Avenue West. After the City acquired the HPCC in 1993, this trail is now more feasible. The Boardwalk Subdivision now being built north of the golf course will include a path along the eastern border of the site. This will allow the City to extend this trail south to Park Avenue West through some wetlands and seven acres of woods. This trail will provide recreational and environmental benefits and will allow residents of north Highland Park to bicycle to the Downtown area more safely. In 1995, the City received a grant of \$29,500 from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to build this trail by late 1997.



Green Bay Trail

The City acquired the abandoned right-of-way formerly owned by the Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee Railway in the 1960's and built the popular Green Bay Trail in the early 1970's. The Trail extends from Lake-Cook Road to Downtown Highland Park and from Vine Avenue to Highwood. The Plan supports the extension of the Trail north of Elm Place including a new bridge over Vine Avenue that is to be built by Lake County in 1997. The Plan also supports an extension of this Trail through Highwood to Lake Forest that is proposed by Lake County.

Taylor Avenue/Park Avenue West Trail

At the west end of Taylor Avenue, a strip of public right-of-way runs along the Skokie River to land owned by the Illinois Department of Transportation and Byerly's Market. As part of the Byerly's development, a pedestrian/bicycle trail is planned along the eastern edge of their parking lot next to the Skokie River south of Park Avenue West.



The Greenways Plan recommends a new trail along this right-of-way and a bridge over the River. This trail will provide a scenic route for pedestrians and bicyclists and will improve access between the Hidden Creek Water Park, Central Avenue, and Park Avenue West. This will also improve access to neighborhoods west of US 41 when a new bridge is built over the highway.

NSSD Trail

The Greenways Plan recommends a new off-street pedestrian/bike trail between Clavey Road and Lake-Cook Road across the North Shore Sanitary District (NSSD) property. This trail will be a key segment of the Skokie River greenway and an important connection between Fink Park and the Chicago Botanic Garden. The location and design of this trail must be sensitive to the District's operations and need for security. Therefore, the City and NSSD should discuss access, location, fencing and landscaping to determine a mutually acceptable design for the path.

Centennial Park/Old Elm Road Trail

An easement intended for access between Centennial Park and Old Elm Road is located along the Skokie River at the eastern edge of the lots on Old Mill Road. The Greenways Plan recommends that a pedestrian/bicycle trail be built on this land to connect to Lake Forest. This trail will also connect to another proposed trail along the southern edge of Old Elm Road running east to Sheridan Road that will provide safer access to Fort Sheridan, the Green Bay Trail, and Highwood. Given the existing trees and vegetation on this land and the proximity of adjacent residences, this proposed trail must be carefully designed to protect the vegetation and privacy of this neighborhood.

Beech Street Trail

The City owns a strip of public right-of-way east of Sheridan Road at the end of Beech Street that was originally intended to continue Beech Street to Ravine Drive. The Greenways Plan recommends the construction of an off-street path within this right-of-way to provide access to Lake Michigan and Millard Park. Due to the topography of this area, it may not be possible to allow bicycles on this path but it is ideal for a pedestrian path that would allow access to the lakefront from the Green Bay Trail along Beech Street. Given the existing trees and vegetation on this land and the proximity of adjacent residences, this proposed path must be carefully designed to protect the vegetation and privacy of this neighborhood.

Sidewalks

As noted earlier, many streets in Highland Park were built without sidewalks, which has had a mixed impact on the community's character. It created an environment where natural vegetation and landscaped yards abut the streets without interruption. This created a neighborhood ambiance that is desirable for many residents. However, the lack of sidewalks also created hazards for pedestrians who must use the streets for walking and running. These hazards are particularly severe for children, the elderly, and the handicapped who should not use the streets. In order to improve safety and accessibility, the Greenways Plan recommends the construction of sidewalks along a number of streets to complement the trails and Bicycle Routes already described. One of the general principles that guided the Greenways Committee was that there should be a continuous sidewalk along one or both sides of all major streets, especially on the designated Bicycle Routes, or where gaps occur in the sidewalks. These proposed sidewalks are shown in the attached map. Due to the natural vegetation, landscaping, and topography found along some of these streets, the proposed sidewalks must be carefully built to reduce the visual and physical effects on adjacent areas. Therefore, the Plan recommends that the City hold a public meeting before each sidewalk is designed to allow for comments by affected residents. A few of the recommended sidewalks are described below but not listed in priority.

Sheridan Road

Several blocks of Sheridan Road have no sidewalks, which forces pedestrians into the street. This is hazardous due to the narrow width of the street and the curves and hills that create sight problems for drivers. This problem is most acute between Dean Avenue and Roger Williams Avenue where people often walk in the street to reach Rosewood Beach. Problems also occur near Ravinia Festival. Nearly 20% of the 1993 survey respondents identified Sheridan Road as the one street in the community where new sidewalks are most needed. Therefore, the Greenways Plan recommends that a sidewalk be built on at least one side of Sheridan Road to fill in the gaps that exist.



Ridge Road

In the 1993 survey, Ridge Road was the second most noted street in need of sidewalks, particularly between Park Avenue West and Deerfield Road. This is hazardous due to the narrow width, close vegetation, and winding nature of Ridge Road. Over 10% of the survey respondents asked for new sidewalks along this street. As residential development continues on the west side, more traffic, pedestrians, and bicyclists will create more conflicts and hazards. Therefore, the Plan recommends the construction of a sidewalk in phases along Ridge Road from Route 22 to Lake-Cook Road. Given the existing vegetation and proximity of adjacent homes, this sidewalk must be carefully built to protect vegetation and privacy in these neighborhoods.

Green Bay Road

Sidewalks are currently located on at least one side of Green Bay Road between Central Avenue and Lake-Cook Road. However, there are long segments where the sidewalk is located on only one side of the street or where gaps in the sidewalks exist. This forces pedestrians to cross the street or walk in the parkway. This problem is most acute where students walk to Edgewood School or Lincoln School. Although the Greenways Committee generally preferred new sidewalks along only one side of major streets, the Plan recommends a complete sidewalk on both sides of Green Bay Road because of traffic volume and speed, lack of traffic signals, and heavy pedestrian activity.

Other Streets

The Greenways Committee examined all streets in the community in developing these recommendations, particularly major streets connecting neighborhoods, schools, parks, and business areas. In order to improve the safety of these streets for pedestrians and bicyclists, the Plan recommends that new sidewalks be built on Route 22, Berkeley Road, Lake-Cook Road, Crofton Avenue North, Deerfield Road, Cavell Avenue, Cloverdale Avenue and other streets.

On-street Bicycle Lanes

Design standards require all on-street bicycle lanes to be at least eight feet wide to allow four feet for each direction of travel. It is unacceptable to allow two-way riding in a single bike lane because it promotes riding against the flow of traffic which is both illegal and hazardous. Therefore, a street with bike lanes should have at least 32 feet of pavement to safely accommodate both vehicles and bicycles. Most of the streets in Highland Park are not this wide. Therefore, the Plan recommends consideration of bike lanes only on Green Bay Road from Lake-Cook Road to Laurel Avenue until complete sidewalks are constructed along both sides of this street. Any proposal to use bike lanes must be evaluated by the Traffic Commission and City Council.

Intersections

Highland Park has 33 street intersections with traffic signals but only eight of these do not currently have pedestrian accessible push-buttons to activate the “Walk” light at the crosswalk. This causes delays and potential hazards for pedestrians or bicyclists (particularly children and the elderly) who must wait to cross during the green light



without the additional time and safety provided by the “Walk” signal. Therefore, the Greenways Plan recommends that all intersections with traffic signals be modified to include pedestrian accessible push-buttons. The Plan also recommends that the timing of existing traffic signals be reviewed to provide enough time for pedestrians to cross the street.

Bridges/Tunnels

One of the most urgently needed types of facilities is more bridges over US 41. The existing pedestrian bridge south of Deerfield Road is deteriorating and does not comply with the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is also not well located to provide convenient access for many residents west of the highway. The at-grade crossings at Park Avenue West and Route 22 are not easy for pedestrians or bicyclists to use, especially children and senior citizens. Therefore, the Greenways Plan recommends the construction of two new bridges over the highway, one near Park Avenue West and the other near Route 22. Due to the high cost of these bridges, it is critical that the City seek financial assistance from outside sources, particularly IDOT which has jurisdiction over US 41. The Greenways Plan also recommends some new bridges for trails over the Skokie River and Middlefork River and tunnels to connect the Skokie Valley (Com Ed) Trail to Berkeley Road and the Heller Nature Center.

ROUTE SELECTION CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter describes the factors considered in choosing the routes and improvements recommended in this Plan. Besides these factors, the Greenways Committee also consulted the City’s 1976 Comprehensive Master Plan and the Park District’s 1994 Comprehensive Open Space Master Plan. The Regional Greenways Plan adopted in 1992 by the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission was also reviewed to identify how Highland Park’s greenways should connect to the region’s developing trails system.



Results of 1993 Pedestrian and Bicyclist Survey

In October of 1993, a survey was published in the Highlander to gather public comments on bicycling and walking issues. Nearly 1,100 surveys were returned indicating the community’s high level of interest in these issues. The responses represented a total of 2,794 people or about 9.4% of Highland Park’s population. Some of the findings are noted below. A detailed report summarizing the survey findings is available from the Community Development Department. The survey found a much higher percentage of Highland Park residents are active walkers and bicyclists than the national average. While only about 33% of adults in the U.S. ride bicycles, nearly 61% of the respondents bicycle at least several times each month. This means most residents will benefit from the improvements recommended in this Plan. The survey also found that less than 10% of residents walk or bike to work, school, or shopping, which means that most trips are for recreation or fitness and not for utilitarian purposes. There is potential to increase the number of these trips because Highland Park is a compact community. Most of the trips

made by cars in the Chicago metropolitan area are less than three miles long. Since Highland Park is only about 3.5 miles wide and 4.5 miles long, the improvements recommended in this Plan may encourage more commuting and shopping trips by providing safer, more direct and more accessible routes for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The survey also identified the most popular destinations for walking and biking trips. Downtown Highland Park was the most frequently mentioned destination although the Green Bay Trail, Chicago Botanic Garden, lakefront, and “neighborhood” were also listed frequently. This list was used to show the parks, schools, shopping areas and other popular places that should be linked by trails and sidewalks. The most frequently traveled streets and trails were also identified. Not surprisingly, the routes mentioned most often were the Green Bay Trail, Sheridan Road, Green Bay Road, St. Johns Avenue, and Ridge Road. The survey also identified the split between the east and west sides of the community caused by US 41 as a problem since almost all of the popular destinations and heavily used routes are on the eastside. For example, even though the Heller Nature Center is an attractive natural area, it was not mentioned as a destination by many respondents because it is difficult for bicyclists and pedestrians to reach safely from the eastside. This emphasizes the need for improving access over the highway by improving intersections and building new bridges. The Highlander survey also provided specific suggestions about where new off-street trails, sidewalks, or other improvements are needed. General comments were also provided about bike lanes, bike racks, the need for better maintenance of streets and trails, and other issues. For example, the respondents were evenly divided on the question of building new sidewalks along streets where they do not already exist. Many comments were also made about the need for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians to obey traffic laws, show more courtesy, and share the streets and sidewalks safely. A common complaint was the need to trim overhanging trees and bushes along trails and sidewalks.

Field Work

All Greenways Committee members were active bicyclists, runners or walkers who were very familiar with existing conditions and problems in town. The members spent much time touring the community in 1994-1995 to identify specific problems and locations for new routes or facilities. All routes were visited to become more familiar with their location, width, condition, accessibility, appearance, and potential to be used as greenways. From this fieldwork the proposed routes that are shown in the attached map were selected by the Greenways Committee.

Route Analysis

Once potential routes were chosen, the Greenways Committee analyzed much information to select the improvements recommended in this Plan including the Highlander survey findings. In addition, the Greenways Committee reviewed the physical condition of existing sidewalks and off-street trails as well as the pavement width and type of surface for all streets. The location of all existing sidewalks was mapped to identify where gaps occur. The locations of all public rights-of-way were reviewed to identify areas to use as greenways. Information about traffic and personal safety was also reviewed. The Park District provided information on trails in the parks.



An extensive list of criteria prepared by the Chicago Area Transportation Study was also used to select routes and improvements including items such as access, accidents, aesthetics, bridges, continuity, cost, directness, grades, pavement quality, potential use, security, sightliness, and width. A more complete description of these criteria is available at the Community Development Department.

Design Standards

In 1992, the Illinois Department of Transportation adopted standards for designing state-funded bike paths, bike lanes, bridges, etc. These standards guide the location, width, slope, surface, drainage, lighting, and other characteristics of such facilities. They are identical to the standards used by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) in their Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities and are considered to be the state-of-the-art in bicycle facility planning. Because all projects that receive federal or state funds must comply with these standards, the facilities recommended in the Greenways Plan have been selected based on these standards. The Plan also recommends that the City adopt these design standards as a policy to guide the design, construction, and maintenance of the City's facilities.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this Plan focuses on improvements to existing facilities and many new projects, the Greenways Committee also identified other actions that the City should take to make Highland Park a safer and more accessible place.

Safety Education

In cooperation with School District 112, the Highland Park Police Department is actively involved in education children about safe bicycling and walking. The Greenways Plan recommends that these efforts be expanded to educate people of all ages on ways to share the streets, trails and sidewalks with more safety, awareness, and courtesy. The Highlander, cable-TV, and brochures like this one should be used to teach the community about the benefits and hazards of walking and bicycling. Although the City should lead these efforts, the Greenways Plan strongly encourages a collaborative effort with the Park District and School Districts.



Law Enforcement

Although educating the community's drivers, bicyclist, and pedestrians is essential to improving safety for everyone, it is also necessary to enforce the laws of the City and State. The Greenways Committee supports full and active enforcement of all traffic laws to regulate the behavior of drivers, walkers, and bicyclists. In 1993, the Police Department began patrolling the Green Bay Trail, Skokie Valley Trail, and other locations on bicycles. This is an excellent way to improve safety by enforcing laws and demonstrating safe bicycling behavior like wearing proper helmets. The Greenways Committee recommends the continuation and expansion of this patrol program.

Amenities Signs, Bike Racks, Benches, Water Fountains, Maintenance

The Greenways Plan recommends that signs be placed on routes designated in the Plan to show where people are encouraged to walk or bicycle, including signs to show the location of restrooms and water fountains. This would help residents and visitors in Highland Park, especially at street intersections and the Metra stations where signs on the pavement could direct people through parking lots. These signs would make the community an easier, safer, and more enjoyable place to walk or ride a bicycle. In all cases, the signs should conform to the standards of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and be reviewed by the Design Review Commission and Traffic Commission.

One of the items requested in the 1993 survey was more bike racks around the community, especially in downtown Highland Park. The City has already provided bike racks and other amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists who shop downtown and in 1995, the City received federal funds to install 20 new bike racks at 11 more locations including the Metra stations. The City will also work with businesses to put racks on public property. The Plan encourages the City, Park District, School Districts and private landowners to provide more bike racks around the community.

In order to enjoy the facilities recommended in this Plan, the Greenways Committee supports providing more benches and water fountains throughout the community. Although this amenity was requested in the 1993 survey, it is a lower priority than the new facilities recommended in this Plan. Because funds for greenways projects are limited, benches and water fountains should be added in other projects when possible. Private donations should also be sought to provide these amenities. Such facilities should be included in other projects where possible. The Greenways Plan also encourages the Park District to provide more water fountains in parks.

Respondents to the Highlander survey also requested that the City remove tree branches or vegetation that encroach on sidewalks, streets, and trails. The Greenways Plan encourages the City to regularly monitor the condition of the vegetation near these facilities. Particular attention should be paid to the Green Bay Trail, where gardens and fences are sometimes too close to the trail. A minimum width of 10 feet and a minimum overhead clearance of 10 feet should be maintained. Another action requested by the survey respondents is to actively enforce ordinances requiring people to clean up after their pets. The Greenways Plan supports these efforts and encourages more publicity about these laws, including articles in the Highlander and informational signs near trails and parks.

Miscellaneous Items

Chapter 75 of the Highland Park City Code contains “Bicycle Regulations” that affect the ownership, registration, and use of bicycles. The Greenways Plan recommends these provisions and other sections of the Code be revised as needed to make them up to date and more enforceable. For example, Chapter 151 of the Code regulates subdivisions and the construction of streets, trails and sidewalks. This ordinance should be revised to achieve this Plan’s recommendations.

FINANCING AND IMPLEMENTATION

In order to implement the Greenways Plan, the Greenways Committee identified funding programs and other ways to pay for these recommendations. In addition, the proposed routes and improvements described earlier and shown on the map are prioritized in the attached table. All of these proposals make up an Action Plan for the City of Highland Park to use in the future.

Funding Sources

The Greenways Committee identified various sources of money to use for greenways-related activities like trails, bridges, sidewalks, and other improvements. Although these programs have a different focus and funding levels, they all offer financial assistance for greenways. One of the primary goals of these programs is to increase bicycling and walking as an alternative to driving cars in order to decrease congestion, pollution and highway costs. The Greenways Plan has emphasized connections between neighborhoods, schools, business districts, and train stations to increase the City's chances of receiving funds from these programs. Another major focus of these programs is preserving open spaces and access to recreational facilities. Therefore, the Greenways Plan also emphasizes these objectives.

Federal Funds

In 1991, Congress adopted the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) as the primary federal program to fund highways and related transportation projects. This Act greatly increased funding for public transit, bicycling and other forms of transportation. It also required states and cities to give more consideration to these alternatives in planning for highways and other projects. ISTEA provided about \$150 million to IDOT for distribution throughout the state between FY92 and FY97. The City will aggressively seek a share of these funds.

State Funds

The two agencies most involved with greenways are the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). IDOT is responsible for administering the ISTEA funds that are passed on to the cities to support alternative types of transportation and improve air quality. Each program involves a competitive application process so there is no guarantee that the City will receive funds from these sources. In most cases, these programs require the City to share in the cost of the improvements so the City will need to spend local funds on the projects recommended in the Plan. IDNR administers several programs to provide greenways, build facilities, protect open space, and improve recreation. In the case of the IDNR programs, the City must pay 50% of the cost of these projects. The City will seek funds from both IDOT and IDNR.



City Funds

One of this Plan's guiding principles is to rely on non-local funds as much as possible to implement these recommendations. In order to do this, the City will request funds from all possible federal and state sources. However, the City will still face expenditures because these programs do not provide 100% of project costs. The municipal sources that may be used to pay the local match for these programs or to pay the entire cost of some of the recommendations include the General Fund, Street and Bridge Fund, Motor Fuel Tax Fund, Public Benefit Fund, and Capital Improvement Street Construction Fund. These funds generally operate on a "pay-as-you-go" basis which means the City Council annually chooses the projects that will be built during the year. In 1994, for example, the City budgeted \$80,000 to build sidewalk ramps to improve access for the handicapped and other pedestrians and bicyclists. This expenditure was the first in a five-year program to improve curbs in the community to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The City Council has provided funds to build projects recommended in this Greenways Plan.

In addition to the specific funds listed above, the City can issue bonds to finance major capital projects. Most of the projects recommended in the Greenways Plan are not so expensive that they will require bonds to be issued. However, the construction of new bridges over US 41 will be very expensive with an estimated cost of at least \$750,000 per bridge. The City believes these bridges should be the State's responsibility since IDOT has jurisdiction over US 41. However, it may be necessary for the City to consider issuing bonds to construct the recommended bridges if it becomes clear that IDOT will not fund them during the next decade.

Private Funds

One source of private funds to implement the Greenways Plan is the Highland Park Community Foundation which was created as an independent not-for-profit organization to solicit, accept, and administer donations from individuals, corporations, and foundations. The Foundation may be asked to assist with amenities like signs, benches, water fountains, and bike racks. Another source of private funds could be an event to raise funds to maintain and develop pedestrian/bicycle paths. Another source of funds is requiring developers to provide access for trails or to pay for new trails or sidewalks in their developments. The Greenways Plan recommends this requirement be placed on all new developments. Because this Plan is an official amendment to the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, it provides the legal justification for these payments and identifies the locations where improvements are most needed. Finally, the Plan recommends that special assessments of property owners should not be used to fund these improvements.



Other Sources

Although the City is primarily responsible for implementing the Greenways Plan, other agencies will also provide improvements to benefit the community's pedestrians and bicyclists. For example, the Park District will be involved because some of the most significant projects are located on the District's land including projects that were not in

their 1994 Comprehensive Open Space Master Plan. In recognition of the tax cap which limits the Park District's revenues, however, it is essential for the City and Park District to collaborate whenever possible to build these projects, especially concerning applications for federal and state financial assistance. In addition to the Park District, other local public agencies which may implement these recommendations include Lake County, Cook County, Deerfield, Lake Forest, Highwood, Northbrook, Glencoe, School Districts 112 and 113, and North Shore Sanitary District. These agencies can help to improve facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists by providing information, allowing public access, building new trails and bike racks, and by coordinating with the City to implement this Greenways Plan.

Relationship to Capital Improvements Program

The annual City budget includes a Capital Improvements Program to identify projects to be built during the coming five years including parking lots, sanitary sewers, water lines, street reconstruction, etc. The City Council has agreed to consider including funds in the Capital Improvements Program for greenways projects based on the priorities listed in the Greenways Plan. Brochures like this one should be used to teach the community about the benefits and hazards of walking and bicycling. Although the City should lead these efforts, the Greenways Plan strongly encourages a collaborative effort with the Park District and School Districts.

Timetable

The attached table identifies the specific proposed routes and improvements recommended in this Plan and includes priorities for making these improvements. Short-term projects are recommended for completion by 2000; mid-term projects should be done by 2005; and the long-term projects should be done before 2010. It must be emphasized that these priorities are goals and not actual commitments. The timing of specific projects will be based on the availability of funds and on the City's ability to incorporate them into other infrastructure improvements. The Mayor and City Council will decide the implementation of the City's specific improvements and the Park District, Lake County and other agencies will implement their own projects.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Greenways Plan seeks to build on the City's excellent foundation of existing trails, paths, and sidewalks to improve recreational facilities and transportation connections for all residents. It provides alternative transportation facilities to supplement the community's existing streets. Even though most Highland Park residents want these facilities and will actively use them, this Plan comes at a critical time because the continuing redevelopment of land in Highland Park will bring more traffic and remove natural areas and open spaces. Because funds are more available than ever before from federal and state sources to pay for these recommendations, it is time to acknowledge these trends by acting to protect and connect Highland Park's neighborhoods with the greenways recommended in this Plan.



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