



III. COMMUNITY CHARACTER

There are a number of existing features that contribute to the community character and identity of Oak Forest and make it distinctive from other communities. During the planning process, residents identified several key community assets to maintain and enhance in the future, which are listed below.

Key Community Assets

- A family-oriented community with a small-town character
- A strong sense of community with long-term residents
- Multi-generational, with children returning to raise their families
- Good City services and leadership
- Less congested and “commercialized” than neighboring communities
- Housing still affordable, with diverse options available
- Access to regional destinations via Metra and expressways
- Transportation options available (auto, Metra, Pace)
- Excellent schools and community facilities/programs (library, parks, etc.)
- Nearby Forest Preserve amenities (trails and golf course)
- An abundance of open space
- Strong institutions and churches
- A strong Chamber of Commerce
- A large industrial park





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As discussed in more detail in the Sub-Area Plan to follow, a major redevelopment initiative is underway that seeks to transform the existing Metra parking lot on the northwest corner of 159th and Cicero into a walkable, mixed use development adjacent to a new Oak Forest Metra Station. Located at the primary Oak Forest cross-roads location, this redevelopment will significantly enhance the overall “image” of Oak Forest for both residents and those traveling through the City.

In an effort to enhance the appearance of commercial corridors, the City will be replacing street lights and implementing parkway enhancements along Cicero Avenue between 149th and 167th, and also replacing street lights along 159th Street between Cicero and Ridgeland Avenues. The type of street light used will vary based on the overall character of each street section, utilizing a palette of business district street lights, non-business district street lights, and pedestrian lights.

NATURAL, RECREATIONAL AND OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

There are several key resources within the City that are primarily operated by the Oak Forest Park District and Cook County Forest Preserve District.

The City is largely surrounded by Cook County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) property to the northwest and southwest. Several residential neighborhoods, including The Landings, Oak Forest Club and Gingerwood, have a wooded and natural character due to their close proximity to these CCFPD areas.

The Oak Forest Park District is an independent municipal agency with the same boundaries as the City, which owns or leases and maintains twenty community and neighborhood parks located throughout the community totaling approximately 72 acres. These areas serve a vital environmental protection and recreational function for the City and the entire region. They offer diverse natural areas for hiking, biking, equestrian activities, cross-country skiing and observation of wildlife. Several creeks traverse portions of the City, providing interesting visual features in residential neighborhoods. The City also contains a number of small wetland areas, which serve an important stormwater detention and treatment function to reduce storm water run-off.





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Left: A creek along Natalie Drive provides a natural buffer.

Right: The George W. Dunne National Golf Course is a unique and valued community resource.



In addition, the George W. Dunne National Golf Course and Forest Preserve National Golf Club is a top public course that offers the unique features of bent grass fairways and greens, lakes, tree lined fairways and an abundance of wildlife.

The Oak Forest planning area contains environmental features that serve both an aesthetic and environmental protection function. These primarily consist of creeks and small wetlands and water bodies that are located throughout the planning area, and are usually surrounded by areas of floodplain. A number of these flow into the forest preserves on its periphery. While these natural features contribute to the overall character of adjoining neighborhoods, they also can constrain development. Many of the remaining vacant parcels in the City are significantly impacted by the presence of floodplain and/or wetlands.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The Community Character Goals and Policies seek to enhance the quality of life and visual environment of the City.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOAL # 1

Develop a strong and positive physical community image through public and private improvements that enhance unique features of the community and contribute to the City's sense of place.

Policies:

1. Require new development to be designed with quality design elements including landscaping, attractive signage, consistent streetscape treatments, architectural details, and other decorative elements that enhance the appearance and image of the City.





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2. Enhance the identity of Oak Forest by unifying the appearance of major corridors with distinctive physical features.
3. Utilize urban design improvements including water features, public art, landscaping, decorative lighting, and other aesthetic features etc. to identify and/or accentuate community gateways and the public realm.
4. Provide community facilities and services that meet citizens' expectations and support the City's identity as a desirable community.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOAL # 2

Protect the City's natural resources and open spaces in order to enhance the quality of life and provide a balance between the built and natural environments.

Policies:

1. Preserve and enhance key natural features and open space in and surrounding the City, including topography, woodlands, streams, ponds, wetlands, and floodplain areas.
2. Improve connections to the Forest Preserve areas that surround the City and promote these as desirable amenities that make Oak Forest distinctive.
3. Minimize the environmental impacts of development by encouraging the use of sustainable and "green" building and site design practices.
4. Consider land acquisition and/or conservation easements to protect sensitive natural resources and open space connections as development and redevelopment occur.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER GOAL # 3

Continue to provide ample cultural, educational, and recreational opportunities that meet current and emerging needs of Oak Forest residents.

Policies:

1. Support and work in cooperation with other government entities and community organizations to expand and upgrade facilities, services, and programs to benefit residents of all ages, including senior citizens and youth.
2. Support more community-wide events and activities that draw residents together.

