

**City of Highland Park**

# **CENTRAL DISTRICT PLAN**

**Business District**

**Technical Assistance provided by:**

CAMIROS

**Approved  
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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This plan is a guide for the management and care of the Central District of the City of Highland Park. The Central District is one of eleven planning districts created for the purpose of updating the Comprehensive Master Plan that guides land use and community development decisions across the City. The Central District is a unique section of the City. It contains the City's commercial downtown and a number of important community institutions. It is the City center and the seat of local government. The District also contains surrounding single-family residential neighborhoods and a good deal of the City's supply of multiple-family housing units. Based on the diverse range of uses found there, all Highland Park residents have a stake in the success and continued health of the Central District.

This Central District Plan was prepared by the City of Highland Park Planning Commission and was adopted by the Highland Park City Council on May \_\_, 2001. In preparing and refining this Plan, numerous public meetings and work sessions were held with members of the public, property owners, elected officials, the Planning Commission, staff of the City's Community Development Department, and the Central District Core Group Task Force. The resultant Plan is a statement of planning and development policy that can guide future land use and public investment decisions and is grounded by a community vision of the future supported by objectives and specific recommendations aimed at setting an agenda to implement the Plan's policies.

The Central District of Highland Park has long been a hub of activity in the north shore suburbs of Chicago. For many years it has functioned as the retail, service and government center of the City. The Central District has recently undergone significant changes. Over the past eight to ten years, the center of the area, referred to as the Pedestrian Commercial Core, has seen changes in the types of businesses and the introduction of a major mixed-use development. Adding to the nature of land use changes has been redevelopment of single-family and small multiple family dwellings in and near the Pedestrian Commercial Core into four and five story condominium projects. General economic prosperity is generating more commercial activity and higher density residential development based on past planning, current zoning regulations and market demand. This component of the City's Master Plan, the Central District Plan, reflects the current development forces affecting Highland Park and the desires of community residents and officials to conserve and maintain the community's traditional character. The Central District Plan will guide the community as it addresses the challenges and opportunities through the year 2020.

The Central District Plan contains the following elements:

- A description of the Central District with a summary of recent major trends within the district.
- A vision for the Central District's future including specific objectives and an illustrative concept of how the policies contained in the Plan might effect changes in the Downtown area.
- A set of planning policies guiding future land use, urban design, and zoning.
- A description of development opportunities supported by Plan policies.
- A strategy for implementing the Plan.

The Central District Plan is grounded in a vision for the Central District's future. That vision is supported by five basic objectives aimed at guiding the Central District:

- Support and increase the overall role and structure of the Central District as the City's center.
- Protect the substantial public and private investment in the Central District.
- Integrate residential living opportunities in the Downtown and throughout the Central District.
- Make the Downtown everyone's neighborhood.
- Manage an appropriate balance between conservation of existing character and judicious expansion of key economic sectors.

Plan policies regarding land uses are the heart of this Central District Plan. The policies are intended to guide future land use and development decisions. While fairly specific, they should be interpreted flexibly to account for changing conditions in the economy, to meet residents' needs and expectations of City lifestyle.

Key elements of future land use guidelines are as follows:

- Strengthen and support existing single family residential neighborhoods including: creating appropriate adjacent land uses as buffers; providing needed capital improvements; slowing vehicular traffic, where needed, using traffic calming strategies; and preserving the character of the neighborhoods through new regulations or design guidelines.
- Emphasize shopper convenience. Consumer research has indicated that the concept of a shopping "experience," or a unique theme for an area, may be waning in favor of the need for convenience and efficiency. The ever increasing demands on household time places a premium on efficiency. The faster consumers can make a purchase, the more satisfied they are.
- Promote pedestrians in the Downtown. Pedestrian amenities and safety provisions are recommended for the entire downtown with special emphasis on Central Avenue and Second Street.
- Recognize the importance of maintaining a link with the past by incorporating as many existing buildings as possible into future redevelopment concepts. However, there is some functional obsolescence in the area and under-utilization of land that has created opportunities for redevelopment in the downtown.

The Central District Plan's major recommendations, as shown on the Illustrative Concept include:

- Containment of the Pedestrian Commercial Core between Green Bay Road, Laurel Avenue, Elm Place and the half block west of Linden Avenue on the east.

- Redevelopment of convenience commercial uses along Central Avenue, west of Green Bay Road.
- Redevelopment of the First Street, Green Bay Road and Elm Place triangle, north of Elm Place.
- Conservation of the character and scale of the area east of the Metra railroad tracks and the storefronts of Central Avenue east of Green Bay Road.
- Improvement of the Second Street corridor from its intersection with Park Avenue West to Laurel Avenue.
- Preservation of valued housing stock, which contributes to neighborhood character
- Development of selected sites in and near the downtown for residential use.
- Completion of the Downtown circulation system with the construction of Water Tower Boulevard between Green Bay Road and Central Avenue.
- Addition of new areas of open space and “vest pocket” parks throughout the Pedestrian Commercial Core.

Ultimately, implementation of the Central District Plan requires the recognition and acceptance that Highland Park’s public interest is affected by private and public actions. The individual decisions of each landowner, developer and resident of the Central District affect not only the Central District but also the whole community. Municipal actions taken through zoning designation and public investments also affect the lives of each citizen. If future community decisions are vital to keep the Central District vivid, it is also necessary that the City of Highland Park’s residents recognize that actions of the past and present have shaped and will continue to shape the Central District’s future.



## 1 PLANNING THE CENTRAL DISTRICT

As the heart of Highland Park, the Central District contains many of the City's most cherished institutions and unique uses. The Central District has always been, and continues to be, a significant place in Highland Park. It is the City center and, as such, it is everybody's neighborhood. Residents regularly visit the area and are concerned about what happens in and around the Central District. For many, it defines Highland Park in a physical sense and confers a shared sense of place for all Highland Park residents. Land use patterns in the District reflect the historic development of the City, first as an outlying farming community, and later, as one of the major residential commuting areas located along the north shore of Lake Michigan. Commercial development has historically located along the Central Avenue frontage and, over time, has expanded to adjacent areas on both the east and west sides of the railroad tracks. While many communities are trying to create mixed-use concentrations and strong transit links in their downtown, these amenities are an established part of the Central District. There are a broad range of land uses in the District including retail stores, business services, offices, housing, restaurants, and civic uses. Over the past two decades the Downtown has experienced a great deal of activity with the development of Port Clinton Square and most recently, Renaissance Place. National retailers have located in the Central District alongside local businesses.

For purposes of consistency in discussing the geography of the Central District, the terms “**Downtown**”, “**Pedestrian Commercial Core**”, and “**Surrounding Neighborhoods**” will be applied to sections of the Central District (see Figure 1). Current land uses in the Central District as of 2000 are shown on Figure 2, Existing Land Use. These sub-sections sections of the Central District are described below.

**Downtown:** includes the Pedestrian Commercial Core, convenience commercial areas currently zoned B4, institutional uses (the Karger Center, the post office, City Hall and the Highland Park Public Library) and multiple family developments with mixed use potential (areas zoned RO). The Central District contains most of the major multi-family residential areas that have been the location of much development activity in recent years.

In addition to the specialized shopping opportunities in the Pedestrian Commercial Core, the Downtown provides a significant range of general convenience commercial activities. The local supermarket, located at the intersection of Green Bay Road and Central Avenue, is a Highland Park institution serving the needs of neighborhoods surrounding the downtown and loyal customers who travel relatively long distances to shop there. Other businesses, such as dry cleaners, hair salons, florists, gift shops, clothing, and automotive service establishments, also occupy the Downtown.

The Downtown provides easy access to Metra commuter rail service and the St. Johns Avenue train station offers Highland Park residents service from the Central District to downtown Chicago. Within the Downtown many significant civic institutions are found including the Karger Recreational Center, the Firehouse youth activity center, and the water tower. Adjacent to City Hall and the public library is Memorial Park, which provides a beautiful passive area in the downtown.

There are also a number of public and quasi-public areas in the downtown. Highland Park City Hall and the library are located east of the Metra railroad right-of-way at Laurel Avenue. Immaculate Conception Parish has a church rectory and social hall located along Deerfield Road.

**Pedestrian Commercial Core:** includes the predominance of the District's retail and office activities and is composed of the areas of the District currently zoned B5. Generally, the Pedestrian Commercial Core

extends from Laurel Avenue on the south to Elm Place on the north, Green Bay Road on the west and Linden Avenue on the east. The Pedestrian Commercial Core has been the focus of the City's intensive efforts to enhance the streetscape in the Downtown. The PCC is the venue of most civic and community functions throughout the year.

**Surrounding Neighborhoods:** include multiple and single family dwellings; institutional uses (Highland Park Hospital; Highland Park High School, Elm Place and Indian Trail schools, etc.) and parks and other open spaces (Sunset Woods Park and Exmoor Country Club).

The area located in the triangle bounded by Vine Avenue, Green Bay Road, and Exmoor Avenue consists of single-family and two-family homes. Also experiencing redevelopment pressure is the area located west of Sunset Woods Park. Residential areas east of the downtown are considered to be a part of the Lakefront District, which contains large, single-family homes on large lots. There is a concentration of other places of worship located in the Memorial Park area, in the vicinity of Laurel and Linden Avenues.

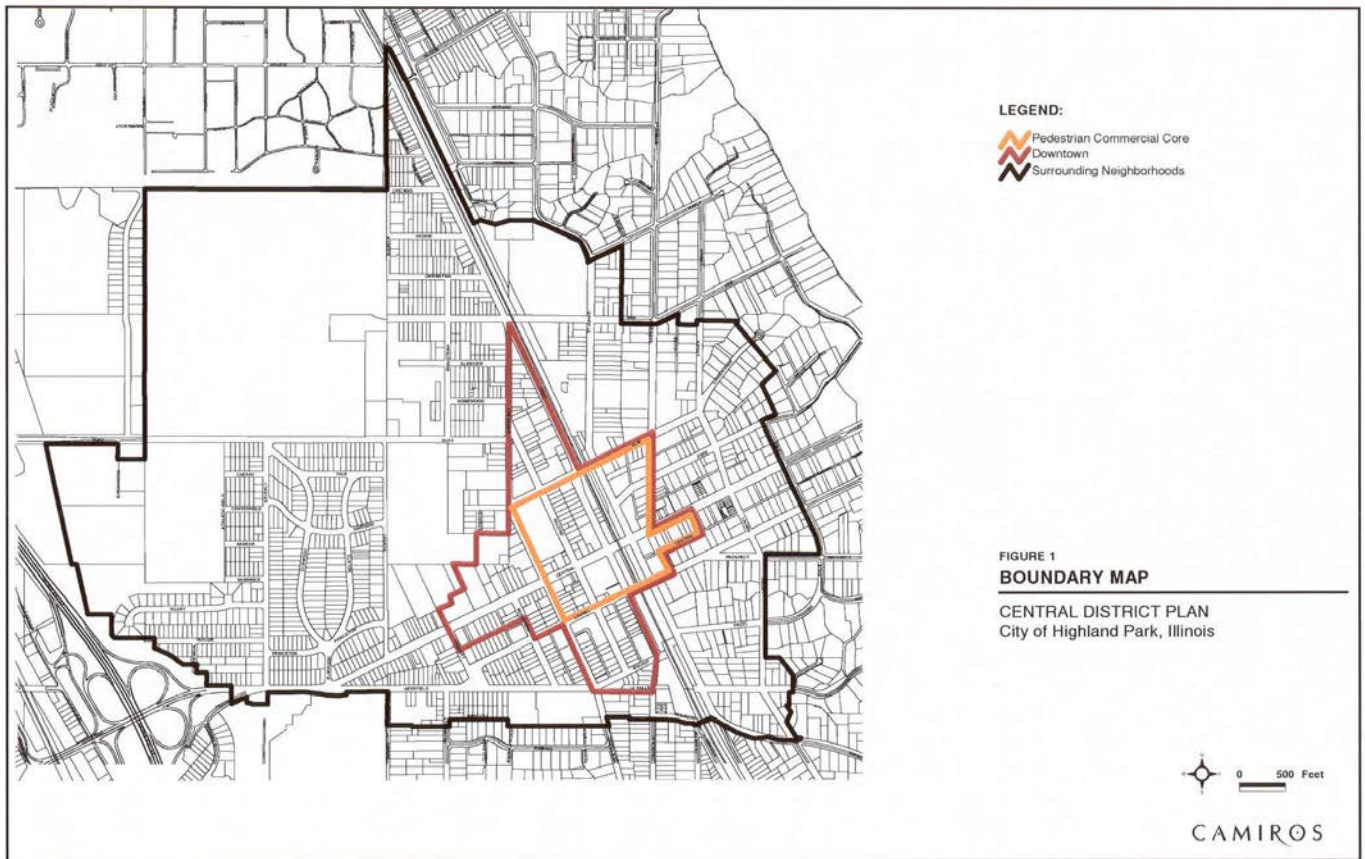
Park and recreational facilities are located throughout the Surrounding Neighborhoods. The major facility is Sunset Woods Park owned and maintained by the Park District of Highland Park. This thirty-eight acre multi-purpose park contains a baseball diamond, soccer/football playing fields, skate park, tennis courts and playground equipment as well as passive areas for sitting and picnicking. As much as any park in Highland Park, Sunset Woods Park is considered the "community park" centrally located to serve all Highland Park residents. The Central District is also home to Laurel Park, a 1.5 acre passive park.

There are three public schools in the Surrounding Neighborhoods: Highland Park High School, Elm Place Middle School and Indian Trail Elementary School. All are located east of the Metra railroad tracks in the northeastern part of the district. The high school stadium-type athletic fields are located in the western portion of the Central District, south of West Park Avenue.

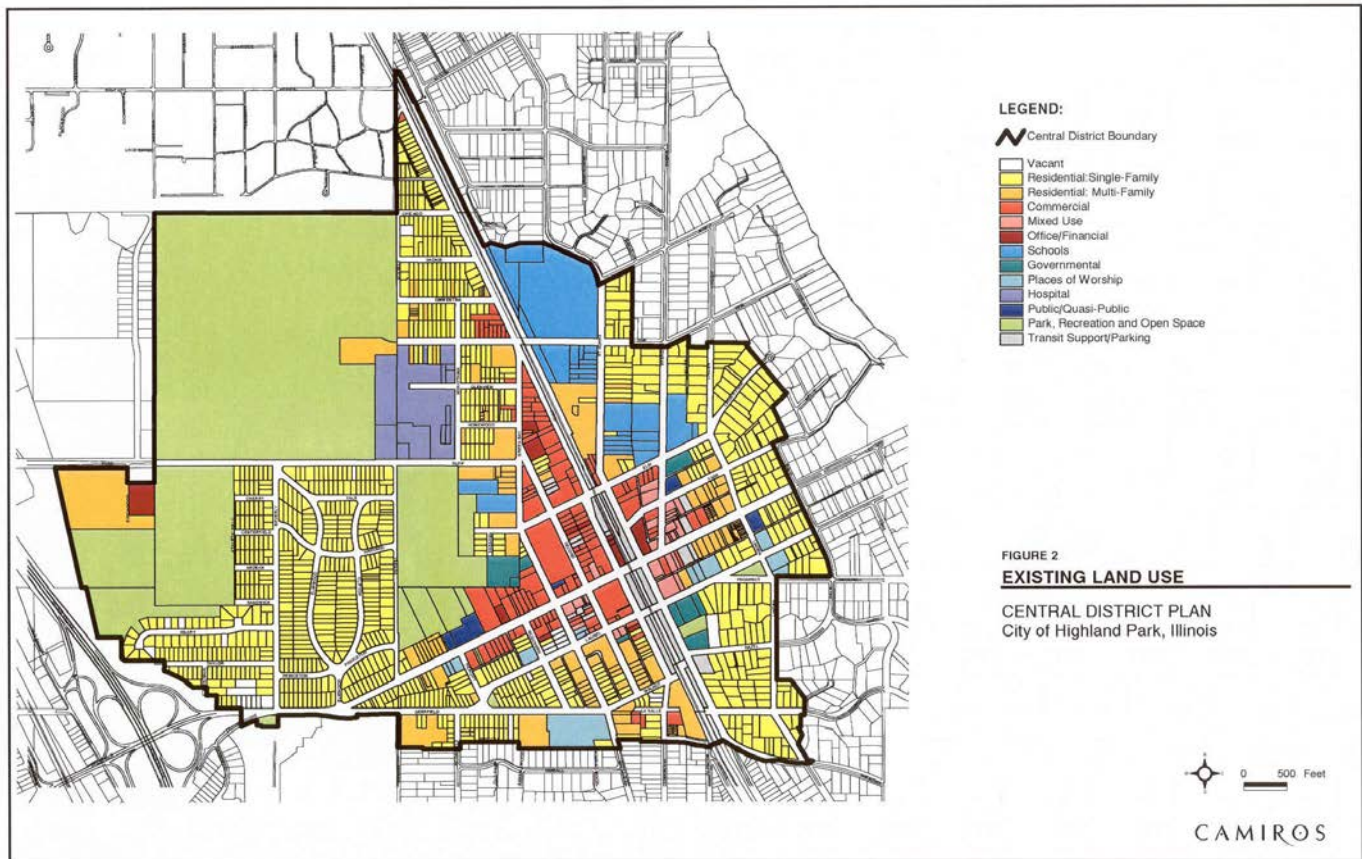
With the exception of the 148-acre private Exmoor Country Club, which is within the boundaries of the Central District, the largest single owner of land is Highland Park Hospital. The hospital is an acute care facility located north of West Park Avenue and west of Green Bay Road. The hospital offers a wide variety of outpatient services and is a member of a regional network of leading Chicago hospitals affiliated with the Northwestern University Medical School. Like many other major hospitals across the country that started out as community hospitals, Highland Park Hospital is evolving into a regional medical service complex delivering advanced medical services.

The street pattern of the Central District is a traditional Midwestern grid that is rotated to be parallel to the train tracks and perpendicular to Lake Michigan. Block sizes in the grid vary widely with very few blocks having the same dimensions. Street rights-of-way are generally 80 feet wide, with the exception of major thoroughfares, such as Central Avenue, which is approximately 100 feet wide. Central District transportation issues have been addressed in a recently completed Downtown Traffic Study (1999). According to the study, traffic congestion and circulation issues are a primary concern in the Central District.

**FIGURE 1: BOUNDARY MAP**



**FIGURE 2: EXISTING LAND USE MAP**



## 1.1 RECENT TRENDS

An understanding of recent trends helps provide direction as to the location and extent of growth in an area. The extent and type of growth is a measure of the attractiveness of the community.

Like most communities, Highland Park has experienced spurts of growth and development separated by periods of relative inactivity. Significant redevelopment activity requires the right combination of a strong economy, a supportive regulatory environment and market demand. These characteristics have coincided in the Central District in recent years as evidenced by the strength of residential condominium development activity, and the major commercial investments that have taken place throughout the Central District, most recently expressed by the development of Renaissance Place, a major retail/mixed use project on the block bounded by Green Bay Road, Central Avenue, Second Street and Elm Place.

During the last twenty years, the Central District, and more specifically the Pedestrian Commercial Core, has withstood substantial changes and challenges, including development of regional shopping malls, the burgeoning Skokie Valley Corridor business concentration, and the changes in the retail industry, such as the trend toward large multi-purpose retail stores. Other challenges in the Central District include the potential acceleration of “teardowns” of single-family residences; replacement of older, modest, dwellings with higher density and higher cost housing; construction of new buildings in new styles; and expansion of the Highland Park Hospital campus.

The result of this activity and the historic development of the City’s Central District have created a fully developed, thriving, multi-purpose sector of the City. With it has come intensification of the Downtown, increased traffic, and a loss of the more affordable housing stock. However, the Downtown still exhibits a wide variety of land uses, development intensities, style and character. Many areas are representative of the traditions and the historic development of Highland Park. Other areas reflect contemporary development, shopping and living style.

Existing buildings have been adapted to new uses offering a wide range of goods and services. Boutiques and restaurants attract significant numbers of customers and vacancy rates are low. Business in the Pedestrian Commercial Core is good as Highland Park enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has achieved a level of success sought by traditional downtowns across the country. The Central District is a place to pursue a myriad of activities. Highland Park residents and others use the Downtown to shop, transact business, take care of their health, meet friends, dine, enjoy entertainment, be involved in their government, recreate, socialize and many other things. It has become what most would agree is a very pleasant, active and dynamic place to carry out these activities. Nevertheless there are challenging issues to resolve, including how best to accommodate future growth and redevelopment.

Development and redevelopment opportunities still remain in the Central District. Many areas immediately behind or off the main streets (Central Avenue, Green Bay Road and Sheridan Road/St Johns Avenue) reflect economic obsolescence and are underutilized given the market strength of the Central District as a whole. Market forces will continue to propel development concepts forward. It is the challenge of this Plan to establish sound policies that garner community support to manage redevelopment challenges that change over the coming decade.

### **1.1.1 RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT.**

Residential demand citywide, including in the Surrounding Neighborhoods of the Central District has begun to prompt the redevelopment phenomena known as “teardowns.” In these instances, existing homes, usually constructed before the 1960s, are demolished in favor of much larger and more expensive homes. Too often, these larger homes appear out-of-scale with surrounding homes in the immediate area and create a disharmonious mismatch within the host neighborhood. The community also experiences a simultaneous loss in its supply of affordable housing as older, smaller, more affordable homes become scarcer. This process occurs when a very large and expensive house replaces a more modest, yet perfectly sound, dwelling.

There is a substantial demand for multiple-family housing in the Central District. In recent years, the areas surrounding the Pedestrian Commercial Core, have experienced significant new construction; hundreds of new condominium units have been constructed in the Central District. Others are being added to this very popular Central District housing stock. For the most part, these developments are replacing modest single-family housing that has been zoned for redevelopment for many years. In some cases though, housing units torn down were converted single-family homes that contained multiple dwellings and offered some of the most affordable rental housing in the City. The majority of such recent construction and pending development is occurring in the southern part of the Central District within a few blocks of the Metra commuter rail station.

The overall urban design impact has been significant as condominium structures replace rows of older frame cottages at significantly higher densities. The targeted market for this condominium housing development is the upscale price range with units selling from the \$300,000’s and up in the year 2000. This higher density development is permitted in the long established RM2 and RO zoning districts at densities of 30 to 50 units per acre. These zoning districts skirt the Pedestrian Commercial Core.

### **1.1.2 COMMERCIAL AND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT.**

Commercial development has also intensified in the Central District with the construction of a number of projects. The impetus for the resurgence and intensification of the Pedestrian Commercial Core originally came from the forward thinking planning strategies of the 1970’s and subsequent construction of Port Clinton Square. This mixed-use development, built in 1984, contains first floor and aboveground retail and office uses with underground parking. Subsequent projects included the renovation of the North Shore Building on the northwest corner of Central Avenue and Sheridan Road, another renovation on the southwest corner of Central Avenue and Second Street and a new development containing street level commercial space and upper level residential units at the northeast corner of Central Avenue and Sheridan Road.

The newest and largest redevelopment project is Renaissance Place (opened in 2000), bounded by Green Bay Road, Central Avenue, Second Street and Elm Place. This four story, mixed-use project, of 200,000 square feet, contains a department store, streetfront retail, a fine arts motion picture theater, restaurants, 40,000 square feet of office space, 32 apartments and underground public parking to accommodate over 500 vehicles. It represents a major addition to the Central District and should function as a commercial anchor for many years to come.

In recent years, the Central District, and more specifically the Downtown, has withstood substantial change and challenges: development of regional shopping malls, the burgeoning Skokie Valley Corridor business concentration, and the changes in the retail industry. These commercial trends reflect powerful economic forces and validate past development and redevelopment policies for the Central District. The major changes resulting from development have caused consternation with some community residents. This is not unexpected and, indeed, is predictable where residents feel as strongly about their community as Highland Parkers do. Further change is inevitable and the process of community-based planning for the Central District is the positive response to the community interest caused by so much change at one time. With open planning processes, specific themes, strategies, and Plan policies can be reviewed, reconfirmed, refined, or replaced. In the planning context, updating the City's policies seeks the proper balance between conservation and development, the balance between the need to make adjustments in land use and urban design to reflect current economic realities, and maintaining desirable traditional places with a character that gives physical dimension to our heritage. While it no longer serves as the retail center of southern Lake County, the Central District remains a most important part of the City and region - physically, economically and emotionally. It is the downtown that perhaps best embodies the continuity and stability that make Highland Park a unique place.

## **2 A VISION FOR THE FUTURE**

The Central District, as the center of community life in Highland Park, is more important now than ever before. It embodies the distinctiveness and complexity of Highland Park and its residents. Always unique physically, socially, politically, and in terms of leadership, Highland Park remains a model of an advanced suburban community. The Central District Plan emphasizes achievable results but it also contains concepts that challenge the community to reach higher. It presents a realistic path for change and improvement that will move Highland Park into the 21st Century. The concepts build on a realistic assessment of present conditions, strengths and opportunities.

The Vision Statement and Illustrative Concept presented in this Chapter provide a framework for continued public and private investment in the Central District. The planning concepts are designed to guide this investment.

The Vision Statement is designed to provide a theme for these planning policies and concepts. The Central District vision looks to the future with one eye on the best of the past and the other on the realities of the present. The vision reflects the shared goals of residents, business owners, and property owners and acknowledges the role of the Central District and its Downtown within Highland Park. It serves to achieve consensus on the directions of change and states the basic commitments that residents want from their elected officials for this important sector of their community. The vision is further clarified through a series of objectives for conserving what residents want to retain as well as planning and managing future change throughout the Central District. These objectives guide specific recommendations about what should be done in the Central District.



## A VISION FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT

*Highland Park's Central District is the actual and symbolic center of the City and the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The Central District is intended to be the most urban district of our suburban city. It functions as a small, well-contained urban village. As such, it is relatively intensely developed and thereby has the ability to function as a pedestrian district. It is the location for business, medical, government and retail activities, and is also a place to live. It is also the center of public life in Highland Park with festivals, parades and a range of other public events. The downtown section of the Central District is unique within the North Shore and different from the rest of the City - it is more compact, more uniform, yet has a variety of architectural styles and is more intense. These assets must not only be protected but also renewed, so that they continue to provide the foundation of civic life for generations to come.*

## **2.1 OBJECTIVES**

The attainment of the *Vision for the Central District* is not the sole responsibility of government. The Central District is a complex area with multiple owners, users and supporters, each with their own goals and needs. All these parties need to work together in a coordinated manner if the area is to move in the direction of the Vision. Such direction needs to be reflected in the investment, business location and community support of businesses, and in the personal shopping, entertainment choices and civic spirit of its citizens. It also has to be reflected in the capital improvement and regulatory policies of the City. To do this, all parties - citizens, business, and government - must make sure their actions or policies support the following five specific Central District objectives:

1. Support and Increase the Overall Role and Structure of the Central District as the City's Center
2. Protect the Substantial Public and Private Investment in the Central District
3. Integrate Residential Living Opportunities in the Downtown Core and throughout the Central District
4. Make the Downtown Everyone's Neighborhood
5. Manage an Appropriate Balance Between Conservation of Existing Character and Judicious Expansion of Key Economic Sectors

### **2.1.1 SUPPORT AND INCREASE THE OVERALL ROLE AND STRUCTURE OF THE CENTRAL DISTRICT AS THE CITY'S CENTER**

The Central District serves many specific roles. It is an employment center, a shopping center, an entertainment area and a government center. It also contains a number of residential neighborhoods. Finally, the transportation network of streets and sidewalks connects the various functional areas in the Central District, and connects the district to the rest of Highland Park and the region.

The Downtown's scale of activity provides a distinctive civic destination. Buildings are more compact and more vertical. Walking is accentuated as buildings and activities abut one another. Office, government, shopping and entertainment are present, creating a mix of uses. The Pedestrian Commercial Core is an "urban village" and provides a physical environment and character that is distinct from other suburban locations. This central gathering place role brings people together on common ground. The Central District contains a mix of activities that appeal to, and involve, in one form or another, all residents of Highland Park and many from the larger region. Beyond the Central District, uses and activities are increasingly compartmentalized into homogenous groupings. The Central District strongly supports a sense of place, the integration of uses, and the vibrant interaction of people. This is what makes the Central District unique in Highland Park. It needs continued stewardship augmented through future public and private support.

### **2.1.2 PROTECT THE SUBSTANTIAL PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT**

Highland Park has too much at stake to allow any hint of decline in its Downtown. The Downtown and the Pedestrian Commercial Core comprise only a small percent of the City's area, but they represent a much larger percentage of the tax base. The largest, non-industrial private investments in Highland Park have been made in the Downtown. The largest non-transportation, public investments are located in the Downtown. The tax base of the Downtown has, for many decades, helped fund the extension of City services and facilities to outlying neighborhoods.

Beyond public finance issues, the Downtown is an irreplaceable asset to the community. It is not possible to recreate the mixture of historic and new structures, the density of activity, the central location, and the range of uses elsewhere in Highland Park at a comparable cost.

### **2.1.3 INTEGRATE RESIDENTIAL LIVING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DOWNTOWN AND THROUGHOUT THE CENTRAL DISTRICT**

Improving pedestrian connections between the Downtown and the Surrounding Neighborhoods will benefit the Pedestrian Commercial Core. Residents in the areas around the Downtown should have easy access to the shops, restaurants, employment and services contained there to support its vitality. The strategy is to draw existing neighborhoods closer to the Downtown and create links by encouraging new housing opportunities. Residential use also has a place within the Downtown as can be seen by the success of the recent condominium developments. Similarly Highland Park Hospital should be better connected to Downtown through enhanced pedestrian links. The hospital brings patients, visitors and employees into the Central District, yet it is not viewed as being part of the Downtown. An opportunity exists to make more of a visual connection and to improve the access between the hospital and the downtown core.

### **2.1.4 MAKE DOWNTOWN EVERYONE'S NEIGHBORHOOD**

The Downtown should welcome all residents of the City as well as visitors from the region. It should offer all season activities that appeal to a cross-section of the population so the experience of being there becomes a shared and unifying element in Highland Park. Everyone should have a vested interest in the vitality of the Downtown as the center of the City and an asset to the community and the region. It is the best place in the community for citizens to come together for diverse activities and interaction.

### **2.1.5 MANAGE AN APPROPRIATE BALANCE BETWEEN CONSERVATION OF EXISTING CHARACTER AND JUDICIOUS EXPANSION OF KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS**

The Central District, like any part of the City, needs continual reinvestment to maintain its functions and value. Most investment must come from the private sector owners of Central District property. Public funds may be used to spur private investment, but the ultimate success of the Central District and its Pedestrian Commercial Core hinges on sustaining private sector investments in the form of both redevelopment and adaptive reuse or updating of existing buildings. Substantial new development is possible in the Central District based on land use and zoning policies recommended in this Plan. Over time it will be market demand in these key economic sector that will trigger further investment and redevelopment. While expansion has been occurring at a rigorous pace during the last half of the 1990s, proving significant as yet unmet market demand for commercial and residential development must take place before new rounds of

major expansion will take place. However, it is inevitable that additional development and redevelopment will take place in the future whatever the timing and the pace with which it will be realized. This provides the community with the opportunity to set policies to manage future investment in terms of scale, building height, location, architectural character and to move toward a vision that best serves residents of the community. The most critical area in need of continuous stewardship is the Pedestrian Commercial Core of the Central District - the area bounded by Water Tower Boulevard, Elm Place, Laurel Avenue and Linden Avenue.

## **2.2 PEDESTRIAN COMMERCIAL CORE ILLUSTRATIVE CONCEPT**

Part of the vision for the future expressed by this Central District Plan is presented as an Illustrative Concept for public and private investment of redevelopment in the Pedestrian Commercial Core. This concept is shown in Figure 3: Illustrative Concept. The Illustrative Concept presents one reasoned example of what might result from the Plan Commission, City Council and private sector owners, investors and developers using this Plan as a guide in making planning and development decisions over time. The Illustrative Concept presents a look at what might be if the policies embodied in this Plan are followed. It is, however, only illustrative - showing but one of many possible outcomes. What actually occurs will be the result of many choices by individual property owners, deliberations by the Plan Commission, and decisions by City Council as they apply the precepts and policies of this Plan to future opportunities and events that arise during the life of this Plan.

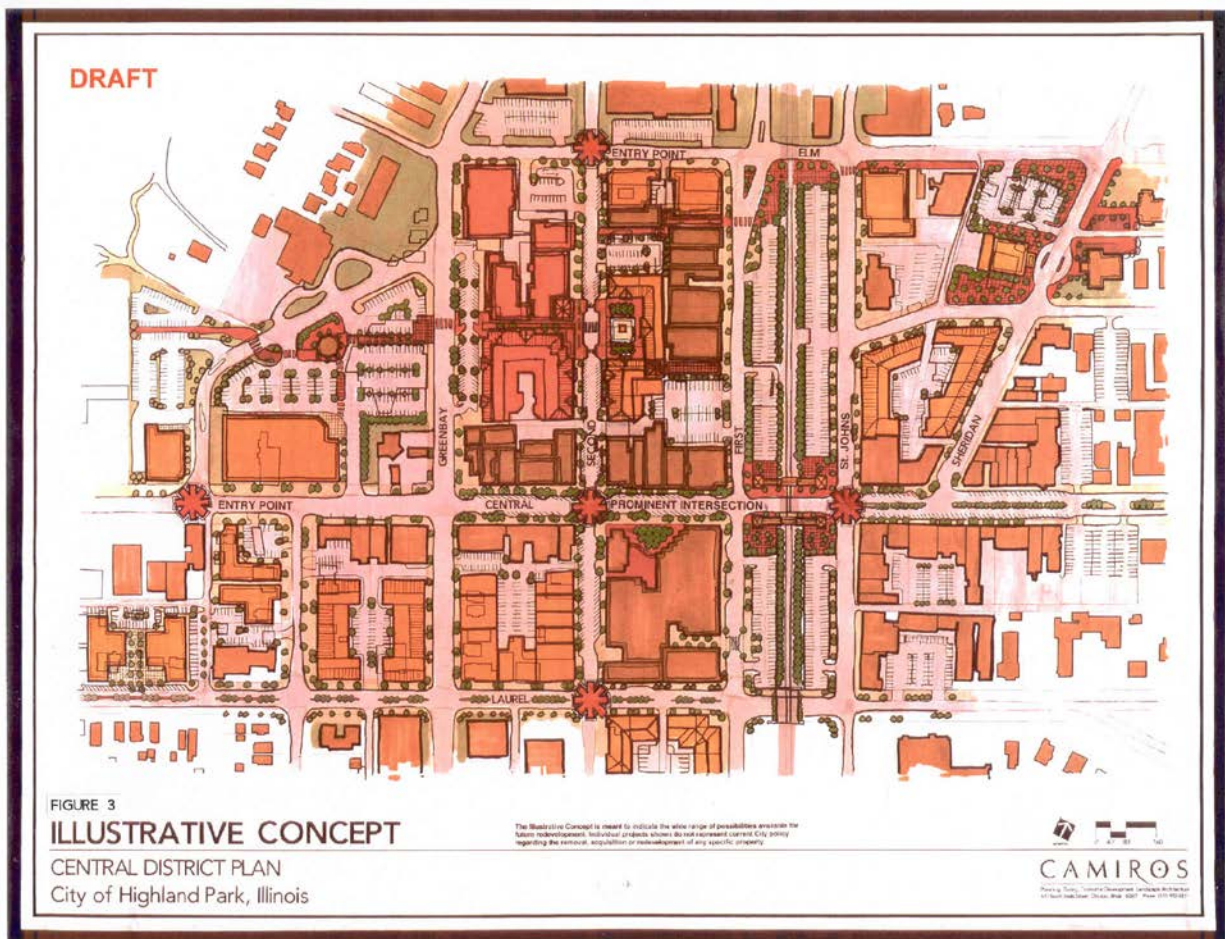
The Illustrative Concept highlights nine formative strategies for the Pedestrian Commercial Core. They are:

1. Containment and embellishment of the pedestrian retail and office core between Green Bay Road, Laurel Avenue, Elm Place and the half block west of Linden Avenue on the east.
2. Redevelopment of convenience commercial uses along Central Avenue, immediately west of Green Bay Road and fronting on Elm Place immediately north of the Pedestrian Commercial Core.
3. Redevelopment of the First Street, Green Bay Road and Elm Place triangle north of Elm Place.
4. Conservation of the character and scale of the area east of the Metra railroad tracks and the storefronts along Central Avenue, east of Green Bay Road, while permitting judicious, improvements and investment in these character setting areas.
5. Improvement of the Second Street corridor from its intersection with West Park Avenue to Laurel Avenue. Addition of condominium development within the Pedestrian Commercial Core above stores and offices.
6. Preservation of valued housing stock and neighborhood character.
7. Development of selected sites in and around the downtown core for mixed-use and residential uses.
8. Completion of the Central District circulation system with the construction of Water Tower Boulevard between Green Bay Road and Central Avenue.

9. Creation of new areas of open space and “vest pocket” parks throughout the downtown core.

Maintenance of scale appropriate to the community’s character and the inclusion of coordinated pedestrian enhancements are the main elements that require public scrutiny as redevelopment occurs over time. Both elements will work to attract residents and visitors alike to the Pedestrian Commercial Core, keeping it vital and productive for property owners, storeowners and the municipal coffers. The provision of convenient off-street parking will be a subject of particular concern for further redevelopment to occur in a positive manner. The City should continue to monitor parking needs in the Central District and particularly in the pedestrian commercial core. Public participation in the provision of off-street parking should be an option to consider as proposals come forward. Public investment in deserving projects may be a prerequisite to core area redevelopment and the best way to control the nature of such redevelopment.

**FIGURE 3: ILLUSTRATIVE CONCEPT**



### 3 PLAN POLICIES

While the Plan's vision statement, objectives and Illustrative Concept for the Pedestrian Commercial Core provide a look at the possible outcomes that could be realized, it is the policies that are the heart of the Central District Plan. These policies are intended to guide land use decisions, urban design principles and standards, conservation and development initiatives, public infrastructure and quality-of-life investments. The policies address land use, urban design, parks/open space, traffic circulation, and parking. These policies are meant to be fairly specific but interpreted in a flexible manner to allow for adjustments and alterations to remain realistic over time.

The Plan policies are general rules that are subject to interpretation. They are meant to inform and provide direction to City officials as they make planning-related decisions over the next decade. Because they are so important, they are highlighted in each section of this Chapter.

Plan policies are presented in both mapped and written form; mapped and text policies are to be used together. Maps help to present and explain physical aspects of certain policies. But they can often be misunderstood with regard to the hard limits that define where designation and concepts start and stop. Plans do not function well over the long run if they are seen as too rigid. The Plan will be most useful if used as a guide to assist the deliberations and creative thinking of the Plan Commission and City Council when individual decisions are before them.

The specificity in the description of the policies, especially in the drawings and illustrative renderings, are for the purpose of describing the intent of the policies. These policies are intended to guide decisions made by the Plan Commission and the City Council when the opportunity for implementation of various aspects of the Plan arise. Flexibility in how these policies are achieved is inherent. Private sector initiatives will play a big role in the achievement of the Plan policies. Consequently, interpretation of the Plan policies must allow for feasible development projects that meet the basic intent of the policies within the context of economic reality.

Five sets of interrelated policies, set forth in the following sections, make up the Central District Plan. They are:

1. Land Use Policies
2. Urban Design Policies
3. Zoning Policies
4. Residential Conservation Policies
5. Traffic and Pedestrian Circulation Policies

These policy areas work together to make the Central District Plan comprehensive in scope, and functional in application and operational characteristics.

***Land use policies*** are the driving force and the key to the other policies. ***Urban design policies*** can be thought of as the preferred way to carry out the land use policies. ***Zoning policies*** set the rules for both use and design. Zoning policies determine where specific land uses are located and state many of the standards

that determine basic design elements. The *residential conservation policies* acknowledge that the Central District contains buildings that embody the history and character that many residents cherish and desire to see retained. Some of these highly valued buildings and neighborhoods are under pressure to redevelop as a result of economic prosperity and current zoning. Neighborhood residents or the community-at-large do not necessarily welcome all of this redevelopment. These policies, to conserve aspects of the Central District neighborhood and housing character, address multiple objectives: preserving historic homes, maintaining neighborhood character and uniformity, and retaining relatively affordable housing in the Central District. Finally, *traffic and pedestrian circulation policies* promote connecting land uses in the District, to other parts of Highland Park and the broader region.

The policies balance the community's values for the Central District, the rights of private property owners, and City responsibility to provide quality services, throughout the district.

### 3.1 FUTURE LAND USE

Table 1: Characteristics of Central District Land Uses, provides a quick summary of the future land uses in the Central District. The categories reflect the overall land use and circulation pattern of the Central District and set the stage for future changes in land use and in public improvements necessary to accommodate change. While an important aspect of the Central District's character is that uses may be mixed together rather than separated, designation of identifiable areas can provide guidance for key investments and organize major uses in the most practical and beneficial manner.



**TABLE 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF CENTRAL DISTRICT LAND USES**

<b>Residential Uses</b>	
Single-Family	A freestanding detached house that occupies its own lot. Densities range from 3 to 6 units per acre.
Townhouse	These are single-family attached homes with private parking courts and/or pedestrian courtyards. Densities range from 8 to 10 units per acre.
Multi-Family: Low	These are dwelling units that are attached with common, or “party,” walls or in 2-3 story structures with no elevator. Densities range from 8 to 15 units per acre. Parking is accommodated on-site in surface lots or garages.
Multi-Family: High	A multi-family unit is one contained within a single building that clearly houses several units. In most instances 4 to 5 stories. Densities range from 15 to 50 units per acre and parking is accommodated on-site in surface lots or underground structures.
<b>Commercial Uses</b>	
Commercial: Retail Core	This is the heart of the downtown where the most intensive retail activity occurs. Development is pedestrian-oriented with storefront retail typically built to the lot line, office and housing on upper floors, and parking on-street or in off-street parking lots.
Mixed-Use; High Density & Low Density	Retail and office uses are located on the first floor with offices and housing above. Parking would be provided on-site and construction would be permitted to the limits of lot line. Development is pedestrian-oriented.
Commercial: Community Retail/Office	Retail and service uses that serve the needs of surrounding neighborhoods and City residents. Businesses would provide customer parking on-site.
Hospital	Hospitals, clinics, medical offices, laboratories and other uses, directly and indirectly, related to medical use.
<b>Public and Quasi-Public Uses</b>	
Park and Recreation	Active or passive outdoor and indoor recreation facilities that are either publicly or privately owned.
Schools	Public and private elementary and secondary schools.
Public and Quasi-Public	Local, state and federal governmental functions, museums, libraries and places of worship
Transit Support/Parking	Activities supporting the commercial and commuter rail function with parking and passenger pick-up areas.

### **3.1.1 THE FUTURE LAND USE POLICY PLAN**

The Land Use Policy Plan provides a framework for the management of development and redevelopment. Such development takes place as a result of many factors and is usually influenced by a number of entities, each with independent agendas. Illinois municipalities are authorized to regulate land use within their municipal limits through zoning. Municipalities are further encouraged to regularly undertake a comprehensive planning process to assure that zoning regulations reflect community values, market conditions and the rights of private property owners.

This Plan divides the Central District into a number of distinctive land use categories (see Figure 4, Future Land Use Policy Plan). These areas have been defined and planned through the analysis, and integration, of a number of factors. The historical functional context of any given area, the existing use of land and existing zoning designations are critical factors in previously built up areas such as the Central District.

Equally important are the conditions of the structures and the economic utilization of the lots that these structures occupy. This constitutes the opportunity factor in planning the future. Relative strength of the market, as it exists at present and as anticipated in the future, tempers the Plan with reality. Accessibility and location relative to points and corridors of access and to off-street parking in relation to these market factors are also an extremely important consideration in future land use planning. Finally, the community's values and desires for the character and future functioning of the Central District inform the planners how each of the other factors are to be integrated into the Future Land Use Policy Plan.

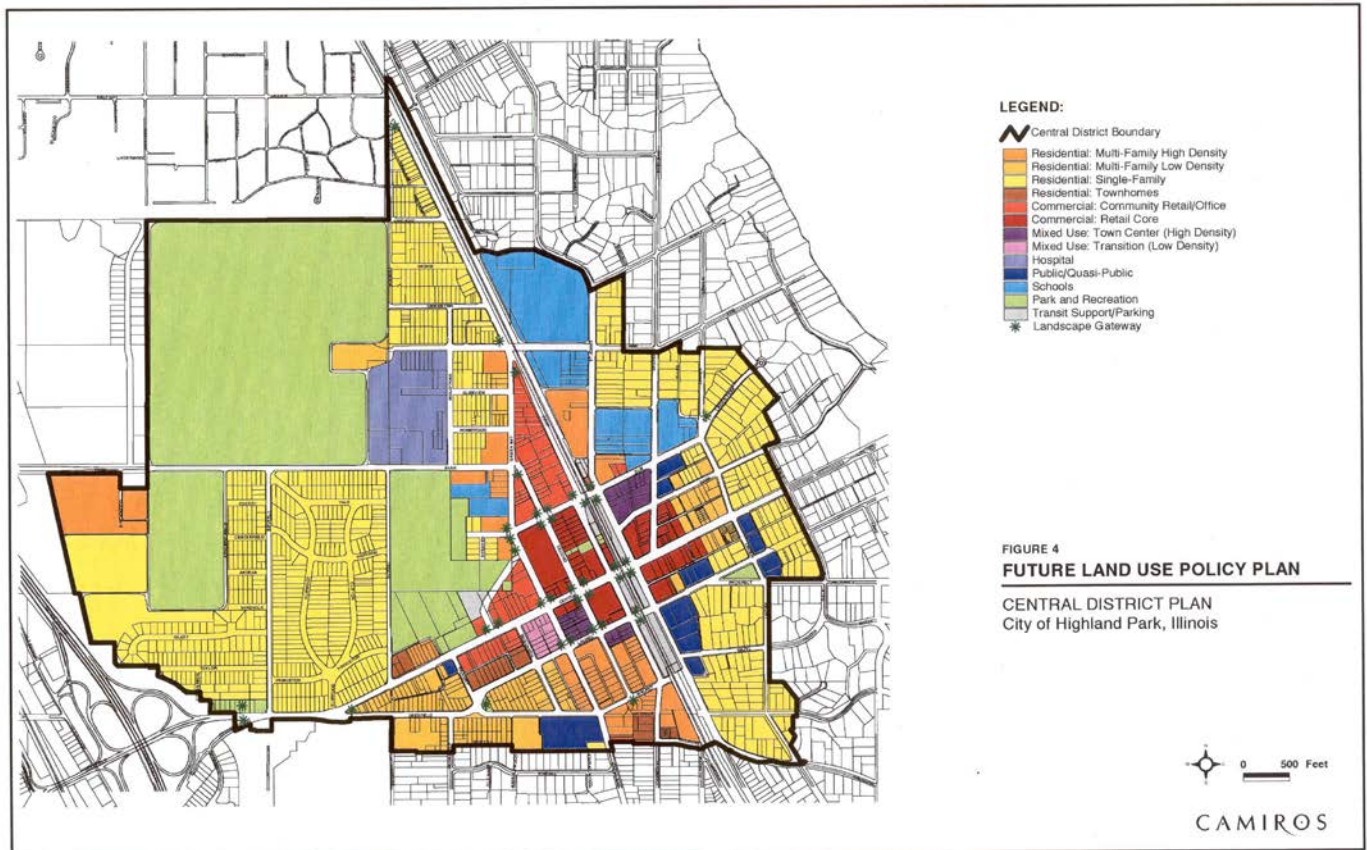
The Future Land Use Policy Plan divides the Central District into discrete sub-areas by major function and primary land use activity. The residential areas are intended to be almost exclusively for housing, but some districts in the Downtown contain a sprinkling of other uses.

The Future Land Use Policy Plan sets forth the land use types and their arrangement, and will serve as the basis for zoning regulations and private and public investments that are essential elements of any Plan. The Central District Plan addresses the achievement of the vision and its objectives through a series of Plan policies that have both physical and programmatic implications. In other words, the Future Land Use Policy Plan presents a formal and official framework for the organization of land use activities. This framework is structured to accommodate the community's vision and core objectives for the Central District by providing a physical framework to describe how the vision and objectives can be translated into future development projects.

***The Future Land Use Policy Plan is based on the following policies for land use in the Central District.***

- Strengthen and support the Surrounding Residential Neighborhoods, including creating appropriate adjacent land uses as buffers, providing needed capital improvements, slowing vehicular traffic, where needed, using traffic calming strategies, and preserving the character of the neighborhoods through new regulations or design guidelines.

## FIGURE 4: FUTURE LAND USE POLICY PLAN



- Emphasize shopper convenience. Consumer research has indicated that the concept of a unique theme for retail shopping areas may be waning in favor of the need for experience convenience and efficiency. The ever increasing demands on household time places a premium on efficiency. The faster consumers can make a purchase, the more satisfied they are.
- The emphasis on convenience will not diminish the importance of the pedestrian in the core retail and office area. Pedestrian amenities and safety provisions are recommended for the entire core area with special emphasis on Central Avenue and Second Street.
- Recognize the importance of maintaining a link with the past by incorporating as many existing buildings as possible in the concept. However, there is some functional obsolescence and underutilization that creates opportunities for future investment and redevelopment in the Central District.

Future land use policies of the individual land use categories that make up the Plan map are set forth below.

### **3.1.2 RESIDENTIAL LAND USE**

There are four types of residential land uses proposed for the Central District. Increased multiple family residential use in the Downtown will add to the round-the-clock vitality of the Pedestrian Commercial Core, expand the consumer base, and help consolidate the Downtown area by occupying underutilized or vacant. Most residential activity is the result of redevelopment of single-family homes. Commercial use in areas zoned residential is generally limited to some existing non-conforming uses that cannot be expanded or significantly modified.

The Central District's residential neighborhoods contain a variety of housing types and economic character. Each type of residential use tends to be oriented towards a particular lifestyle. There are historic single-family residences, considered by many to be architectural "treasures," that date from the City's beginnings. Fine, upscale homes grace the eastern edge of the Central District. Large and small subdivisions contribute to the varied housing resources of the Central District. There are areas of modest single-family housing, walk-up and garden apartments. Townhouses and duplexes can be found mixed into the single-family areas of some of the more diverse Central District neighborhoods. The residential housing types are described below.

#### *SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL*

A single-family detached house is a freestanding structure that occupies its own lot. Lots in conventional subdivisions are usually square or rectangular but may vary, and range in size from 7,200 to 12,000 square feet as a minimum requirement of the Zoning Ordinance. Densities range from three to six units per acre. Setbacks are prescribed for front yards, side yards and rear yards. In the past two decades rising land costs and an overall scarcity of developable land in many highly desirable markets, such as Highland Park, have reduced the size of the typical single-family lot. Pressure to build increasingly large homes on lots that result from resubdivisions and teardowns is also a growing trend in such areas.

Single-family residential land uses within the Central District are regulated under the City's R5, R6 and R7 (one and two family units permitted) zoning districts. The existing zoning pattern has done a good job of

protecting the single-family residential portions of the Central District from encroachment of multiple-family or non-residential land uses. However, market forces have begun to exert redevelopment pressure on certain areas such as the Sunset Woods neighborhood. Other neighborhoods that contain a predominant pattern of single-family housing are now zoned in multiple-family zoning categories. Rezoning these areas to one of the single-family zoning districts can conserve the existing residential character found there. Selected rezoning and strengthening the residential zoning bulk controls can support the City's objective of conserving these residential neighborhoods in the face of such pressures.

### ***Single-Family Residential Plan Policies***

- Continue to apply the R5 and R6 district zoning to single-family residential areas within the Central District utilizing the lowest density district consistent with existing development patterns.
- Apply the R7 single-family and two-family zoning district to areas that either currently have such zoning or that exhibit a mixed housing pattern, but one that is predominantly single-family in character and whose residents desire to maintain the present pattern of development.
- Only in the case of existing historical non-conforming commercial uses shall the single-family areas (those zoned R5, R6 and R7) accept commercial uses.
- Small areas of select historic homes adjacent to the Pedestrian Commercial Core, currently zoned in multiple-family districts, should be rezoned to appropriate single-family zoning districts to preserve these historic dwellings and the residential character of these areas.

### ***TOWNHOUSE RESIDENTIAL***

Townhouses are attached single-family houses contained within one structure where common party walls separate individual units. Typically, there are four to six units in a townhouse structure. Townhouse widths typically range from 22 to 32 feet. The overall density that can be achieved with a suburban townhouse project varies with natural site conditions, with the size of the units and building clusters, and with the requirements for parking. Townhouse densities typically range from eight to twelve units per acre, however, they can be built at higher densities in appropriate downtown settings.

Individual units are typically multiple stories although there is no restriction on single story townhouses. Highland Park does not have a separate zoning district exclusively for townhouses at this time. Townhouses have been developed within the multiple-family, low-density zoning district (RM1). Each unit has a private entrance on the exterior of the building and typically each house is a complete entity with its own utility connections. Although townhouses have no side yards, they can have front and rear yards. Most townhouse developments today are structured as condominiums. Townhouses can provide a number of benefits to a community's housing resources. They are an excellent housing option for smaller households and those who do not wish to do extensive home maintenance. They have the potential to be more affordable by

means of smaller square footage of the units and the minimal land area that individual townhouses occupy. In terms of land use arrangement, townhouses can act as harmonious buffers between single-family neighborhoods and more intensely developed commercial or multiple-family areas.

#### ***Land Use Policies Regarding Townhouse Residential Uses***

- Introduce a new zoning district exclusively for townhouses, with a density consistent with that found in the RM1 District, in order to provide an option to accommodate land use transitions and reserve a reasonable amount of land for this housing type.
- Provide for the conservation of existing townhouse developments within the recommended townhouse zoning district.

#### ***MULTIPLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL - LOW DENSITY***

The Future Land Use Policy Plan identifies a number of areas for low-density, multi-family housing. Such areas provide the potential for housing choice in the community. It offers a logical option for single and two-person households and for those who choose not to own, or choose not to live in, a freestanding single-family dwelling. Many of the existing units in the category happen to be the more affordable housing in the community and must be considered a valuable housing resource for that reason. By and large, these designated areas are located to act as a transition from non-residential. Downtown uses to single-family areas in the Surrounding Neighborhoods. Garden apartments also fall within the low-density, multi-family category. These structures are typically two or three stories, do not contain an elevator and, typically, have 10 or more units within a single building. Landscaping and parking are situated around the site and densities range from between 10 to 15 units per acre.

#### ***Land Use Policies Regarding Low density Multiple-family Residential Uses***

- Protect the existing housing resource of this type and density through the maintenance of current RM1 zoning where it now exists.
- Rezone areas currently zoned RM2 but developed as low-density multiple-family (predominantly on the east side of the Pedestrian Commercial Core) to RM1 to remove the possibility of future redevelopment at higher densities.

#### ***MULTIPLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL - HIGH DENSITY***

High density, multiple-family housing is another type of housing design found within the Central District. High density, multiple-family buildings can be categorized into two basic types based on the size and height

of the buildings: mid-rise and high-rise. Buildings over eight floors can be classified as a high-rise. There are no high-rise structures in Highland Park and the zoning regulations continue to prohibit buildings of this height. No high-rise residential buildings are anticipated by this Plan. Buildings less than eight floors are considered mid-rise structures. Mid-rise buildings are virtually always equipped with elevators.

In Highland Park, mid-rise multiple-family buildings are generally from three to four stories in height. Parking is provided in surface lots adjacent to the building or in underground spaces that are part of the structure. Densities range from 15 to 50 units per acre. High-density dwellings are built in free-standing structures and as part of mixed-use buildings. Apartments have long existed over stores in the commercial core. Very recently (spring of the year 2000), new rental units have come on the market above the Pedestrian Commercial Core's newest development – Renaissance Place. This major mixed use-development contains 32 dwelling units and will help reestablish the core as a place to live.

Numerous mid-rise, high-density multiple-family buildings have been built in the Central District in recent years. A large supply of such housing has been added to the existing supply that historically developed along St. Johns Avenue north of Elm Place. Table 2: Recent Residential Projects in the Central District, shows just how active this segment of the market has been of late. This type of development is responding to strong market demand reflecting the aging of the population and the desirability of Highland Park's Central District as a place to reside.

Table 2, below, illustrates the extent of recent condominium development.

**TABLE 2: RECENT RESIDENTIAL PROJECTS IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT – Year 2000**

PROJECT NAME	NUMBER OF UNITS
<b>Recent Developments</b>	
1869 Sheridan Road	8
Sheridan Square Condominium	24
Highland Park Place Condominiums	77
Laurel Hill Condominiums	19
Les Maisons Condominiums	36
Subtotal	164
<b>Pending Developments</b>	
Second Street Condominiums (under construction)	48
Green Bay Condominiums (under construction)	48
Grande Pointe Condominiums (under construction)	29
Renaissance Place	32
2000 Green Bay Road Condominiums (under construction)	61
Subtotal	218
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>382</b>

Source: City of Highland Park

As of the first quarter of 2001, there appears to be additional market demand for high-density, multiple-family development in the Central District. A number of areas north and south of the Pedestrian Commercial Core are prone to redevelopment as they are appropriately zoned for this type of development. However, each new high-density development removes other uses that may have less market support but have, nonetheless, important value to the community as transitions to single-family neighborhoods, as small independent businesses, and for the maintenance of affordable housing that is in short supply. A balance is needed to accommodate the demand for high-density housing and the other valued uses that are oftentimes in conflict with high-density residential development ventures. Encouraging high-density multiple-family development within the Downtown as part of mixed-use structures is one means of responding to market demand for such housing and reserving land in the surrounding neighborhoods for these other valued land uses.

***High-Density, Multiple-Family Residential Plan Policies***

- Encourage upper level residential development in the Pedestrian Commercial Core.



- Reduce the total amount of area zoned for high-density, multiple-family housing outside the Pedestrian Commercial Core.
- Lower the basic density in the various high-density developments in the range of 30 to 40 dwelling units per acre with adjustments for mixed-use applications.

### **3.1.3 COMMERCIAL LAND USE**

Convenience Retail, the Pedestrian Commercial Core and Town Center and Transition Mixed-Use categories. There is a clear distinction between the Pedestrian Commercial Core and Community Convenience Retail having to do with the accessibility of the customer or employee associated with the businesses in these districts. Pedestrian Commercial Core is primarily oriented toward the pedestrian shopper while the Community Convenience Retail activities tend more towards a vehicular environment. As a consequence, there are four categories of commercial use indicated for the Central District in the Downtown. These are the Community pedestrian-oriented retail concentrations thrive in a compact form within a comfortable walking environment with convenient parking nearby. The Community Convenience Retail activities can be more spread out where easy ingress and egress can be provided to accommodate automobile dependence. Mixed-use commercial activities are best located at the perimeter or abutting the Pedestrian Commercial Core and, as the name suggests, developments would be multiple story with the ground floor containing non-residential uses and the upper floors providing office uses and dwellings.

## *PEDESTRIAN COMMERCIAL CORE*

The Pedestrian Commercial Core is located in the heart of the Downtown, where the most intensive commercial development occurs. Streetfront retail activity is an important part of the development, along with streetscape treatments that incorporate pedestrian amenities. Development on the upper floors of structures in the district would include office and housing. Customer parking would be available on street, in private off-street parking lots or in municipal parking lots, developed through public private partnerships. The Pedestrian Commercial Core extends both east and west of the Metra train tracks and virtually coincides with the B5 Zoning District. At the edges of the B5 District, the two new MU districts will extend the pedestrian dominated precinct and provide for increased residential development in the Pedestrian Commercial Core. The pedestrian focus of the Downtown is along Elm Place (south side) Central Avenue, Laurel Avenue (north side), Green Bay Road (east side), Second Street, First Street, St. Johns Avenue, and Sheridan Road. These streets are and will be the primary retail shopping and restaurant streets in the Central District.

There are two separate parts to the Pedestrian Commercial Core that may be broadly categorized: the boutique district east of the Metra railroad tracks and the shopping goods/apparel district west of the railroad tracks. The recent opening of Renaissance Place will secure the shopping and apparel focus of the west side. It should serve local and sub-regional shoppers from the north shore. Residential and entertainment uses are included in the project as well and provide extra strength for evening activity complementing the current theatre and restaurant concentration in the Pedestrian Commercial Core. Future development in the Pedestrian Commercial Core should continue to provide mixed-uses in development plans. Residential, restaurant and entertainment uses in the core will help the area thrive as an activity center and commercial enterprise. Current demand for condominiums in the Central District can be accommodated, in part, within the Pedestrian Commercial Core itself, thereby meeting some of the demand without encroaching on nearby, single-family residential neighborhoods. Adjacent to the Pedestrian Commercial Core, the Plan identifies areas for office service-oriented mixed-uses. These areas will not compete directly with retail uses in the Pedestrian Commercial Core but will provide opportunities for mixed-office and residential buildings.

### *Pedestrian Commercial Core Plan Policies*

- Encourage mixed-use development in and near the core, including retail shops, retail service establishments and restaurants on the ground floor, and combinations of office and residential on upper floors. Residential uses within the Pedestrian Commercial Core will increase the retail market and add to the vitality that is so important to the synergism of Pedestrian Commercial Core areas. The Zoning Ordinance should provide adequate bulk and height entitlement to accommodate mixed-use developments within a limited area defined by the B5 District or a part thereof.
- Encourage office-oriented mixed-use developments at the northeast and southwest corners of the Pedestrian Commercial Core.
- Locate parking to the rear, and along the edges, of the Pedestrian Commercial Core primary streets in a manner that is both comfortable and convenient to the shopper. Office and residential parking should

be oriented toward long-term use in decks or underground garages developed as part of new mixed-use projects.

- Institute two new zoning districts for mixed-use developments (to be designated MU1, Town Center Mixed-Use and MU2, Transition Mixed-Use) to be located strategically around the edges of the Pedestrian Commercial Core. Town Center Mixed Use would allow four story structures while MU2, Transition Mixed Use, would be limited to three story structures. Upper story housing is required to be located in new structures in these proposed zoning districts.

#### *COMMERCIAL: COMMUNITY RETAIL/OFFICE*

Community retail and office land uses are oriented towards the daily retail and service needs of City residents or persons employed by businesses in the Central District. Typical uses in this category are auto-oriented in that businesses must provide customer parking on-site for bulk purchases such as groceries, dry cleaning and the like. These types of uses generate frequent vehicular trips by employees and customers and thus need to provide accessible and convenient parking. Future uses would include a wide range of convenience retail businesses such as grocery stores, financial services, automobile service and repair businesses, cleaners, and real estate and insurance offices. The community retail and office areas are located at the edges of the downtown where off-street parking can be accommodated on site.

Highland Park is fortunate to have a full service grocery store in the Central District to anchor the community retail and office activities in the Central District. The food store, supported by three drug and variety stores, secures the area as a place where daily shopping can take place. The diversity of the retail uses provided to the community allows for the Central District to meet a broad range of shopping needs. Add to this a pleasing environment as well as the restaurant and entertainment functions and the elements for a healthy commercial district have a strong foundation. The Plan policies must provide for maintaining the anchor uses to assure the ongoing economic health of these enterprises.

#### *Commercial: Community Retail/Office Plan Policies*

- The general area to be formed by Green Bay Road, Central Avenue and the proposed Water Tower Boulevard should be carefully managed and cooperatively planned with the property owners to assure full development potential of this area for community retail and office use in the future. Planning should include attention to architecture and site design to make this area a main gateway to the Pedestrian Commercial Core and a prime contributor to the character and quality of design for the Downtown.
- Community Retail and Office uses that front Central Avenue on relatively narrow lots should be restricted to the area east of Hickory Street on the south side of Central Avenue and to the proposed Osco store west of the proposed Water Tower Boulevard on the north side of Central Avenue to discourage additional strip commercial development in the Central District.

- Retain places for community-serving businesses such as automotive service and repair establishments, back office operations, and medical clinics, along with businesses that cannot afford the higher rents associated with the Pedestrian Commercial Core, such as dry cleaners and small appliance repair. The area traditionally accommodating such uses, defined by Elm Place, First Avenue and Green Bay Road, should continue to play this role.
- Encourage the U.S. Post Office to locate its retail operations in the Pedestrian Commercial Core and relocate its other operations to a more suitable location outside the Central District. This will allow the opportunity for future use of the site to be more compatible with the low intensity park use to the north, thereby opening views of the park to the entire community and providing an excellent gateway in to the commercial core of the Central District.

Even though auto oriented commercial uses are accommodated in the Community Retail and Office areas, effective pedestrian facilities and access shall be considered and provided in development and redevelopment activities in these areas.

#### *MIXED-USE AREAS: TOWN CENTER AND TRANSITION*

The two Mixed-Use categories proposed for areas surrounding the Pedestrian Commercial Core are appropriate for combinations of small offices, limited retail, business services and residential uses. Medical offices, but not clinics, would be most appropriate for such locations and structures. Retail uses such as small pharmacies, clothing shops or bookstores are also harmonious with the mixed-use concept. Retail uses that involve heavy deliveries or perishable items, or that emit odors are not appropriate since such uses will impact the residential uses that will be above them.

Residential uses would be required within each building developed within mixed-use areas. The retail or commercial service uses can serve to support downtown businesses as well as neighborhood retail functions. They can also provide for the expansion of boutique shops and apparel stores that define areas close to the proposed locations of mixed-use zoning.

The scale and intensity of buildings in mixed-use areas must have the bulk and height latitude to accommodate two or more land uses such as retail and residential within the same building. Two levels of use intensity are recommended; a high-density category permitting four story structures and a more moderate density one in which building would be limited to three stories. Structure parking, most likely underground, is essential with the inclusion of residential use.

Areas within the Pedestrian Commercial Core are appropriate for the higher density mixed-use developments. The block at the southwest corner of Green Bay Road and Central Avenue just west of the Pedestrian Commercial Core between Green Bay and McGovern Street is currently a mixture of land uses and would be appropriate for the lower density mixed use development category. This designation would provide a transition to the residential neighborhood to the south and west of this block. Some of the downtown's newest multi-family housing is in the general area as well as some of its oldest businesses. This area is within walking distance for commuters using the Metra train and is ideally suited for higher

intensity development that could take advantage of the proximity to regional transportation facilities. Parcels in the vicinity of Sheridan and Park Avenues, are other examples of appropriate mixed-use areas.

### ***Mixed-Use Developments Plan Policies***

- Develop two new zoning districts to enable mixed-use developments of different densities that are appropriate for a blending of uses. Essential provisions of this district will include requirements such as:
  - Developments shall be a minimum of two floors;
  - The ground floor shall be occupied by a commercial use(s);
  - One floor above the ground floor shall be devoted entirely to residential use;
  - Building height shall be limited to four stories and fifty feet in the Mixed-use Town Center and three stories and forty feet in the Mixed-use Transition category.
  - Minimum residential unit size shall be 650 square feet;
  - Density shall be approximately 25 dwelling units to the acre in the Town Center category and 15 units to the acre in the Transition category with density bonuses of up to 20 percent for the inclusion of affordable housing in either category.
  - To achieve the maximum height, a conditional use process whereby the applicant demonstrates substantial public benefits from the development would be required.
- A number of mixed-use areas are suggested along the edge of the. (Refer to the Future Land Use Policy Plan, Figure 4)

### **3.1.4 PUBLIC AND QUASI-PUBLIC USES**

This group of land uses includes a wide variety of community facilities and services that contribute to the quality of life in the City. Four general land use categories have been identified that encompass private, as well as public, facilities. These uses include places of worship and faith-based organizations, municipal and other government uses, not-for-profit museums, and community centers. These uses reflect the richness of community life and the variety of interests that comprise the life of the City. Such uses are important to the City and its residents and belong in the Central District. Many such uses provide a transition from the commercial uses within the commercial core to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Together with schools and parks in the Central District these uses provide a strategic buffering for residential neighborhoods and allow for the development of the commercial core within the tolerances of the community design values.

#### ***Public and Quasi-Public Uses Plan Policies***

- Retain the public and quasi-public uses in the Central District. Actively seek appropriate reuse of such facilities with similar uses if vacancies arise.
- Design, setback, bulk and parking standards for such uses should be sensitive to adjacent and nearby residential houses.
- Seek appropriate locations for additional cultural facilities, such as a performing arts center, community art center, and museums within the Central District.
- Encourage the U.S. Post Office to locate its retail operations in a development in the Pedestrian Commercial Core and relocate its other operations to a more suitable location outside the Central District. This will allow the opportunity for future use of the site to be more compatible with the low intensity park use to the north, thereby opening views of the park to the entire community and providing an excellent gateway in to the commercial core of the Central District.

### **3.1.5 PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION FACILITIES**

Park, open space and recreation facilities include active, passive, outdoor and indoor facilities that are either publicly or privately owned. Park and recreation uses are an important component in preserving the mixture of uses in the Central District and enhancing the pedestrian scale and character of the district. Major facilities include both public and private facilities and land areas.

Sunset Woods Park is a major asset to the businesses and residents of the Central District. The park has both passive and active areas. The passive areas of the park, with seating and picnicking areas, serves the older population in the surrounding neighborhoods, while the active playfields serve children and their parents. Laurel Park and Memorial Park are small parks on the east side of the district that provide visual relief and passive facilities to area residents. There are a number of park and recreation facilities adjacent

to the Central District that also service the Central District. Facilities include Moraine Park, Park Avenue Beach and Central Park along Lake Michigan, and the Hidden Creek Aquapark. Each of these facilities is within walking distance, or a short drive, for most Central District residents.

The Karger Recreational Center is expected to remain an important facility within the Downtown. Karger's recreation functions are likely to be relocated to a new building at the Highland Park Country Club. The current building will remain for potential nursery school and daycare center. The Firehouse Activity Center will remain at its present location, adjacent to Karger, and serve youths.

The Exmoor Country Club is a private facility providing golf and social activities for its members. The course is expected to remain for the long-term with no known changes in ownership or redevelopment. Another private facility, the Birchwood Tennis Club, is located west of Wolters Field and there are no known changes anticipated for this facility either. Should either of these facilities be redeveloped, very careful review of such development plans will be required.

#### ***Parks, Open Space and Recreation Facilities Plan Policies***

- Reserve public park lands for recreation purposes only.
- Provide specific zoning district protection for park areas.
- Maintain and expand, if possible, the indoor recreation opportunities within the Central District in a manner that coordinates activities and facilities with those that are, or may be, located at the Highland Park Country Club Complex.
- Rezone the Exmoor Country Club property to a new open space zoning district to assure the community has the full opportunity to consider the appropriate reuse of this large parcel, should that use change in the future.

### **3.1.6 SCHOOLS**

Central District schools include public and private elementary and secondary schools. Fortunately, the public schools that are within the Central District are located such that they add to the transition between the district's commercial areas and surrounding residential neighborhoods. At present, Highland Park High School is planning an expansion along St. Johns Avenue north of the main building.

#### ***Schools Plan Policies***

- Rezone the schools in the Central District to a Public Activity Zoning District.
- Maintain the schools that currently exist within the Central District.

- Continue to protect Central District schools from excessive traffic conditions and land use situations that may be incompatible.
- Work with the Elementary School and High School Districts to improve citizen and City input on school associated projects.

### **3.1.7 HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL-RELATED ACTIVITIES**

Hospital and Medical-Related Activities are land uses strongly represented in the Central District. These uses are anchored by Highland Park Hospital. Medical-related facilities include medical and dental offices and clinics, elderly housing and housing for special populations, and day care facilities. In the volatile health care industry, this may change again over the long run. At the present time, current hospital policy suggests expansion of hospital facilities will be restricted to the existing campus.

The hospital campus is expected to be contained within an area west of Midlothian Avenue and south of Vine Avenue, east of Exmoor Country Club and north of West Park Avenue. Any related uses such as clinics, or specialized residential or medical offices, are to be located within the hospital campus as it now exists with the addition of a few residential lots it already owns along the south side of Vine Avenue.

#### ***Hospital/Medical Related Activities Plan Policies***

- Encourage medical offices and clinics within the Pedestrian Commercial Core and Community Convenience Retail areas of the Central District.
- Maintain hospital-related zoning on the existing hospital campus to encourage the compact development of medical facilities.
- Provide adequate buffers between the hospital and new or expanded campus structures, and neighboring homes and residential neighborhoods to the east, north and south.
- Continue the public process of amending the Healthcare District Master Plan when expansion or modification of hospital facilities are proposed.

### **3.1.8 Transit Support and Parking Uses**

Transit support and parking are those uses which are located along the Metra rail line and support the commuter function with parking and traffic access designed to facilitate the picking up and dropping off of passengers. In addition, municipal parking is located throughout the commercial core and provides an important resource for various downtown users. In order for the downtown to continue to be successful, existing parking areas have to be maintained and possibly expanded in strategic locations.



### ***Transit Support and Parking Uses Plan Policies***

- Maintain current commuter parking facilities. As with all parking facilities, seek additional ways to promote shared use in non-peak commuter periods such as weekends.
- Continually analyze the supply of, and need for, off-street parking facilities.
- Provide adequate on-street and off-street parking for consumers and employees, at appropriate locations, through joint cooperation between the public and private sector.
- Continue to market the existing public parking options currently available in the commercial core area of the Central District.
- Structure access and parking to assure that the Central District is convenient to use and can accommodate contemporary business, shopping and living style mandates.
- Support automobile access to the downtown core from the north and south of the pedestrian and shopping corridor along Central Avenue.
- Integrate structured as well as surface parking lot facilities into developments that can serve the pedestrian shopping areas of the commercial core.
- Design and locate parking facilities in a manner that does not detract from the pedestrian environment.

## **3.2 URBAN DESIGN**

If the Future Land Use Policy Plan sets forth guidelines for what uses go where, urban design policies sets forth how redevelopment changes are made and how they might be coordinated and related to other uses in the Central District. Urban design is derived from a complex array of principals that address the arrangement of physical elements such that they function in unison, and create a built environment consistent with the community's vision and goals. Under successful urban design, the components that make up the Central District buildings, sidewalks, streets, railroad right-of-way, landscaping and green space, street furniture, signs, utility poles, parking lots and garages will work together efficiently and present a pleasing environment in which to live, work and shop. Urban design is people-oriented. The perception of a pleasing environment and the expectation of proper functioning are judgments that people make as they respond to their environment.

### 3.2.1 GENERAL URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Urban design policies are also driven by the vision and objectives for the Central District. The watchwords connecting the vision and related objectives to the urban design policies are character, density and quality. The following general urban design policies need to be considered in all future public and private approval and investment decisions. The Central District's urban design framework builds upon the successful retail and residential base, conserves traditional character-giving elements while allowing for appropriate new economic and cultural development.

#### *General Urban Design Plan Policies*

- Provide the infrastructure and allow land uses that support a mix of uses that will define the Central District as the city center.
- Create a pleasing environment that will contribute the elements that will induce people to choose the Central District as a place to live, shop and work.
- Encourage compact development and facilities that will encourage and support pedestrian use in the Pedestrian Commercial Core area of the Central District.
- Integrate residential options throughout the Central District including the Pedestrian Commercial Core area.
- Provide for a variety of activities, gatherings and community events that will support retail and restaurant usage and make the Central District everyone's neighborhood.
- Establish Central Avenue, Second Street, Sheridan Road, and St. Johns, south of Central, as primary character streets in the Central District. Encourage the conservation of building facades and general scale of development along these street frontages through the City's development approval particularly the design review process.
- Restrict the bulk and height of structures in the Central District through zoning provisions in order to conserve the traditional character of the area.

Figure 5, General Urban Design Framework, illustrates the location dimensions of these general policies. Together the urban design policies link together the main elements of the Central District - the Pedestrian Commercial Core area, the Community Convenience Retail area, the hospital campus and Sunset Woods Park. In a sense, the overall urban design expands the center of activities somewhat to the north to take advantage of improved access afforded by proposed Water Tower Boulevard with Second Street highlighted as a northern approach and major gateway into the Pedestrian Commercial Core area. The

southern section of the core area takes on a residential emphasis blended with retail, office, public functions and transportation.

### **3.2.2 BULK, INTENSITY AND BUILDING HEIGHT**

A traditional urban design principal for downtowns in America has always been one that places the highest intensity in the center and reduces intensity moving away from the center. In the Central District this principal has generally been followed with adjustments made for the hospital complex, the high school, and the high-density condominium areas north and south of the Pedestrian Commercial Core. Overall bulk and building height are very important in setting the design character of the Central District and to the residents of the City in general.

The allowable height in the center determines the sense of intensity for not only the center but also all the rest of the District since with few exceptions, other areas and uses will not be as high. Considerable attention has been placed on determining the correct design height for zoning controls in this process of planning the Central District. The general consensus of the Plan Commission is that the current allowable building heights are too permissive. Few buildings (only two to three) are now built to the allowable zoning height of sixty feet. The policy herein is to lower the allowable height in the center and adjust the height of other surrounding zoning district in harmony with this adjustment.

**FIGURE 5: GENERAL URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK**



Additional condominium development activity will continue on those parcels now zoned for residential development outside the commercial core. Many parcels have already been utilized for condominium development although additional condominium activity may occur especially in the RM1 and mixed-use zones.

### ***Urban Design Policies Regarding Building Bulk Regulations***

- Reduce overall building height in the Pedestrian Commercial Core area to a maximum of four stories (through a conditional use permit approval process).
- Adjust height limits on character streets in the B5 zoning district and the proposed Mixed Use – Town Center district to allow greater height further away from the building front.
- Adjust height restrictions accordingly to maintain the highest buildings in the center, reducing heights as one moves away from the center.
- Increase the ability to introduce residential uses on upper floors of buildings in the Pedestrian Commercial Core area by adjusting density restrictions to make residential in mixed-use buildings a physical and economic possibility.
- Allow adequate building height allowances to accommodate peaked roofs on structures, particularly mixed-use and multiple-family structures.

Areas reserved for convenience commercial use in the Central District do not need to be more than three stories in height. Indeed, most will want to be no more than two stories in height. Mixed-use buildings can be one story higher to accommodate commercial uses on the lower floors and dwellings on the upper floors. Four stories should be adequate to accommodate buildings with one or two commercial stories and two to three residential stories designed with a peaked roof.

### **3.2.3 CHARACTER STREETS**

Highland Park's Central District has a character that is appealing to residents and one that most want to retain. Much of this character is perceived from streets that traverse the Central District and which front the traditional retail building and shops that are familiar to residents. Central Avenue between Green Bay Road and First Street is perhaps the most important character street on the west side of the Central District. Second Street between Elm Place and Laurel Avenue has the potential to become a major source of character for the future and is therefore consider a character street for the purposes of this Plan. Laurel Avenue also has a great deal of potential for the future. It may be possible to install median planters in the center of this roadway to embellish this important entry into the Pedestrian Commercial Core. This can be coupled with intense parkway landscaping to further the beautification of the entryway into the core area. On the east side of the Metra railroad tracks, Sheridan Road between Central Avenue and Park Avenue, and St. Johns between Laurel Avenue and Central Avenue constitute the character streets that warrant particular attention.

### *Urban Design Policies for Character Streets*

- Provide a continuous pedestrian promenade mid-block between Central Avenue and Elm Place, and First Street and Green Bay Road. This will be a continuation of the promenade already provided in Renaissance Place eastward all the way to First Street
- Upgrade the Second Street corridor with major streetscape improvements and appropriate new development that will connect West Park Avenue to the Pedestrian Commercial Core and extend southward to Laurel Avenue.
- Conserve the commercial street frontage on Central Avenue from Green Bay Road to Linden Avenue and on Sheridan Road from Central Avenue to Park Avenue.
- Institute a landscaped median and parkway landscaping program for Laurel Avenue from Deerfield Road to First Street. Make visual improvements to the Laurel Avenue Bridge using planters, landscaping and creative painting.
- Treat Central Avenue, Elm Place (south side), Laurel Avenue (north side), Green Bay Road (east side), Second Street, First Street, Sheridan Road and St Johns Avenue south of Central as “character streets” for the Central District emphasizing gateway planting and landscaping, selected building façade maintenance, and comprehensive signage treatment. Put into place controls and review procedures with the intent of conserving the facades of historic and to be identified “character buildings” buildings along these signature streets.

### **3.2.4 BEAUTIFICATION OF PLACES AND VIEWS**

Significant and relatively low cost beautification improvement can be made throughout the Central District with special emphasis on the Pedestrian Commercial Core. These areas are now visually appealing yet possess the potential for beautification improvements. The City should prepare a detailed beautification design plan for the Central District that would identify locations for special landscape treatment, select motifs for planting and containers, and signage improvements that would take this policy to a point of implementation

### *Urban Design Policies for the Beautification of Places and Views*

- Advance the visual appeal, convenience and facilities in the commercial core to support pedestrian use.

- Create a "garden" focal point around the City water tower that is linked to the park.
- Add small gardens, passive parks and entry features at high visibility locations throughout the Central District. Potential locations are suggested on the Future Land Use Policy Plan, (see Figure 4).
- Develop an entry gateway along the north and south sides of Central Avenue where the Skokie Highway interchange channels traffic onto eastbound Central Avenue. Duplicate the same gateway design motif at the Central Avenue/Deerfield Road split. Other major gateways into the Central district should be constructed at; West Park Avenue and Green Bay Road, Deerfield Road and Green Bay Road, and Central Avenue just west of Linden Avenue.
- Other gateways should be given attention as entry points into the Pedestrian Commercial Core area. Important locations include intersections at Second Street at Laurel Avenue, Central Avenue and Elm Place. The Laurel Avenue Metra Underpass Bridge and the First Street/Laurel Avenue intersection could be significantly enhanced. Each end of the proposed Water Tower Boulevard and the Green Bay Road intersection with Elm Place can be designed as a single gateway and certainly warrant such treatment.

### **3.3 RESIDENTIAL CONSERVATION POLICIES**

Residential conservation includes policies that maintain existing building and neighborhood character. Three values combine to suggest these conservation policies. They are the preservation of irreplaceable historic homes around the edges of the downtown core, maintaining neighborhood areas that contain somewhat smaller homes that offer more affordable options for homeownership in the Central District, and limiting the teardown phenomenon in those areas where consistency in house to lot size would be lost with the introduction of oversized residential structures.

#### **3.3.1 PRESERVING HISTORIC HOMES**

The eastern side of the downtown core contains a number of historic homes that warrant preservation of the structures themselves and the settings in which they are located. Preservation in this context does not mean museum type restoration with onerous regulations concerning what owners can and cannot do to their properties. Rather it provides support to the owners of these properties to maintain them in a condition that preserves the integrity of their historic origins. Such support should take the form of a protective zoning policy, celebration and acknowledgement of these wonderful resources to provide continuing education about them and the people who built them for the entire community, and perhaps preservation policies that will assure owners that their neighbors and the area in general will have stability that will justify their continued stewardship over their homes which also happen to be community resources at the same time.

***Policy to Preserve Historic Homes.***

- Institute rezoning of key historic parcels on the east side of the Commercial core from multiple-family to an appropriate single-family zoning category.
- Study the potential for designation of these areas as a historic district.

**3.3.2 MAINTAINING AFFORDABLE NEIGHBORHOODS**

Early development in the City brought a housing stock to the community that is much different than what is currently being built. Neighborhoods around the downtown core were composed of simple cottages for working families. In later years, newer neighborhoods were developed reflecting lot size, building materials, design and homes size customs of their era. The earlier neighborhoods now represent the City's more affordable housing stock. Maintaining a supply of affordable housing within the City is seen as an important community objective. Diversity in the housing stock provides the option to continue to have a population that has a range of income and age characteristics and offers those workers critical to the City functioning; teachers, public safety employees and employees of the City's retail sector, the ability to live in Highland Park.

Not all such neighborhoods are suitable for long-term maintenance. Long standing zoning patterns in some areas have induced speculation and expectations that are now matched by market pressure. Areas south of the downtown core that have been and continue to be zoned RO and RM-2 will continue to be redeveloped for higher density condominium uses that reflect long-term City zoning policy. Adjacent areas long zoned RM-1 will also see change in the coming years. However, this lower density zoning offers the City the option to mix new development with a rehabilitation program for certain of the smaller cottage homes along with the introduction of town homes that can be realized under a City sponsored affordability program if sponsored by the City Housing Commission.

Two neighborhoods located north of the downtown core and west of Green Bay Road can be maintained in their current configuration. The Vine Triangle neighborhood that is bounded by Vine Avenue, Green Bay Road and Exmoor Avenue, carries a zoning that reflects the neighbors' desires for retention of their homes and the general character of the neighborhood. The neighborhood immediately east of the Highland Park Hospital campus is the other area appropriate for long-term conservation as an area of relatively affordable single-family homes, duplexes and small apartment structures. The hospital's change of direction makes it timely to reassess the land use policy of this neighborhood. Rezoning this area to R7 will meet the neighbor's desires for their area and maintain dwellings in a price range that is becoming scarce. Most of the multiple family neighborhood east and north of the Highland Park Theatre, west of Linden Avenue and south of Elm Place is currently zoned RM2 but developed to RM1 intensity and density with some older single family residences remaining. Reducing the densities permitted in the area to RM1 and R5 will accomplish a better transition to the single family neighborhood to the east of Linden Avenue, will retain the more affordable garden apartments that currently exist in this area, and reflect neighborhood desires to preserve existing character.

***Policy to Maintain Affordability of the Housing Stock.***



- Rezone the area east of Midlothian Avenue frontage between West Park Avenue and Vine Avenue to the City's R7 single and two-family zoning district.
- Rezone areas currently zoned RM2 but developed as low-density multiple-family (predominantly on the east side of the Pedestrian Commercial Core) to RM1 to remove the possibility of future redevelopment at higher densities.

For additional information regarding Affordable Housing goals and policies, the Affordable Housing Needs and Implementation Plan, an element of the Master Plan, expands and provides direction on this issue.

### **3.3.3 LIMITING TEARDOWNS**

“Teardown” refers to the private redevelopment of single-family residential lots in existing, fully developed neighborhoods. Often teardowns can result in disharmony in the scale of the replacement houses relative to original surrounding homes in the neighborhood. Generally, the replacement house is much larger than the original. Because of gracious lot sizes in areas such as Sunset Woods Subdivision, these large houses are perfectly legal from a zoning standpoint. Developers of such houses are within their legal rights to teardown the old structure and replace it with a larger, residential structure even if the result is severely out-of-scale with the rest of the neighborhood.

Lots susceptible to teardowns usually have a relatively large lot size improved with a more modest sized and priced house on the property. The ratio between the size of a lot and the size of the home on the lot is a prime indicator of its vulnerability to teardown. For example, a small house on a larger than average lot is likely to be targeted for redevelopment. A small home on an average lot, but located in a neighborhood where the average home size is already much larger might also be a candidate to teardown. In either case, the driving force is the desirability and resultant high value of the area and the teardown lots.

Over seventy percent of the single-family home sites in the Central District have buildings that cover less than twenty percent of their lot. Lots that currently contain dwellings that cover twenty percent or less of the lot are viewed as susceptible to teardown. An added factor, although seemingly of less importance, is housing costs. The median cost of a home in Highland Park was about \$374,000 in 1999 according to a Chicago Tribune survey. Houses valued less than this median can be considered even more vulnerable to becoming candidates for teardown redevelopment in the future. In 1999, just over thirty-five percent of the homes in the Central District had values under the median using data from the Lake County Assessors office as a base and factoring market value from assessment values.

To stabilize these susceptible areas and discourage teardowns that lead to scale problems, techniques and regulations may be put into place through the community's zoning authority. Essentially, the entitlement to build extremely large homes can be reduced by adjusting selected bulk regulations in those zoning districts that are susceptible to teardowns.

#### ***Policy to Control Disharmonious Residential Teardowns.***

- Institute provisions that will discourage teardowns in the R6 and R7 neighborhoods where susceptibility to teardowns may lead to the construction of replacement houses that are severely out-of-scale with surrounding homes and neighborhood character.

### 3.4 Zoning Policies

The zoning policies discussed herein result from combining land use and urban design policies including those addressing the bulk and character issues which are so critical to the future of the Central District. Zoning Policies distill land use and urban design policies to identify applicable regulations that the City can apply to achieve the Plan's objectives.

Zoning policies are not an official zoning map nor are they in anyway to be considered a part of the ordinance structure of the City's development codes. Figure 6, Existing Zoning, shows the existing official zoning map of the Central District for reference. Zoning Policies are instead meant to inform City officials on how development codes might be adjusted to be consistent with the policies of this Plan. They are presented in zoning terms for ease of use however, and thus look like zoning map information. Nevertheless, they are policy statements that, at the pleasure of the City Council, may be incorporated into the City's zoning ordinance at a later date and then only after extensive analysis and public hearings.

This section of the policy chapter of the Plan supports three types of policy changes to the City zoning ordinance. They are; changes to the provisions of some of the existing zoning districts, remapping of existing zoning districts and the addition of five new zoning districts. The changes suggested to provisions are not extensive, but the remapping of existing districts is significant. The five new districts: Mixed Use Town Center (MU-TC), Mixed Use Transition (MU-TR), Townhouse (TH); Public Activity (PA); and Open Space (OS) will cover large areas of the Central District.

Changes to district provisions are focused on adjustments to bulk, density and height requirements to the B5, B4, and RM-2 zoning districts. With regard to the B4 and B5 districts the policy is structured to lower the allowable building height in the Pedestrian Commercial Core and the Community Convenience Retail areas of the Central District. The building height provisions of the RM-2 district would be lowered from 45 feet to 40 feet under this policy with a limit of three stories. That would have the effect of lowering the height of any additional multiple family structures in the area surrounding the Pedestrian Commercial Core.

All the existing zoning districts would have changes to the areas where they are now mapped under the zoning policies of this Plan. Figure 7: Zoning Policies, shows the proposed mapping of the current districts and the application of the five new zoning districts suggested herein. Some are minor, such as the changes to the R5 and R6 district mapping that actually cover existing residential development. Others represent significant changes. For example, the RM-2 district designation is significantly reduced in area coverage.

The new districts cover large areas as well. These are protective adjustments not meant to either encourage or discourage future development. The PA is applied to all public and quasi-public land uses including City Hall, the Highland Park Public Library, the Highland Park Community House, the former American Legion Hall, various houses of worship and other similar uses. The OS is applied to open land whether publicly owned or privately owned. In both cases, the intent is to assure that any future change in use of these areas could only be effected with deliberate zoning change and therefore in the control of the City Council with counsel from the Planning Commission.

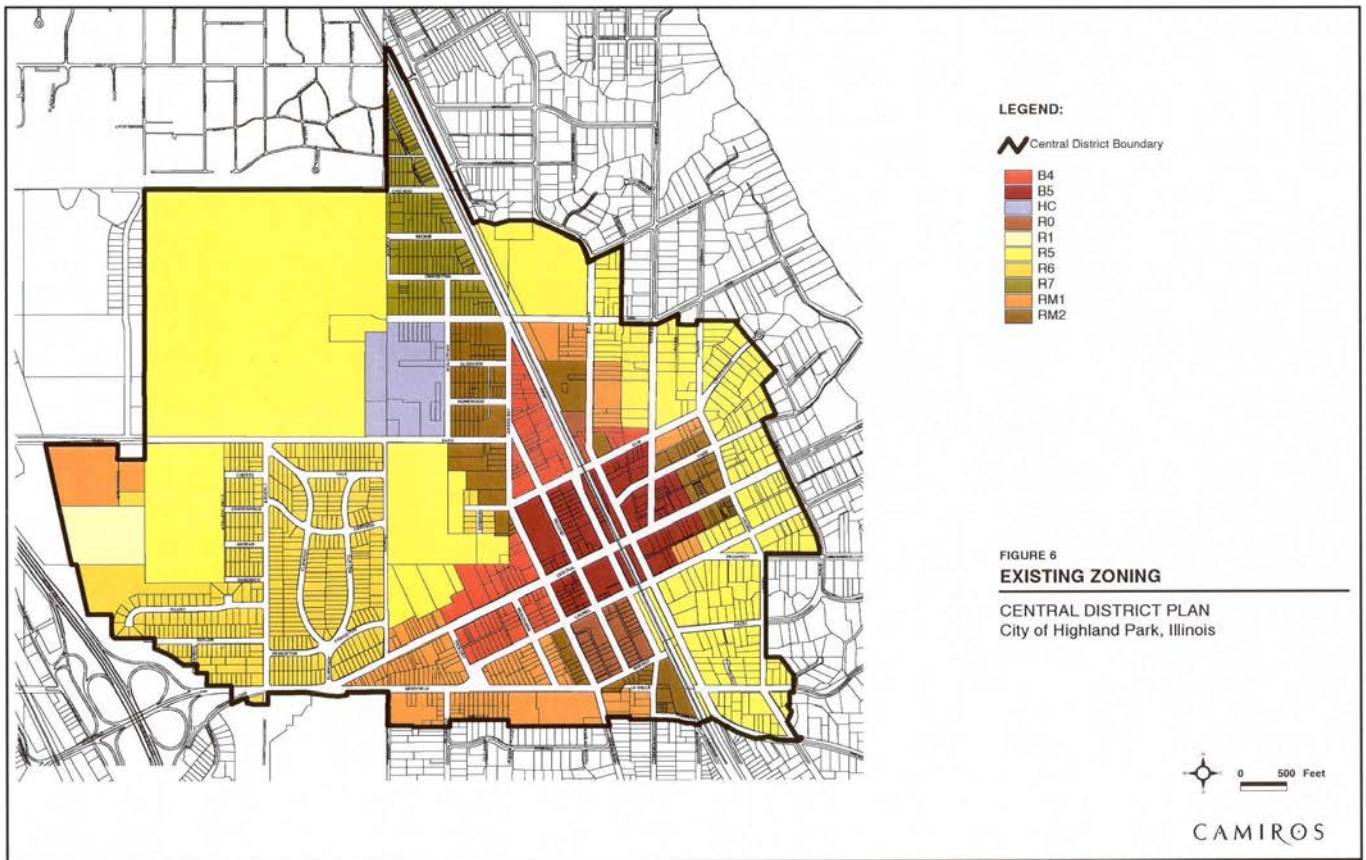
Since these zoning policies are to lead to detailed consideration, study and public hearing before being considered as ordinance changes, highlighting the major elements suffices for the purposes of this Plan. The policies are considered as those affecting the business zones of the Central District, the residential districts, and those that are entirely new districts.

### **3.4.1 BUSINESS DISTRICT ZONING POLICIES**

The City's business zoning districts within the Downtown includes the B5 and B4 zoning districts. Under this Plan, the policies regarding these two important zoning districts change the provisions of both districts and reduce the area covered by the B4 slightly. A new district is recommended for the Pedestrian Commercial Core. It is the MU-TC, Mixed-Use Town Center District, one of two mixed use district recommended in this Plan. The MU-TC district will be designed to provide flexibility in use and residential options for areas within and immediately around the Pedestrian Commercial Core.

These changes provide adequate height for the type of uses envisioned and permitted in the business districts and allow for options in the roofline and architectural style of new buildings without overwhelming the residential buildings, park setting and general neighborhood character that surround the business district

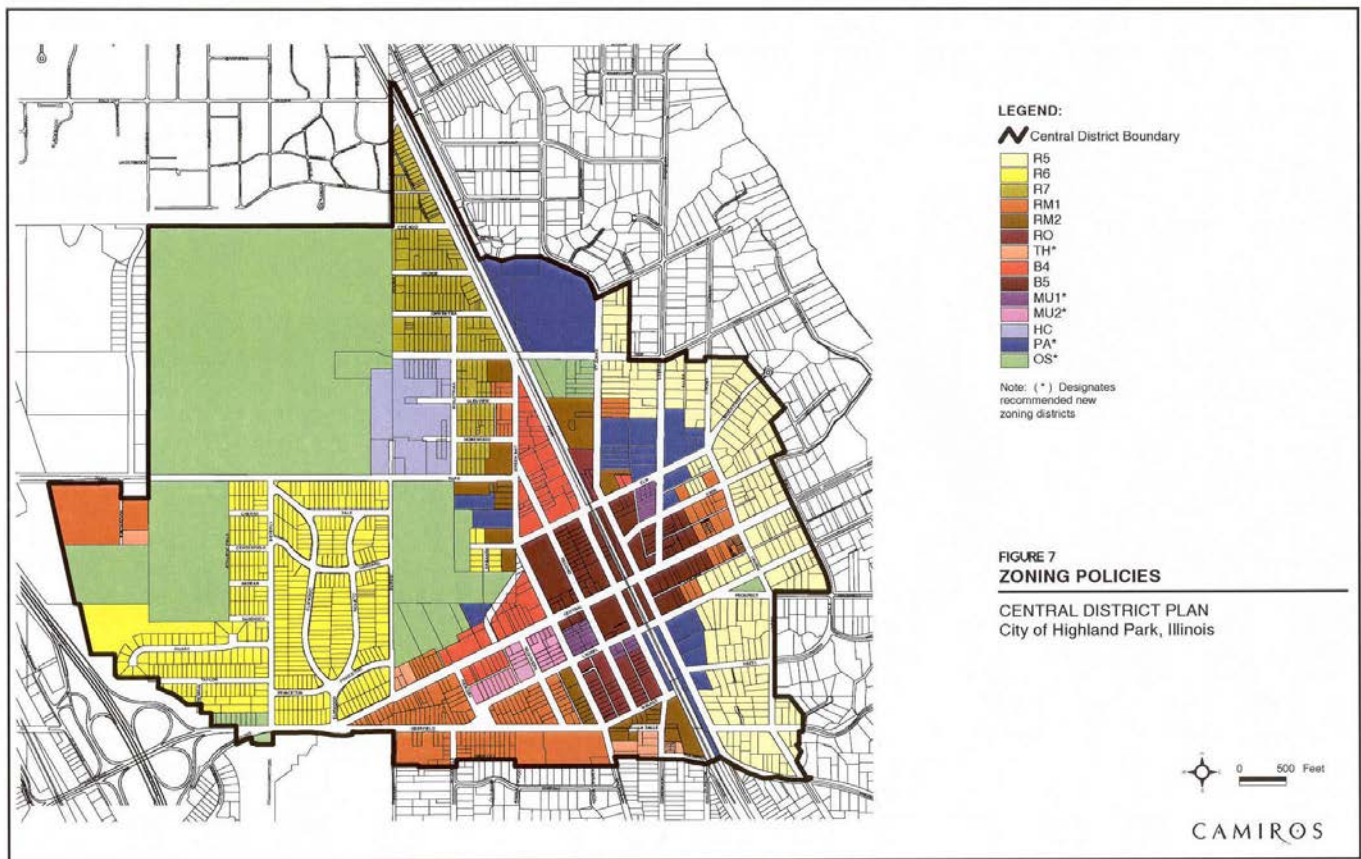
**FIGURE 6: EXISTING ZONING**



### ***Zoning Policies for the Central District Pedestrian Commercial Core***

- Establish step back height provisions (sometimes referred to as a ziggurat building design) in the B5 zoning district.
- Reduce the maximum allowable building height in the B5 District from 60 feet to 40-feet/3 story along the street frontage and a maximum 50-feet/4 story away from the street frontage consistent with the step back height provisions.
- Lower the maximum allowable building height in the B4 zoning district from 45 feet to 40-feet/3 story height limitation.
- Create two new mixed-use zoning districts to be called; MU-TC, Mixed Use Town Center and MU-TR, Mixed Use Transition respectively. These two districts shall be essentially the same with regard to allowable uses and differentiated by height and density. The MU-TC will permit a structure 50 feet in height but limited to four stories, while the MU-TR will allow three stories and 40 feet maximum height. Both mixed-use districts would require a minimum two-story building with commercial use of the ground floor and a minimum of one full floor of residential use on upper floors. The types of commercial uses permitted would be somewhat more restrictive than the B4 or B5 to assure that the residential component of each building would not be negatively impacted by inappropriate commercial uses. A residential density of the two mixed-use districts shall be determined by when the final district provisions are adopted as amendments to the zoning ordinance but they shall be lower than the density of the RM-2 since the first floor of structures in these districts will be taken up by a retail, office or service use as permitted under the ordinance. A minimum unit size of 650 square feet is envisioned for the two mixed-use districts. Incentives could be added to these districts to advance the goal of adding diversity to the City's housing resources.
- Apply the Conditional Use permit approval process to developments seeking to build in higher than 3 story/40 feet in the B5 and MU-TC districts. The City shall consider the provision of substantial public benefit in a development prior to approving projects of 4 stories/50 feet of building height.

### **FIGURE 7: ZONING POLICIES**



### 3.4.2 RESIDENTIAL ZONING POLICIES

Policies covering the residential use areas of the Central District focus on stabilizing lower density neighborhoods and allowing for continued multiple-family (primarily condominium development) at appropriate places throughout the Central District.

In the Central District, the R6, Single Family District, provides zoning for the Sunset Woods Subdivision. Teardowns in this subdivision have affected this neighborhood in recent years. Zoning adjustments may be instituted to discourage such actions. Consequently zoning policy changes that increase the yards and reduce allowable lot coverage might be considered for the R6 Single-Family Zoning District. Further study is recommended to determine if there is a need for similar action in neighborhoods that are recommended to be zoned R7, Single and Two-Family Residential. The R7 zoning district allows single and two-family dwelling along with the normal mix of neighborhood institutional uses, places of worship, parks and schools etc.

The RM-2, Multiple-Family Residential zoning district is subject to extensive zoning map changes under these policies. The effect of changes to the RM-2 is a significant reduction in the areas zoned for high density multiple family residential land use. Furthermore, it is recommended that building height in the RM-2 be limited to a maximum of 3 story/40 feet. Certainly, other zoning districts will allow multiple-family residential such as the MU Mixed-Use District and the B5.

Mapping of the RM1 District also changes significantly. The multiple-family area at the far eastern section of the commercial core extending to Linden Avenue is recommended to become RM1 under the policy directives of this Plan. Most of this area is currently zoned RM2 but developed to RM1 intensity and density. This will accomplish a better transition to the single-family neighborhood to the east of Linden Avenue and it will retain more affordable garden apartments that currently exist in this areas.

A proposed new town home district is intended for application where low scale multiple-family structures can best ease the transition from the commercial core or higher density residential to the single-family neighborhoods that surround the commercial core of the Central District.

#### ***Zoning Policies for the Central District Residential Areas***

- Apply the R7 Residential Zoning District to selected areas in the neighborhood directly east of Highland Park Hospital. As shown in Figure 7: Zoning Policies, areas that do not front Green Bay Road and that are currently zoned RM-2, are recommended to be rezoned in the R7 district. This policy is designed to preserve and encourage the retention of traditional single-family homes in this neighborhood, as a resource for affordable housing in the City.
- Rezone from RM2 to RM1 those parcels fronting Green Bay Road in the neighborhood directly east of the Highland Park Hospital that have not been developed to RM2 standards.
- Rezone the garden apartment area east of the Highland Park Theatre from RM2 to RM1.
- Add new districts to the Highland Park Zoning Ordinance: The TH, Townhome; the PA, Public Activity, the OS, Open Space; and, the abovementioned MU-TC, Mixed-Use Town Center and MU-TR, Mixed Use Transition zoning districts. Map the new districts as shown on Figure 7, Zoning Policies.
- Develop the TH district regulations to provide density consistent with that of the RM1 zoning district.

### **3.5 Traffic Circulation, and Parking Policies**

The access component of this Central District Plan incorporates the existing pattern of vehicular access and identifies road network improvements that would facilitate movement through the Central District. Findings

and recommendations regarding road improvements, and changes to circulation and traffic operations, can be found in the CBD Traffic Task Force Study presented to the City Council in 1999.

This Central District Plan incorporates a pedestrian pathways network to augment the vehicular circulation system (see Figure 8: Circulation Plan). The pedestrian pathways plan has been developed to suggest how direct connections to local destinations, such as schools, parks, and public facilities, can be accomplished without every trip requiring a vehicle or access to a major arterial roadway.

### **3.5.1 ROAD NETWORK**

The road network should be efficient and allow free circulation between various neighborhoods in the Central District. Local streets should be safe for children, comfortable for bicycling and pleasant to walk along. Efforts should be made to accommodate vehicles, buses and pedestrians along major thoroughfares in the district.

Streets are categorized on the basis of their major traffic carrying function. Typically, streets fall into one of four categories: Regional Arterials, Arterials, Collectors and Local Streets. Regional arterial streets are defined as the major traffic carrying streets which carry through traffic over relatively long distances. Arterial streets interconnect and augment the regional system and provide service to trips of moderate length at a somewhat lower level of travel mobility. Collector streets are streets that penetrate neighborhoods and collect traffic from local streets in the neighborhoods, and channel it to the arterial street system. Local streets primarily provide direct access to abutting land uses and carry travelers to the higher classifications of streets.



**FIGURE 8: CIRCULATION PLAN**



The Regional Arterial Streets in the Central District consist of the following:

- Green Bay Road is a major regional highway serving virtually all of the north shore communities.
- Central Avenue from Skokie Valley Road to Green Bay Road. Central Avenue provides access to the downtown from Skokie Valley Road and to other western suburbs via a connection with Deerfield Road.

The following streets serve as Arterial Streets in the Central District:

- Park Avenue West from Green Bay Road to Skokie Valley Road.
- Vine Avenue from Green Bay Road to St. John's Avenue.
- Elm Place from Green Bay Road to Linden Avenue.
- Central Avenue from Green Bay Road to Linden Avenue.
- Deerfield Road/Laurel Avenue from Central Avenue to Linden Avenue.
- Linden Avenue from Elm Place to Laurel Avenue.
- Sheridan Road from Linden to St. John's Avenue.
- St. John's Avenue from Sheridan Road to Vine Avenue.
- Water Tower Boulevard (new bypass street to be built from Green Bay Road to Central Avenue.)

Central District Collector Streets include:

- Vine Avenue from St. John's Avenue to Sheridan Road.
- St. John's Avenue from Vine Avenue to Maple Avenue (extending to Bloom Street).
- Sheridan Road from Central Avenue to Moraine Park.
- Central Avenue from Linden Avenue to Central Park.
- Linden Avenue from Laurel Avenue to Sheridan Road.
- Deerfield Road/Walnut Street from Central Avenue to First Avenue.
- Sunset Road from Park Avenue West to Central Avenue.
- Beverly Place from Park Avenue West to Central Avenue.
- Mulberry Place between Oakwood Avenue and Sheridan Road.

All remaining streets in the Central District are considered local streets. Alleys, present in a few neighborhoods, provide access to the back of lots and buildings.

### **3.5.2 SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS**

Appropriate design and operation of the road network is of key importance to the proper functioning and economic health of the Central District. Numerous recommendations are listed in the 1999 CBD Traffic Task Force Study. The City Council, working with staff input, will continue to monitor the Central District traffic situation and implement those improvements deemed most productive in achieving efficient traffic flow and ease of circulation on an as needed basis.

### **3.5.3 PEDESTRIAN NETWORK**

In moving towards a notion of a community that is more sensitive and respectful to the environment, it is hoped that residents will rely less on their cars and more on walking, bicycles and public transit. Safe and convenient pedestrian movement throughout the Central District is an important and integral component of the Plan. The pedestrian framework is designed to link major destinations and activities within the Central District as well as attractions and destinations in other parts of the City. A hierarchy of functional classifications of pedestrian ways can be used to describe the intent of the Central District Plan.

The area where the City should focus pedestrian enhancements is bounded by the south side of Elm Place, Sheridan Road/ St. Johns Avenue, the north side of Laurel Avenue and the east side of Green Bay Road, as well as Central Avenue between Green Bay Road and Linden Avenue. The major pedestrian precinct is the promenade associated with the main shopping and signature streets of Central Avenue, Sheridan Road and Second Street. The Central Avenue promenade extends from a mid-block point between Sheridan Road and Linden Avenue on the east to Green Bay Road on the west. The Second Street segment extends from Elm Place on the north to Laurel Avenue on the south. Sheridan Road extends from Central north to park Avenue. A third segment of the Pedestrian Shopping Promenade would cross mid-blocks and extend from First Street to Green Bay Road. This segment would link retail and parking located on First Street to the shopping concentration on Second Street and would establish a connection with Renaissance Place and Sunset Food grocery store. The Central Avenue and Second Street promenades should receive the highest priority of pedestrian improvements.

These improvements include:

- Preferential treatment of pedestrians in crosswalks.
- Lighting, seating, landscaping and other specialized street furniture oriented to the pedestrian.
- Year-round maintenance to remove ice, snow and other by-products of weather.

The second level pathway system that will traverse the Central District is the Pedestrian Community Promenade. It consists of a system of specially signed and marked sidewalks and off-street pedestrian paths that connect specific destinations or activity areas in the Central District. The pathways would contain special crosswalk markings, possibly sidewalk surface treatment and signage to indicate the preferential treatment for the pedestrian. Trail segments were labeled and identified in order to distinguish the focus of their routes.

The major destinations include the following:

- The “educational path” connects Highland Park High School, Indian Trail School and Wolters Field.
- The “public facilities path” connects City Hall, the Library, Karger Recreational Center and Highland Park Hospital.
- The “park path” connects Manor Park, Sunset Woods Park and the beach parks along Lake Michigan.

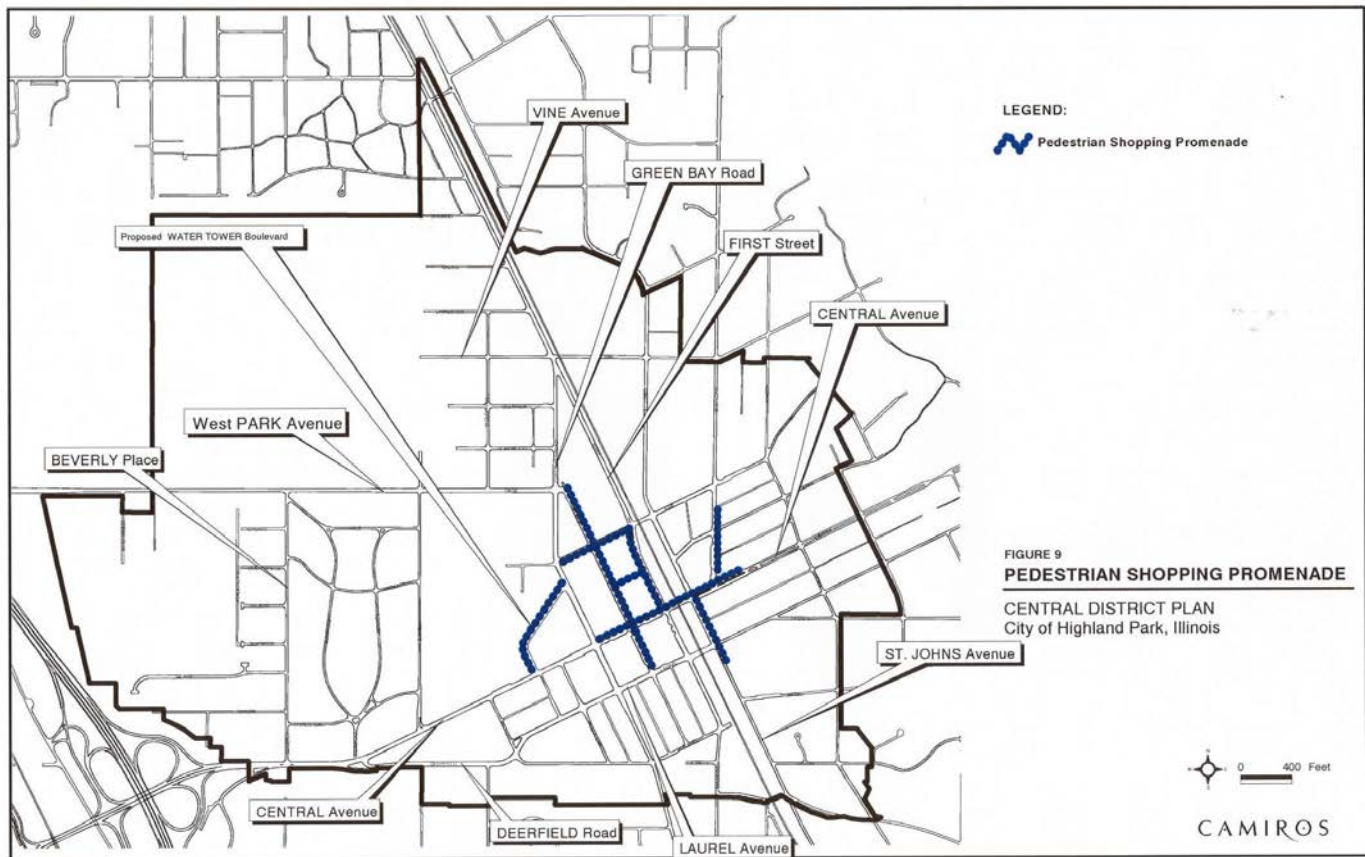
The “neighborhood paths” connect each of the surrounding residential areas to the downtown and other destinations in the Central District.

### **3.5.4 DOWNTOWN PARKING POLICY**

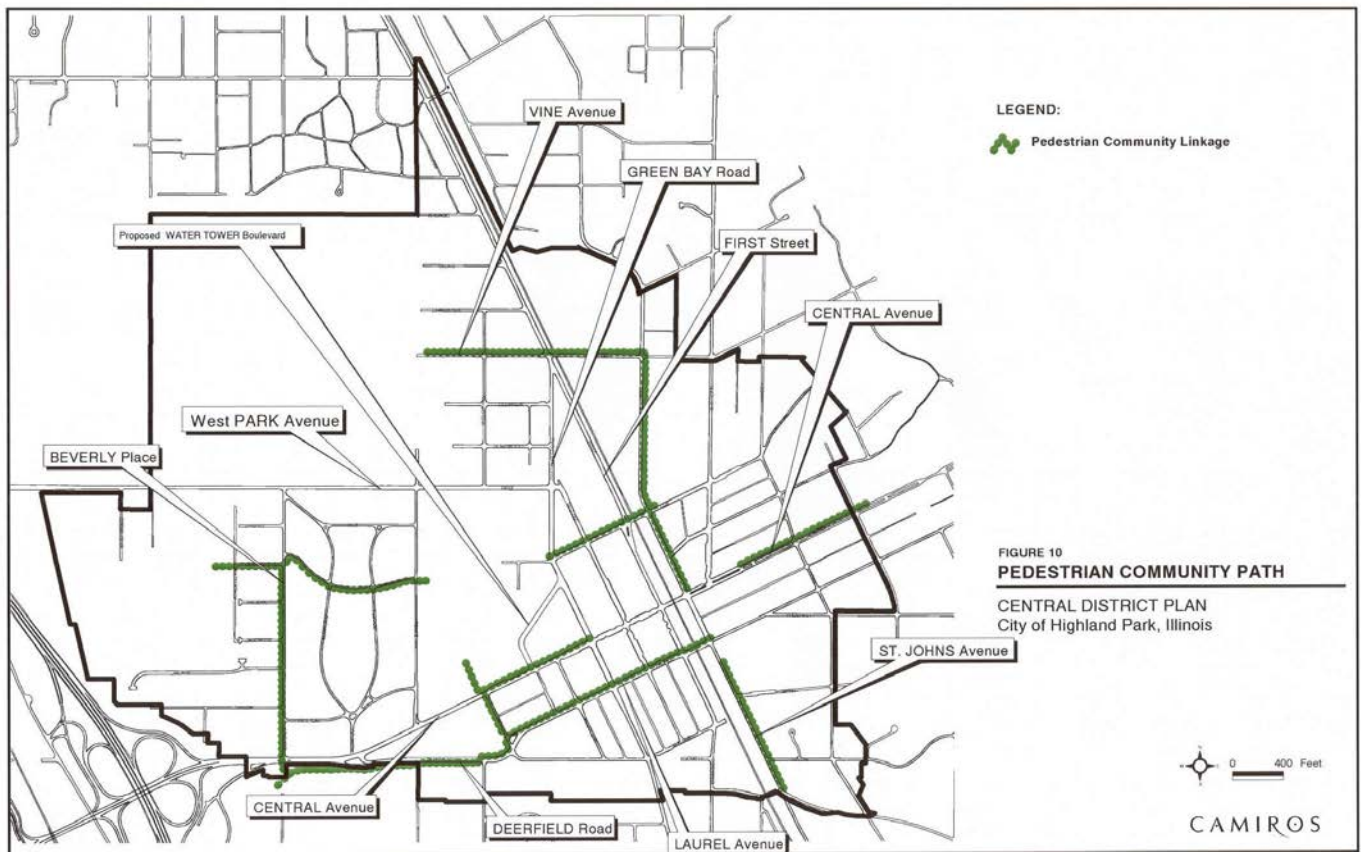
Every downtown district is perplexed with the issue of providing adequate parking for retail customers, employees and office workers. Although it is a difficult issue to evaluate objectively, it is an issue that must be addressed in order to maintain a successful and vital downtown. “Perception” and “problem” are two words that often come up in many discussions regarding parking issues, especially those pertaining to downtown areas. For example, a central business area may have an appropriate supply of parking space available in relation to the amount of retail and office space located there, but the parking is located in an area viewed as inconvenient or unsafe by potential users. In general, few people desire to park more than 300 to 500 feet from their destination. Parking that is located further than that is largely viewed as too far away to use. Similarly, parking may be located in underground garages but sometimes these are perceived as dangerous or inconvenient to use. The key to successful parking solutions is locating available space in areas that are convenient, or least perceived as such, by the user.

Highland Park’s downtown parking issues are very common problems encountered by many downtown areas. People, in general, like to park as close to their destination as possible. However, there is limited on-street space located directly in front of the downtown stores and offices. Employees of these businesses compete with shoppers and visitors to the downtown. The search for close parking is then compounded by people driving around looking for on street parking close to their destination and employees parking in prime spaces.

**FIGURE 9: PEDESTRIAN SHOPPING PROMENADE**



**FIGURE 10: PEDESTRIAN COMMUNITY PATH**



In March, 1999, a Highland Park Department of Community Development Department inventory indicated a total of more than 1,800 parking spaces in the Pedestrian Commercial Core area located in surface lots, garages and on streets. Given recent development activity, it is possible that the current parking supply may not be sufficient to support a higher level of development intensity in the Pedestrian Commercial Core area. However, it should be noted that downtown areas that thrive usually do so in spite of parking limitations, not because ideal parking exists.

Highland Park now has below grade parking north and south of Central Avenue in the Pedestrian Commercial Core. Some persons object to using underground parking from a safety standpoint. Others see it as a benefit to be out of the weather. However, the use of garage parking as at least part of the parking supply is necessary if a true pedestrian environment is going to prevail in the Pedestrian Commercial Core – that core area being defined by the boundaries formed by Green Bay Road, Laurel Avenue, Linen Avenue, and Elm Place. Parking in the core area is compounded by the use of significant area for Metra commuter parking. Surface lots and “behind the store” parking is scattered throughout the core area with a significant amount located east of the Metra railroad tracks. These surface lots are heavily used and empirical experience indicates that employee and office users make use of these parking spaces as they are usually filled early in the day before most stores and shops are open.

There is no doubt that parking is important factor for the continued success of the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area. The status of parking in the area is a current area of study. The downtown parking supply is being evaluated through a separate parking analysis study that takes into consideration the finalized circulation plan and improvement recommendation from the CBD Traffic Task Force Study. To this end, the City Council commissioned a parking study for the Pedestrian Commercial Core area in the third quarter of the year 2000. This study will determine the current and future demand for area parking and, if there is such a need, suggest means to address that need. The parking study will be presented to the ICPC, a commission established by the City Council to monitor the parking study and subsequently to recommend what appropriate implementation measures should take place.

Standard parking ratios for retail and office uses are 5 and 3.5 per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area, respectively. These standard parking ratios are based on suburban-type development where all users arrive via cars and no reduction in parking demand occurs through transit, walking, or multiple purpose trips. In a downtown area, the parking ratio should be less than suburban development. The parking ratios designated in the Highland Park Zoning Ordinance for most retail and office uses range from 2.5 to 4 per 1,000 square feet of gross floor area, with most commercial core uses requiring 3.3 spaces per 1,000 square feet of leasable floor area. Given current conditions in the commercial core, a parking ratio covering both retail and office use of 3.3 spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area would be suitable for purposes of assessing overall parking needs. Residential apartments typically require 1.5 to 2 spaces per dwelling unit.

The Pedestrian Commercial Core area has a strong supply of parking in that there is a wide variety of different types of parking, total number of spaces and the dispersal of parking facilities throughout the area. Of course, what everyone wants is an available parking space immediately in front of one's destination when they want to be there. This cannot function as a standard however and the accommodations the shopper/visitor to the Central District makes are part of the equation in determining if parking is a problem or not and if that problem is real or perceived.

The best approach to parking improvement may be work toward a series of incremental enhancements specifically tailored to meet identified need. Then each parking improvement should be evaluated to determine its effect on the system as a whole. However, parking access in the Pedestrian Commercial Core area can be made more accommodating to the user through customer service oriented methods as well as physical improvements. Convenient parking can be incorporated into the retail core area by constructing parking garages above or below ground level retail and office space. This allows for close proximity of parking to the downtown without taking up valuable downtown retail land. Another method to make finding available parking less frustrating would be through a coordinated parking program for the entire area emphasized through a unified signage plan, directional signs, and availability options communicated to parking space seekers through signs, garage attendants or digital electronic display boards. There are good examples of that kind of communication in the area now, channeling parkers to the Laurel Avenue entrance to the Port Clinton garage. Ways should be sought to expand that approach so that the shopper/visitor is given direction to parking as they pass through one of the gateways to the district and the core retail area within the district. Ideally, that person should feel they are being greeted and helped from the moment they enter one of these gateways.

#### ***Parking Policies for the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area***

- The present off-street parking strategy - locating parking around the outer edges of the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area of the Central District should be continued and expanded when necessary due to intensification through new development or the identification of localized shortages in one part or another of the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area. Figure 3, Illustrative Concept, indicates possible outer edge locations for such parking.
- If warranted through a detailed parking study, a public parking structure dedicated for shopper/visitor patrons should be considered to be located where the existing parking lots adjacent to the METRA tracks presently exist. The primary focus area shall be from Elm Place to Laurel Avenue between St. Johns Avenue and First Street. Such a structure should be designed to present a gracious wall enclosing the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area from the open, parking dominated space on either side of the Metra railroad tracks.



- Structure parking should be incorporated into the design of any major retail, residential and mixed-use developments in the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area.
- On-street parking should be retained to the maximum degree possible, but allow for alterations where key pedestrian/aesthetic improvements intersect with new development projects and new structure parking development.
- Parking should be accommodated through a combination of private parking facilities for new developments and common or shared off-street parking for existing local businesses. This can be accomplished through agreements made with owners of commercial core office buildings, churches, transit or other lot owners for use of their parking at “off-time” hours
- Consider adjustments to regulations for on-street parking in the form of “preferred zone” parking. This approach provides special on-street parking privileges for certain types of users within a defined area. Establishing retail, residential, and employee parking zones within specific areas of downtown that would encourage on-street parking, based on the land use emphasis of a given area. It would also preserve on-street parking in the core shopping area for retail use.

## 4 DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Redevelopment of parcels in the Central District especially the Downtown and Pedestrian Commercial Core remains a real option for the future. Under this plan a significant amount of redevelopment can take place whenever the market demand will support further development. Projects that come forward will undoubtedly be significantly more intense than the building and uses that now occupy potential redevelopment parcels. Many of these parcels are older structures that do not represent major investments in site improvements. Market demand is the only real barrier to further development and reasonable intensification in the Central District.

The sections that follow present opportunities for development in the various sub-areas that combine to form the Central District. There are twelve of them covering both the commercial and residential dominated areas covered by this plan. Figure 11, Central District Sub-Areas, locates each sub-areas and indicates by figure number where the reader can find the individual map series that show; existing land-use, existing zoning and the planned zoning policies that will enable development opportunities.

At the time of adoption of this plan (the second quarter of 2001), there appears to be significant demand for more residential development in the form of relatively high-priced condominium. This type of development adjacent to and within the Pedestrian Commercial Core is very positive for growth in the market for other uses, as it brings more people with substantial disposable income into the immediate market area. There is, of course, a finite limit to the numbers of new units that can be added over time. Market demand cannot grow indefinitely. As a classic single-sided market, like other north shore communities, Highland Park has limitation to its retail development potential caused by its geographic location on the shore of Lake Michigan. For now, however, the Central District population is growing due to the condominium development activity of recent years. As redevelopment sites outside the Pedestrian Commercial Core are reduced in number, pressure will be brought to add such units inside the Pedestrian Commercial Core itself.

Other kinds of development that are not particularly market driven are also supported by this plan. Of particular importance is the addition of affordable housing units to assure that the community will have reasonable balance in its housing supply for families of diverse income levels. Community and cultural facilities also have a place in the Central District as they enrich the lives of all Highland Park residents.

This Plan supports such development. It will add strength to the retail and commercial activities on which a healthy downtown anywhere is dependent. It also offers the potential to greatly improve the quality of the buildings and architecture on many of the streets inside the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area. While total retail space will increase slightly perhaps, the engine to drive new and more substantial buildings can come from a strategy that encourages residential development within the core. The challenge to the City is fivefold:

1. Assure that new development has the kind of design excellence that Highland Park residents have come to appreciate and demand.

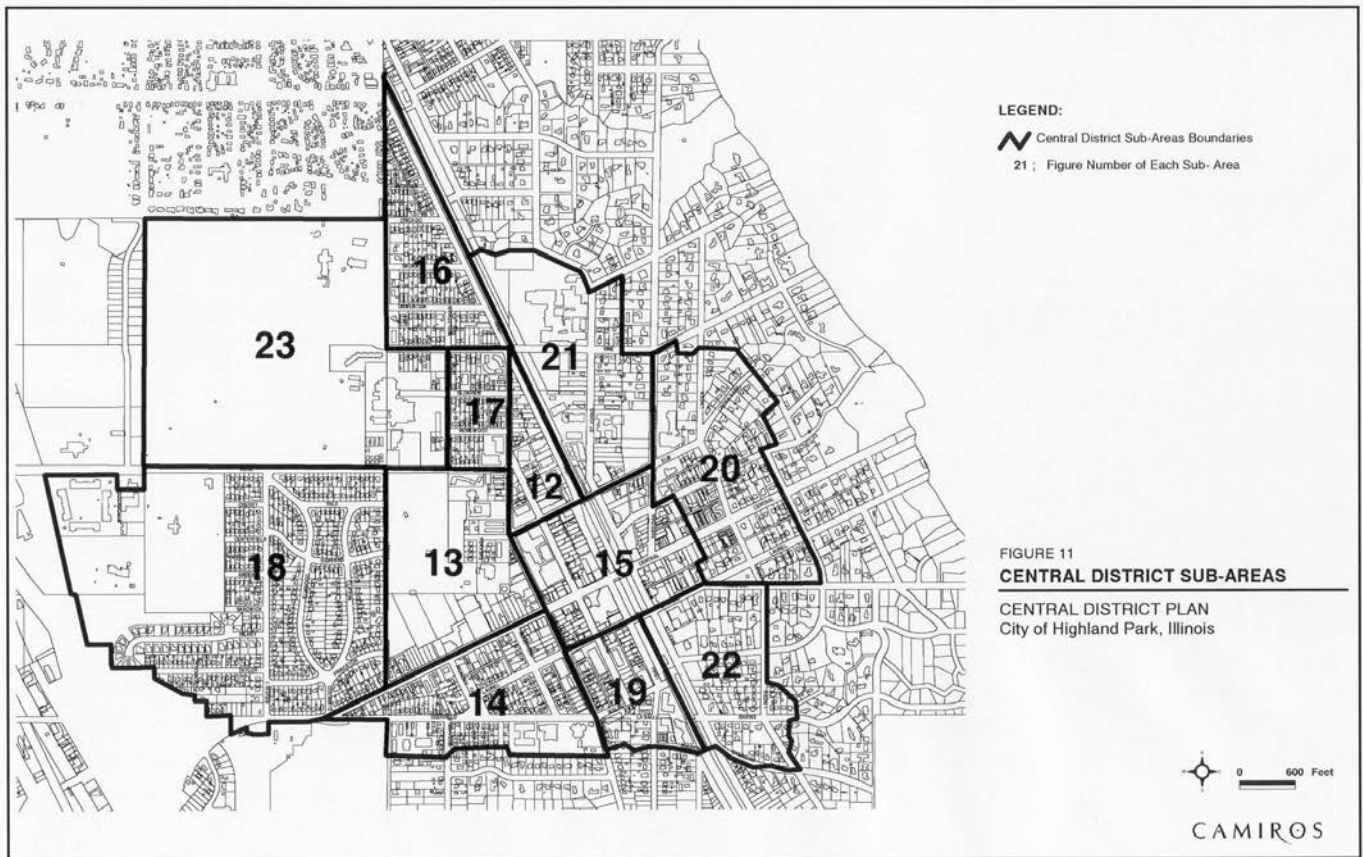
Balance the amount and scale of new, mixed-use development with the shared community value of maintaining community identity and traditions, and the familiar look of the Central District. Pacing the rate of change can help, as can advanced zoning and architect design techniques. Provisions such as the addition of story limitations to the control of building height, the requirement for peaked roof lines and the application of the ziggurat principle on signature streets will add to the City's control over what the character of new development will be in the future.

2. Manage the parking system to make the Pedestrian Commercial Core appealing and convenient to the resident, shopper and visitor.
3. Continue to encourage cultural and entertainment activities within the core area.
4. Increase the attention put into beautifying the Pedestrian Commercial Core.

All of these strategies are included in this Plan. As a package they can make healthy change and balanced growth a very positive thing for the community. Redevelopment requires intensification in all but a very few instances. The overall excellent health of the Central District allows the community to manage intensification so that it remains within acceptable scale and that what does arise is well done and adds to the community.

Suggestions regarding land use and character of development are general and should be seen as such. It is primarily each individual property owner, within the parameters of established land use regulations and community design review that primarily determines actual redevelopment of any site. Parking is the wildcard however. In most cases public/private cooperation or partnerships will be needed for other large-scale developments such as Renaissance Place. Such participation can provide much greater project control that will give the community confidence in the outcome of any such future projects.

**FIGURE 11: CENTRAL DISTRICT SUB-AREAS**



## **4.1 COMMERCIAL AREA OPPORTUNITIES**

A number of development opportunities exist within the Central District due to the strength and success of the area and the exiting zoning provisions that have long been a part of the City's planning and zoning policies for the area. Among this Plan's basic assumptions is the need to adjust zoning and land use regulations to be more responsive to prevailing community values that include the desire to maintain the City's traditional sense of character and scale. In response, this Plan proposes policies that suggest reducing permitted building heights from that currently permitted as a matter of right.

Yet significant development potential remains because of the vast difference between what is now built and the historic zoning allowance even after downward adjustments. The challenge before the City during the life of this Plan is to maintain the balance between traditional, familiar elements of the Downtown physical environment with the equally important element of providing a framework for land use change thorough redevelopment that can maintain a healthy commercial core.

The Illustrative Concept on Figure 3, is meant to indicate the possibilities for development that exist in the prime target areas within the Pedestrian Commercial Core and immediate surrounding neighborhoods. These concepts suggest projects in order to illustrate potential and quality standards that the City expects from any new development. They do not represent City policy in any manner and, most particularly, they do not imply City policy regarding the removal, acquisition or redevelopment of any individual property shown in the Illustrative Concept itself. Redevelopment in any of these areas is expected be initiated by property owners, not by the City.

The maps associated with each of the sub-areas discussed below shown present conditions through existing land use, the present zoning of each area and recommendations for adjusting zoning for each area; in effect zoning policy covering the prime development sites in the Central District. These maps indicate directly the City's policy for what it would like to see happen for these key sites.

### **4.1.1 ELM PLACE/GREEN BAY ROAD/FIRST STREET TRIANGLE**

This area, bounded by Green Bay Road, Elm Place and First Street is located north of the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area streets that border and traverse the area, forming it into two triangular parcels - one large, the other much smaller. Elm Place has relatively new developments (Walgreens and Elm Place Shops) and serves as the base of each. Automotive service stations occupy the point of each of the two triangles where Second Street meets Green Bay Road and where First Street meets Green Bay Road.

Significant redevelopment and updating appears on the horizon for much of this area. The area is characterized by older structures, many of which were originally built to service automobiles and many of which still remain automotive-oriented. Along Green Bay Road older residential remnants await redevelopment. Other commercial building fronting on Green Bay Road remain viable for a variety of eclectic shops that cannot afford to pay the higher rents typical of the Pedestrian Commercial Core stores. A number of these building can remain and be made part of an overall development scheme with careful site design.

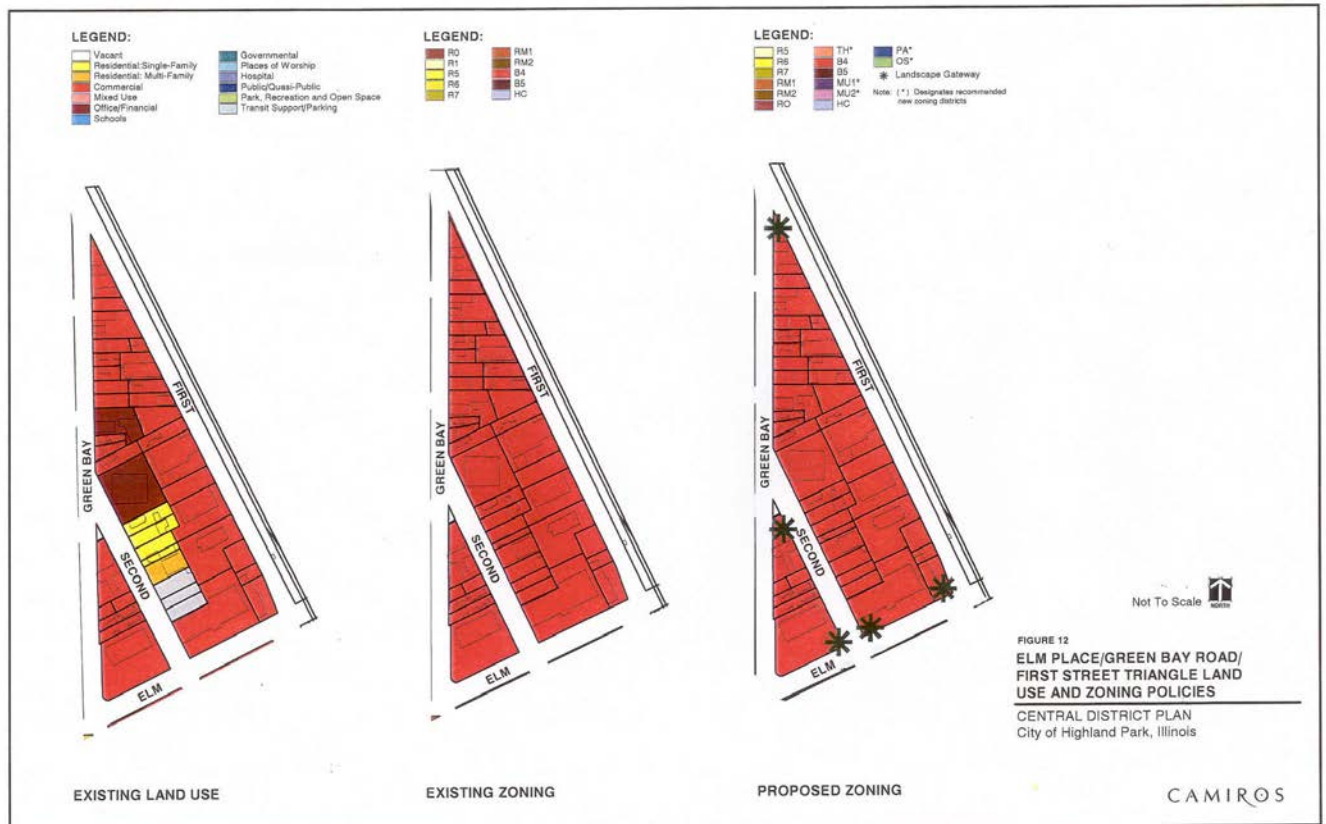
Proposed land use for this area under this Plan is Community Convenience Commercial. The Plan's recommended zoning policy for this area maintains the entire area B4 commercial, the same as it has been under the current (year 2000) Zoning Ordinance. Land uses that now exist serve an important function in the community - housing businesses that cannot, and for the most part should not, be located in the

Pedestrian Commercial Core Area. Examples include the car wash, fast food restaurants and gasoline service stations. These types of uses are important for the accommodation of community residents.

Within this land use context, redevelopment opportunities still exist. The most appealing areas for such redevelopment may be the frontage along Green Bay Road, more or less across from the Homewood Avenue intersection, and further to the south along the Second Street frontage between West Park Avenue and Elm Place. Figure 12, Elm Place/Green Bay Road/First Street Triangle Land Use and Zoning Policies, indicates one example of what may result from redevelopment actions in this area over time.

Opportunity exists to enhance and beautify the northern approach to the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area of the City in this area. The intersection of Green Bay Road, Second Street and Park Avenue is planned to become a gateway into the downtown. Streetscape treatment of the intersection can be significantly improved. A significant gateway feature, such as an obelisk, fountain or sculpture, would be a strong feature at this intersection; a similar treatment may be considered for the point formed by Green Bay Road and First Street where Vine Avenue intersects.

**FIGURE 12: ELM PLACE/GREEN BAY ROAD/FIRST STREET TRIANGLE LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



#### **4.1.2 WATER TOWER AREA**

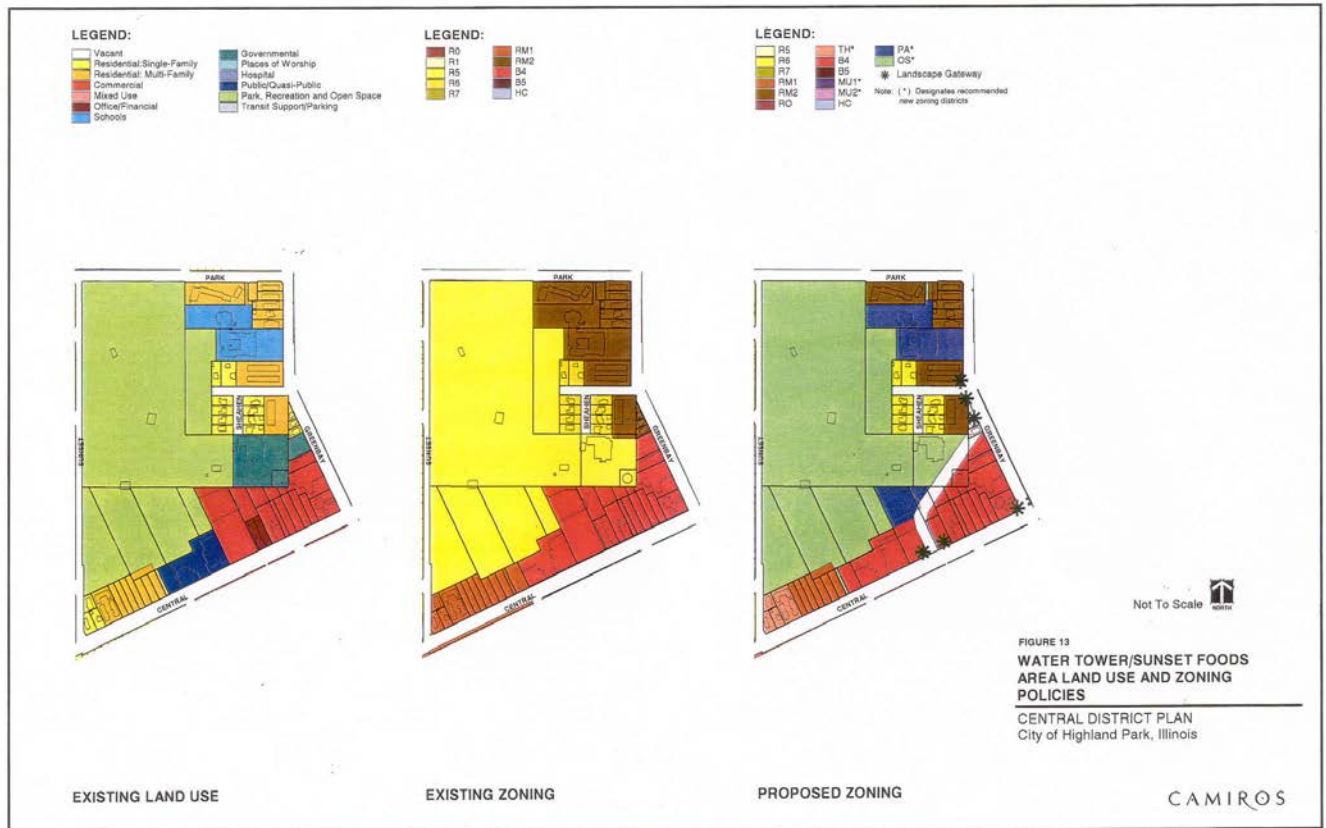
Green Bay Road, Central Avenue and the proposed Water Tower Boulevard defines the Water Tower Area. It is located west of the Pedestrian Commercial Core and is dominated by the Sunset Foods grocery store (see Figure 2: Existing Land Use). The area has a significant grade change from east to west falling 20 to 30 feet from Green Bay Road to the planned termination of Water Tower Boulevard. An automotive service station occupies the northwest corner of the intersection of Green Bay Road and Central Avenue. Sunset Foods and attendant off-street parking occupy most of the balance of the area. Two older commercial buildings front on Central Avenue to the west of the gas station and the former Jewel supermarket site and the existing Post Office compose the west end of this planning area.

The future for this area should be sensitive to two major elements, one economic and the other an urban design element. First, it is important to recognize the Plan policy of strongly encouraging Sunset Foods to remain in its present location and to provide necessary assistance to enable Sunset to modernize and expand their facilities. Second, the City water tower has a role as a visual icon in the community and defines the gateway to the Downtown. The opportunity exists to greatly enhance its immediate base area and to encourage its use by adding landscaping and other inviting improvements, and linking it to both Karger Center and the pedestrian concourse emerging through the center of Renaissance Place. Such improvements would induce people to enjoy it more and come to view it as a unique piece of the pedestrian and open space resources of the community.

Proposed land use for this area are Community Convenience Commercial and a small passive park around the water tower with pedestrian links to Karger Center, Sunset Woods Park and Renaissance Place. Under this development scenario, anticipated redevelopment may include relocating the existing food store in a new and larger facility. Finding adequate space for off-street parking for the new store will be a development challenge for this action. Key to commercial redevelopment of this area is reversing the current relationship of off-street parking areas and buildings to Central Avenue and Green Bay Road. The Illustrative Concept depicts the storefronts moved toward Central Avenue, thus continuing the building scheme established along the street east of Green Bay Road. Off-street parking is illustrated to the north (behind) the commercial frontage. Site planners and architects will be challenged by the change in grade of the land in this area. The grade change may offer a means to incorporate structure parking into the redevelopment plan and should be studied as the project is designed in detail.



**FIGURE 13: WATER TOWER/SUNSET FOODS AREA LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



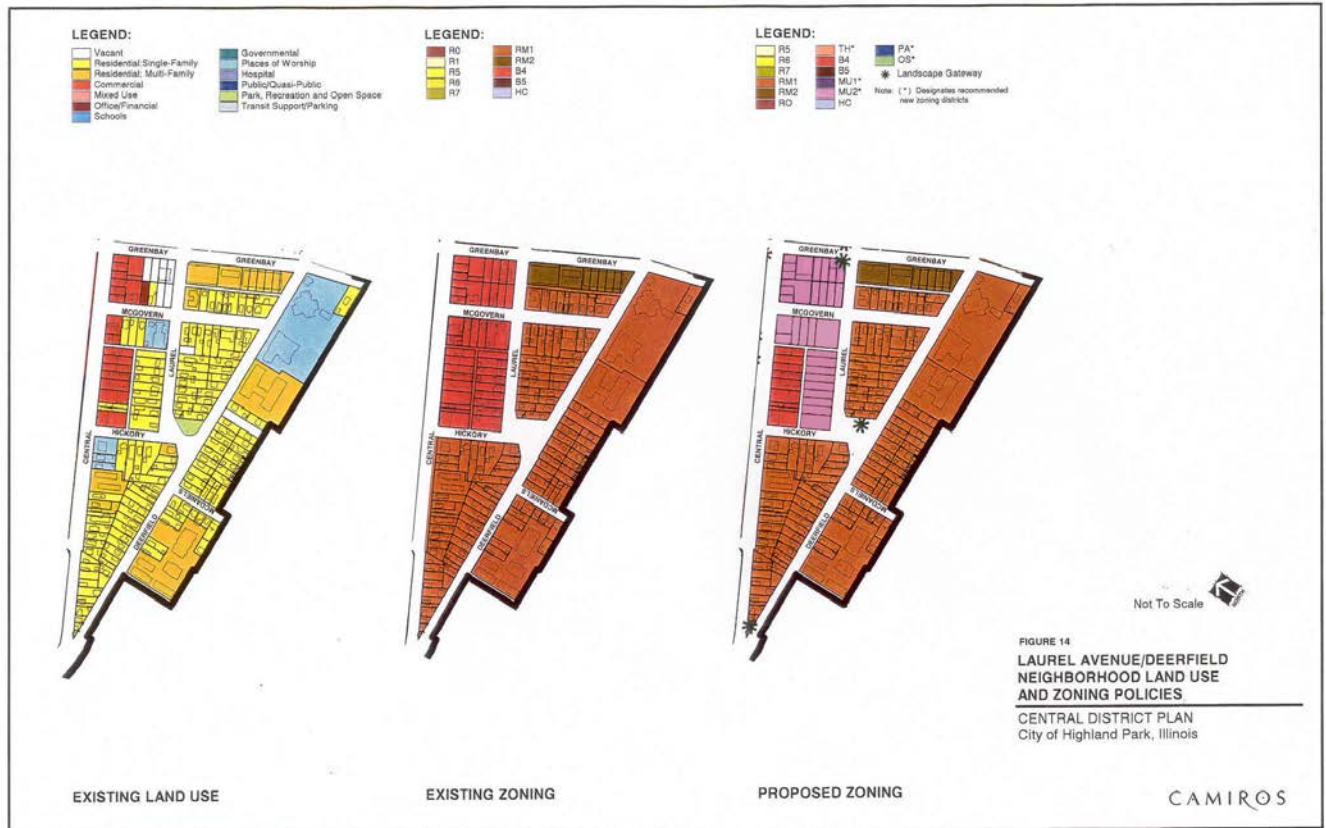
### **4.1.3 LAUREL/DEERFIELD NEIGHBORHOOD**

This triangular area, bounded by Central Avenue, Green Bay Road, and the rear lot line of lots along the south side of Deerfield Road. The area contains a mix of single family cottages and multiple family residences as well as three religious institutions. Elderly housing occupies the site of a former school along the south side of Deerfield Road. The frontage along Central Avenue between Hickory and Green Bay is commercial. The area has been zoned for multiple family residential with commercial zoning again between Hickory and Green Bay, Central and Laurel east of Hickory. Only a few pockets of multiple family have appeared over the past years as a result of the RM1 zoning. Property owners are anticipating that market forces will prompt redevelopment of the RM1 in the near future. Numerous site are available for such residential intensification through redevelopment. In most cases adjoining parcels will have to be joined for logical redevelopment to occur.

There is a major commercial site in this neighborhood as well. It is the former fire station located at the southwest corner of Laurel and Green Bay Road. The face of the block (facing Central Avenue) is occupied by a relatively new structure confirming continued retail and business use of the block. However, the block also transitions into the residential area south and west in the heart of the Laurel/Deerfield Neighborhood. This suggests that the most logical plan for this block may be to reserve it for mixed-use development at the lower intensity proposed for the MU Transition District (MU2 on the Zoning Policies Map). The MU2 provides for non-retail mixed use at the lower height and corresponding lower density as well. Zoning policies for this proposed new zoning district call for structures not higher than three stories instead of four stories. As the name implies, this district transitions the retail and commercial Pedestrian Commercial Core into the Residential enclave along Deerfield Road and Laurel Avenue that lies to the west and south

It is anticipated that any new development will have residential units on the upper floors and a variety of office/service uses on the ground and perhaps even the second floor. Parking for any such new development will most certainly have to be a combination of structure parking and surface parking. If and when new development occurs along the Laurel Avenue frontage, streetscape for the Laurel Avenue frontage should be an important part of the City's development approval criteria. A detailed beautification plan for Laurel Avenue should be in place prior to any redevelopment actions along Laurel Avenue in this area.

## FIGURE 14: LAUREL/DEERFIELD NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES



#### **4.1.4 SECOND AVENUE PLAZA**

This area, bounded by Elm Place, First Street, Central Avenue and Second Street, is in the heart of the Pedestrian Commercial Core. There is a solid front along Central Avenue made up, primarily, of one-story structures that are fully occupied with thriving retail stores and offices. The existing buildings currently fronting Central Avenue are part of the familiar physical context of the Pedestrian Commercial Core, however, they do not begin to approach the zoning potential of the B5 zoning designation even under the expected reduction in building height recommended in the Plan. Nor does this line of buildings exhibit particular architectural excellence or traditional character that help define the Pedestrian Commercial Core. If they were to be replaced with new structures, it would not be unexpected to realize buildings of better design that better contribute to the community values that promote the concept and policy of signature streets in the Pedestrian Commercial Core.

Improvements behind the Central Avenue frontage, to the north, contain a mix of buildings, and unused and unorganized space along with surface parking lots. Some of these buildings have the traditional character of older commercial building; others, with multiple stories represent a degree of investment that would make wholesale redevelopment difficult in the near future. However, a large number of the structures in this area are both undistinguished and of low value relative to the zoning entitlement of the land they occupy. A unique feature of this block is the continuous open space behind buildings that front First Street and Second Street, offering an opportunity to create a pedestrian concourse in this block that corresponds to the concourse designed in Renaissance Place. In contrast, some older buildings along the north end of Second Street have excellent design characteristics and historical quality and have been redeveloped in recent years to accommodate modern uses. As future redevelopment occurs in this area, planners should be sensitive to incorporating these older buildings into plans that may modify this end of Second Street.

The major development opportunity exists mid-block along Second Street, directly across from the concourse that traverses Renaissance Place, that now contain surface parking lots and single story retail buildings. The central feature of an ideal community development in this area would be a formal plaza with enough size to accommodate events surrounded by mixed-use, retail and condominium buildings that will frame the plaza and, in turn, use the plaza to distinguish the project.

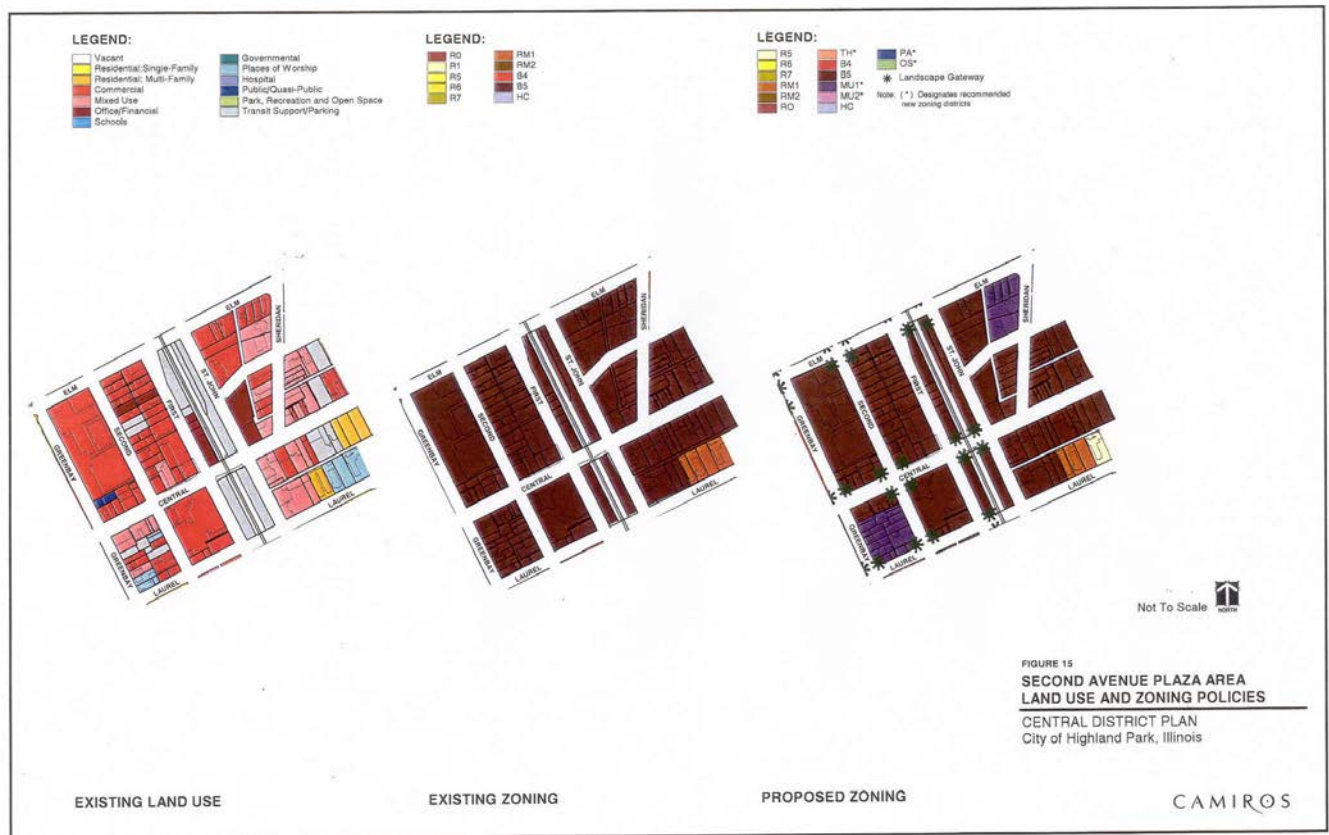
Underground parking would have to be included in any such project that included condominium development on upper floors to promote project feasibility. Pedestrian links can be designed into the block to provide access from parking along First Street and the surface lots that front First Street. It is anticipated that the entire interior of the block would be designed and landscaped to present an extremely appealing pedestrian/shopper environment.

Additional opportunities for mixed-use retail and condominium development may also exist along the Elm Place face of the block. Here, the existing one-story buildings and single story strip commercial developments might give way to more mixed-use retail and residential projects. The unknown is the degree to which off-street surface parking will foreclose other use options. Large mixed-use projects with City assistance may be able to handle off-street parking in a manner that integrates the required parking within the new structure. Certainly the approach would produce better design solutions for the strategic pedestrian environment that is the foundation of the Plan policies for the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area. In reality, both approaches to solving the parking requirement will be necessary – surface and structure parking. A fully integrated, public and private parking system should be considered the essential infrastructure for the continued success of the Central District core area.

Updating of the streetscape is proposed along Second Street. The new streetscape would respond to the elements that define the outside areas of Renaissance Place. New trees would be planted and seating areas offered. New signage would unify the design theme of the area into a single place anchored by the plaza.

The most striking feature of this Plan is the creation of a mid-block plaza and attendant pedestrian approaches. The plaza and pedestrian concourse would knit together the north side of the downtown, build on and secure the success of the Renaissance Place, and give Highland Park another distinguishing element making it the premier downtown among the Chicago suburban communities.

**FIGURE 15: SECOND AVENUE PLAZA AREA LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



## **4.2 RESIDENTIAL AREA OPPORTUNITIES**

Residential uses surround the downtown. These are mature residential neighborhoods that developed during the early growth of the community. The neighborhoods are distinct in the size and character of homes within each area. Six neighborhood units have been delineated based on the physical conditions such as streets, parks and non-residential land uses, which frame or bound the areas. There is no “official” status or recognition of these neighborhoods and their names are based on landmarks or major streets in the area.

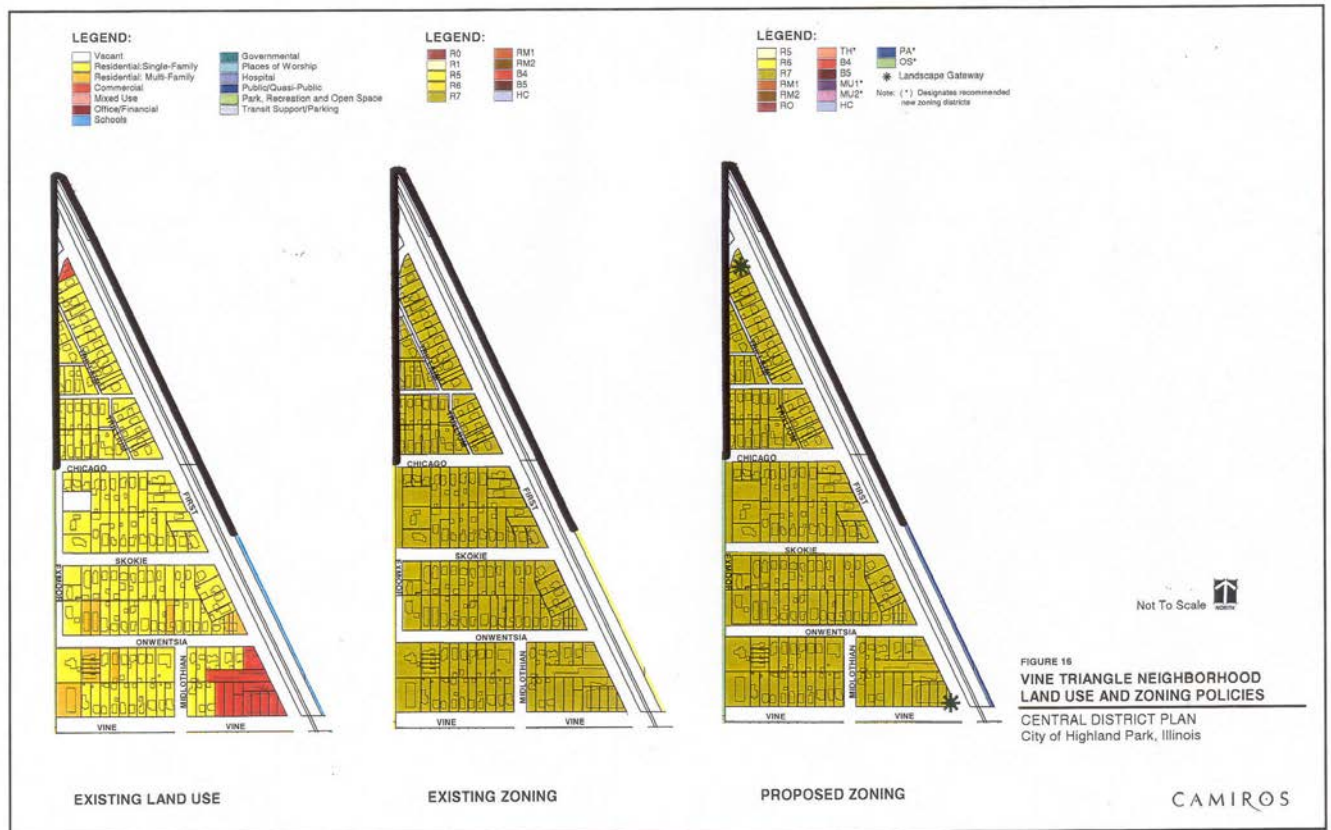
### **4.2.1 VINE TRIANGLE NEIGHBORHOOD.**

This neighborhood comprises the area bounded by Vine Avenue on the south, Green Bay Road, which extends in a southeast-northwest direction, and Exmoor Avenue. The redevelopment pressure in this neighborhood is moderate. The neighborhood has expressed a clear desire to remain single-family in character and was recently rezoned to the R7, single- and two-family zoning category to achieve that purpose. There exists at the corner of Green Bay Road and Vine Avenues long standing commercial uses including offices, retail and service uses that are non-conforming uses to their current zoning district.

Planning recommendations for this area sets a strict conservation policy for this neighborhood maintaining the single-family character under the R7 zoning category and suggesting that the City neighborhood improvement process be applied periodically to assist in maintaining and upgrading the physical condition and the quality of life in the neighborhood.

The plan also recommends that all existing non-conforming commercial uses in the area be allowed to continue by removing the amortization provisions for such non-conformities from the zoning ordinance. Further, the Plan Commission and City Council shall explore amendments to the zoning ordinance that would allow the continuation of non-conforming commercial uses through the designation of such uses as conditional uses.

## FIGURE 16: VINE TRIANGLE NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES





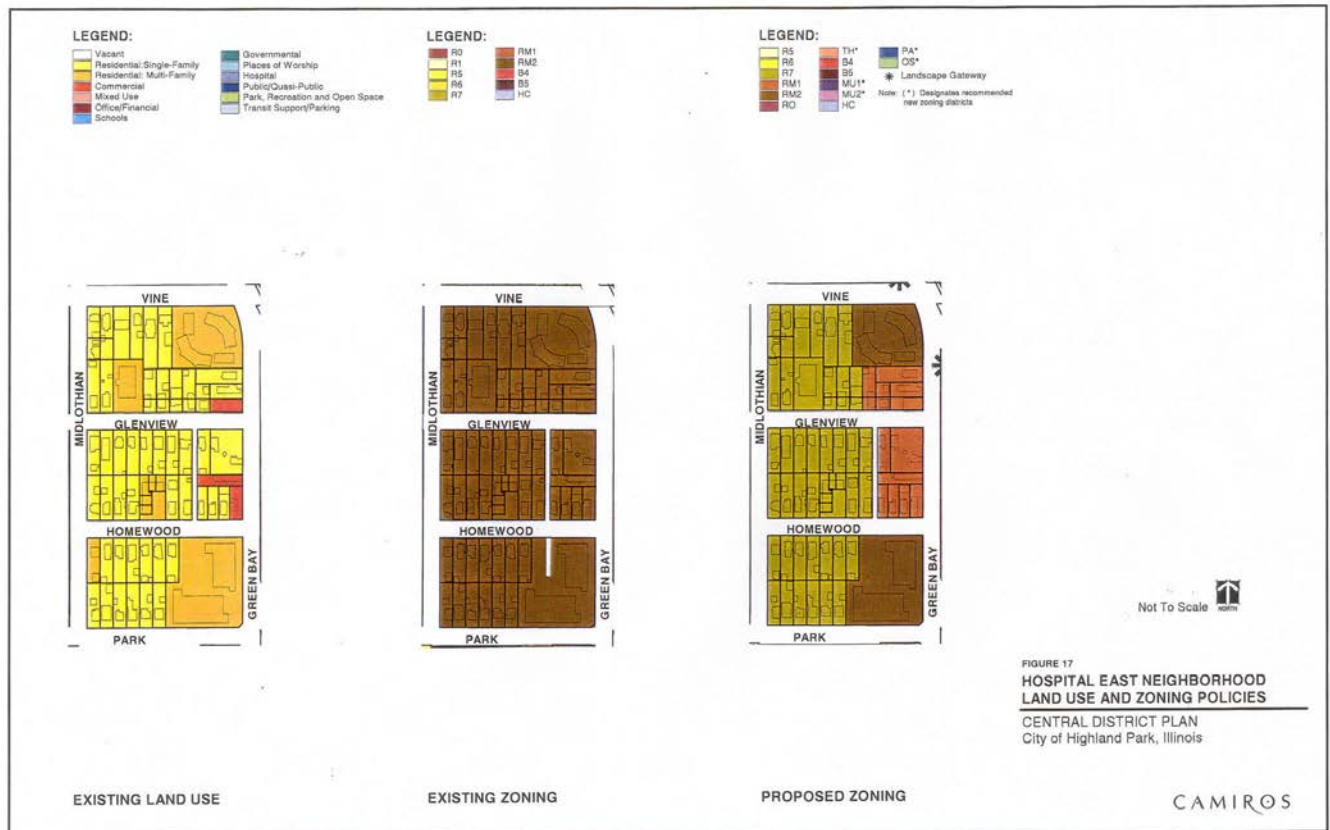
#### **4.2.2 HOSPITAL EAST NEIGHBORHOOD.**

As implied by the name, this neighborhood consists of the residential area that is immediately east of Highland Park Hospital. Its boundaries are: Vine Avenue on the north, Green Bay Road on the east, Midlothian Avenue on the west and West Park Avenue on the south. This area has, until very recently, been undergoing redevelopment pressure from previous expansion plans for the hospital and hospital-related activities. With a change in ownership and subsequent shift in the hospital's plans for the future, the Hospital East Neighborhood has a different future and the option to select the nature of that future. Some higher density residential uses have developed in the area. However, most of the residential uses remain single-family in nature even though there are a scattering of small-scale multiple-family units inside the neighborhood. Of course, along the Green Bay Road frontage to the neighborhood at West Park and Vine Avenues, higher density condominium projects have previously been developed.

The Plan sets forth a new conservation-oriented planning policy for this neighborhood. It is to be maintained as a residential neighborhood as it is at present, rather than a hospital expansion reserve. Accordingly, zoning designation should change from RM2 to a combination of R7 west of the immediate Green Bay Road frontage, with a combination of existing RM2 zoning and RM1 designation along the Green Bay Road frontage. Along Green Bay Road, the existing multiple family developments at Green Bay Road and Vine Avenue shall maintain the RM2 zoning designation and the intervening areas should be rezoned to the RM1 zoning district.

Because of years of multiple-family zoning, there will be a limited number of smaller scale multiple-family structures mixed in with the predominant single-family and two-family dwellings. The policy of change for this neighborhood recognizes and acknowledges this historic fact and accepts these multiple-family structures in their present numbers as consistent and a part of the neighborhood varied housing fabric. Recent changes to the provisions for non-conforming residential uses in the Zoning Ordinance enable these structures to continue to exist within the R7 zoning districts without undue regulatory burden.

**FIGURE 17: HOSPITAL EAST NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



### **4.2.3 SUNSET WOODS NEIGHBORHOOD.**

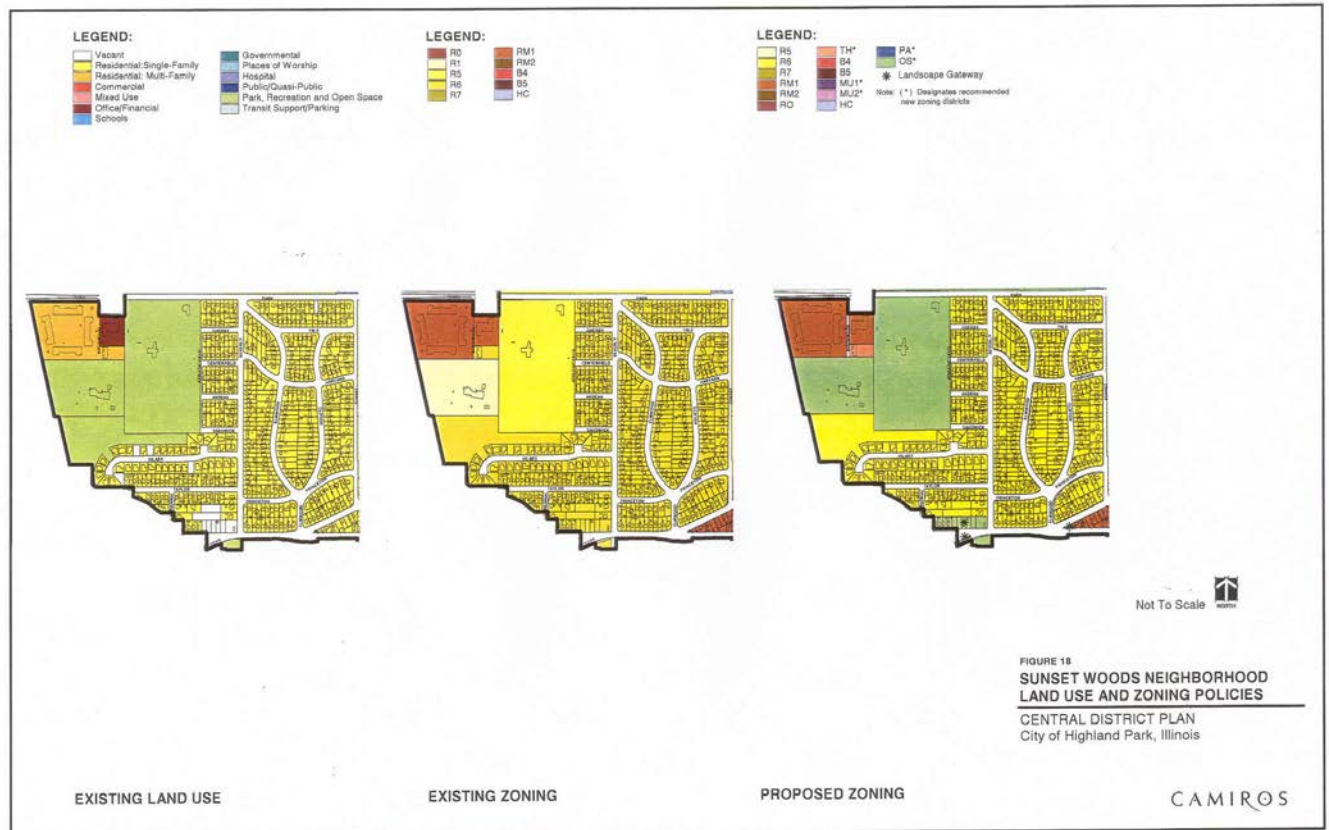
This relatively large, single-family residential area lies between Sunset Woods Park and the Skokie River, and from West Park Avenue on the north to Central Avenue on the south. The area is stable, with some pressure being felt on the perimeter, especially along Central Avenue, for redevelopment. It is an area built under the City's R6 zoning district and remains under that land use and density regulatory framework. It is an area of fine, well kept homes, close to Sunset Woods Park and the downtown core, with well-defined boundaries and a strong sense of neighborhood connection. It is an area that is vulnerable to teardowns due to its desirability and the relatively large lot area that is characteristic of the neighborhood. A number of large new homes have been built on Hilary Lane that has solidified the western part of the neighborhood as a single-family area. Traffic is an issue and a concern in the neighborhood. Beverly Place has been designated for the testing of traffic calming measures to reduce the impact of "cut through" vehicles using the neighborhood to avoid the Green Bay Road/Central Avenue intersection.

The Plan establishes a conservation planning policy for this neighborhood with special attention to controlling the nature and amount of teardown activity in the area. The neighborhood should remain in its present R6 zoning district category. As one alternative, the frontage on the north side of Central Avenue west of Beverly Place should be considered for use as an open space entry feature to the Central District.

Areas along and south of West Park Avenue west of the High School athletic fields, represent a mix of uses including a sports club, offices townhouses and multifamily residential. All these uses co-exist harmoniously and are likely to remain in their present configuration unless market values force redevelopment due to shifts in the market. Long-term plan recommendations include single-family use for the sports club and townhouse residential for the balance of the area.

In the Sunset Park neighborhood, benefits will flow from application of the City's continuous neighborhood improvement program. Anticipated outcomes from this program will help in the effort to maintain the housing stock in the neighborhood by underpinning value and thus making teardown that much less economically feasible. However, a more directed policy to inhibit teardowns is required to truly make a difference in stopping this trend. A zoning ordinance policy that would reduce the ability to cover more of an individual zoning lot with building footprint may be considered.

## FIGURE 18: SUNSET WOODS NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES



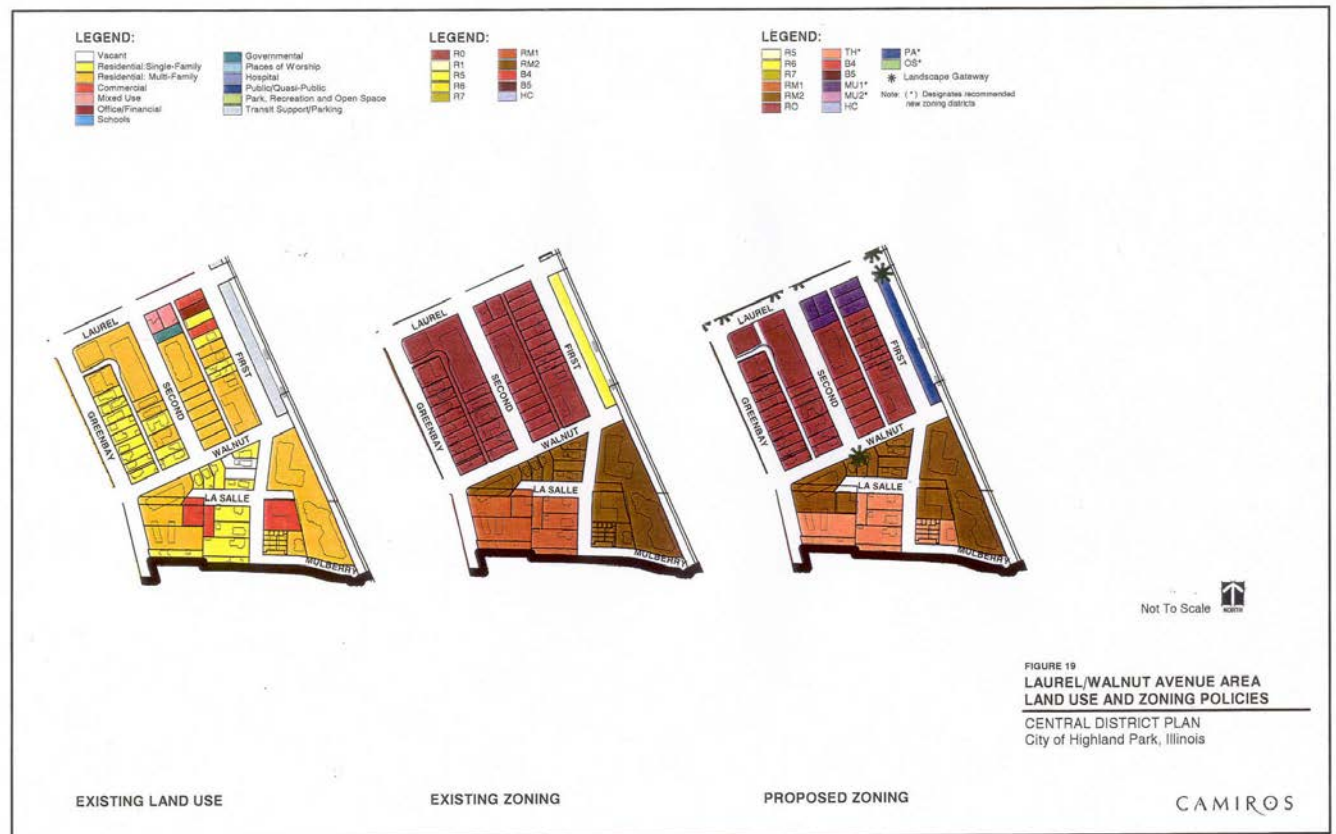
#### **4.2.4 LAUREL/WALNUT NEIGHBORHOOD.**

This neighborhood continues to be an area of change. Many homes in the eastern portion of the area, in the vicinity of First Street and Walnut Street and Second Street and Green Bay Road, have been acquired and replaced, or are about to be replaced, with multi-family residences, primarily condominiums. The proximity of this area to the Metra station and the downtown makes it a desirable location for commuters and those who desire to be near to the conveniences of the downtown. A portion of the western part of the neighborhood is expected to serve as a buffer between the commercial activities of the downtown and the single-family homes along Deerfield Road. Low-density, multi-family uses, such as low-rise garden apartments and condominiums and townhouses, are proposed for a portion of this neighborhood.

The Plan reaffirms a policy seeking redevelopment of most of the lots in this neighborhood to a higher density than currently is the case. Six zoning categories are applied to this neighborhood in the Plan: RO, RM-2, RM-1 and the newly proposed districts TH (Townhouse district) and the MU-TC (Mixed-Use Town Center District). The mixed-use category is applied along the south side of Laurel Avenue between Second Street and First Street encouraging a mix of residential with the commercial opportunities.

Zoning policy for the residential areas of this neighborhood invite redevelopment at higher densities throughout most of the area. The Townhouse district is strategically placed at the south end of the neighborhood to act as a transition between the highest uses (RM-2 and RO districts) and nearby single-family residential uses to the south of the Central District.

**FIGURE 19: LAUREL AVENUE/WALNUT LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**

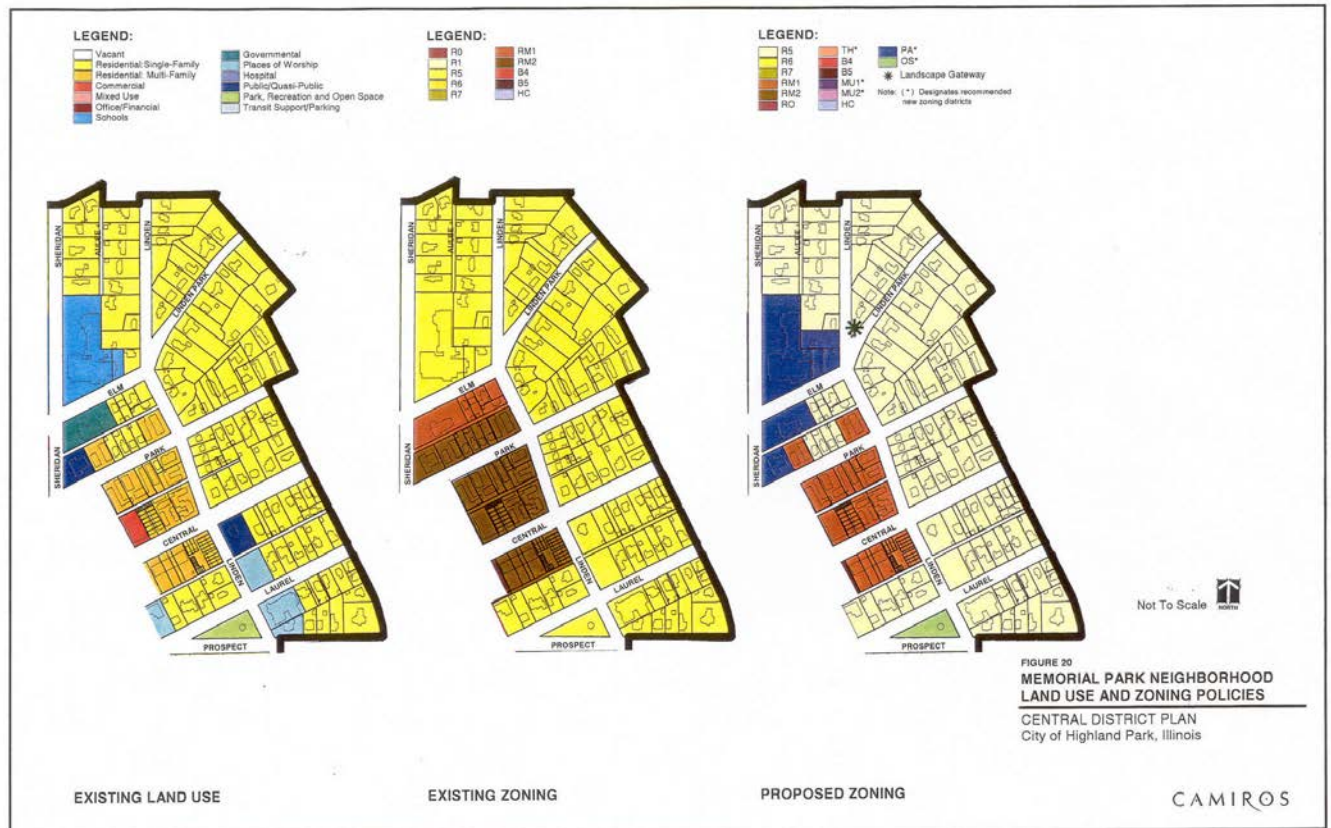


#### **4.2.5 MEMORIAL PARK NEIGHBORHOOD.**

Located east of the Metra train tracks and generally south of the east side of the downtown core, this neighborhood reflects the stately homes of the lakefront residential areas in the City. A number of local and national structures are listed in the National Register and a portion of the Hazel Avenue/Prospect Avenue National Historic Register District is in this neighborhood.

The Plan recommends a strict conservation policy for this neighborhood in the eastern section of the Central District. The single family precincts generally east of Linden Avenue are designated to remain as they are now - maintaining its present R5 zoning and subject to the City's neighborhood improvement program, as are other Central District neighborhoods. The multiple family areas now zoned RM-2 that lie west of Linden Avenue are to be down zoned to RM-1 with small areas along Park and Elm Place suggested to be rezoned to R5. These lots contain historic homes that are a resource for the community and should be encouraged to remain as part of the housing legacy of the community.

**FIGURE 20: MEMORIAL PARK NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



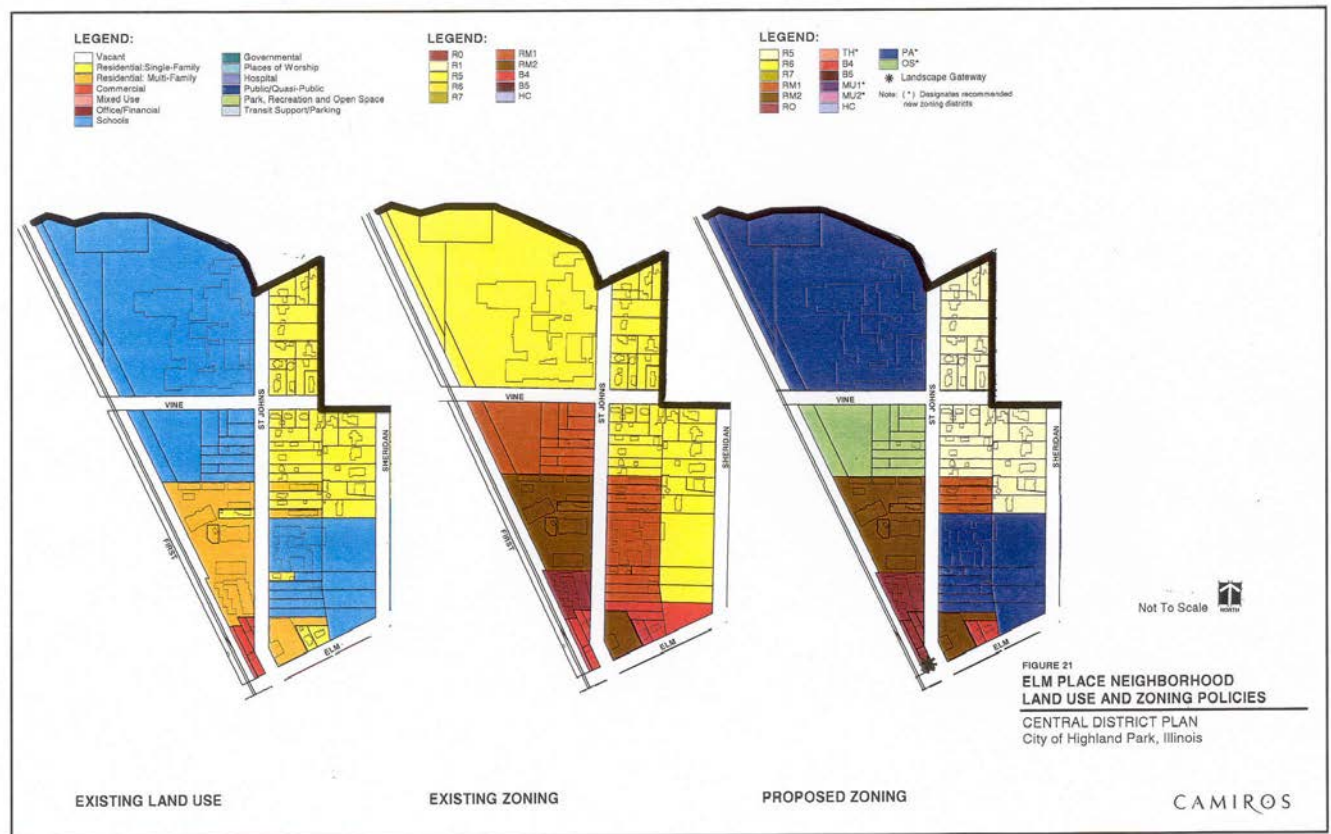


#### **4.2.6 ELM PLACE NEIGHBORHOOD.**

This neighborhood is located north of the retail core and east of the Metra train tracks. It is similar in character to the Memorial Park Neighborhood in type and character of housing. Portions of two historic districts, the Maple Avenue/Maple Lane National Register District and the Linden Park Place and Belle Avenue District, are in this neighborhood. Low density multiple family buildings are located along Linden Place and provide a source of relatively affordable housing in the Central District.

The Plan treats the Elm Place Neighborhood much the same as the single-family portions of the Memorial Park neighborhood. The Elm Place Neighborhood is designated for strict conservation of its present quality character. R5 single-family zoning should remain in place. The City should extend an anti-teardown policy and related techniques for this historic neighborhood, as it is also susceptible to the teardown phenomenon that is found throughout the City's lakefront residential areas.

**FIGURE 21: ELM PLACE NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



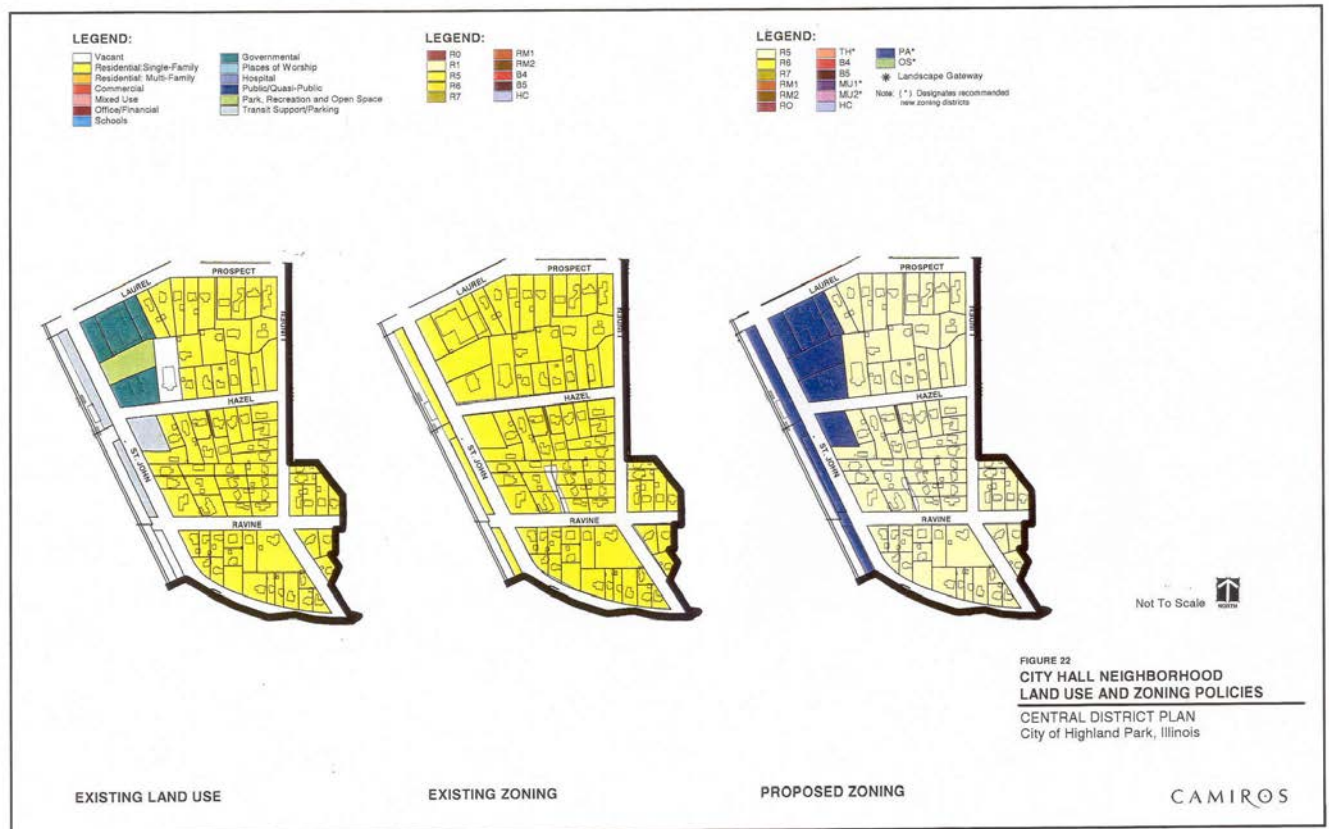
#### **4.2.7 CITY HALL NEIGHBORHOOD**

This neighborhood is anchored by the Civic buildings located along St Johns Avenue generally south of Prospect Avenue extending to Linden on the east and Sheridan Road on the south. The neighborhood is made up of the civic buildings, Library and City Hall and fine single-family homes on relatively large lots for the Central District

The Plan treats the City Hall Neighborhood is much the same as other east side neighborhoods. The City Hall Neighborhood is designated for strict conservation of its present character. R5 single-family zoning should remain in place. The City should extend an anti-teardown policy and related techniques for this historic neighborhood, as it is also susceptible to the teardown phenomenon that is found throughout the City's lakefront residential areas.

This policy will preserve the low density, single-family dwellings and maintain the character of this important neighborhood.

**FIGURE 22: CITY HALL NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



#### **4.2.8 EXMOOR/HIGHLAND PARK HOSPITAL DISTRICT**

This district is not a true neighborhood but rather the balance of the Central District made up of two large landholds; the Exmoor Country Club and the Highland Park Hospital campus. Housing does exist in this district however it is hospital owned housing for employees located at the west end of the hospital campus.

The Plan recommends that the hospital campus remain within its present boundaries east of Midlothian Avenue and south of Vine Avenue. The hospital is zoned in a special HC, Hospital zoning district that suit its needs and those of the surrounding residential neighborhood.

The largest single parcel of land in the central District is the Exmoor Country Club with its golf course and grounds. This major open space is an environmental benefit for the community and should be encouraged to remain in its present function. Zoning the area as Open Space in the new OS district will act to protect the community from a change in use should the golf club use cease for whatever reason. Under this zoning, a future user would be encouraged to petition the City for a rezoning for a new use for this large parcel. As such, the City would have significant control over the future use of the land. As a matter of future land use policy, this parcel should be primarily single family residential in nature. However, the size of the parcel would tend to encourage a planned development approach to any kind of redevelopment opening the possibility for some variety in housing type, price level and occupancy mix.

**FIGURE 23: EXMOOR/HOSPITAL NEIGHBORHOOD LAND USE AND ZONING POLICIES**



## 5 IMPLEMENTATION

Change is inevitable in any active and vibrant commercial district. The challenge for City officials and planners - and developers for that matter - is to manage change so that the downtown's economic health is maintained, the tax base of the community protected for the long-term, and the valued elements that connect residents to their heritage are preserved. This requires recognition of three interrelated policies that are responsive to these realities.

First, the competitive alignment facing the retail business community of downtown Highland Park is evolving continuously and, as it does, presents an ever-changing challenge to the retailers. Retailing itself is in flux as new entries in the marketplace appear and new methods of retailing arise. This dynamic environment requires that downtown Highland Park retailing change and evolve to stay competitive. At the present time, the retail structure of downtown Highland Park appears quite viable and the introduction of Renaissance Place has an excellent chance of further securing the competitive strength of the downtown.

Second, protection of all of the components of the City's tax base is good management of the community's resources. The downtown tax base is an important part of the City's total tax base. State sales tax rebates are another critical economic component for the City to manage. Downtown retail sales compose a significant component of overall retail sales and this sales tax base needs to be preserved and promoted for the long-term.

Third, preserving the critical elements of the City's heritage - places, structures and ambiance that are the shared icons of the community - need to be assured as part of an overall response to the community reaction to intense redevelopment in Highland Park.

This chapter presents strategies aimed at balancing the strengths and weaknesses of Highland Park, both real and perceived. As a group, these strategies seek to attract desirable and realistic uses, which augment existing uses and help to achieve the vision for the Central District.

## **5.1 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

The early and middle 1990s were a very active time for development. The economy was "robust," existing office and retail space - part of the 1980's construction boom - was generally filled, and development financing for a range of projects was relatively easy to secure. The development history of downtown Highland Park presents a clear enough example of how the national economy, as well as other forces, can hinder or initiate the development process.

Therefore, the proposed development strategies balance downtown needs with development realities and identify opportunities for improvement. With that construct in mind, the strategies described here identify a series of projects to help achieve the Downtown Vision.

### **5.1.1 RENAISSANCE PLACE SPIN-OFF DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE**

The Renaissance Place development went through a long and complicated approval and construction process and expectations are that it will succeed economically. The anticipated success of this project will likely create demand for additional users in the downtown who want to be as close to the project as possible. Opportunities for additional commercial development have been identified herein and the Plan Commission and City Council will be required to manage other complex planning processes including, most likely, significant public and private initiatives.

### **5.1.2 RETAINING A GROCERY STORE**

Until recently, downtown Highland Park was fortunate to have two full service grocery stores. Chain grocery stores have very specific marketing areas and needs for physical space. Such stores typically require 70,000 square feet of space and a location within a shopping center. The Jewel-Osco chain moved out of the downtown because the acreage necessary to accommodate such a development was not available. The remaining store, Sunset Foods, is a local "institution" in the community and offers personal service not offered by the larger chains. The quality and consistency of such service is valued highly by City residents.

It is unlikely nor desired that the downtown attract one of the new "super" food stores or one of the "warehouse" type food stores which have lower prices but limited service. The "geography" of the community, as mentioned earlier, does not lend itself to a large market area. Therefore, it is imperative that the community retain a local grocer. The Plan recommends that the long-range site and space needs of the store be discussed with the owners and public/private partnerships to facilitate redevelopment be explored.

### **5.1.3 AUTO MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR**

There are a number of auto maintenance and repair facilities in downtown Highland Park surrounding the commercial core. These uses are well-suited for downtown because of the central location and customer access to Metra rail and Pace bus facilities. However, the appearance of some of the existing auto repair uses requires improvement in order to enhance the downtown's appearance.

One option for addressing this problem is that the existing facilities be made more attractive. Numerous examples exist of gas stations and similar uses (even at the entries to downtown areas) that are attractively landscaped and present a clean appearance. However, most of these facilities in downtown Highland Park



have limited space for even modest landscape improvements. These uses negatively affect the visual entry to the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area. Several are located along Green Bay Road at the north end of the downtown. The service stations along Green Bay Road should be encouraged to put much greater effort into their site landscaping, especially at the “points” where Green Bay Road intersects First Street and Second Street.

Given these concerns, a number of sites should be considered for redevelopment or expansion as auto-related uses. A number of properties are located along First Street, north of Elm Place, which could accommodate auto-related uses. The location and shape of these sites will require creative site planning, focusing on several factors. Special attention should be given to fencing and landscaping between these uses and adjacent residential uses. Also, in pursuing this option, the City should work with existing downtown auto maintenance and repair users to assess their interest and the potential for this type of redevelopment.

#### **5.1.4 ENTERTAINMENT**

The entertainment function in the Central District is not currently developed to its full potential. Few residents come downtown primarily for entertainment. During the past few years, however, a number of eating and entertainment establishments have located in the Pedestrian Commercial Core Area. The development of Renaissance Place also includes a restaurant and a movie theater, as well as destination-type retail stores. The goal for the City should be to promote the shopping environment as an attraction which will, in turn, generate the entertainment component of the downtown.

The entertainment strategy for the downtown cannot be a single activity or use, but a series of activities, some of which already exist. Note that those activities come in two varieties - those unique to downtown Highland Park and those that may be found elsewhere. The entertainment uses present a variety of attractions and, to the extent possible, each should be expanded. The special activities include the theater at the Apple Tree Theater, the numerous events at the Highland Park Community House, and the annual Port Clinton Art Festival. These activities cannot be found in every community; they are destinations that serve a broader market. They also bring character and identity to the downtown. Events and attractions such as these do not directly bring shoppers’ downtown, but are intended to expand the awareness of available business and appreciation of the Central District.

A major initiative of the Plan is to organize community resources to realize a performing arts center to be located within the Central District. Such a facility would be an additional draw for downtown businesses and an added attraction for the quality-of-life in Highland Park.

### **5.2 DOWNTOWN AESTHETIC STRATEGIES**

Strategies to enhance the appearance of downtown must be seen as supportive, and part, of the other strategies and plans. Simply improving the aesthetics of the downtown will not revitalize the area or change its image. Conversely, redevelopment of the downtown without aesthetic improvements will not create the downtown character described by the Plan’s goals and policies. Therefore, a strategy to continually augment downtown’s physical appearance is essential. The program for implementing this strategy is described in Chapter 3 of this Plan in the section covering Urban Design. Previous urban design studies have been prepared by the City and these too should be looked to for direction in pursuing the urban design policies embodied in this Plan. Some of the major elements are as follows.

### **5.2.1 STREETScape**

*Public Space for the Public.* Apply the principles of good urban public space design, so that existing areas can be reinforced and new areas can be created that will be used and appreciated by the public.

*Building Entrances.* Encourage street level entrances instead of interior, “mall type” entrance corridors for better interaction between businesses and the public environment.

*Pedestrian Amenities.* Continue to enhance the pleasurable public experience of being downtown by maintaining the existing pedestrian amenities and exploring new ways to add interactive urban design elements like fountains and art in public areas.

*Maintenance of Alleys.* Encourage the use of existing alleys for loading, garbage pick-up, utilities, and, in some instances, parking. Also, encourage joint property access easements in the rear of lots where alleys have previously been vacated. Discourage alley vacations that will be impediments to existing, or future, site servicing needs.

*Front Setbacks.* Consider adopting “build to front lot line” requirements downtown to continue the setback pattern, preserve the existing pedestrian scale and reinforce the visual aesthetics of the pathways.

*Scale.* Maintain and enhance the existing pedestrian scale of the downtown. Redevelopment and new development should strike a balance between street width and building mass, while paying particular attention to the details at, and near, the pedestrian level(s). There should also be a general consistency between new and existing building widths and the vertical rhythm (piers) in the facade.

*Height.* Set a minimum building height standard of two stories for new infill development in the downtown area. When surrounding buildings are three stories or taller, require new buildings to be of a relatively compatible height - not to exceed current zoning height - in order to strengthen the height continuity of downtown. Employ the ziggurat concept where building height is permitted to increase as buildings setback further from the street in the B5 District.

### **5.2.2 ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER**

Attention to details in architectural design and streetscape design should be encouraged. This would help to soften, as well as elaborate on, the urban environment that is the downtown. Such details include, but are not limited to, soldier brick courses and other ornate materials used to breakup the monotony of facades, window size, placement and repetition, cornices, rooflines and roof pitches, and projections and recessions of building walls, which add architectural rhythm and help to breakup the monotony of facades. Also, decorative brick paving patterns in the sidewalk, formally spaced street trees, uniform decorative lighting, and comfortable, well-placed benches along the sidewalks and at corners can contribute to architectural character definition.

### **5.2.3 PARKING**

*Parking Structures.* Explore the possibility of converting some parking areas along the Metra train tracks from surface to structure parking. For example, adding just one level of parking to both public lots on the

east side of St. Johns Avenue, straddling both sides of Central Avenue, would increase their capacity by over 200 spaces.

*On-Site Parking.* Consider prohibiting new developments from building on-site parking lots in front of building(s). Instead, encourage parking behind buildings when possible, or on the side when appropriate.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

It is not often that communities undertake comprehensive planning for their central areas when times are good and the area is prospering. More often, such planning is propelled by crisis or the demise of the downtown economy. Highland Park has not had to react in this way. Instead, the City has planned rationally at a peak of Central District success. This represents both thoughtful and rational stewardship of one of the most important areas of the City.

The process that has been followed to create this Plan has included stakeholders and residents, City Officials, and professionals in the fields of real estate, law and design. The results represent a consensus on many individual issues that will affect land use and zoning decisions within the Central District for many years ahead. Not everyone agrees with every conclusion or policy contained in the Plan, but it is safe to say everyone will agree that all viewpoints were heard and carefully considered. The final Plan policies are in many ways different that they were in the initial drafts of the document. That is due to the interest and participation of committed residents and property owners and the willingness of City Officials to carry out true participatory planning as it should be done.

Highland Park's Central District is in very good shape in the year 2000. This Plan is intended to keep it that way. The Plan is structured to conserve what is best in the Central District, and to maintain the character and scale of development that residents have come to appreciate over the years. Yet the Plan allows for healthy and balanced change. There is room under the Plan policies for substantial development and redevelopment actions in the years ahead. Given the excellence of the Central District in its present state, the focus in implementing this Plan should be on fine-tuning the quality of the physical environment and adding facilities and improvements that will advance the quality of life for the entire community. Highland Park has a rare opportunity – the chance to make its Central District one of the finest examples of community building in the nation and one of the most enjoyable places anywhere in which to live, work and shop.