

Willow Road Study Community Context Audit Summary

The Community Context Audit (CCA) forms were provided to each Community Advisory Group (CAG) member to be completed. A total of 18 completed forms were received through December 30, 2009.

The purpose of the CCA is to help define community issues and features. The audit is designed to take into account the community's history or heritage, present conditions and anticipated conditions. It considered factors such as mobility and access (vehicular, non-vehicular and transit), safety, local and regional economics, aesthetics and quality of life.

The following sections discuss the features which had a high or medium importance to the CAG members. All comments will be considered in the development of project alternatives.

Section 1: Community Characteristics/Land Use

In general, the CAG members agreed that the Willow Road study area was part of an established center, namely the Village of Northfield, but is also adjacent to the Villages of Glenview, Northbrook and Winnetka. The study area is also considered a multi-modal transportation center with automobiles, buses, pedestrians and bicyclists traveling along and across Willow Road. Metra stations are near the project area in Glenview and Winnetka.

The study area was considered to be part of a residential center which includes important cultural and social/community features. Several responses emphasized that the project study area is primarily residential but it was noted that Willow Road serves the residential population of all four participating communities. Willow Road is considered an important route for the area but it is right in the middle of the Northfield community.

The residential uses identified by the members include the following:

- Single-family residential along most of the south side and between Sunset Ridge and Wagner Roads on the north side
- Multi-family residential at Fox Creek Drive, north leg of Bristol Avenue/Robin Hood Lane, Old Willow Road, and south leg of Bristol Street
- Within Glenview, adjacent to the project study area: Heatherfield, Haverford, Sunset Village, Valley Lo, Big Oak and Ammer Ridge multi-family developments.

The cultural features identified by the Project Study Group (PSG) and the CAG include:

- Lutheran Church of the Ascension
- St. James the Less Episcopal Church
- Northfield Community Church
- St. Philip the Apostle Catholic Church
- Willow Creek Community Church North Shore

The social/community features identified include:

- Willow Park (playground, soccer and baseball fields, community events shelter, tennis courts, fitness track, bird sanctuary, FEMA floodway and floodplain areas)

- Clarkson Park (ice rink, community event room, playground, picnic tables and shelter, FEMA flood plain area)
- Fox Meadow Park (soccer and baseball fields, wetland conservation area)
- Northfield Community Center (gym and fitness center)
- Arthur C. Nielsen, Jr. Campus North Shore Senior Center
- Sunset Ridge School
- Middlefork School
- St. Philip the Apostle School
- Northfield Community Nursery School
- Kohl Children's Museum
- College of American Pathologists
- Downtown Northfield
- Northfield Village Hall and Police Station
- Northfield/Winnetka Library
- New Trier Northfield Campus
- Skokie Playfield Facilities (A.C. Nielsen Tennis Center and Winnetka Ice Arena)

The natural features in the area were considered medium to low in importance but many CAG members noted that there are flooding issues. The project should include drainage and storm water management improvements to address the flooding.

Section 2: Infrastructure Assessment

Providing sidewalks with American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance and providing pedestrian crossings and crosswalks were agreed to be highly important. While there are sidewalks along most of the study limits, they are discontinuous or are narrow at several locations. The pedestrian crossings at the Interstate 94 interchange were noted as being scary and poorly located for visibility by drivers. It was noted that school children reside south of Willow Road while most of the features (schools, parks) are on the north side. There is no bus service provided for Sunset Ridge and Middlefork Schools. Several CAG members stated that a school speed limit zone should be established along Willow Road. Lighting of crosswalks and provision of a median refuge area were suggested for consideration in the project.

Traffic signals for both vehicles and pedestrians were also highly important. It was suggested to add pedestrian countdown signals at each signal. Better coordination of the traffic signals between Waukegan Road and Northfield Road was also suggested. Several members noted that there is a need to provide space for left turning vehicles so that the flow of traffic is not impeded.

There are existing traffic signals at the following locations:

- Existing traffic signals – Willow Road at:
 - IL 43 (Waukegan Road)
 - Fox Meadow/Three Lakes Drive (Kraft Foods)
 - Sunset Ridge Road
 - Wagner Road
 - Old Willow Road/Northfield Road
 - Happ Road/Central Road

- Pedestrian signals with pushbuttons are provided on Willow Road at:
 - Sunset Ridge Road (east leg)
 - Wagner Road (east and south legs)
 - Old Willow Road/Northfield Road (east leg)

Accommodating bicycles by providing bike lanes, paths or other facilities was considered medium to high in importance. While there are bike racks at several locations (parks and schools), there are no designated paths for bicyclists to travel on. It was noted that the proposed Skokie Valley Trail crosses Willow Road on the Union Pacific right-of-way between Northfield and Happ Roads. The Northwest Municipal Conference's Bikeway Plan also includes a trail which would run along Willow Road from the Techny Trail in Glenview to the North Branch Trail in the Cook County Forest Preserve east of Interstate 94.

Section 3: Neighborhood Culture, Aesthetics and Street Amenities

Addressing community safety concerns and traffic safety were the most important aspects regarding neighborhood culture. Providing safe pedestrian crossings was considered high importance to almost all CAG members. This was discussed in the previous section.

The neighborhood parks, open space and civic areas were also considered highly important features in the project study area. Numerous seasonal events such as July 4th Parade, School Fair, Northfield Rocks, Campout Night and Ribfest all occur along the Willow Road corridor.

The identified parks and civic areas include:

- Fox Meadow Park at southeast corner of IL Route 43 (Waukegan Road)/Willow Road
- Willow Park (Northview Bank and Trust Field, Northfield Park District offices) just east of Middlefork Primary School between Wagner Road and Bristol Street
- Clarkson Park (Northfield Park District) on southwest corner of Willow Road at Bristol Street
- Erickson Woods (Forest Preserve District of Cook County) on the north side of Willow just east of I-94
- Northfield Community Center at the northeast corner of Willow Road and Wagner Road
- Arthur C. Nielsen, Jr. Campus North Shore Senior Center on Northfield Road about 1/3 of a mile south of Willow Road
- Skokie Playfield Facilities (A.C. Nielsen Tennis Center and Winnetka Ice Arena) on Willow Road in Winnetka
- Northfield Village Hall at the southeast corner of Willow Road and Happ Road
- Northfield Police Station at the southwest corner of Willow Road and Walnut Street
- Northfield/Winnetka Library on the west side of Happ Road south of Willow Road

Inclusion of street trees and landscaping in the project had a medium to high importance to the CAG members.

Section 4: Economic Development

This topic had the most variability in the responses to the CCA and therefore probably will have the least influence on the purpose and need for the project. While the general response was "yes" to whether the Willow Road study area has been identified for new development, there was a split on whether this had high or low importance to the project. Many CAG members noted that the redevelopment that will be occurring would not result in an increase in traffic on

Willow Road. It was also generally agreed that the roadway serves as both a commuter corridor and a gateway to the community but there were varied responses on the level of importance of these to the project.

A good number of the CAG members agreed that the stakeholders for the project include the following business and other advocacy groups:

- Northfield Chamber of Commerce
- Glenview Chamber of Commerce
- Northbrook Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- United Parcel Service
- Business owners
- Northfield Park District
- Northfield School District
- Northfield Nursery School
- Association of Parents of Schoolchildren
- Willow Park Baseball Clubs and Soccer Clubs
- Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts
- Biking and Running Clubs
- North Suburban Awareness Group
- TMA of Lake-Cook

Section 5: Community Planning

All four villages have Comprehensive Plans. The Village of Northbrook is in the process of updating their Plan. In addition, the Village of Northfield has a Village Center Study completed in 2008 which directs development of the commercial area at the east end of the Willow Road study area.

The only special study identified which is associated with this project was the Willow Road Context Sensitive Enhancement Plan (Lakota Study). In addition, a Phase I Study and Phase II Plans had been previously prepared for a three-lane improvement on Willow Road.

Several CAG members stated that Willow Road is a Strategic Regional Arterial (SRA) route. SRA routes are an IDOT network of roadways that serve longer distance travel. It extends from Illinois Route 62 in Inverness (as Palatine Road) to Sheridan Road in Winnetka. The segment between Quentin Road in Palatine and Interstate 94 in Northfield is the portion designated as an SRA route. The CAG member responses were split on whether the project has regional significance with many stating that this is a local concern. Other comments included:

- The other roads in the area have slow-downs and back-ups during rush hours.
- Providing interchanges at Interstate 294 with Lake Street and Dundee Road could provide an opportunity to solve the regional issues.
- Back-ups and congestion on Willow Road are causing traffic to divert to adjacent roads.

Other scheduled or planned projects that may tie into this project or impact this project include:

- Willow Road Phase I Study – West Village Limit to Provident Avenue, by Village of Winnetka
- Installation of landscaped medians on Waukegan Road south of Willow Road, by Village of Glenview
- Waukegan Road resurfacing (2010) – Willow Road to Golf Road, by IDOT