



SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING IN ROMEOVILLE

The Village of Romeoville has a rich history and tradition of planning, one that originally focused on supporting the economic vitality of the town of Romeo in the 1830s with the growth of industries relating to the railroads and building up the real estate opportunities for residents and workers. This tradition continues today with a modern focus on the excellent access provided by I-55 and the extensive growth of industrial and intermodal enterprises. The result is a strong local economy with a residential community that enjoys a high quality-of-life. As a result, Romeoville has evolved into a dynamic community of choice for residents, businesses, investors, and visitors alike.

Since the adoption of its current Comprehensive Plan in 2001, the Village has invested in the planning and development of key areas, including transforming the downtown area into the revitalized Uptown Square and the future Metra station with transit oriented development (TOD) on the east side of town. These long range efforts are already bearing fruit with new development occurring in Uptown Square and construction of the new Metra station scheduled for 2017. Moreover, the Village continues to advance a more diversified tax base through new commercial and industrial projects that create jobs and boost the local economy.

However, local, regional, and national economic changes over the last decade have resulted in an outdated Comprehensive Plan that requires a new vision consistent with the community aspirations, needs, and market realities in Romeoville. The 2001 Comprehensive Plan was also a streamlined poster plan that – while effective at the time of adoption and straight-forward in streamlining the community's vision into a manageable format – has outlived its initial purpose with the need to provide a more robust planning document that reflects present conditions and updated goals for the future.



Romeoville has a strong tradition of planning, from its earliest days as an industrial railroad town to the present day community built on a balance of residential neighborhoods, industrial development, commercial corridors, and natural areas for recreation and preservation. Even after the 2001 adoption of its current Comprehensive Plan, the Village has embarked on planning efforts for Uptown Square and the future Metra station area on the east side of town (above).

The Comprehensive Plan Update must now provide a specific vision and goals that ensure new projects reflect the high quality of development that Romeoville has achieved, and accommodate new investments and redevelopment associated with Uptown Square, the future Metra station area, and the Route 53 and Weber Road corridors. The updated plan must consider smart growth planning principles which include a mix of land uses, compact building design, a range of housing opportunities and choices, walkable neighborhoods, preservation of open space and environmental areas, a variety of transportation choices, and potential reuse of the NRG energy plant and other outmoded industrial sites.

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE OF PLANNING PROCESS

Now, fifteen years after the adoption of its current Comprehensive Plan, the Village is once again seeking to address new priorities, while creating an updated vision for how Romeoville manages community and economic development into the future. Although Romeoville is mostly built out, the Village can strengthen its position in the market and the community's overall quality-of-life by enhancing key districts and corridors. This comprehensive planning process is intended to be both reflective of land use traditions and responsive to many changes, both locally and nationally, that affect the long term viability of Romeoville.

While all pertinent elements of the existing plan will be considered, special consideration will be given to the various subareas identified for this plan update. In particular, the plan update will explore opportunities for development that enhance the vitality of the sub-areas, boost the local economy, and advance Romeoville's image as an exemplar place for finding a new home, setting up a business, or infusing with investment. Although a Downtown Master Plan was prepared in 2003 for the area now known as Uptown Square, changes in the post-recession economy have resulted in the need to reconsider basic strategic policies to continue supporting the re-vitalization of this special place in Romeoville.

The comprehensive planning process provides opportunities for extensive public input through an online survey, an interactive project website and mobile app, community workshops, open houses, and interviews with community stakeholders. These public engagement elements are described in more detail in Section 2.

These outreach efforts will enable the community to actively contribute to the planning process, providing valuable ideas and feedback needed to guide the plan to ensure that it will reflect the community's long-term vision and values.

ON THE WEB

Project website for the Romeoville Comprehensive Plan Update
<https://www.bigpictureromeoville.com>



IMPORTANCE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

While the Comprehensive Plan Update will explore strategies that guide growth and development across the Village, the plan will pay particular attention to assessing opportunities to enhance Romeoville's key subareas, including Uptown Square.



There is a recurring recognition in judicial decisions that land use regulations must link to and implement well-considered goals and objectives for the future development and growth of a community. The process of forethought about future use and development of land and provision of public services in a community is referred to as comprehensive planning in Illinois State Statutes. Without it, there can be no rational allocation of land uses and resources, and local government would have no guidance for the growth and development of the community. Similarly, residents and landowners in the community would have no assurance that ad hoc decisions with respect to their land, or their neighbor's land, would not materially alter the character of an area and impair the value and use of land. Thus, land use decisions should follow a rational and deliberate consideration of the goals and objectives of the community.

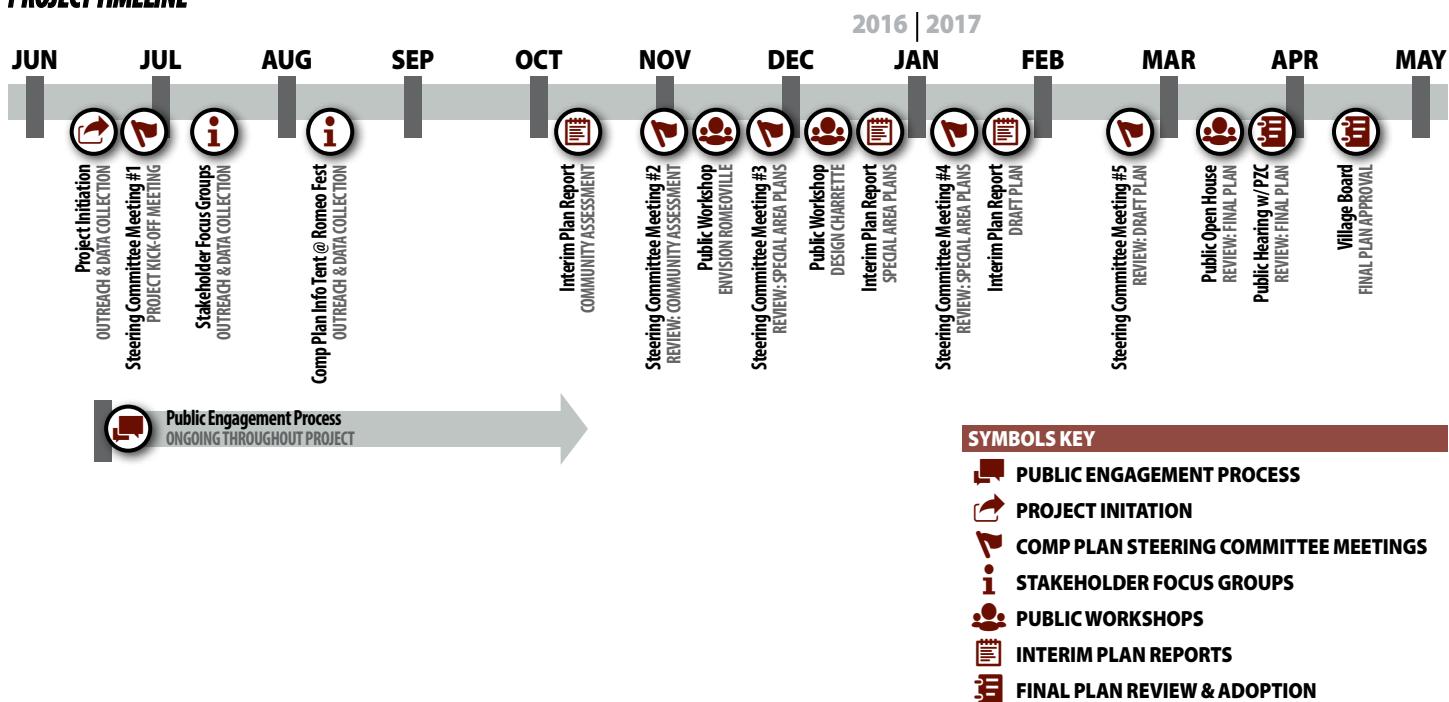
The current Romeoville Comprehensive Plan provided guidance for decisions on growth and change in the community since 2001. With this 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, the Village will articulate its goals, objectives, and priorities for the next stage in its development as a community, recognizing that planning must be an ongoing process. The Comprehensive Plan provides Village officials with a set of policies and principles to be implemented through economic development initiatives, municipal regulations, and the development approval process.

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING PROCESS

The Project Timeline is provided below highlighting key meetings, public engagement activities, and project deliverables that comprise the planning process. With project initiation during the summer of 2016, this report represents the culmination of the Community Assessment phase, which included research, analysis, focus group interviews, and the first meeting with the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. These steps encompass the first three phases of the planning process, including the public engagement approach that occurs throughout the project.

The fourth phase will be the formation of a community vision for Romeoville, including planning goals and objectives. The fifth and sixth phases will include the specific Subarea Plans and preparation of the Comprehensive Plan core elements. The sixth phase also will focus on the Implementation Plan, as well as public meetings to present the complete draft Comprehensive Plan to the public, Planning and Zoning Commission, and Village Board for review and approval.

PROJECT TIMELINE

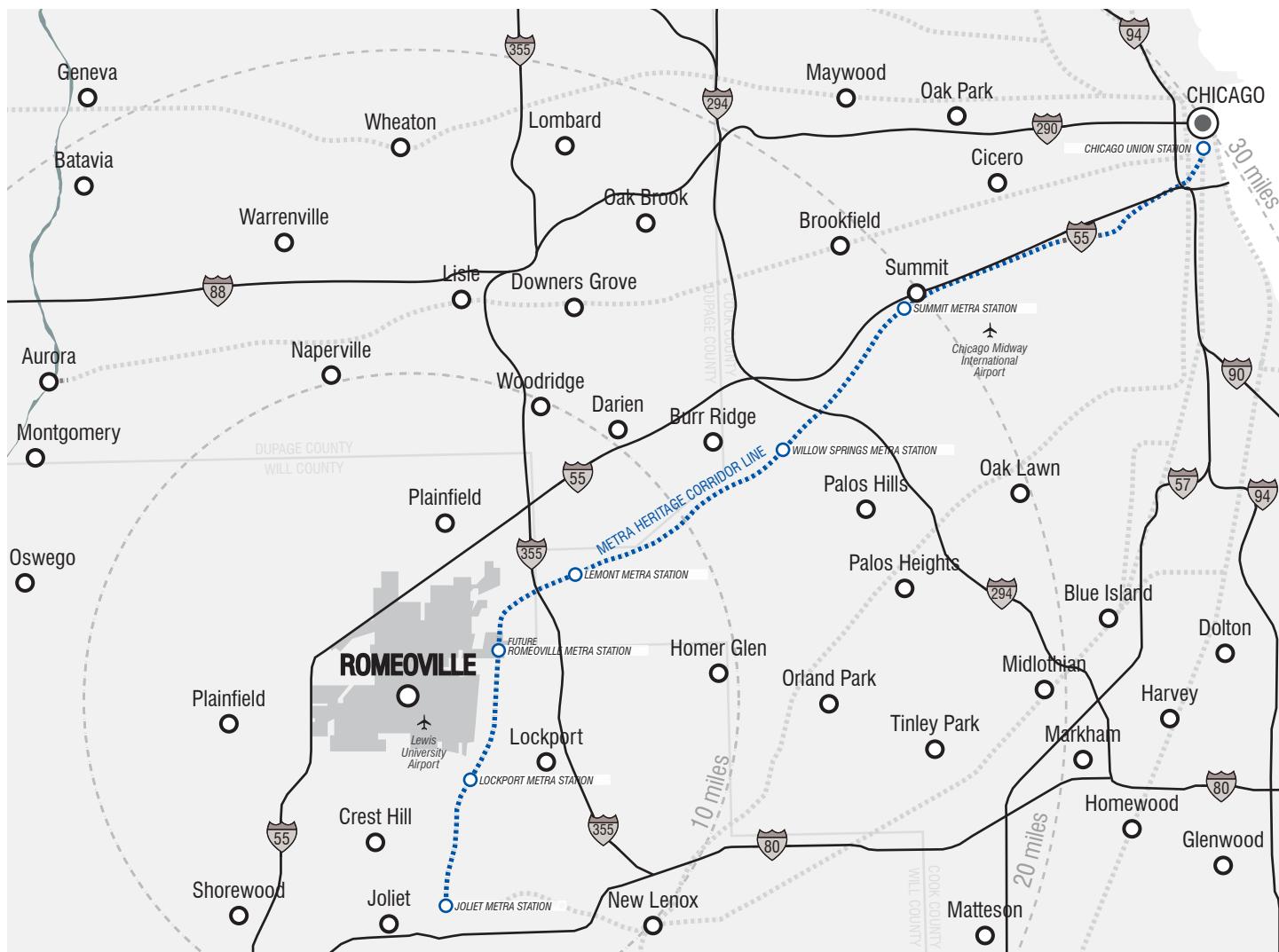


LOCATION

Located in northern Will County, Romeoville is located approximately 34 miles from Downtown Chicago and offers excellent interstate access via I-55 and I-355 with plans for a future Metra commuter rail station that enhances the Village's transit access to the Chicago metropolitan region. Romeoville is bounded by: Bolingbrook and Woodridge to the north; Lemont and Lockport to the east; Joliet and Crest Hill to the south; and Plainfield to the west. The Village is also characterized by its access to waterfronts and natural areas, including the Des Plaines River, I&M Canal, Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, Romeoville Prairie Nature Preserve, O'Hara Woods Forest Preserve, and Veterans Woods Forest Preserve. In addition, while Romeoville has its own airport service via Lewis University Airport, the Village is located 36 miles from O'Hare International Airport and 28 miles from Midway International Airport. Romeoville's location within the Chicago metropolitan region is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

FIGURE 1.1
Regional Location Map

Sources: Bing Maps; Metra



PLANNING AREA

The Illinois State Statutes empower municipalities to plan future land uses within a 1½-mile radius outside their actual municipal boundaries, known as the planning jurisdiction. This planning area allows a municipality to identify desired future land uses, review plans for unincorporated areas, and preserve public sites and open space corridors. As is the case for many communities, Romeoville's planning area overlaps with neighboring municipalities. In such instances, communities will often enter into boundary agreements, which establish jurisdictional boundary lines that both municipalities agree not to plan or annex.

For the purposes of this Comprehensive Plan Update, Romeoville's planning area encompasses all territory within the Village's corporate limits including certain unincorporated areas of Will County located at the periphery of the Village. Jurisdiction over some unincorporated areas at the Village's periphery is subject to intergovernmental agreements with the adjacent municipalities of Bolingbrook, Woodridge, Lemont, Lockport, Joliet, and Plainfield, as illustrated in Figure 1.2. Romeoville currently does not have boundary agreements with Crest Hill.

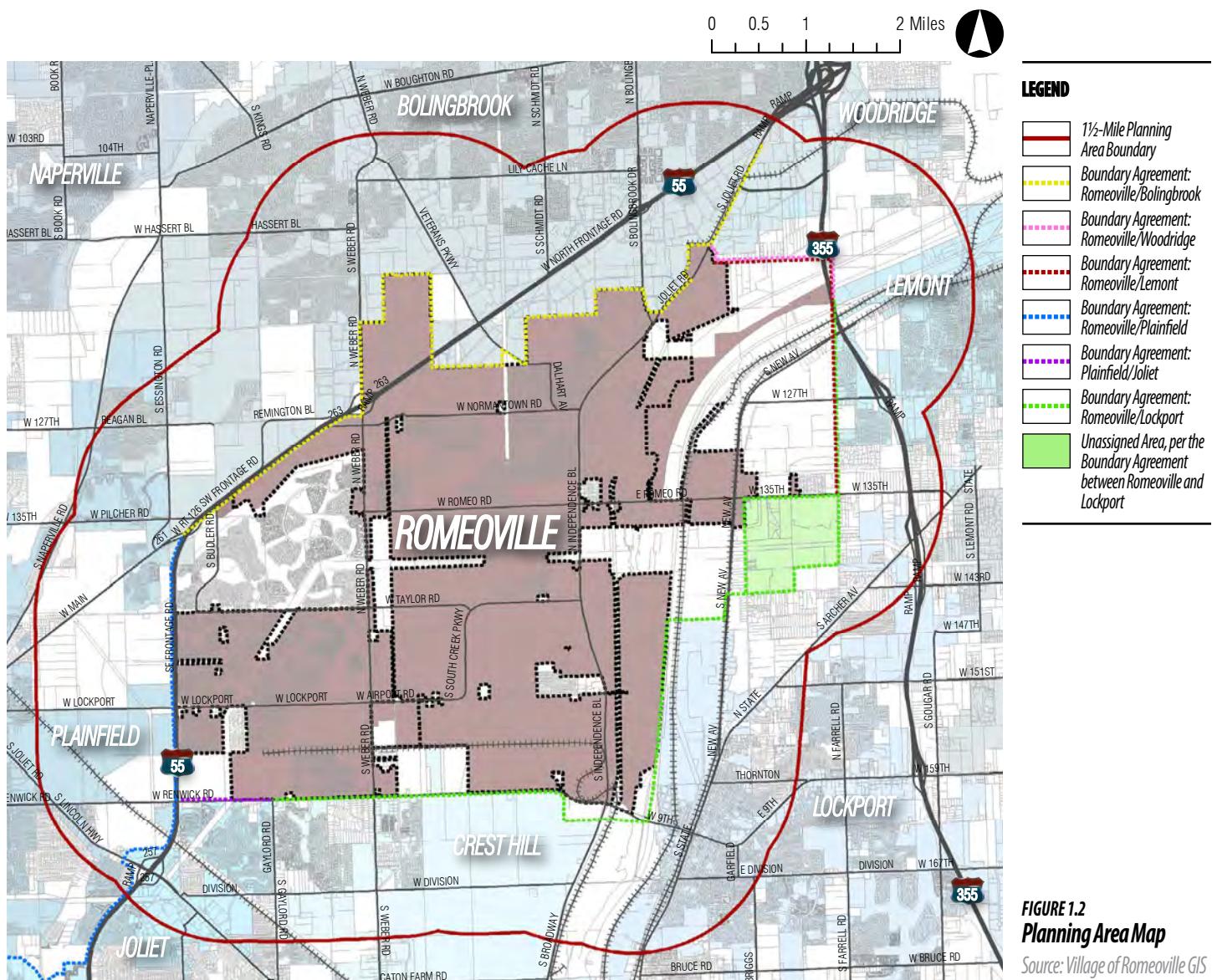


FIGURE 1.2
Planning Area Map

Source: Village of Romeoville GIS

KEY PLANNING THEMES

Romeoville has grown from a small, rural village providing stone and building materials from local quarries, into a full service community. Growth and expansion through annexation and development of farm land has characterized much of Romeoville's past. The result is a community with 40,000 residents and a strong economic base consisting of commercial and industrial development due to its strategic location on the I-55 highway corridor and access to commuter rail service in the vicinity.

Now, in 2016, the Village faces new challenges, ones that are more typical of a maturing community. With limited opportunities for growth through annexation, Romeoville must now focus on taking advantage of and utilizing its limited vacant lands, redevelopment of obsolete uses, and local resources to address issues associated with maintaining a balanced community. The key drivers of the planning process will be those policies that support a greater diversity in land uses, continue to boost economic development, diversify the housing stock, improve connectivity for pedestrians and bicycles, encourage transit ridership, and further strengthen a sense of community through developments that offer a full range of living, entertainment, shopping, employment, and opportunities for social engagement. As much as development can serve as a catalyst to infuse renewed energy into the community, the other pieces identified above will also provide residents and visitors with the feeling that each subarea, corridor, neighborhood, and district in Romeoville is a special place.

At this point in the planning process, input from residents and community leaders, combined with the research and analysis of the Consultant Team, has resulted in the identification of five key planning themes that will guide the planning process. As described on the following pages, these key planning themes lay a preliminary foundation for visioning, goal setting, and drafting plan concepts in the next phases of the process.



ADVANCING A BALANCED ECONOMIC BASE



ENSURING FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH MARKET-SUPPORTED STRATEGIES



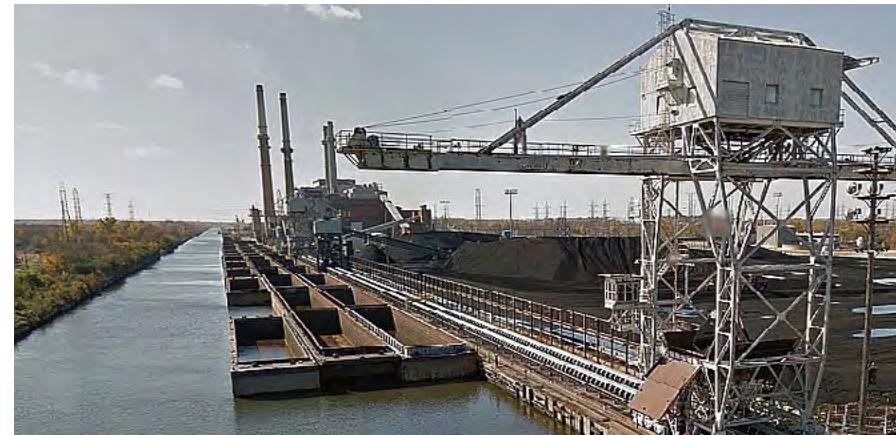
IMPROVING ACCESS & MOBILITY



DIVERSIFYING THE HOUSING STOCK



LEVERAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



PLANNING THEME #1

ADVANCING A BALANCED ECONOMIC BASE



With its location along the Des Plaines River, I&M Canal, and rail lines, Romeoville has a strong legacy of industrial development. Continued support and strengthening of the Village's industrial base will be imperative to provide strong employment centers, enhance the revenue base, and maintain Romeoville's legacy as an exemplar place to do business. There is recognition that, as industries continue to evolve and their product transport needs change, their needs for land also evolve. As a result, certain industrial sites that were highly productive in the past are now coming off-line and creating brownfields. This plan will include strategies that ensure brownfield sites, such as the NRG Energy coal plant, return to productive use and, where appropriate, provide for potential redevelopment in an environmentally sound manner.

While industry is integral to Romeoville's economic base, diversification of the local economy by expanding commercial and residential opportunities will be important over the next 20 years to ensure a fiscally sustainable future. As the economy continues to rebound and evolve to fit the needs of an increasingly mobile and tech-focused consumer base, there is the realization that planning for commercial uses is not the same as it was in the past. The sharing economy has changed the way we think about renting short-term living spaces and car ownership. With more and more online options to purchase goods and services, commercial districts need to be more than just places to browse and shop. It is increasingly necessary to support commercial districts that provide an expanded range of experiences that can't be replicated on the internet.

PLANNING THEME #2

ENSURING FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH MARKET-SUPPORTED STRATEGIES

The effectiveness of the Comprehensive Plan will result from the adherence to market-supported strategies that ensure land use recommendations and development concepts are feasible in the marketplace, both now and into the future. The plan must be more than a visionary document; it must result in built projects and community improvements. Market-supported strategies provide the backbone for the Implementation Action Plan that will identify feasible projects and strategies that the Village can use on a daily basis to spur action with community partners. Part of that approach will be ensuring the financial feasibility of the land use and development concepts contained in the Comprehensive Plan. This approach ensures the impacts of potential development will not fiscally strain the Village's budget or burden municipal utilities, services, and infrastructure.



PLANNING THEME #3

IMPROVING ACCESS & MOBILITY



Romeoville is well served by a multi-faceted transportation network, from major arterials and proximity to interstate highways to Pace bus routes and multi-use trails. The Village took proactive steps to develop a transit-oriented development (TOD) plan for the proposed Metra commuter rail station on the Village's East Side. Access to transit is fundamentally tied to safe and convenient routes for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists to access the train station or bus stop. That is why it is imperative to approach transportation planning from a multimodal perspective, integrating land use planning to ensure all modes are properly accommodated in site design. This includes connectivity with the Village's system of parks, forest preserves, trails, and open space opportunities, such as the I&M Canal, Centennial Trail, Des Plaines River, Isle a la Cache, and the Romeoville Athletic and Events Center in Uptown Square. The Comprehensive Plan will build upon the transportation recommendations from the 2009 Bike Trail Master Plan and Transportation Plan, identifying additional or modified means of connectivity to account for the Village's growth areas. Distribution of recreational facilities will also be important to ensure all residents have equitable access to the opportunities for exercise, education, social interaction, and connection to nature offered by these facilities.

PLANNING THEME #4

DIVERSIFYING THE HOUSING STOCK



Expanding housing options will ensure residents can age in place by finding suitable housing types that meet their changing needs over time without having to leave Romeoville. To meet this end, housing policies will be established to address the Village's housing stock, with particular attention to the distribution of diverse housing types at varying price points. Opportunities will be identified to expand market rate housing, attainable housing, and development of housing as part of mixed-use projects, particularly in relation to Uptown Square, the proposed Metra station area on the East Side, and other areas at important locations along major transportation corridors. In addition to housing diversification, it will be important to address specific housing issues that characterize the market and neighborhoods in Romeoville, particularly introducing best practices and possible funding sources aimed at improving housing through community development projects. It is important to look beyond housing as just structures with monetary value, and advocate for programs and resources that improve social and economic conditions, and ownership opportunities, that foster neighborhood investment that transforms houses into homes.





PLANNING THEME #5

LEVERAGING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Village prides itself on building and maintaining strong connections with its community partners. Effective implementation of the Comprehensive Plan is dependent upon maintaining strong working relationships with all of the Village's partners, from transit agencies, taxing districts, and other governmental bodies to businesses, non-profit foundations, and community-based organizations. From local businesses and industrial enterprises to educational institutions and community-based organizations, the Village continually strives to leverage these partnerships to support community events, provide services and programs to residents, advance the vibrant business culture, and enhance Romeoville's identity as an exemplar place to raise a family, enjoy natural amenities, do business, continue education, or visit for experiences that are unique to Romeoville. Educational partners like Lewis University, Rasmussen College, Joliet Junior College, and Romeoville High School are vital to advancing the Village's strong economic base by educating and training students who will enter the local workforce that fill the employment needs of local businesses and industrial enterprises. The services and programs provided by local organizations are the building blocks upon which to build a strong community that can be sustained over the long run. These strategic partnerships can create efficiencies, leverage limited resources, and strengthen the collective capacity of Romeoville's network of organizations to enhance the quality-of-life for residents, strengthen the business environment, and create vibrant commercial areas.



PARTNERING FOR OUR FUTURE...

We want Romeoville to be the best that it can be, now and into the future, so The Village is updating its Comprehensive Plan. Check out the project website and tell us what's most important to you!