

City of Warrenville, Illinois

For a Visit, Or a Lifetime...

Strategic/Economic Development Plan



IBEW LOCAL #701 BUILDING



Report 4



City Council Strategic Plan Input Report

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Introduction

Preparation of the City of Warrenville Strategic / Economic Development Plan has been an inclusive process with insights and suggestions provided through resident surveys, neighborhood dialogues, community stakeholder meetings, business focus groups, and most recently City Council interviews. The Mayor and all sitting City Council members provided input to the process via individual interviews with the consulting team. Discussions focused on securing the Council's perspectives on the topics and concepts raised through the input process. These included:

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Warrenville provides a high level of city services, which has become the standard expected by residents. The City has a reputation for ample and timely services, and mostly receives positive feedback regarding that work. Police protection was among the well regarded services and the Warrenville Police Department was lauded as having significantly improved safety in the City over the last several decades. However, some safety concerns were noted through the public input process.

In regard to public finances, the City practice of not incurring debt for capital expenditures and maintaining budget reserves are noteworthy. This approach received praise and appreciation throughout the public input process. Even so, as with all communities, budget decisions require prioritization of projects and programs. Whether and how the City might incur debt for a project or reprioritize budget resources for other activities was raised during the input process.

TIMELINE

- JANUARY 2014**
Facilitation begins with a document review, staff and officials training, and analysis of resident input.
- APRIL 2014**
Consultant and designated City staff meet with the overlapping taxing bodies.
- MAY 2014**
City staff hosts two specialized stakeholder input meetings.
- JUNE 2014**
Consultant meets with key representatives of City departments.
- JULY 2014**
Consultant completes meetings with economic development focus groups.
- AUGUST/ SEPTEMBER 2014**
Economic Development White Paper developed by consulting team
- OCTOBER 2014**
City Council input interviews conducted by consultant.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Warrenville is a blend of a rural and suburban community. Longtime residents, some of whom have lived in Warrenville since before it incorporated in 1967, value a more rural lifestyles while newcomers anticipate more suburban standards and regulations. City services and ordinances relate to this community character in how they seek to balance expectations of residents and businesses. In particular, property maintenance code enforcement can be an issue. In Warrenville, as in most communities, it is addressed by a Senior Code Enforcement Officer through a complaint-based enforcement approach.

In addition to quality city services, Warrenville residents value the City's annual community events. The events provide desirable community traditions that longtime and newer residents enjoy. Events help drive economic activity and further enhance community character. Annual events tend to be located in the Civic Center or Cerny Park, both of which have potential to be a more formally established central gathering place.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The City of Warrenville has a depth of economic development resources but also myriad economic development priorities, not all of which can be achieved given available time and resources. These were highlighted in other documents prepared as part of this project (the Economic Development Strategic Plan Input Report and White Paper). Those reports note that economic development objectives of the City may require long lead times or additional resources to be accomplished. Therefore, one aim of the Strategic / Economic Development Plan will be to address how the City might apply resources in the short and long term.

Focus group input and economic development best practices indicate that additional households will be important to support commercial development in Warrenville. Simply put, more rooftops are needed to house potential customers that ultimately will buy more goods and services. Higher density dwellings (townhomes or other multiple-family) will generate more residents on a per acre basis and create greater buying power to support commercial development. What type of housing is most appropriate and where it should be located in Warrenville was a part of discussions held in this task, but ultimately would be determined as a result of further economic and land use deliberations.



The Illinois Prairie Path outside City Hall



Input Process

Meetings with City Council members reviewed status of the Strategic/Economic Development Plan project and secured input via interview questions that were developed based on feedback received from resident, stakeholder, and focus group input.

The Council member input will contribute to the final Strategic / Economic Development Plan, which will include a statement of goals, objectives, and action steps to guide implementation. As representatives of Warrenville residents and businesses, the Council members provided feedback and suggestions reflective of their contact with constituents, as well as their own perspectives as City leaders and residents themselves (some of them having lived in the community all their lives).

STRATEGIC GOAL CATEGORIES

- 1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- 2 OPEN SPACE
- 3 FINANCES
- 4 FLOODING & STORMWATER
- 5 INFRASTRUCTURE & UTILITIES
- 6 SAFETY

Albeit paraphrased, interview questions included the following:

- ▶ The input process has identified an appreciation and expectation by residents for high quality city services. What is your perspective on that and how City staff fits into the equation?
- ▶ The City's approach to financial management does not include incurring debt for capital expenditures. Should that approach continue? Can you see a project or need that would merit consideration of changing the approach?
- ▶ Do you think of Warrenville as suburban or rural? Why?
- ▶ The strictness of property maintenance enforcement has been raised in the community input process. Some note there is not enough, some feel there should not be strict enforcement. Where do you feel the City should be on that continuum?
- ▶ What do you hear from constituents regarding their perceptions of safety in Warrenville? What is your feeling on the topic?
- ▶ Do you feel it is important for the City to help expand community events? If so, are there any specific events you feel would be appropriate for the City to support?
- ▶ Participants in the various stakeholder input meetings have repeatedly identified the creation of a central gathering place as a high priority for the City. Do you see this as a priority for the City? What form do you see the central gathering place taking in Warrenville?
- ▶ In the context of the Economic Development Input Report, White Paper, and Council meeting discussion, what strikes you as the top 3 economic development priorities for Warrenville?
- ▶ What types of new residential development do you feel should be part of Warrenville's future land use planning?
- ▶ Other topics have been part of the City's strategic planning. Are there priorities in these areas you feel should be pursued:
 - Infrastructure
 - Environment
 - Parks and Recreation

City Council Input Summary

This summary of City Council input for the Strategic / Economic Development Plan is meant as an overview of the discussions; it does not reflect any one perspective or set of comments (as a number of the alderman noted, those details can be heard at City Council meetings). The description focuses on areas of consensus among the aldermen and where their observations confirm, clarify, or differ from previous input tasks of this project. Differing perspectives among aldermen whose comments were either broad, or presented alternate approaches to an issue, have been noted.



GOVERNMENT SERVICES

DISCUSSION AREA 1

The level and quality of public services in Warrenville, as noted earlier, are appreciated and considered good. Operational decisions about those services are made by City administrative staff as supported by the Council through the budget and Capital Maintenance and Replacement Plan. Input on services as it relates to the strategic planning process is noted here.

Existing Services

Provision of essential services was clearly considered a fundamental function of Warrenville government. Some services, or the extent to which they are provided, will always be open for discussion. For example:

- ▶ The extent of snow plowing and salting provides options for communities. Recollection of snow plows and salt consumption from 2013-2014 were still fresh during the discussions. How often to plow and salt streets is a point on which further discussion seems warranted.
- ▶ The ACORN van servicing senior residents was a service some consider very important and others consider not essential.

Code Enforcement

Warrenville staff includes a Senior Code Enforcement Officer to administer city ordinances that help maintain the community's physical structures and natural environment. The staff member provides monthly reports summarizing complaint-based violations to the Council. Discussions on this topic noted that the service is difficult and challenging in all communities, yet there was concurrence that the service in Warrenville generally functions soundly and is particularly appropriate for matters that can impact the health of residents (such as leaf burning).

Code enforcement services as discussed are particularly relevant as they relate to the City's history and image – in fact, this summary would be as pertinent and instructive to understanding Warrenville if it were listed below under the section on Community Character. Longtime residents recall when leaf burning was not an issue or a code violation. However, newer residents expecting a more suburban lifestyle may feel otherwise. The point is not limited to code enforcement; many of the public services in Warrenville must be provided within this context.



GOVERNMENT SERVICES (CONTINUED)

DISCUSSION AREA 1

Public Safety

Perceptions of safety in Warrenville were described as overwhelmingly positive, particularly in comparison to the early years of the City; the work of the Police Department was commended. Crime in Warrenville is considered not extraordinary in comparison to like communities; although specific parts of the City were acknowledged as having intermittent minor crimes, drug issues, and gang activity.

New Services

While discussed in the abstract, a variety of ideas were raised in regard to possible new services, programs or use of funds – including the perspective that no new services stood out as necessary. The topic was intended to identify the types of additional services or programs that might be most worthwhile to the City. It should be noted that consideration of additional services would have to be made in context of the City's history of conservative fiscal management, particularly remaining debt free and maintaining a responsible fund balance. Further, the process by which the City deliberates significant matters, and might consider changes to service provision or new expenditures, was described as open, thoughtful, and inclusive of residents and interested parties.

Concepts raised for potential new uses of funds included: incentives to new and existing businesses, paying down pension obligations, or providing a facade improvement program. Others noted in more detail included:

- Fall leaf pickup is a service that has been considered by the City. However, the need for this service was not supported by all. There was concern that such services quickly become considered essential by residents and would be difficult to eliminate in times of tight budgets.
- Additional staff or consultant services to conduct increased economic development functions was noted by some as an area where the City might consider applying additional resources. Current economic development activities were considered sound and done well, but not with adequate resources or frequency. Reorganizing staff functions or priorities to provide this service was an approach noted in some discussions.



COMMUNITY CHARACTER

DISCUSSION AREA 2

The community character of Warrenville encourages longtime residents to stay and is considered attractive to potential new residents; it has a unique blend of rural and suburban qualities that few other municipalities can claim.

Some suggest that Warrenville is a rural community with suburban amenities while others consider it a suburban community that allows for rural lifestyles. Regardless of the viewpoint, there is a sense that this dual focus suits Warrenville. However, some tension between the two perspectives can be expected. For instance, lifelong residents may not prioritize sidewalks whereas newer residents express interest in sidewalks, curbs, bike lanes, and other infrastructure improvements. In addressing these needs, Warrenville regularly weighs the needs of all its residents and businesses.

Community Events

Annual community events, such as Summer Daze, 4th of July fireworks, and baseball/softball tournaments, are considered to be of value to the residents of Warrenville. They provide local entertainment and traditions that bring former residents back to town and attract people living outside of the City. In this light, the City annually budgets to underwrite the cost of community events, primarily through hotel/motel tax revenues. Enhancements to these events could include outreach to Latino/Hispanic neighborhoods and consideration of reviving events that have ceased due to organizers moving out of Warrenville.

A related consideration is whether a central gathering place for events or daily interactions could be another asset in Warrenville. The City does not have a traditional downtown to serve such a function. However, the historic role of the Civic Center area makes it a possible location. That notion is furthered by the number of community functions in the area (City Hall, the Library, and Park District facilities) as well as the anticipated development of the Musselman property behind City Hall. Other locations for formal or informal gathering included Cerny Park or a location near (or in) Cantera.



Illinois Prairie Path



Veterans Memorial

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

DISCUSSION AREA 3

Economic development in Warrenville and the need to look beyond traditional commercial development to drive economic vitality has been given focus in earlier reports.

Those studies also highlighted bringing higher density residential development to the City and building on success in the Cantera development as key objectives. Similarly, the need to work with and support existing businesses has been noted.

For this input step, discussion sought to highlight the types of strategies that might be pursued to achieve the City's economic development goals. Some of those discussed were:

- ▶ Take a proactive approach to economic development by assessing available properties and decide what is strategically viable for the area (rather than waiting for developer proposals).
- ▶ Expand outreach to current businesses, hotels, and realtors.
- ▶ Move forward with redevelopment of the CCRS #1, the former Musselman property.
- ▶ Encourage development, redevelopment, and renovation on Route 59, potentially supported by a TIF district.
- ▶ Improve the appearance and viability of Route 59 properties.
- ▶ Consider a facade improvement program and determine the range of need (i.e. do business owners need \$5,000 or \$50,000 for improvements?).



Restaurants in Cantera development

LAND USE

DISCUSSION AREA 4

Determining locations for commercial and residential uses play a role in Warrenville's economic development deliberations. The White Paper prepared for this project suggests a focus on housing developments of increased density to add more residents and potential customers.

The appropriate density for such housing is an issue that requires further discussion and consideration of where it may be located, as it will influence the overall character and quality of life in the community.

Discussions during City Council input acknowledged that higher density housing options could provide economic development benefits. It was also noted that offering different housing options for groups such as empty nesters and young professionals who are not interested in single family detached homes has merit. Building high-end townhomes was commonly suggested, due in part to its ability to create more density without compromising the rural qualities of the City. In general, incorporating some type of higher density housing was seen as a possibility if done with an attractive form. Other populations to consider included groups such as Fermi Lab's contract workers who seek high-quality short-term lease options. The CCRS #1 property redevelopment was noted by most as an option for townhome or duplex development.

The character and appearance of future development was noted by some as a pertinent land use consideration. This might include providing connections to recreational amenities such as the Forest Preserves, the West Branch of the DuPage River, and the Illinois Prairie Path (used by up to 300,000 people annually).

OPEN SPACE/SUSTAINABILITY

DISCUSSION AREA 5

Warrenville is a community surrounded by ample open space including the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County and recently-cleaned West Branch of the DuPage River.

All Council members consider these spaces to be a great community asset, although it was acknowledged that the areas can hinder development and progress because they cannot be built on. In any case, preserving and supporting use by residents of the natural environment in and around Warrenville was expressed as a current and ongoing priority for the City. The potential for creating a river walk or other river-focused amenity also was discussed.

WARRENVILLE GAZEBO OUTSIDE CITY HALL



Ideas raised through conversations about open space, the Park District, and sustainability included interest in:

- ▶ an indoor public pool
- ▶ a need for pedestrian access to McKee Marsh
- ▶ municipal fuel efficient cars
- ▶ reducing use of fertilizers
- ▶ increasing use of native landscape species
- ▶ engaging more with organizations like the Sierra Club and The Conservation Foundation.

Refined Goal Statements

A set of preliminary goals for the Strategic / Economic Development Plan was drafted early in this project as part of the Resident Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input report.

As successive community input has been secured, concepts raised in those discussions have been used to suggest how the initial goals might be amended. The goal statements listed below are as they appeared in the Specialized Stakeholder Strategic Plan Input Report. Some suggestions for how those goals might be amended based on input derived from the focus group discussions were noted in the Economic Development Strategic Input Report. Additional notions for amendments based on City Council input are noted below.



REFINED GOAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 1

Economic Development

Resident Strategic Plan Input Report

“Enhance the City’s tax base, increase local shopping and dining opportunities, expand the City’s labor market, and create attractive gathering places by:

- ▶ actively planning for and aggressively encouraging well designed and environmentally responsible commercial development in the Route 59 corridor;
 - ▶ mixed use redevelopment in the Old Town/Civic Center; and
 - ▶ rehabilitation, improvement, and occupancy of older vacant commercial properties throughout the community.”
- ▶ *Input from this task noted the challenges inherent in securing development on the Route 59 Corridor and Old Town/Civic Center areas (as raised in the White Paper). However, these areas were considered important to the City and need to be addressed. In that regard the input does not alter this goal.*
- ▶ *Discussions indicated value in the City being aggressive in pursuit of economic development objectives. This concept could be reflected by amending the goal to note a proactive approach for the entire goal – rather than just in the first bullet point.*
- ▶ *While the notion of adding higher density housing to the City was acknowledged as a component of economic development for Warrenville, there was concern that the type and location of such development not alter the essential character of the community. This concept could be reflected in the goal by adding a bullet point encouraging new “appropriately scaled and located” multiple-family housing in support of a growing tax base and the needs of local residents and employees.*



Cantera businesses

REFINED GOAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 2



City Finances

Resident Strategic Plan Input Report:

“Uphold the City’s record of fiscal conservatism by adopting a balanced budget overall and at the fund level, ensuring a relatively low cost of living for Warrenville residents, incurring little to no debt, and maintaining a diversified revenue stream.”

- ▶ *Input from the City Council interviews reflected the importance of and support for current City finance practices. While discussions included thoughts on current and possible additional services, the input does not alter this goal statement.*

GOAL 3



Open Space and Environment

Resident Strategic Plan Input Report:

“Preserve and protect the natural features, open space, and wooded areas that contribute significantly to the City’s overall character, setting, and uniqueness, and seek opportunities to showcase, access, and promote these components as important and valuable community assets.”

- ▶ *Input from the City Council interviews reflected the importance to the community of open spaces and environmental characteristics. The comments did not significantly alter this goal statement, but added emphasis to the second part of the goal, as it suggest finding ways to “showcase, access, and promote” open space and environment. As noted in this report, implementation ideas related to this goal might include a naturally designed river walk along the West Branch of the DuPage River, furthering City sustainability practices, and increasing access to the Illinois Prairie Path.*

REFINED GOAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

GOAL 4



Flooding and Stormwater

Resident Strategic Plan Input Report:

"Improve flood protection and reduce residential and business flooding in the West Branch of the DuPage River Watershed, require environmentally responsible development that effectively controls the volume and improves the quality of stormwater runoff, and address neighborhood drainage issues."

- ▶ *The input from the City Council interviews does not significantly alter this goal statement.*

GOAL 5



City Infrastructure and Utilities

Resident Strategic Plan Input Report:

"Repair, maintain, replace, and strategically upgrade the City's physical infrastructure assets in a well planned, coordinated, and timely manner that is fiscally responsible, enhances public safety and supports increased private property values."

- ▶ *The input from the City Council interviews does not significantly alter this goal statement.*

GOAL 6



Public Safety

Resident Strategic Plan Input Report:

"Provide excellent, proactive, public safety service throughout the community, focusing on addressing the perception of gang activity and drug use."

- ▶ *The input from the City Council interviews does not significantly alter this goal statement.*

Conclusion

This City Council Strategic Input Report is the final input step in preparing the City of Warrenville Strategic/Economic Development Plan. The discussions comprising this input considered a range of topics for the strategic plan. In that way this document is somewhat wider reaching than the two previous input reports. As with all the input to the plan, the results of this report will be applied to drafting of the goals, priorities, and desired results to be outlined in the final strategic plan.



Appendix

CITY COUNCIL MEMBER INTERVIEWS

David Brummel, Mayor

Fred Bevier, Ward 1 Alderman

Stuart Aschauer, Ward 1 Alderman

Robert (Bob) Wilson, Ward 2 Alderman

Bill Weidner, Ward 2 Alderman

Dan Leonard, Ward 3 Alderman

Kathryn Davolos, Ward 3 Alderman

Clare Barry, Ward 4 Alderman

Leah Goodman, Ward 4 Alderman

