

III. POLICY CONTEXT

As mentioned in the Introduction to this report, the existing Comprehensive Plan for the City dates from 1964. A rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan is being undertaken because this outdated plan no longer provides meaningful policy or land use guidance to City officials and staff. A Comprehensive Land Use Plan map was adopted in June of 1997, but without any accompanying goals or policies to aid in its implementation. The 1997 land use map served as a basis for significant zoning map amendments adopted in March 1999.

This section provides an overview of the development codes and economic development tools that the City is currently utilizing in its day-to-day administrative and planning activities. These tools will aid in implementation of the Plan and facilitating development within the City, along with additional tools that may be identified through the planning process.

DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

The future land use map within a Comprehensive Plan represents a community's desired development pattern for the future. A key implementation mechanism used to achieve the desired development pattern is the mapping of zoning districts that regulate use of property and development densities anticipated by the land use map. The City of Oak Forest currently utilizes several zoning designations that are briefly summarized in this section.

As the planning process proceeds, the need may arise to analyze zoning districts in more detail to determine whether text or map amendments will be appropriate to facilitate implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. The allowable mix of uses and/or allowable development densities may need to be adjusted in some areas to more closely align development regulations with the policy intent of the Plan.

Oak Forest has seven **residential zoning districts**. The zoning districts and the corresponding minimum lot sizes are summarized in [Table 5: Residential Zoning Districts](#) on the following page. The RE and R1, R2, and, R3 zoning districts permit only single-family dwellings. The density in the zoning districts ranges from 0.5 to 6 dwelling units per acre. The lowest density RE district is not mapped at any location within the City. The majority of the City is zoned R3 General Residential District and the permitted density is 6 dwelling units per acre. The R4 Single Family



Residential District includes a few parcels along 149th Street and LeClaire Avenue; it was created for the purpose of permitting construction on legal nonconforming lots of record and to permit “lot splits” where each lot will meet all requirements of the zoning district. The R5 district permits a mix of dwelling units including single-, two-, and multi-family dwelling units, provided the density does not exceed 5.8 dwelling units per acre. The R6 Planned Multifamily Residential District permits a maximum density of 12 dwelling units per acre with a maximum building height of 35 feet.

Table 5: Residential Zoning Districts

Residential District	Minimum Lot Size
RE Residential Estate District	87, 120 square feet (2 acres)
R1 Single Family Residential District	10,000 square feet
R2 Single Family Residential District	8,125 square feet
R3 Single Family Residential District	7,200 square feet
R4 Single Family Residential District	7,200 square feet
R5 Planned Residential District (permits)	7,500 square feet
R6 Planned Multi-Family Residential District	3,600 square feet

There are three **commercial districts** and a **mixed use district**. The commercial districts are as follows: B1 Local Commercial District, B2 General Business District, and B3 Planned Commercial District.

- The B1 district permits local commercial uses, and prohibits auto-oriented uses such as gas stations, drive-through facilities, auto repair, and auto sales. Outdoor sales and display are also not permitted within the B1 district. This district is mapped along 159th Street, between Cicero and Lorel Avenues, and includes the Metra station area. Mixed use developments that include residential dwelling units are permitted as conditional uses within the B1 district. There is not a maximum building height or density specified for this district, so presumably, a higher density transit oriented development (TOD) would be permitted within the B1 district in the station area. However, if the City hopes to create a pedestrian-oriented TOD, it may be desirable to establish a build-to line that requires buildings to be located up to the sidewalk, rather than setback 25 feet, which is the current B1 front yard setback requirement.
- The B2 General Commercial District permits a wider range of commercial uses, including “highway commercial activities.” These include auto-oriented uses such as gas stations, auto-repair and auto sales. This district also permits larger-scale



shopping centers. This district is mapped at various locations, but primarily on the 159th Street frontage, west of Lorel Avenue.

- The B3 Planned Commercial District permits commercial development on major corridors where shallow lot depth had previously constrained redevelopment. Land assembly to the rear of properties is permitted, provided that a site plan for the proposed development is approved by the City Council. This district is located along Cicero Avenue. Uses in the B3 District are subject to the approval of the Community Development Director if they are proposed in an existing building. If newly developed properties are less than 20,000 square feet in size they do not require City Council approval (unless they are PUD). Properties over 20,000 square feet in size are subject to PZC and Council approval.
- The PMU Planned Mixed Use District permits buildings that are 12 stories in height and that contain a mix of commercial and residential uses, subject to approval by the City Council. However, this district is not currently utilized at any location in the City. The need for this district classification has been superceded somewhat by subsequent amendments to improve the flexibility of the B3 District.

Oak Forest has 2 **industrial zoning districts**, the M1 Manufacturing District and the M2 Heavy Manufacturing District. The M1 district is not currently utilized. The M2 zoning district accommodates existing manufacturing uses located along the I-57 frontage and just east of Harlem Avenue. Heavy industry that would generate major environmental impacts is prohibited.

Lastly, there is a **SR Special Recreation District** that specifically permits equestrian activities and related commercial activities, however this district is not mapped at any location in the City. It was created to accommodate the potential future annexation of the stables located at 167th Street and Lockwood Avenue.

City staff are currently preparing a major text amendment regarding the permitted, special and conditional uses within each district, to make them more comprehensive and in some cases more restrictive. These amendments are expected to be taken to the PZC for consideration in the spring of 2007.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The City has proactively focused on economic development, and has organizations and tools in place that will eventually aid in implementing aspects of the Comprehensive Plan. These tools and organizations are summarized below.

Oak Forest Chamber of Commerce

The Oak Forest Chamber of Commerce is an organization that serves the City's business community. Currently, the Chamber has more than 175 Oak Forest area professionals, businesses, organizations and government entities as members. The Chamber of Commerce office is located within City Hall. In addition to hosting monthly Chamber functions for its members, it also produces a monthly newsletter called the Oak Leaf. The Chamber organizes an annual Community Awareness Fair to introduce and market businesses to the community which draws over 2,500 attendees. In addition to the benefits it provides to its members, the organization also utilizes its dues to provide funding for business district enhancement and contributes to an Oak Forest High School scholarship for the students in their business organization. The Chamber is also currently working with the City to produce and distribute a new Community Handbook that will be available in the spring of 2007. This is planned to include a membership directory and other useful City and business information.

Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts

The City has established three tax increment finance (TIF) districts, as indicated in [Figure 9: TIF Districts](#) on the following page. The tax revenue collected during the year prior to district creation is the "base" amount that continues to be distributed as before; the additional revenues generated within the districts are the "increment" set aside for district-specific initiatives. These "incremental" revenues can be used to assist with infrastructure, streetscape and other public improvements within the district. The presence of the TIF districts may aid in securing developer interest and investment in future projects likely to be identified during the planning process, as well as the implementation of additional public realm improvements that the Plan may identify as high priority for the community. TIF 1 only has four years remaining, and the City seeks to extend the life of the TIF for another 12 years. TIF 2 was created in order to connect TIF 1 to TIF 3. TIF 3 has 19 years left. Property within these TIF districts are located along 159th Street and Cicero Avenues.



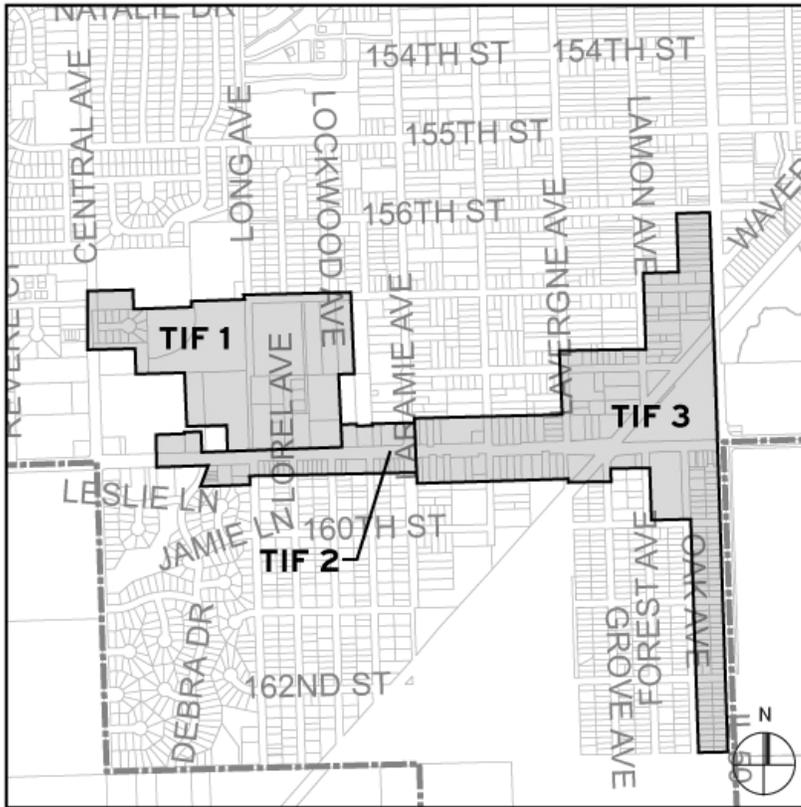


Figure 9: TIF Districts

Not to Scale

Business Retention Program

The City of Oak Forest has begun to identify new ways to maximize opportunities presented by the City of Oak Forest's established businesses. These businesses may be one of the best options for economic renewal. The City hopes to start an economic renewal program to ensure the survival and growth of existing businesses, learn the strengths of the local business climate, and identify the areas of the business community that need improvement. The intent of the program is to inventory the City of Oak Forest business community and then find ways to promote growth.

The Oak Forest Business Retention Program is a new program that will be undertaken by the City, but is still in its draft stages. The elements of the draft program have been identified as follows:

- Survey: A questionnaire for the business visitation team will be used to use obtain information on the needs of each business, the problems they face, and their plans to expand or reduce their operation.



- Ongoing Visitation Program: The formal visitation program will take place on a regular basis tailored to fit the needs of the City in which we conduct the survey in person.
- Economic Development Action Plan: The EAC is developing an economic development action plan to address opportunities and obstacles that surface through the visitation program as well as many other initiatives. This plan will outline the most pressing issues identified by the City's businesses.
- Annual Appreciation Event: The EAC will hold at least one business appreciation event each year. This event will promote networking with business education sessions.

Facade Assistance Program

Sponsored by the City of Oak Forest, the Facade Assistance Program (FAP) is offered for commercial businesses as an incentive to improve the appearance of buildings, landscaping and signage. The FAP is a matching grant program that permits landlords and lessees to apply for matching funding. The applicant and landlord are expected to cover a minimum of two-thirds of the cost associated with renovation, while the City will cover the remaining cost up to a maximum of \$10,000. There is a minimum total project cost of \$5,000. A signed agreement between the City and the applicant must be completed for Economic Advisory Council review and recommendation to the City Council to approve the grant. Eligible projects include upgrades to signage, installation of facade materials and landscaping, and soft costs such as architectural/engineering costs and permit fees.

Class 8 Incentives

Class 8 real estate tax incentive established by the Cook County Real Property Assessment Classification Ordinance is designed to encourage industrial and commercial development in areas of the County which are experiencing severe economic stagnation. Properties within Bremen Township are eligible for Class 8 because the township is one of five in Cook County that are targeted by the South Suburban Tax Reactivation Program. All new construction, substantial rehabilitation or reutilization of abandoned buildings for industrial or commercial use may qualify for the Class 8 incentive. This incentive assesses qualifying real estate at a reduced level for a period of twelve years from the time of construction or substantial rehabilitation or reoccupation.

