

Long Grove

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Chapter 3: History

Long Grove is in many ways a unique community. Its location marks the western edge of the once great ice sheet that centered over Lake Michigan during the Glacial Period thousands of years ago. Before European settlement, Northeastern Illinois was a mixture of open prairie and forested groves. Long Grove is unique in that, again, it was on the boundary of one of these groves.

Long Grove Church was founded in 1846. The present building built in 1847 is the oldest church building still in use in Northeastern Illinois. George Ela gave the site of the Long Grove Church, and he lies buried in its churchyard. There was once a German Methodist-Church across McHenry Road from its present location known as the James Byrne residence. (1979, 1991)

Nearly as old as the City of Chicago, Long Grove changed very little from its founding until the Great Depression of the 1930s. The early 1930s were quiet until the first "commuter" families-- defined as someone who made his principle living outside of the community-- appeared in the Village during the latter part of the decade. Perhaps twenty such families had purchased acreage when World War II intervened and stopped the change which was occurring in Long Grove. Following the war, more new families entered and the pattern of the present community took shape. The new residents were united in appreciation of the rural beauty of Long Grove and in the unique historic heritage of the community. When Route 83 was built, it missed the crossroads to the east. Later when Route 53 was built, it likewise bypassed Long Grove. The result was a farming and shopping village identical to those characteristic of the 19th century preserved intact.

For some years there had been the Kildeer Civic Association which served as community watchdog, and in 1956 serious consideration was given to incorporation. The concept grew of a municipality dedicated to the preservation of its rural character, open green space, and natural beauty. In a day when ecology and environment were little known words, Long Grove was a pioneer. In December 1956, a vote was taken on incorporating 4 square miles, including a population of 400, located in the heart of the present Village. With a favorable vote the Judge entered the results, and on December 31, 1956, Long Grove became a legal municipality. Since its inception, the Village has defended its rural lifestyle, successfully opposing new attempts to incorporate areas around Long Grove that were not in keeping with the Village's rural character. The Village's success in keeping its character is the result of planning which aligned with regional and County plans, all of which reinforced the importance of maintaining open space and large acre rural zoning (1979, 1991, 2017)

As a result, Long Grove grew greatly by annexation. The original 4 square miles grew to almost 14 square miles. Mardan Woods and Mardan Estates to the south, and other areas along the northern periphery of the Village were also annexed. A period of quiet growth ensued during the 1960s, '70s, and early '80s while experiencing some interesting planning innovations in the Village. (1979, 1991)

The Village Board recognized early the unique nature of the Historic Business District. Here was fortuitously preserved intact a 19th century rural shopping crossroads such as had once served most of the country, but which "progress" had largely swept away. As increasing commercialization occurred, it was obvious that soon the rural atmosphere of The Historic Business District could be lost. The Village adopted a Historic Landmark Ordinance by which all new construction in the business area must conform to 19th century architecture.

In November 1971, the Village entered into a contract with the County of Lake setting up the "Long Grove Sewer Sub-area." Again within a legally-described boundary, an area was established within which the Village of Long Grove has the right to approval before any proposed development can connect to the Lake County Public Works sewer system. This type of agreement, of which Long Grove had the first, has been widely hailed by such bodies as the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission as a large step forward in the orderly growth of the area. (1979)

During the early 1970s, there was an addition to the scenic beauty of Long Grove by the construction of a covered bridge on Robert Parker Coffin Road over Buffalo Creek. The bridge was patterned after a vintage 1800 bridge in New Hampshire. The underlying iron truss bridge was originally constructed in 1906 by the Joliet Bridge and Iron Company of Joliet, Illinois, and is considered architecturally unique, distinguishing it from other similar structures constructed at the time. The bridge is a rare surviving example of a pin-connected Pratt Eyebar Pony Half-Hip Steel Truss Bridge for an urban setting. A decorative covering was added in 1973 to shield the steel from the elements, and enhance the appearance while controlling the weight restriction over the bridge. Located just off Route 53, the bridge serves as a rustic entrance to this rural village. (1979, 1991, 2017)

In February 1974, the Village, recognizing that certain soil types and configurations of terrain place definite and specific limitations on building construction, development and land utilization, passed a Conservancy Ordinance which prohibits any construction in floodplains. The Conservancy Ordinance was designed to further the appropriate use and conservation of land and water resources and, in doing so, protect the health and welfare of all present and future residents, not only of Long Grove, but also of the surrounding areas.

Perhaps the most innovative planning tool implemented by Long Grove is its Scenic Corridor Easements Ordinance adopted in February 1978. Designed to protect residential development from



the considerable noise generated by vehicular traffic along major thoroughfares in and bordering the community and to provide a refuge for native flora and fauna, the Ordinance requires that land located within 200 feet, measured from the right-of-way, of major state and national highways and expressways and 100 feet from all other state, county, and collector streets be preserved in its natural state as scenic corridors. The Scenic Corridor Easements Ordinance represents a significant and vital step to the preservation of open green space in the Village of Long Grove. (1979, 1999)

Today, the Village of Long Grove exhibits many of the natural and man-made features that were characteristic of the region when settlement first began in the early 1800s. There still exists in Long Grove an abundance of the original flora and fauna of the region, including the original "Long Grove" of trees, prairie, wetlands, and a wide variety of wildlife. Perhaps even more-significant are the remaining man-made features built by the settlers of this rural farm community. The Long Grove Church and Cemetery (built in 1847), the Historic Business District, Archer School, the Gridley homestead on the Abbott farm, the covered bridge, and a number of farm houses all offer proud testimony to the culture, architecture, and way of life that existed in this region over 100 years ago. Map 3.1 indicates the location of these historic sites. (1979, 1991)

Fortunately, the forces of progress and time have not been allowed to destroy the rich heritage of Long Grove. Undoubtedly this region was once dotted with a number of communities such as Long Grove, but the demand for developable land and the neglect of these artifacts have caused them to vanish with the passage of time. Today, Long Grove stands alone--a monument to the diligence and perseverance of its residents--as a community which has successfully preserved much of the charm, natural beauty, and historical richness which has hallmarked the community since the 19th century. (1979, 1991)

An expanded description of the history, historic development pattern and the actions of Long Grove citizens to preserve the rural character of the community is provided in Appendix I.

**Map 3.1 Historic Sites in
Long Grove**

