



Business Development Strategic Plan

2022 - 2024



City of Highland Park



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Executive Summary

The City of Highland Park is committed to supporting the local business community; laying strong foundations for sustaining a balanced and healthy business climate while providing for considerate growth and responsiveness to those who live, work, visit, and do business within the community. The Business Development Strategic Plan ("Plan") sets forth an ambitious, yet achievable, strategic business development agenda for the City of Highland Park for 2022 - 2024. The Plan is a living document and is reviewed and updated based on input from City staff, City Council, the Business & Economic Development Advisory Group ("BEDAG"), businesses, property owners and other community partners. As a dynamic document it allows for local stakeholders and leaders to more effectively implement the plan over the coming years, adapting to changing conditions to ensure ongoing community vibrancy.

The purpose of the Plan is to articulate a set of measurable strategies and actions to support the local economy. It acts as a guide for purposeful action and planning during this snapshot in time based on best practices to attract and retain businesses, encourage investment and reinvestment in Highland Park's unique assets, and highlight the competitiveness of the city's commercial real estate opportunities.

As part of the Strategic Plan update process, the City conducted robust community engagement. Business development stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and property owners, provided feedback through targeted City focus groups and extensive community outreach in Q4 2021. The City Council and BEDAG provided additional feedback in Q1 and Q2 2022. The revised plan outlines specific focus areas, objectives, and strategies for business development in Highland Park. Each focus area includes clear purpose of action along with detailed goals and tasks.

Focus Areas

- Business Retention & Attraction
- Marketing & Public Education
- Local & Regional Partnerships
- Policy Considerations
- Administrative & Regulatory Processes
- Development, Redevelopment & Repositioning Strategies
- Infrastructure Improvements

These focus areas allow for new organizational approaches, enhanced community branding, and strengthening of existing practices. City staff leads implementation of the Plan, however policy set by the City Council, volunteer efforts by the BEDAG in support of business retention, and marketing collaboration with community and regional partners, are crucial for amplifying the message that Highland Park is a premiere location for doing business and are critical to the success of the Plan.

Executive Summary

City staff will provide regular reports to the City Council and Business & Economic Development Advisory Group throughout the life of the Plan. One of the primary goals of the Office of Business Development is to maintain and enhance the economic viability of Highland Park. Key performance indicators, or KPIs, will help the City make strategic planning decisions, accomplish its vision for the future, and measure the progress of the business development strategy. In addition to the metrics included in the Plan, annually, staff will report on the City's commercial vacancy rate as reported by Co-Star, the number of closed vs. new businesses based on the City's licensing database.

City Mission

The mission of the City of Highland Park, Illinois is to provide high-quality municipal services in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner through effective, transparent, and collaborative governance.

Business Development Mission

The mission of the Office of Business Development is to increase community vibrancy and improve the quality of life in Highland Park through a healthy business mix, lively business districts, community-wide events, and open communication.

Special thanks to the City Council for their vision and direction, and the Highland Park Business & Economic Development Advisory Group for their hard work and commitment to promote the City and improve the quality of life in Highland Park.

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Business Retention



Coordinate with property owners to retain businesses within the community by providing support, economic development incentives, and resources.



Business Retention

Conduct Outreach to Existing Businesses

Meet With the City's Largest Employers & Sales Tax Generators

Annually, throughout the course of the year, City staff meets with the City's largest employers and sales tax generators, and explores opportunities to retain these businesses and support their growth in Highland Park.

BEDAG Business Outreach

Annually the Business and Economic Development Advisory Group (BEDAG) conducts a minimum of 30 on-site visits with locally registered businesses to gather information that may be used to improve City services and contribute to the success of local businesses.

- Seek feedback from BEDAG on the current survey and update it accordingly.
- Notify businesses that a BEDAG Advisor will contact them for an interview.
- Provide Advisors with a script and a questionnaire to ensure businesses are interviewed in a consistent and fair manner.
- Address business concerns individually. Significant business concerns or opportunities that require a policy change will be shared with the City Council and may be added to the current or future Plan.
- Explore opportunities for informal business visits by Advisors to increase number of touches within the business community annually.

Enhance the City's Image as a Resource for Businesses

Ongoing Communication With Business Owners

Through ongoing communication with local businesses, support their needs by responding to inquiries and providing resource information. Resources include but are not limited to the City's available property database, incentives, business development organizations (Small Business Administration, Small Business Development Center at College of Lake County, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Highland Park Chamber of Commerce, SCORE) marketing recommendations. City staff also provides guidance for outdoor dining and display licenses, special event permits, grant opportunities, and opportunities for businesses to collaborate on events.

- The Highland Park Police Department partners with business owners to provide law enforcement recommendations for public and property safety and education programs for employees.

Business Retention

Enhance the City's Image as a Resource for Businesses

Host an annual meeting with the Mayor for businesses.

Host an annual meeting with the Mayor for businesses, business development partners, and government partners to promote networking, share information and discuss collaborative efforts and opportunities.

- In 2023, work with BEDAG to recommend the meeting structure, content, and schedule, and seek the Mayor's approval.
- Beginning in 2024, schedule meeting and invite businesses via weekly newsletters.

Coordinate SCORE Workshops

Counselors to America's Small Business (SCORE) is a non-profit association dedicated to entrepreneur education. Small businesses' formation, growth, and success is a focus of U.S. SCORE programming, which provides free business counseling, workshops, and low-cost management consulting. They also provide templates for business plans, advice on developing a business plan, and obtaining a business loan. SCORE counselors can help entrepreneurs start businesses and small business owners grow their businesses and prosper. Annually, the City brings SCORE workshops and mentoring programs to the Highland Park Public Library.

- The City promotes SCORE services to local businesses via the weekly Business Development eNews, on the City's website, and in the City's Guide to Doing Business in Highland Park to encourage them to utilize their services.

Spotlight on SCORE

93

Client mentoring sessions

28

Individual clients mentored

55

Individuals attending webinars

SCORE usage in 2021



Business Retention

Recognize Outstanding Businesses

Administer the Business Recognition Awards

The City recognizes businesses for excellence in business and longevity in the community in increments of 25-year milestones.

- Businesses operating in the City for 25 years are recognized in the Highlander during their milestone year, as space is available.
- Businesses operating in the City for more than 50 years, and in 25-year increments thereafter, receive public recognition at a City Council Meeting, as well as in the Highlander, Business Development eNews, the City's website and on social media in Q4.

Administer the Beautification Awards

The City recognizes retail, restaurant, service, and auto business owners and commercial property owners that have successfully integrated aesthetics that are consistent with the environment in the community through attractive façades, landscaping, signage, and window clarity among other criteria.

- In Q2 of 2022, the Business and Economic Development Advisory Group will make recommendations to update the Award criteria in order to improve the program. The recommendations will be forwarded to the City Council for formal consideration.
- Throughout the year the City seeks nominations from BEDAG, and from businesses via the Business Development eNews, and the public via the Highlander, social media and the City's website. The nomination deadline will be the first Friday after Labor Day.
- Annually in October, staff presents nominees to BEDAG for their feedback via an electronic survey and will create an evaluation matrix.
- Annually in October, staff presents BEDAG's Award recipient recommendations to the City Council for review and final selection.
- Annually in October/November, Beautification Award recipients receive public recognition at a City Council meeting, in the Highlander, in the Business Development eNews, on social media and the City's website.

Business Retention

Promote the City's Incentive Programs

Promote the City's Sales Tax Rebate Program

The City's Sales Tax Rebate Program is intended to stimulate sales tax growth and create jobs by incentivizing retail businesses to locate or expand in the City. It also preserves the current level of sales tax revenues to ensure budget sufficiency. It protects the interests of the City and its citizens with a thorough and objective review of such rebate requests.

- Promote the Program to existing businesses during on-site visits and to new businesses during recruitment meetings, as well as via the City's website, Business Development eNews, annual business registration renewal packet, and the City's Guide to Doing Business in Highland Park.

Promote the City's Small Business Façade Improvement Program

The City of Highland Park recognizes the importance of independent merchants to the City's image and tax base. The Small Business Façade Improvement Program aims to provide assistance and an incentive to property owners and local businesses to improve the look and functionality of their property and place of business. The Program is available to small business operators and commercial property owners citywide.

- Throughout the course of the year, promote the Program to existing businesses during on-site visits and to new businesses during recruitment meetings, as well as via the City's website, Business Development eNews, annual business registration renewal packet, and the City's Guide to Doing Business in Highland Park.



Business Attraction



The City of Highland Park has all the assets necessary to help businesses succeed:



- Business-friendly environment
- Dedicated staff to assist with site selection and support new and existing businesses
- Beautiful, walkable shopping districts
- Strong shop local culture
- Collaborative marketing opportunities
- Excellent dining, shopping and entertainment, and numerous cultural attractions and events to attract customers and first-rate employees
- Renowned for a high quality of life, an affluent populace, and a highly-educated workforce
- Close proximity to the City of Chicago and other key business corridors
- Easy access to I-294, I-94, Rte. 41, and public transportation, including Metra service at three train stations and freight access.
- Close proximity to O'Hare and Mitchell Int'l Airports, Chicago Executive Airport
- Population in 20-mile radius, 3.1 million

Business Attraction

Conduct Ongoing Outreach to Attract Businesses

Proactively reach out to commercial real estate professionals and prospective businesses to promote the City as a place to do business.

- Continue to build strong relationships and provide connectivity to those wishing to do business in Highland Park and opportunities.
- Provide site selection assistance to prospective businesses.
- Provide leads to brokers and property owners to negotiate leases or sale terms with interested prospective businesses.
- Provide knowledge of local market trends, zoning restrictions, and existing business mix to prospective businesses.
- Community Development and Business Development staff will guide businesses through the plan review and permit process.
- Provide access to community demographics for current and prospective businesses on the City's website and the Guide to Doing Business in Highland Park.
- Provide a business outreach status update in the Monthly Business Development Report.

Promote available commercial properties.

- Assist property owners and real estate brokers with marketing available space to businesses in expansion mode and poised to enter the Chicago suburban market.
- Ensure the City's real estate database is easily accessible on the City's website and promoted to interested parties.
- In Q2, 2022, an online, interactive map of available commercial properties was created; continue to update on regular basis.

Explore new Tax Increment Financing opportunities.



Business Attraction

Encourage Property Owners to Fill Vacancies

Encourage property owners to lease to pop-up shops to fill vacancies and add to community vibrancy, short or long-term.

- On a quarterly basis at the Central Business District Property Owners Association (POA) meetings, inform property owners that pop-up shops are permitted in Highland Park and educate about the permitting process.

Encourage property owners and brokers to attract desired restaurants, experiential uses, and boutiques.

- In Q2, 2023, share relevant focus group feedback with property owners and brokers.
- In Q2, 2023, share the list of desired restaurants and other businesses with property owners and brokers to assist them in identifying prospective tenants that align with the community's goals.

Spotlight on: Pop-Up Shops



A fun way to attract new shoppers, a pop-up shop is a temporary storefront space leased and operated by someone interested in testing a new business idea, exploring new markets, or taking an online business into a physical space. Pop-up shops might be open for just one day or a few months, and can be extended into a long-term lease.

[Gallery Five](#), located in Port Clinton Square, was created as a space to show exciting, contemporary work from artists working in a variety of media. These artists all share a passion to bring the beauty and joy of their art to the North Shore. Learn more at [galleryfive.art](#).

Visit [cityhpil.com/popupshop](#) to view opportunities in the Central and Ravinia Business Districts.

Marketing, Communication & Public Education



Enhance communication, interaction, and participation among the City Council, staff, residents, community leaders, and other stakeholders.

Marketing, Communication & Public Education

Manage and Expand the City-wide Enjoy Highland Park Campaign

Grow Enjoy Highland Park campaign followers and increase engagement across all platforms.

Continue to produce content to spotlight Highland Park businesses across all digital platforms, with a focus on video content. Support the campaign with a blend of paid and organic content.

Enhance the Enjoy Highland Park website.

Continue to enhance the interactive features of the Enjoy Highland Park website, and create a content plan to ensure a mix of evergreen and seasonal content.

Grow the Enjoy Highland Park email list and explore targeted email.

Continue to produce The Weekender. Evaluate the possibility of additional, themed Enjoy Highland Park emails.

Prepare a toolkit to assist business owners in promoting the campaign.

In FY 23, at the suggestion of focus groups, the City will consider designating funds to produce a business owner toolkit, including professionally printed posters, window decals, or other collateral as recommended.

Raise awareness about the Enjoy Highland Park campaign in the City.

Implement varied and multi-channel touchpoints for the campaign, including via direct mail, email, earned media, partnerships & collaboration with businesses, and events for Highland Park residents and neighbors.

Engage the community with a campaign survey.

In Q1 2023, conduct a broad survey of residents via the City's communications modalities, including the Enjoy Highland Park website.

Develop an earned media strategy for the campaign.

Research appropriate regional and national outlets, and pitch feature articles on Highland Park businesses and experiences.

Create a toolkit for elected officials and appointed volunteers.

In Q2 2022, create a toolkit to support the efforts of Ambassadors (elected officials and appointed volunteers) to provide guidance on why and how to support the campaign.

About the Campaign

Launched in summer 2021, the Enjoy Highland Park campaign aims to position the City as a regional destination for shopping and dining. The campaign's digital-first strategy focuses on driving online engagement through videography and photography on Instagram and Facebook, supported by a standalone website, email campaign, and select print placement.

Enjoy Highland Park video and social feature Highland Park businesses across all industries. The website includes an interactive dining and shopping guide, calendar of events and more. The Weekender eNews includes things to do, places to shop and dine, and news from businesses.

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Visit enjoyhighlandpark.com to view campaign videos, browse the dining and shopping guides, sign up for the Weekender and more.

To keep up with the campaign, follow [@enjoyhighlandpark](https://www.facebook.com/enjoyhighlandpark) on Facebook and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/enjoyhighlandpark).

Launch Results

Over the first five months of the campaign, Enjoy Highland Park reached **170,011** unique accounts (**413,503** impressions) through a paid digital marketing campaign focused on Facebook and Instagram. The overall campaign engagement rate was **5.6%** across all paid and organic posts, which collectively reached **217,465** unique accounts.

The City's Instagram following grew to **1,783** followers during the life of the campaign, and the new Enjoy Highland Park Facebook Page now has **668** followers.

The Enjoy Highland Park website logged **10,951** pageviews.



Marketing, Communication & Public Education

Partner with Organizations to Promote Highland Park

Collaboration with sister governments and community partners is key to achieving the City's marketing objectives to promote Highland Park businesses, raise awareness of the City as a regional destination for shopping and dining, and cultivate community vibrancy. Staff provides meeting notes to BEDAG and City Council to keep them apprised of the City's coordination efforts.

Conduct quarterly meetings with government partners to share information and discuss collaboration efforts and opportunities to promote Highland Park.

On a quarterly basis, the City communicates with government partners, including the Park District of Highland Park, North Shore School District 112, Township High School District 113, Moraine Township, Lake County, and the Highland Park Public Library in an effort to share information and discuss collaborative opportunities to advance business interests to benefit the community.

Meet with the marketing communications professionals from Highland Park sister governments.

On a quarterly basis, City staff meets with all public relations/marketing communications professionals at the school districts, Park District, and Highland Park Public Library to share information, engage their stakeholders in the Enjoy Highland Park campaign, and identify opportunities for co-promotion and participation.

Meet with the Park District of Highland Park to enhance collaboration.

- On a quarterly basis, City representatives including the City Council and the City Manager or designee meet with the Park District of Highland Park to exchange information and discuss opportunities for collaborative programs to promote local businesses, and identify ways to partner with Park District to magnify events and increase participation.
- Partner with the Park District to promote Highland Park businesses to the guests that visit Highland Park for sports events and other activities.



Marketing, Communication & Public Education

Partner with Organizations to Promote Highland Park

Meet with Ravinia Festival to ensure cohesive collaboration and identify opportunities for co-promotion of events.

- On a quarterly basis, City representatives including the City Council, City Manager’s Office and Office of Business Development, Police, and Fire personnel communicate with representatives of Ravinia Festival to discuss opportunities to enhance collaboration and support.
- City staff coordinate with Ravinia Festival staff to plan a minimum of two Neighborhood Meetings for interested residents and businesses in the Ravinia District to discuss initiatives including but not limited to traffic management. Meetings will be held pre-season and post-Ravinia Festival season.

Meet with NorthShore University HealthSystem to share information and promote local businesses.

- The City Manager or designee attends the quarterly Highland Park Hospital Community Advisory Committee meetings to exchange information with hospital administrators and community leaders.
- Coordinate with NorthShore University HealthSystem and Ravinia Festival as notable destinations to promote local businesses.

Meet with the School Districts serving Highland Park, including NSSD 112, District 113, and TrueNorth Educational Cooperative 804.

- On a quarterly basis, City representatives including the City Council and the City Manager or designee meet with Districts 112 & 113 to discuss the disposition of property, and opportunities for collaboration to support local businesses.

Promote opportunities for businesses to collaborate on special events presented by the City.

Marketing, Communication & Public Education

Promote Business Information and News to Stakeholders

Promote Highland Park and its businesses to residents and visitors.

- On a monthly basis, update the City's online Business Directory featuring all registered businesses in the community.
- On an ongoing basis, promote businesses and special events in the community via the Business Development eNews, City eNews, in the Highlander, The Weekender, on EnjoyHighlandPark.com, and on social media.
- On weekly basis promote business and event information on community kiosks
- Apprise the public of the ways in which the City assists, markets, and supports Highland Park businesses.

Promote new businesses, business expansion & relocation, and special events to brokers and real estate professionals.

On a quarterly basis, issue communication to brokers and real estate professionals with information about new leases to promote local business opportunities in Highland Park.

Provide businesses with timely information concerning construction, emergencies, or other important news items via Business Alerts.

Work with contractors and utilities on behalf of businesses to mitigate the impact and inconvenience of construction work.



Marketing, Communication & Public Education

Promote Business Information and News to Stakeholders

Promote local event venues and meeting places.

On an annual basis, coordinate with event venues and meeting places to maintain up-to-date information on the City's website.

Provide a Monthly Business Development Report to the City Council, BEDAG, and staff.

Via a Monthly Report to the City Council, all City staff, and BEDAG, announce business openings, closings, and other relevant information.

Manage the City's Banner Program.

Banners provide an opportunity for the City to make a positive impression on residents and visitors and an important way to communicate information. The banner program includes the Central and Ravinia Business Districts. Ravinia District banners are modified to match the District's branded colors and theme.

- The Office of Business Development manages the City's Banner Program and work with the Public Works Department to maintain the banners. Banners will be maintained in good condition and replaced as needed.

Develop storytelling campaigns to enhance public perception of the community.

Distinct from the Enjoy Highland Park campaign, create campaigns that focus on promoting community pride and communal spirit.

Marketing, Communication & Public Education

Promote Business Information and News to Stakeholders

Maintain and distribute the City's Guide to Doing Business in Highland Park to new and existing businesses.

The City's Business Guide and Guide to Doing Business in Highland Park provide business owners with an overview of the process to open, expand or relocate their business. The Guide to Doing Business in Highland Park contains more detailed information than the Business Guide. It includes contacts for utilities, local, regional and state government; general City fees; municipal and state taxes; as well as business resources and a checklist to ensure that businesses do not miss any required steps along the way to opening. Also included are the following forms: Letter of Intent to Occupy; Restaurant License Application; Food Service License Application; Liquor License Application, Cigarette, E-Cigarette, Cigar and Tobacco Over the Counter Sales License Application; Massage Establishment Application; Business Registration Application, and; tax forms for Food and Beverage, Packaged Liquor, and Motor Fuel.

- Maintain the Guides in hard copy, electronic format, and on the City's website.
- Review the Guide in Q4 and send them to all relevant Department Directors for review to ensure that all information is up to date and accurate.

Support environmental efforts.

Work with BEDAG and the Sustainability Advisory Group to increase business participation in the City's recycling and composting programs, on an as-needed basis. The City of Highland Park issued its first Sustainability Plan in 2010 and, since then, it has not only implemented many projects and created new policies, but also has embedded sustainable practices and procedures within its departments. Sustainability is a routine feature of the City's operations.

- Provide businesses with opportunities for sustainable efforts via Business Alerts and the weekly newsletter.

Community Vibrancy



Promote the economic vitality of the City's nine business districts.

Community Vibrancy

Build and Program an Alfresco Dining & Event Space

Based on feedback from the 2021 Business Development Strategic Plan Focus Groups the Business and Economic Development Advisory Group, the City Council, and staff, build out an open-air event space without closing City streets and explore new events and festivals, as well as opportunities for a cross-governmental event with the City's sister governments.



Build out the St. Johns North Parking Lot to host alfresco dining and events.

In 2022, the City transformed, a portion of the St. Johns North parking lot to create a flexible, multipurpose event space, capable of hosting large-scale events to increase vibrancy and foot traffic in downtown Highland Park. In 2023 the site will once again be activated and desing planning for a potential long term infrastructure will begin.

- Infrastructure improvements will include the resurfacing of the south portion of the lot, installation of a temporary stage, dining tables, chairs, and other seating; designated areas for vendor stalls; interactive elements, and life-size games.
- In Q2 2022, the City activated the site with 10 events from June to November and weekly, smaller seasonal events targeting different demographics and offering multiple opportunities for Highland Park businesses to reach new clientele welcoming over 24,000 visitors.

Community Vibrancy

Build and Program an Alfresco Dining and Event Space

Hire and supervise an event marketing management firm.

Reporting to City staff, the contracted agency will manage all aspects of event planning, sponsorships, day-of-coordination, and post-event metrics and reporting.

Evaluate the performance of The Lot and assess the possibility of creating a permanent event space in downtown Highland Park.

During Q3 2022, review and assess established metrics for success at The Lot. The City will then make a determination as to whether to pursue plans for a permanent buildout of The Lot either in its present location or in another space that will better meet the City's goals and objectives.

- City staff will review the long-term implications of a permanent buildout of an event space, including infrastructure requirements, impact on businesses and financial impact on the City, and make a recommendation to City Council.
- In Q1 2023, begin process to develop design and budget with community input for potential long term infrastructure build out.
- 2023/2024 begin seeking applicable grant funding if applicable.

Actively market The Lot as an event space, and spotlight additional venues available within the community.

- If The Lot is successful, in Q3 2023, develop a rental package for The Lot, including acceptable events, pricing, and rental agreements.
- In 2024, offer the rental package to local businesses interested in renting the venue. Revenue generated by venue rentals will support the maintenance and continued enhancement of the space.

Community Vibrancy

Increase Foot Traffic in Downtown Highland Park

Continue to explore new events and live entertainment that can be held throughout the four seasons to attract the public and increase foot traffic in Downtown Highland Park.

Consider additional seasonal events as part of the Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 budget development process.

Identify short-term and long-term ways to increase the walkability of the Ravinia District and the Central Business District.

- In Q3 2023, meet with BEDAG to brainstorm opportunities for structural or landscape improvements to enhance walkability, in coordination with Community Development, Public Works, the Transportation Advisory Group, and the Bike-Walk Advisory Group.

Continue to promote Ravinia District and Central Business District events to encourage attendees to browse restaurants and shops.

Support the Ravinia District's marketing efforts with cross-promotion on Enjoy Highland Park platforms.

Spotlight additional venues available within the community.

Promote additional City assets, such as the pond, restaurant at the golf course, and yacht club to the community via all of the City's communications modalities.

Encourage businesses to expand hours, offerings, and outdoor dining, as requested by residents.





Community Vibrancy

Special Service Areas (SSA) Administration

A Special Service Area is a taxing mechanism that can be used to fund a wide range of special or additional services and/or physical improvements in a defined geographic area within a municipality. The City works with property owners and businesses in the following areas within the community to encourage community vibrancy.

Central Business District SSA 19

In 2021, based on coordination with property owners and the POA, the City approved the Central Business District SSA 19 effective January 1, 2022 through 2024. The primary purpose of the SSA is to improve the economic vitality of the Central Business District. Embracing collaboration with businesses, property owners, and the City of Highland Park, the Alliance encourages local spending, investment, tourism, and a sense of community through the promotion of the Central Business District.

The Downtown Highland Park Alliance, a public/private partnership that provides oversight of SSA 19, is comprised of property owners, including the City. The Alliance is committed to working diligently to continue to enhance the business climate in the Central Business District and the community overall. A representative of the City serves on the Board of the Downtown Highland Park Alliance.

In 2022, the Alliance will contribute funds and coordinate events with the City in The Lot, and in downtown Highland Park.

Community Vibrancy

Special Service Areas (SSA) Administration

Ravinia Business District SSA 17

In 2021, in coordination with the Ravinia District property owners, the City approved the extension of SSA 17, effective 2020 through 2022, to fund marketing, events, and beautification in the Ravinia Business District. The three-year SSA annual budget/levy is \$90,000. The Ravinia District SSA 17 Advisory Group comprised of property owners serves as the organizing entity to advance the Ravinia Business District's core business development goals. The City's Business Development Manager oversees the SSA's budget, events, décor, and contractors. The SSA will be considered for 3-year renewal in 2023-2025.

- In 2022, Food Truck Thursdays returns to the Ravinia District with a variety of rotating vendors and live music June 2 to September 8, 4:30 – dusk in Jens Jensen Park. Established in 2017 on behalf of SSA 17, the City's Food Truck Thursdays event series successfully draws thousands of visitors from near and far for live music and al fresco dining.
- In 2022, the SSA will install additional seasonal décor and host new local seasonal events to enhance the District's vibrancy.
- In 2022, the SSA will fund a digital marketing campaign to raise the profile of the District and promote the seasonal events calendar.

Ravinia District Enhancements in 2021

In 2021, the SSA installed seasonal décor and initiated a Halloween Candy Stroll and a Holiday Cookie Crawl, which drew hundreds of visitors to the District and increased traffic in businesses and were welcomed back in 2022. In 2021, to promote the district and events, the SSA began a social media campaign and established an Instagram page; with some posts reaching 334,000+ engagements.



Community Vibrancy

Special Service Areas (SSA) Administration

Briergate Business District SSA 18

In coordination with the Briergate Business District property owners, the City approved SSA 18 to fund improvements in the Briergate Business District and marketing, effective 2014 through 2023. The estimated cost of the improvements is \$3.6 million. The City's portion of the estimated cost is \$3.2 million. The annual budget/levy is \$40,000 over a ten-year period, totaling \$400,000. Annually, \$10,000 of the \$40,000 is dedicated to district marketing and events. Improvements will include vegetation maintenance, business signage, and reimbursement for wayfinding signs, wayfinding sign maintenance, lighting, landscaping, and parking.

The City collects the funds through property tax bills in accordance with State Statute. The Business Development Manager manages the SSA. The Briergate Business Association District serves as the organizing entity responsible for advancing the Briergate Business District's core goals. If the municipal budget allows, and if the City Council supports the \$3.6 million project, the work is anticipated to commence in 2025. The City will continue to explore grant opportunities to fund the improvements prior to 2025.

- Business Development and Public Works work with the Illinois Department of Transportation to obtain permission to manage non-essential vegetation along Old Skokie Road to maintain visibility from Highway 41 to the Business District. This project is ongoing.



Local & Regional Partnerships



Enhance local and regional partnerships to bring new investment to Highland Park and the region.



Local & Regional Partnerships

Advance Economic Development Efforts in the Region

The City contributes to the economic vitality and quality of life in the region by creating and retaining quality jobs, stimulating capital investment, pursuing economic diversity, and improving the business climate, including public-private partnerships and intergovernmental programs with other units of government.

Serve on the Board of the Central Business District Property Owners Association

- The City will continue its membership in the Central Business District Property Owners Association (POA). One elected official and one staff member attend meetings.
- City representatives review and discuss maintenance, special projects, and capital improvement projects as identified in the City's budget and capital improvement plan.
- New projects include a funding plan for maintenance and capital improvements. The City will also explore funding alternatives in an effort to advance the business district improvements and make recommendations to prioritize the City's capital improvement plans for the districts. Property owners' needs are considered as part of the City's budget process which begins in May and continues through December each year.
- Progress reports are provided regularly to property owners and business owners regarding infrastructure improvements, maintenance efforts, business retention, and other activities planned within the CBD.

Support the Highland Park Chamber of Commerce.

One elected official and one staff member serve as liaisons between the City and the Chamber of Commerce. They meet with the Chamber quarterly to provide updates on City activities and programs and share Chamber dialogue with the City Council.

Resume membership in Visit Lake County.

Visit Lake County is a county-wide tourism campaign that markets the activities of member communities' businesses, events, and other initiatives.

Continue to collaborate with the Illinois DCEO.

Highland Park businesses benefit from the City's collaboration with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity which provides resources and technical support, and maintains a climate that enables a strong economy.

Policy Considerations



Explore policy changes to attract new businesses and investment to the City and meet the needs of the community.

Policy Considerations

Review & Improve City Policy

Review existing and explore other incentive types to retain and attract new businesses to Highland Park.

- Review opportunities to expand or improve existing incentive programs.
- Examine different types of incentive programs for consideration of introducing new incentives in Highland Park
- Examine grants offered by comparable communities.
- Conduct research with stakeholders.
- Make recommendation to Council on new program
 - Establish criteria for eligibility to obtain a grant.
 - Establish the maximum grant award.
 - Identify a funding mechanism
 - Develop program details and materials.
 - Consider build-out grants as part of the Fiscal Year 2024 budget development process.

Update the Zoning Code to meet consumer needs

- In Q2, 2023, Community Development and the City Manager’s Office will work together to present a recommendation to the City’s Liquor Control Commission and Committee of the Whole that they allow bars without the requirement for on-site food preparation.
- In Q3, Community Development will draft the code changes and seek approval from the City Council.
- In Q3, the City Manager’s Office will determine the appropriate license fee, and work with Corporation Counsel on an update to the liquor license code.

Revisit opportunities for corrective measures on long-term vacancies.

In 2023, revisit the legality of imposing a tax on long-term vacancies or other corrective measures to encourage property owners to lease their vacant property.

- Research legal corrective measures on long-term vacancies.
- If such measures, such as a tax is viable, define actions to be taken and timeline.
- Define long-term vacancy.
- Next steps to be determined.

Administrative & Regulatory Processes



Explore ways to continue to streamline City processes and increase efficiency while practicing proactive customer service. Administer the City’s Business Registration, Outdoor Dining Licenses, Outdoor Display Licenses, and Vacant Storefront Window Screening Program.

Administrative & Regulatory Processes

Conduct a Community Development Services Survey of Businesses, Developers and Property Owners

Survey developers, businesses, property owners, and real estate brokers to better understand their experiences working with Highland Park, identify roadblocks to doing business in the community, and obtain feedback on the impact of the City's changes to the Zoning Code and development process. Key emphasis will be on a proactive customer service approach across all phases of the process related to a variety of factors including but not limited to proactive assistance, accessibility of information, clarity of the application and administrative processing, plan review and consideration process timelines, inspections, permit issuance, and fees.

- Quarterly, send a customer satisfaction survey to all developers, businesses, and commercial property owners that were issued a permit or a Certificate of Occupancy within that time period.
- Explore ways to streamline the permitting process and improve services based on consistent feedback.

Assist businesses in a proactive manner.

- Ensure that alternate suggestions are presented to assist businesses facing restrictions or other hurdles to successfully opening and operating in Highland Park, such as advising on permitted uses in alternative zoning districts or explaining conditional occupancy opportunities.
- Enhance proactive assistance approach across departments.
- Ensure new and existing businesses work directly with identified point person(s) in Business Development and Community Development to shepherd businesses through the permitting process.

Evaluate the plan review and permit process, and explore ways to streamline the permitting and development services process.

Continue to explore opportunities to enhance the plan review and permit process and regularly explore enhanced customer service with the public, implementing a proactive communications approach and a faster review, permitting, and response time when feasible.

- Review and evaluate permit fees by conducting a comparative analysis of fees in comparable communities and making recommendations for adjustments in order to remain competitive in the marketplace.
- Identify and articulate realistic timelines for regulatory plan review and process times; seek opportunities to fast track permits when appropriate and feasible.



Administrative & Regulatory Processes

Administer annual business registration.

Every business located in a commercially zoned building or property, including a not-for-profit entity, is required by City code to register annually with the City within 30-days of opening. The information obtained from the Business Registration assists the City in its efforts to maintain accurate public safety data, establish future economic development and public infrastructure plans, jointly market City businesses, and disseminate information of critical interest to the local business community in a timely fashion. Home-based businesses are not required to register with the City.

- Maintain a database of registered businesses and update it as new businesses open.
- Annually, after the initial registration, the City sends a notice to all registered businesses requesting that they update their business information and pay a Business Registration annual fee.

Administer the City's Outdoor Dining and Display Licenses.

Annually, businesses seeking to establish outdoor dining, or to install an outdoor display during the warm weather months on the City's public right-of-way or on private property must first obtain an Outdoor Accessory Use License approved by the City Manager's Office.

- Annually, in March, send all restaurants an Outdoor Dining License Application, and all previously licensed businesses an Outdoor Display Application.
- Distribute applications to appropriate departments and the City Manager for review and approval.

Administer the City's vacant ground floor storefront window screening program.

The Vacant Storefront Window Screening Program was established to maintain the pedestrian character that defines the spirit and intent of the City's B5 and B2-RW zoning districts. The program requires that whoever has control of a property is responsible for installing screening in the windows of vacant ground-floor windows within 14 days of the first day that the vacancy occurred.

- Annually, in Q1, send commercial property owners a courtesy copy of the City's Guidelines for Screening Vacant Ground Floor Storefront Windows to educate them about the City's regulations.
- On a weekly basis, staff monitors the Central and Ravinia Business Districts for vacancies and coordinates with the Building Division to achieve compliance.
- Implement a newly-leased storefront window screening program coordinated by the Highland Park Chamber of Commerce.

Development, Redevelopment & Repositioning Opportunities



Promote opportunities for the development of sites in the community to enhance the economic vitality of the City.

Development, Redevelopment & Repositioning Opportunities



Provide information to developers about opportunities in the community.

Identify sites for potential development and redevelopment as well as lots that may be assembled for this purpose.

- Work with property owners to evaluate maintenance, redevelopment, repositioning of those properties.
- Provide developers with code requirements and property owner contact information, where permitted, to encourage development as viable properties become available.
- Briergate Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District– In 2017, the City Council adopted a TIF District for the Briergate Business District, effective 2018 through 2041. The purpose of the TIF District is to encourage property redevelopment in a thoughtful manner to revitalize the subject area, benefit all taxing bodies, provide for economic development, job growth and improve the quality of life in the community. A copy of the Briergate TIF Redevelopment Plan and Project is available for review at City Hall. For information about Briergate TIF, please visit the City’s website at cityhpil.com.
- Ravinia Business District Tax Increment Financing District- In 2004, the City Council adopted a TIF District for the Ravinia Business District, effective 2005 –through 2028, for streetscape design, an identity plan, and infrastructure improvements to attract investment in the RBD. The purpose of the TIF District is to encourage property redevelopment in a thoughtful manner to revitalize the subject area, benefit all taxing bodies, provide for economic development, job growth and improve the quality of life in the community. A copy of the Ravinia TIF Redevelopment Plan and Project is available for review at City Hall. For information about Ravinia TIF, please visit the City’s website at cityhpil.com.

Infrastructure Improvements



Invest in infrastructure improvements that enhance the City's business districts and facilitate access to and enjoyment of Highland Park businesses.

Infrastructure Improvements

Infrastructure Investment is one of the City's top priorities. A total of \$25M is included in the City's FY 2022 capital plan reinforcing the City's investment in its public facilities, streets, and utilities. The following infrastructure initiatives are recommended by stakeholders or presently included on the City's 2022 Major Project Work Plan:

- Explore the possibility of widening sidewalks or other infrastructure changes to promote walkability and outdoor dining.
- Repair Central Business District streets and sidewalks.
- Enhance gateways, underground parking, and wayfinding.
- Evaluate and implement an automated parking enforcement solution.
- Procure electric vehicle charging station(s) for the Central South Lot.
- Evaluate scooter and shared bicycle opportunities.
- Review and update the Sign Code and establish a Mural Arts Program.
- Update vendor permit requirements.
- Review allowed uses in the Ravinia District.
- Continue the following sub-area planning initiatives: Crossroads Business District, Laurel-Deerfield-McGovern, Central Business District - Second Street Corridor, Waukegan/Bloom.
- At the request of Highland Park businesses, work with Pace bus, a separate public entity, to increase accessibility for employees.

At the City's request, in January 2022 Pace announced they would embark on a multi-year, system-wide network restructuring effort to evaluate and recommend potential adjustments to its business services.

Metrics

	Key Indicator	Activity / Project	Data / Outcome
Retention	Business Outreach	BEDAG Advisors visit a minimum of 30 businesses each year. In addition surveys are conducted annually.	Qualitative feedback from Advisors & business owners.
	SCORE! Workshop Attendance	Work with the Highland Park Public Library to increase marketing efforts.	Obtain annual workshop and mentoring attendance from SCORE as available and compare year over year.
Marketing & Communications	Social media followers & engagement rate	Complete monthly campaign reporting to track progress.	Increase followers on Instagram & Facebook by 10%.
	Community Awareness & Feedback	Include question on Citizen Surveys.	Review survey feedback and compare results year-to-year.
	Enjoy Highland Park website engagement	Track website metrics (including sessions, pageviews, social referrals, bounce rate) on a monthly basis.	Decrease website bounce rate and increase retention.
	Email engagement	Begin segmenting email list to fine-tune content.	Monitor engagement and determine feasibility of more targeted emails

Metrics

	Key Indicator	Activity / Project	Data / Outcome
Community Vibrancy	Event attendance	Collect attendance data at all City-sponsored events, including social media tags & posts.	Determine benchmark attendance metrics to facilitate year-to-year comparisons.
	Event feedback	Request feedback from businesses, residents, and visitors in-person, via survey, and on-site at all events at The Lot.	Review survey feedback and compare results year-to-year.
	Digital engagement (website & social media)	Track number of posts, engagement, and event responses.	Compare outreach statistics to actual attendance.
	Business participation	Track businesses participating in events.	Assess interest of Highland Park businesses in planning future events.
	Sales generation	Collect sales, food & beverage tax revenue.	Compare to prior years.
Admin & Regulatory Processes	Request Business Feedback on Processes Related to Permitting	Include direct questions on annual survey to all businesses for those that were issued a permit or a COO in said timeframe.	Compile & analyze service ratings Compare service ratings year over year

About Highland Park

Twenty-five miles north of Chicago's Loop, the City of Highland Park is nestled among five miles of Lake Michigan shoreline and near the center of the metropolitan area's most affluent residential markets.

Highland Park is a thriving community with a diverse population of more than 30,000, a stable economic base, top-rated schools, and a university-affiliated hospital, offering unique business opportunities in Lake County. Highland Park is home to the Ravinia Festival, a world-class summer venue for the performing arts, and a myriad of exciting special events, including Food Truck Thursdays and the Port Clinton Art Festival. Highland Park is easily accessible from Route 41, Interstate 94, and 294 and is served by PACE Bus and Metra train services. Highland Park's business community is diverse, with nine commercial districts. Local businesses enjoy the benefit of active business development organizations, which help advance economic, civil, cultural, and social interests within the community. Additional demographics and information about the City's services and programs may be found on the City's website at cityhpil.com.

Demographics

Population: 30,176 (2020 Census)
College Graduates: 73.8% (exceeds national avg. by 37.8%)
Households: 11,477
Persons Per Household: 2.56
Median Home Listing Price: \$614,564
Median Household Income: \$150,269
Income \$100,000 - \$200,000: 30%
Income Greater than \$200,000: 26%
Population 5-Mile Radius: 128,000
Population 10-Mile Radius: 628,355
Population 20-Mile Radius: 3.1M
Population 10-Minute Drive-time: 250,000+
Population 20-Minute Drive-time: 561,424
Local Workplace Population: 14,863
Workplace Pop. 10-Min. Drive-time: 82,963
Workplace Pop. 20-Min. Drive-time: 417,000+



Business Development Partner Roles

City of Highland Park

- Set policy to advance business.
- Assist property owners by promoting available property on City’s website, working with brokers, and working with interested tenants.
- Assist businesses with permit process
- Manage municipal code
- Oversee zoning and development regulations
- Administer event permit process
- Support commerce by: Producing City Guide, Dining Guide and online Business Directory; Marketing all businesses and events via social media and print media.
- Manage the City-wide marketing campaign, Enjoy Highland Park.
- Administer the alfresco event space, The Lot.

City of Highland Park Business & Economic Development Advisory Group

- Appointed volunteers by City
- Conduct business outreach
- Recommend policy changes to City Council
- Research and consider new regulations to support business
- Opine on business awards

Chamber of Commerce

- Promote members and the community locally and regionally
- Provide access to and resources for marketing and business development

Visit Lake County

- Promote members and the community regionally
- Amplify City dining, shopping, events, and tourism opportunities.
- Provide regional event participation opportunities.

Property Owners

- Tenant recruitment
- Lease or property sale negotiation
- Manage and maintain property
- Adhere to City/State property regulations

Downtown Highland

Park Alliance

- Market and promote the Central Business District
- Amplify messages of businesses
- Provide event grants to businesses

Ravinia District (RD) SSA 17

- Authorized 2023 – 2025
- Market and promote the RD locally and regionally
- Support special events in RD

Briergate Business District (BBD) SSA 18

- Authorized 2014 – 2023
- Infrastructure improvements
- Market and promote the BBD locally and regionally

Central Business District (CBD) SSA 19

- Authorized 2022 – 2024
- Market and promote the CBD locally and regionally

Ravinia TIF District

- Authorized 2005 – 2028
- Streetscape design, identity plan, infrastructure improvements to attract investment in the RD

Briergate TIF District

- Authorized 2018 – 2041
- Infrastructure improvements to attract investment in the BBD

Community Partners: Park District, Library, School Districts

- Assist with co-promotion of events
- Share business news

Strategic Plan: At a Glance Overview

Business Retention & Attraction

Seek opportunities and implement strategies to retain and expand existing businesses, attract new businesses, and broaden the sales tax base to sustain a balanced and healthy business climate.

Retention Strategies

- Engage with the City's largest employers and sales tax generators to retain & support their growth in Highland Park.
- Support BEDAG's business outreach.
- Share resources and information with business owners.
- Host an annual meeting with the Mayor for businesses.
- Coordinate SCORE workshops.
- Promote and administer the Sales Tax Rebate Program and the Small Business Façade Improvement Program.
- Update and administer the Business Recognition and Beautification Awards.

Attraction Strategies

- Proactively provide leads to brokers and property owners, and guide new businesses through the regulatory and permit process.
- Promote available commercial properties.
- Encourage property owners to fill vacancies.
- Encourage pop-up shops and experiential uses.
- Produce and promote the City's business startup guide.
- Provide guidance to prospective businesses and site selectors.
- Explore Tax Increment Financing opportunities.

Policy Considerations

- Explore build-out grants for small- to mid-size businesses.
- Explore other incentives to attract new businesses to Highland Park.
- Update the City's Zoning Code to allow bars.
- Explore a vacancy tax for long-term vacancies.

Marketing & Public Education

Promote existing businesses and its assets to increase awareness locally and regionally; enhance communication, interaction, and participation among all stakeholders.

- Expand the digital-first, city-wide Enjoy Highland Park marketing campaign to position the City as a destination for dining, shopping, and entertainment.
- Promote business openings, expansions, and relocations.
- Partner with organizations to promote businesses.
- Promote the City as a venue for conferences, events, and meetings.
- Provide opportunities for business owners to promote special products and events.
- Manage the banner program.
- Develop storytelling campaigns to enhance public perception of HP.
- Improve communication about business development efforts.
- Support environmental efforts.
- Maintain the Guide to Doing Business.

Community Vibrancy

- Build, program, market, and evaluate an alfresco dining and event space, The Lot.
- Assess the possibility of creating a permanent event space in downtown Highland Park.
- Oversee citywide signature events including Food Truck Thursdays, facilitate relevant special event permits, and help businesses leverage City events as marketing opportunities.
- Promote current events and explore new opportunities in the Central & Ravinia Districts.
- Identify ways to increase the walkability of the Central and Ravinia Districts.
- Encourage business to expand hours, offerings, and outdoor dining.
- Work with SSAs 17, 18, and 19.

Local & Regional Partnerships

Coordinate with local, regional, and state partners to unify efforts toward community and regional vibrancy.

- Advance economic development efforts in the region.
- Serve on the Board of the CBD Property Owners Association.
- Support the Highland Park Chamber of Commerce.
- Evaluate the benefits of resuming membership in Visit Lake County.
- Continue to collaborate with the Illinois DCEO.

Administrative & Support

- Administer the vacant ground floor storefront window screening program.
- Administer business registration and outdoor dining & display licenses.
- Provide information to developers about opportunities.
- View planned infrastructure improvements at cityhphil.com/cip.

Continue to Grow Reputation as a Proactive Business Friendly Community

- Conduct a Community Development Services Survey of businesses, developers and property owners.
- Assist businesses in a proactive manner.
- Evaluate the plan review and permit process, and explore ways to streamline the permitting and development services process.

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highland park

enjoyhighlandpark.com