

Long Grove

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Chapter 6: Community Character

The term "community character" covers a broad spectrum of concerns. First and foremost, community character is a visual concept. In Long Grove, however, community character is more than just an aesthetic concern. Long Grove has worked hard to preserve the natural environment within its jurisdiction for reasons greater than its aesthetic value. Many residents live in and move to Long Grove because the Village takes responsibility for, and an active role in, preserving a healthy and quality living environment. Therefore, while the types of community character discussed herein are often arrived at from a visual perspective, they are also defined by land use, economic, social, and lifestyle terms. (1991)

From its incorporation in 1956, Long Grove maintains a rural community character which is very different and apart from the urban/suburban development pattern of other communities. As illustrated on the Community Form Map in Map 6.1, the Village is characterized by large residential lots and natural open spaces which both define the form and character of the Village, generally referred to as rural or countryside character. Although the environmental character of the land consisting of extensive wetlands and floodplains (see the Long Grove Wetlands and Natural Resources & Flood Zones Maps 5.1 and 5.2, respectively) has largely contributed to the low density nature of the community, the Village made a concerted effort to embrace and preserve these qualities by limiting urban utility services and adopting strict environmental protection laws and scenic conservation programs. Long Grove was an early leader in the environmental movement and was one of the first communities in Illinois to enact environmental regulations. Through these efforts, the community has preserved 1,563 acres in scenic easements and conservancy areas.

Today Long Grove remains an affluent, non-home rule community located in Lake County, Illinois, approximately 35 miles northwest of Chicago. As of the 2010 Census, the Village has a population 8,085 individuals and comprises approximately 12.5 square miles of land area. The Village maintains boundary agreements with the Villages of Kildeer and Hawthorn Woods, which are both situated to the west and the northwest of Long Grove, respectively. Few large undeveloped tracts of land remain within the corporate limits of the Village. Limited areas exist for annexation. Map H-1 in Appendix H shows Long Grove's municipal limits and the boundary agreement lines with Kildeer and Hawthorn Woods. The central questions raised by community stakeholders, as was addressed in the 1999 Plan, are:

“What type of community is the Village of Long Grove, and in what direction is it headed?”

These questions remain the two most critical aspects of the comprehensive planning process.

The Village's past planning policies have been directed at preserving the Village's rural character: likewise, its preservation is viewed-as-an essential element of this Plan. In the past 35 years, and prior to the economic downturn of 2008, the Village has seen periods of unprecedented development which has stressed the Village's ability to preserve its "rural community character." In 1980, there were 559 residential dwelling units in Long Grove based on U.S. Census data; in 1990, there were 1,421 units (U.S. Census Bureau);, and in 2000 there were 2,021 units. By 2010, the Census Bureau indicated that the number of housing units had risen to 2,593. Based on Village building permit records, the number of units increased to 2,664 in 2015. As a result of this rapid growth, the Village of Long Grove has established and implemented policies that better protect, preserve, and enhance its unique, "rural" character. (1991, 1999, 2017)

The development of land in the Village shall be planned with great care to ensure that the unique, "rural" character of the Long Grove community is preserved. Regulations and policies that give better definition to the Village's character and the intention of preserving and enhancing that character are encouraged and should be implemented by all official public bodies of the Village. (1991, 2017)

If the Village wishes to maintain its unique "rural" characteristics; regulations must be adopted that implement the character concepts the Village wants to promote. This Chapter lays the essential foundation for regulations that protect the Village of Long Grove's rich and unique, "rural" community character. (1991, 2017)

Long Grove: Regional and Local Position

In an era of unprecedented, unfettered development, Long Grove has retained the rural charm, groves of trees and natural beauty that have hallmarked the community since its inception. The Village has historically made a tremendous effort to preserve these characteristics. The effort has become much more difficult in recent years. Gone are the large farm fields that used to characterize and buffer the community. Despite the preservation of 1,563 scenic easements and nature conservancy areas, the Village needs to continue to explore new concepts to protect its natural features and to guard its rural character, while effectively managing continuing growth. (1991, 2017)

Recognizing that Long Grove is but a small portion of the entire region, serious consideration has been given to the Village's role, both in relation to surrounding communities and the entire Chicago metropolitan area, in formulating the Comprehensive Plan. The two major regional planning agencies in the Long Grove area are the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), formerly known as the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission (NIPC), which plans for the entire Chicago metropolitan

area, and the Lake County Regional Planning Commission, which is the planning mechanism of Lake County, Illinois. Both have actively implemented regional plans in which the Long Grove area is predominantly preserved as open space--free from intense development. (1979, 1991, 2017)

The situation in the County and the Chicago metropolitan area has changed significantly since the regional plans were first adopted. NIPC's Regional Open Space Plan, known as the "Finger Plan," and the predecessor to the CMAP "Green Vision Plan", shows Long Grove resting firmly in the middle of large open space or 'green infrastructure' areas. The CMAP Parks and Open Space Plan is an update to the Finger Plan, and continues to expound the need for open space in northeastern Illinois. (1991, 2017)

Realizing the importance of retaining the open space character of Long Grove for the benefit of the entire region, as well as the community, the Long Grove Comprehensive Plan is designed to fulfill many of the "action recommendations" in the current regional parks and open space plan. (1991, 2017)

Historically, the Village was built in the forested lands along waterways, thus creating an essentially invisible community by using building setbacks, scenic easements, landscape preservation and new plant materials to minimize the impact of buildings on the built environment. In addition, the Village made preserving this open space an objective in the development process for the Village, thereby promoting what may be called a "green community" concept. The quality of life in the community is greatly enhanced by these open spaces. More importantly, Long Grove and other green communities answer an important regional need for open spaces, thereby separating and defining the sprawling suburbs. (1991, 2017)

Long Grove has long maintained a desire to preserve the open spaces and semi-rural charm that has characterized the Village throughout its existence. At the same time, however, the Village desires to permit quality development within the Village. These two goals have been and continue to remain the most important goals of the Long Grove Comprehensive Plan. The Village needs to first decide then implement the best course of action for continuing to achieve these goals. The Village actively continues to implement the Comprehensive Plan's goals and objectives to ensure the Plan remains an operational reality. (1991, 2017)

Long Grove Community Character

There are three related components involved in describing community character. The first is a view of the large-scale components of a community (such as type of land use and intensity of use) to determine the type of community. A second crucial factor is the scale and a third aspect is the design of development and the degree to which it contributes to a cohesive community. The theoretical elements of each component are described in Appendix B and C. Community character elements identified by residents to serve as development guidelines are provided in Appendix B. (1991, 2017)



Community Form and Character

To further illustrate the elements that define Long Grove's character and function, the Community Form and Character Map 6.1 describes the basic organizational structure of the community, opportunities for economic development, and the role of roads in maintaining a sense of place. Together each component of the community plays an important part in ensuring a sustainable future:

- Nature: preserves habitat, way of life, values
- Character: reflects values
- Economic opportunity: allows for the others to be preserved

Long Grove has its own special personality, composed of districts, corridors, neighborhoods, and special places. As the community matures, redevelopment, infill, and public improvement projects may impact the character of the Village. The Community Character and Form Map 6.1 assists the community in evaluating ways to maintain and improve the quality of life through the enhancement and protection of the Village's visual environment.

Community Scale

The scale concept addresses how a building or space relates both to its inhabitants and to other buildings or spaces. Scale, by its very nature, is subject to quantification, at least on a relative basis. There are several methods for measuring scale. Some relate the building or space to human beings, others relate buildings or spaces to each other, and still others relate the building to its land. These concepts are explored further in Appendix C. (1991)

Out-of-character building scale has been an issue in Long Grove. The scale of newer residential structures is much greater than the older buildings. This trend may however be shifting toward smaller residential structures on smaller lots due to market forces and the rising costs associated with land acquisition and development. (1991, 2017)

In general, a community may have occasional civic buildings that are out-of-scale with the remainder of the community; but they should be buildings of importance to the general public so that their difference has a symbolic meaning. (1991)

Community Character Action Program

With smaller portions of vacant land remaining and with development rapidly taking place, preserving the rural characteristics of Long Grove has become more difficult, yet retains a high level of community importance. In some areas, regaining a lost localized rural character may be impossible. Two strategies have been combined to address this issue. The first is a positive shift in Village development regulations to ensure that new development enhances the remaining rural characteristics of the



Village, with open spaces, clustering, and landscaping included as design elements. The second is the adoption of a strategy that seeks to re-establish rural character, possibly through the use of landscaping, or other innovative development techniques. The Village shall adopt policies and regulations, as well as provide informational materials that encourage the re-establishment of the rural character of the Village so development proposals, as well as individual residents can take action to establish and maintain the desired character of the community. (1991, 1999, 2017)

Residential Cluster (Grouping of Homes)/Conservation Oriented Subdivisions

Development strategies may require the clustering of residential development and alternative housing products, in some cases, as well as the creation of larger, more visible open spaces; improved scenic buffers and street treatments. Encouraging architectural designs that actually minimize the impact of the buildings on the existing landscape is also desirable. This strategy requires setting limits on building size, which the Village has set by ordinance and reaffirmed relative to residential structures, in 2015 by limiting building size to 13,000 square feet. (1991, 2017)

Clustering is a means of group of homes without increasing density, providing open space within a development by reducing the lot sizes or other “bulk” requirements that would typically force all the land to be built upon instead of remaining as open space. Clustering residential developments has mostly been used to maintain the overall low residential density of a site while preserving the conservancy soils. It also can be used effectively to create a more rural atmosphere. (1991, 2017)

In areas of the Village which have remaining vacant land suitable for development, clustering can be used to maintain open land along roads and between nodes of development. The use of public sewers and/or land treatment systems is one method to encourage these developments. Clustering may also mean grouping of buildings on lots smaller than one acre while maintaining an overall rural density. In wooded areas, buildable lot size is one of the most important factors affecting development impact on the existing landscape. In some circumstances, large lot sizes may not promote rural qualities, nor be attainable with smaller land areas being available for development. For the most part, large uninterrupted open spaces may only be achieved by cluster lots or highly



restricted buildable areas on large lots. Clustering may also be supplemented with enhanced landscaping, including extensive use of natural species and land management policies which enhance the character of the Village. Scenic buffers are another critical element in preserving rural character. (1991, 2017)

View from the Road: Corridors and Gateways

The character of Long Grove is viewed by its residents and visitors, not from subdivision streets but from the major roads. These views shall reflect the unique “rural” character of the community. Small meadows along major roads are encouraged to be continuous and of sufficient width to adequately preserve “rural” character, while demonstrating how to use prairies to enhance community character. Therefore, a goal of the Village is to protect these visual qualities through the public dedication of open space areas, conservation areas, conservancy district easements and scenic corridor throughout the Village. Scenic buffers are another critical element in preserving rural character. (1991, 2017)

Roadway corridors are the most visible parts of a community, and can be a major factor in how a community is perceived. “Views from the road” shape our memories in a way that establishes either a positive or negative community image. Corridors are links that tie communities together, and thus, are an important element of a community’s character. Each corridor identified on the Community Form and

Character Map is based on the principal functional characteristics of the roadway which can form the basis for developing guidelines to preserve and enhance Long Grove’s image. A number of factors contribute to the appearance of corridors, including land use, density, open space, landscape, architecture, infrastructure, access, and pedestrian and vehicular circulation. The following is a general description of the key elements which typically define each type of corridor:

Countryside Corridor (limited to residential areas)

- Rural road cross section - drainage swales, no curb and gutter
- Narrow road
- No on-street parking
- Pathways that inter-connect the community
- Buildings do not take access directly from road
- Large front yard setbacks, with or without scenic easements
- Narrow right-of-way
- Natural, informal landscape theme – hedgerows, prairies, tree groves
- No street lights

Suburban Community & Regional Corridor (limited to commercial areas)

- Wide right-of-way
- Sidewalks, one or both sides
- Smaller front yard setbacks
- Urban road cross section, with or without curb and gutter (depending on right-of-way width and adjacent land uses)
- Two-four lane road
- No on-street parking
- Buildings back onto street (no direct access from road)
- Wide parkway area
- Generally little or no unified landscape theme
- “Highway” type street lighting typically with wide spacing

Gateways & Wayfinding

Gateways are important identifying markers of a community. Several gateway locations are identified along each major corridor where they define entrances to Long Grove or special districts, such as the Downtown. A range of design and appearance improvements should be considered at each gateway location. The following is a general description of the key elements to be used to define each type of gateway:

- Landscaping - distinctive accent plantings should be provided at each gateway location.
- Medians - where feasible, new landscaped medians could be provided within existing rights-of-way for approximately one block long.
- Entry Sign - distinctive identity signs announcing entrance to the community and special sub-areas of the City.
- Lighting - special or unique lighting fixtures could be provided to highlight and accent each gateway feature.

In addition to gateways, wayfinding signs are important as they both bring attention to and direct people to special places in the community. While the Village has limited signs identifying the Downtown area, several additional locations should be considered to both create early notification and provide direction to the Downtown beyond existing locations.

Development Access Management

Developments should be required to take access from subdivision roads rather than the main roads to the greatest extent possible. Access drives should be combined or eliminated along major roads when possible. The older areas of Long Grove demonstrate these qualities and actually make up the

perceived image of Long Grove. Development that occurs in wooded areas is relatively easy to mask from view with large setbacks, but development in open areas needs to be treated differently to minimize impacts to the landscape and maintain community character. (1991, 2017)

In open areas, masking views is much more difficult. At even very low densities, the homes scattered across the landscape are very visible and quickly reach a point where the horizon is continually interrupted by buildings. Therefore, clustering and architectural and bulk restrictions are viable techniques to preserve the landscape qualities of the community. The bulk regulation of the Village zoning ordinance, in concert with other development regulations, are important tools in ensuring the protection of community character. Low structures utilizing natural colors and materials, that are thoughtfully placed and sufficiently landscaped so as to blend into and be in harmony with the natural landscape, should be the rule rather than the exception. The large modern homes which have been built in the Long Grove environment tend to draw attention to themselves and thus, accelerate the erosion of the rural landscape, resulting in a loss of community character. (1991, 2017)

Map 6.1: Community Form and Character

