

# Villa Park Comprehensive Plan Update

## Key Person Interviews Summary

*Interviews were conducted on Wed, July 2, 2008*

### Economic Development

- Municipal Finance
  - Enhance Village tax base
  - Sales tax is especially important (it is elastic in terms of the economy)
  - Property tax is also key (revenue from sales and property taxes are comparable)
  - Property tax expansion is limited as Villa Park is a tax-cap community at the DuPage CPI
  - Village willing to consider property acquisition to facilitate development:
    - Focus has been on North Avenue at Ardmore St.
    - Acquired two parcels along North Avenue this year – Harley Davidson will be expanding and will add a new restaurant
    - TOD area along Ardmore to facilitate commercial development
  - Typical TIF contribution to redevelopment = 70%
    - Exceptions: Target – received full property tax increment, no sales tax; Ovaltine – received 82% tax increment
  
- North Avenue Business District
  - Encourage redevelopment/improvement of North Park Mall
    - Flea market inside former mall
    - Support expressed to demolish the mall and put up a mixed-use project
    - Former anchor tenants: Kmart, Dominick's and JC Penney – they moved out years ago
    - Denny's in parking lot burned down
    - Bank and White Castle now exist in car park
    - On south side of North Avenue there is a cheap motel and a junk yard
    - Mall is managed by Arun Co.
    - 15 years of decline
    - Potential location for OTB facility
  - TIF District for North Avenue covers entire commercial area – started in January 2006
    - Strong community consensus to focus on this area for redevelopment and image enhancements
    - Consider more mixed uses along North Avenue (residential/commercial)
  - Business District at North and Addition needs identity and appearance enhancements
  - Reconstruction of North Avenue seen as positive improvement to Village
  
- St. Charles Road Business District
  - IDOT control of roadway makes modifications to current roadway difficult to achieve
  - Need larger sidewalks to improve pedestrian experience
    - Ex: St. Charles Road in Lombard
    - Consider lane reductions
    - Poor maintenance of walkways in winter - always impassable after any snowfall. Enforce/encourage shoveling rules.
    - Too many curb-cuts along St. Charles Road discourages pedestrian activity - not a pleasant walk

- Promote redevelopment of the southeast corner of St. Charles Road and Villa Avenue in the area of the vacant auto dealership. Encourage development of a larger scale mixed use area.
  - Storefronts with 3 stories of residential above and parking in the rear. The storefronts at the sidewalk, rather than pushed back, encouraging walking and tying it to Villa Ave.
- Character of St. Charles Road changes significantly from Lombard to Villa Park
- St. Charles Road – need “complete streets” solutions that serve all users and modes of transportation
- Village Center Concept
  - Consider location where majority of services are or will be offered
  - Consider St. Charles/Ardmore area for municipal center
  - Most services around Village Hall are akin to what one would find in a traditional town center
  - Accessibility should be a key issue/determining factor
  - Focus should be along St. Charles Road corridor
  - Focus instead on enhancing existing neighborhood oriented business districts, that serve like “mini-downtowns” for their neighborhood area. Having grown up in Chicago, I am used to neighborhoods with their own business areas.
    - The Metra station area would be a good candidate for one of those kinds of neighborhood business districts
- Ardmore Business District
  - Nice retail stores nearby
  - Chamber of Commerce is located in old train station
  - Historical Preservation office also nearby
  - Would like to have more restaurants/coffee shops/ice cream parlors/card shops in this area
  - There is a tavern in the Ardmore business district
  - Mike’s Meat Market moved from this area to St. Charles Road
  - Would like to close down part of Central Ave and create a park-like campus leading to library; also, would like to move French Market closer to the library
  - Focus on creating better linkages with other “downtown” areas - Villa Ave and potential TOD areas
  - Reconsider land uses along the Prairie Path
- Villa Avenue Business District
  - Villa Avenue business district used to be a thriving area with a movie theatre, bowling alley, and clothing retailers, but not it’s relatively dead
- Transit Oriented Development – Ardmore Ave
  - Allow of additional heights beyond 5 stories to make new projects financially feasible
  - Consider an underpass to create safe pedestrian and vehicle traffic at the Metra tracks at Ardmore – make it pedestrian friendly
  - Need more condos/townhomes in Villa Park
  - Propose 4-5 storey mixed-use buildings, possibly up to 6-8 stories
  - Pursue the creation of a parking structure as development warrants
  - 600 condos planned for TOD area

- Senior Living: medical and assisted living, mixed-use along St. Charles Rd and the TOD area are needed – this location provides quick access to nearby doctor’s offices
- The Village is also acquiring property in the TOD area north of the railroad tracks by Metra Station along Ardmore
- Roosevelt Road Business District
  - Burlington Coat Factory mall on Roosevelt Rd should remain a commercial retail shopping center
  - Roosevelt Road – healthy economically and good appearance
- Market Economics
  - Banks are taking up prime locations in the Village
  - Villa Park has two Aldi’s
  - Lack of restaurants
  - Need to create destination places
  - Desire for more diversity of types of businesses
  - Opportunity for Movie Theater constrained by nearby competition – Addison along Lake Ave; Elmhurst CBD and Yorktown Center in Lombard
    - Not desirable as produces limited sales tax.
    - Village would need to adopt amusement tax
  - Wal-Mart may be adding a new garden center; relocation/expansion must be addressed
  - Lack of engaging development, destination type businesses
    - Focus on restaurants and entertainment to draw people from other areas and to keep residents here to increase our tax base (e.g. outdoor cafes)
  - Volunteerism from small business owners to serve on local economic development organization difficult due to demands of operating their business
  - Need a greater number larger businesses in Villa Park
  - Has Villa Park missed past opportunities for development and growth?
  - Why are businesses leaving the Village?
  - Promote development opportunities through brochures similar to one previously done (“Villa Park: Pedestrian Oriented Opportunities”)
  - Village should take advantage of older demographics and create programs and uses that appeal to seniors.
  - Industrial areas have limited number of employees and manufacturing businesses
    - Ridge and Addison St’s – poor appearance and rents not strong or similar to other area rent levels
      - Need larger, more modern buildings that appeal to larger business enterprises – over 10,000 sq. ft. that is typical of many existing businesses.
      - Example: Village of Elk Grove business-office park along north York Road and Manheim Road
  - Increase density, both residential and commercial, in the business districts that have residential areas adjacent. Such as the Villa area, Ardmore and Park and the Train Station. Commercial spaces need to be zoned so that larger commercial spaces can be created

## General Community Development

- Vision: Change to family oriented, small town. Desire to be perceived as higher income community.
  - Need re-branding strategy to change image (ex: focus on a “green/sustainable community” as a way to enhance appeal to younger, upscale families)
- Short term goals: enhance appearance and reduce vacancies; improve code enforcement; retain existing businesses
- Long term goals: new municipal campus with mix of uses; redevelopment of Jewel site into more mixed use (ex: new retail center under development at York and North Avenues; Butterfield Road)
- Community Pride Commission – this citizen group makes suggestions for aesthetic improvements to the Village Board, and gives awards for façade improvements and restorations
  - Recent awards given to business at Ardmere and Roosevelt
  - Have active planting program in commercial areas; ex: Park Blvd and Ardmere planters; focusing efforts on adding planters on St. Charles Road as near term goal
  - Sponsor “Community Pride Week” – focus on encouraging volunteerism; issue “spirit award”; provide free Tulips to encourage beautification of Village
  - Focus on Ardmere Ave and Villa Avenue as the primary opportunities to improve the image of the community.
  -
- Village needs to be more pedestrian friendly
- Village needs better way-finding/signage
- Need more garbage cans
- Villa Ave, Ardmere and St. Charles Rd need streetscape improvements
- Triangle Village Center idea – need better sidewalks in these areas
- Demographics
  - Lower profile demographics in the north of the Village
  - Poverty and diversity is increasing
  - Lots of people return to Villa Park as adults, to live and raise kids
  - Village needs community outreach services
  - New residents are younger, first home types, due to the affordability
- Arts
  - Culturally, no “live theater” space in town other than that provided by the High School

## Green Initiatives

- WWI: victory gardens – Men’s Garden Club (long history)
- Jens Jensen did the landscaping for the old Ardmere train station, which at the time was a very modern design
- Village needs more bike racks, and a north-south bike path along Ardmere
- Effort to plant flowers – should put flower garden near library
- Potential Green Initiatives for Villa Park:
  - Windmills near Village Hall
  - Motorcycles/bikes for cops
  - Permeable surfaces, porous materials
  - Bio-swailes and rain gardens
  - Use of native vegetation
  - Historic preservation sites

- Solar panels for Village buildings
- Wind generators
- Subsidize rain barrels for residents
- Start by doing little things. If residents see these things happening, it will raise awareness and get everyone used to the idea.
- Pursue LEED-ND Neighborhood green design standards, and apply to new develop areas like the TOD

### **Library**

- Referendum this fall will allow voters to decide whether the Village ought to purchase the lot on Central and Ardmore to build a new library facility to the south of the existing one and to do a land swap with a nearby church
- Village library is not part of a larger library district
- Estimated to be a \$25 million project
- Library would expand from 24,000 s.f. to 48,000 s.f., it would be a two-floor building with roof-mounted HVAC, and the ability to expand to three floors in the future
- Library is currently leasing space in the building they wish to acquire
- The new library design will be open to the Prairie Path
- Rendering of proposed library is on the library website
- The library board is a separate body from the Village board
- There needs to be better relations and communications and intergovernmental agreements between the two boards
- The two boards partner on parks and recreation activities
- The library is undervalued within the community
- The library is part of the Village government
- Library would like to add more programs and services for outreach, such as Adult Services (i.e., food demonstration), Youth Services; outreach to poor; ethnic outreach (Latino, Indian, Polish); library receives grants to carry out outreach activities
- Library board doesn't reflect the diverse makeup of the Village as a whole
- Needs more long-range planning
- Village should support library's efforts – it's an important investment – will help build a stronger community
- What can the library board do to assist the Village?

### **Housing**

- Need better property maintenance code enforcement
  - Need to develop programs to educate and assist property managers in doing a better job.
  - Consider encouraging property owner associations
  - Consider licensing of managers
- Property maintenance issues tend to concentrate in areas with higher socio/economic differences
  - Parliament Square and Division
- King's Point – boarded up townhouses on the west end of the North Avenue corridor most problematic area
- Maintain diversity in housing affordability

- Consider expansion of senior living facilities
  - Potential location as part of Civic-campus redevelopment area or TOD area
- Reasonable prices, sustainable, affordable homes
- Promote more condominiums, not apartments or single family homes

### **Transportation**

- No PACE bus service along North Avenue
- Existing bus route #313
  - Need a stop near North Ave and Ardmore
- Lack of adequate connectivity between pedestrian and transit areas
- High traffic counts at High Ridge and Ardmore make it difficult for school age children to cross.
  - Village recently installed a stop sign as part of intersection redesign; consider a traffic signal
- Access to elementary north of railroad track difficult for kids south of tracks
- Parking problems along St. Charles Road. Limited availability may be reason for business failures.
- Traffic and speeding is an issue on Villa Ave, Ardmore and St. Charles Road
- Very few new roads are planned for the Village
- Expand bike trails along north-south streets to create better interconnections, particularly on the west side of town

### **Community Perceptions**

- Strong community volunteerism
- We are not glamorous, but we are safe
- Negative perception toward Village influenced by:
  - Streets in disrepair
  - Lack of shopping opportunities
  - Things don't get done
  - Poor sidewalks on St. Charles Rd
- Village identity: Garden Village motto (historical); also Keystone to Western Suburbs motto (dual identity crisis?)
- Everyone seems to have a bad impression of the North Avenue corridor
- Villa Park envies Elmhurst and Lombard
- More desirable places to live: south of St. Charles Road
- Perception that Villa Park has a crime/murder problem
- Southside has become more desirable, seemingly because of perception of high crime in the north areas.
- Historic smokestack at Ovaltine will be torn down
- Jewelry Exchange is an important retail institution
- Lack of planning (lack of knowledge of previous planning efforts)

## Community Facilities

- Elmhurst hospital moving to York and Roosevelt – the building that formerly hosted the hospital will be used for medical office purposes
- Consider location for new medical center
- Schools
  - Great schools in Villa Park and wonderful school board; they are an asset to the Village
    - Drop in enrollment – forecast that growth will likely remain flat (evidenced in HS and elementary schools)
    - Trend toward increasing ethnic diversity at Willowbrook HS – 38 languages spoken, and poverty as seen through more children using the free lunch program; need outreach to African American community – after school programs
      - Consider outreach/engagement of social service agencies and religious organization to help with outreach
      - Need facilities – HS currently provides space
    - Enjoy wide community support
    - HS pleased with Village services
    - PTA budgets have decreased 50%
    - Concerned with safety
    - Incidents @ District #88 Willowbrook High School
      - Addition of 2<sup>nd</sup> police officer
      - Very good support by Village
      - 2007 Referendum approved expansion and updating facilities
        - ◆ Also includes Addison Trail school
    - Problems on north side of village
    - Concern about future funding of area schools
    - Ardmore expanding athletic fields; adding more parking at other schools
- Need programs for kids – nothing to do!
- Recycling: no program in place to recycle items at Village functions
- Concessions closed at community parks – concern that mismanagement will lead to closing
- Churches attempting to fill the gap of no place for kids to hang out and socialize
- Fire Protection:
  - all new homes must have sprinklers (Village ordinance); adds to housing prices
  - North-South emergency access hindered by railroad; need to consider full service stations north and south of tracks
    - South facility built in 1975 not adequate – potential room on site to expand
    - North facility - closing of facility adjacent to Village Hall
    - Second facility on north side too small with no room to expand and not at a good location adjacent to residential
  - Ardmore bridge in poor repair – trucks now restricted
  - Consider grade-separated road
  - Need for training facility
  - Need central location for main facility
- Public Works
  - Department is short-staffed – vacant position never filled. Difficult to provide adequate services under these conditions. Short two people currently.

## Recreation

- Consider development of a new community/fitness center – larger facility with expanded arts programs
- Consider redevelopment of the pool and the Iowa Community Center
- Skate park not safe
- Village managed park system
- Poor upkeep of pools
- Need recreation program for seniors
- Want a great recreational center for kids to be involved in the community and better programming. Iowa Center is less than adequate for Village needs. Physical space is badly needed. There used to be arts classes available, but no longer
- Parks and Recreation department used to be popular; now, enrollment is very low
  - Changed in last ten years
  - Management issues
  - Other recreational centers seen as desirable: Lombard, Bensenville, West Chicago, Wooddale, Roselle

## Historic Preservation

- Village maintains inventory of historic resources in GIS
- Trolley tour provided; provide walking tour of original Village settlement area
- Historic District – locally established, do not have local preservation ordinance. Therefore, have little control
- Target area of historic district – Madison, Harvard, St. Charles Road, Rt. 83
  - Desired boundaries of Ardmore and Villa Ave Districts to follow Lakota Plan
- Considering becoming a Certified Local Government
  - Benefits of designation included grants; 12 yr. tax freeze; requirements include historic preservation ordinance and design review process
- Institute design guidelines to control development, and limit preservation to targeted areas

## Infrastructure

- General Conditions
  - Infrastructure – very old
  - Currently updating master plans for potable water, drainage, sewer and roads; plans are based on need – would like to fine tune plans based on future needs
  - TOD station area: bigger mains and sewers needed to support more intensive future development; also, streetscape element needs to be done
  - Providing infrastructure to new developments – return on investment
  - Do away with unfunded mandates – too many regulations from above, with no basis in reality – there is no funding to implement these requirements, especially re: wastewater
  - High ground water throughout DuPage County
  - Coordination key to infrastructure investments related to major new redevelopments – important to do the underground work while streets are already torn up
- Water
  - North Avenue: Need to upgrade water mains at time of improvement
  - Possible new water tower needed if more dense development occurs
  - Drainage issues from new development will need to be addressed

- Potable water: three connecting points to the Village. Water storage: supposed to have a 2-day supply of storage – Village is very close to this goal.
- Annexation
  - Unincorporated areas: Village needs to decide when to expand utilities to these areas
  - Policy decision: the future annexation of unincorporated lands should be addressed by further study. This would automatically bring new population to Villa Park
  - Preliminary annexations may be pursued south of Roosevelt Road; but, a few parcels can't be reached by Village – just not feasible – developer would be responsible for servicing with infrastructure
- Sewer
  - Sewer system is quite old – the Village is rehabbing 20 miles (about ¼ of total system) over the next several years
  - Combined sewers – storm and sanitary together – was the old method. Village is in process of separating the old combined system. Newer sewer systems are separated.
  - Sewer problems exist, related to wet weather
  - Sauk Creek Sanitary District treats sewage (an entity of the Village)
- Stormwater
  - County-wide stormwater ordinance – adopted by reference; working well; affects any development over 5000 s.f. – most of Village developed before regulating ordinances went into effect. Now, during redevelopment, Village trying to fix things
  - Several street drainage projects ongoing
  - EPA stormwater requirements will add cost to new developments; Village must follow best management practices
  - DuPage Stormwater Ordinance goes into effect August 1, 2008
- Streets
  - Asphalt and concrete costs are up 40% in past two years – difficult to maintain existing infrastructure – maintaining service levels difficult as infrastructure ages
  - 2-3 years ago the Village approved a 0.25% increase in sales tax, providing new funds for road projects, etc.
  - Desire to get rid of backlog of bad streets
  - Costs about \$3-4 million per mile to fully reconstruct a street