

PARK RIDGE —

BUSINESS DISTRICT MARKETING

DRAFT - JULY 2023





TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
ENGAGEMENT	3
CASE STUDIES	6
SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS	9
LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS	10
DISTRICT IDENTITIES	12



SECTION ONE:

Introduction



During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Park Ridge created a process for restaurants to apply for outdoor dining permits on the public right-of-way along Main Street. The fees associated with these outdoor dining permits, which amount to approximately \$25,000 annually, are allocated to support Park Ridge's retail and service businesses. This study has been conducted to define how these fees should be spent to most effectively support Park Ridge's business districts on an ongoing basis.



SECTION TWO: *Engagement*

HOW WE ENGAGED

Through this process, our team conducted focus groups in February 2023 with local businesses to understand how the City can use the outdoor dining permitting revenue stream to best support retail businesses. The goal was to define what kind of support would best benefit businesses without duplicating efforts spearheaded by the Chamber of Commerce.

Participants of these business focus groups included representatives from retail shops, salons, restaurants, professional services, and wellness studios. One-on-one conversations were also conducted with the Director of the Chamber of Commerce, who helped share the word about the focus groups.

KEY QUESTIONS ASKED:

- What types of programs or business support are most needed/most impactful?
- What are your business marketing and communications goals? How can the City best support your efforts?
- How do your customers (residents and those outside of Park Ridge) find out about what's going on in the City?
- How would you describe Park Ridge's Business Districts—Uptown, South Park, and Northwest Highway/Busse?
- Are there business districts in other communities you admire?



WHAT WE HEARD:

The following summarizes the feedback we received about these different types of business support.



MARKETING SUPPORT

Business owners agreed that attracting visitors to Park Ridge is key to their success and that they look to the City to help build a stronger reputation with target audiences. Business owners expressed a deep desire for the City to design a brand, build a stronger social media presence, and invest in campaigns and packaged experiences that will draw visitors in and create a sense of excitement around visiting Park Ridge.

Business owners emphasized the idea that Park Ridge is a city of small businesses with a strong sense of community. Campaigns should highlight the people behind the businesses, which will differentiate the city from nearby Rosemont.

In addition, stronger public relations and media outreach to get the word out about events can be paired with collateral to increase event visibility. There are existing publications that highlight the business and events in Park Ridge such as Stroll and Park Ridge Neighbors, who were involved in these conversations. However, these publications mainly focus their distribution on Park Ridge residents.

EVENT SUPPORT

Events are an integral part of attracting people to business districts. Events that happen at regular intervals, such as weekly or monthly, are more helpful than one-off events in supporting businesses. Concerts in the park were discussed as a regular summer event that businesses want to see continue. Additionally, smaller-scale events, such as a weekly or monthly Thursday night shop and dine special where shops stay open late, were of particular interest.

There was agreement that the City should play a bigger role in supporting events, as there is a lack of capacity within businesses to plan and execute them. Businesses did indicate that if and when they do try to plan events, they encounter "red tape" from the City. Stronger collaboration and coordination to promote events from the Park District and Chamber of Commerce could spread the word to a broader audience.



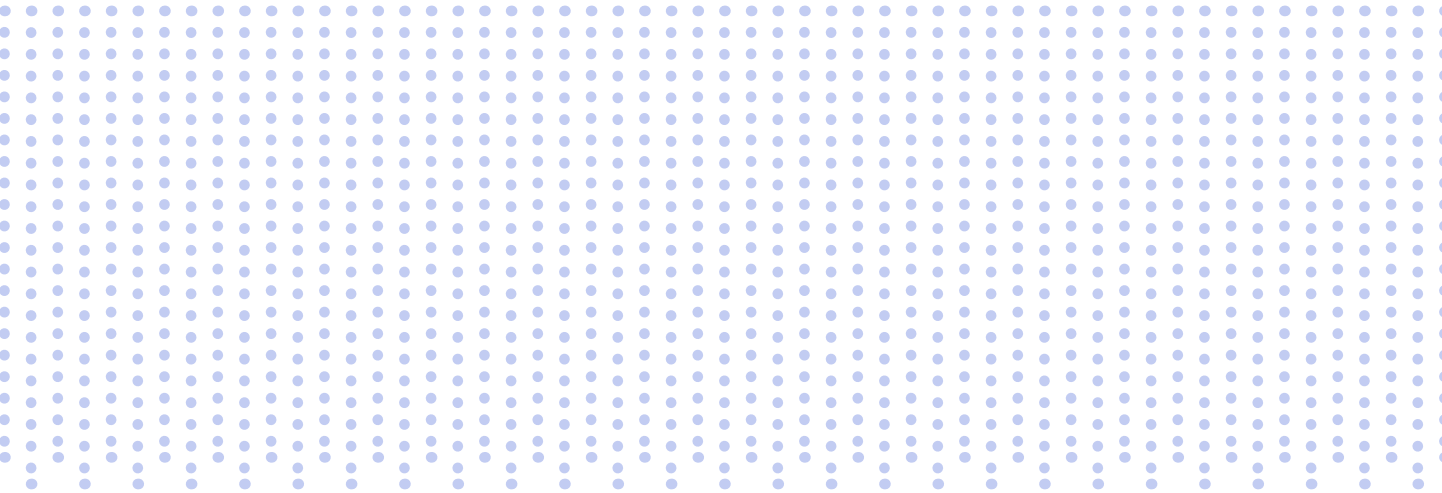
PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS

A pleasing pedestrian environment supports local businesses, particularly retail shops. Businesses recognize that walkability is key to encouraging healthy economic participation where people are able to easily visit both retail and dining establishments. Art installations, including murals, were of interest to business owners as a way to create moments of joy. Branded banners in each distinct and improved signage were widely supported, particularly in the South Park and Northwest Hwy/Busse Hwy areas. Permanent investments in the streetscape, such as infrastructure to support outdoor dining, were desired particularly from restaurant owners.



ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

All participants agreed that South Park is full of potential—it’s Park Ridge’s hidden gem. While fewer people had feedback on the Northwest Hwy/Busse Hwy area, businesses located in Village Green see it as the heart of that area and a place with potential for growth and investment. When asked about other districts/communities they admire, many mentioned Elmhurst and its business marketing and support. Others pointed to Arlington Heights as a place whose investments in their public realm have paid off. Winnetka and Wilmette were also discussed for creating a smaller-scale and pleasant dining scene.





SECTION THREE: Case Studies

Businesses want additional support to improve and promote their districts. There are many different ways this support can be structured.

SPECIAL SERVICE AREA

A Special Service Area (SSA) is a property- taxing mechanism that can be used to fund a range of special services and/or physical improvements in a defined area.

CITY ECONOMIC DEV. DEPT.

A City can focus on business district marketing and support as a core role of its Economic Development Department.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Chamber's role in business support ranges from networking and business-to-business services to planning community events & promotions.

BUSINESS ALLIANCE

A volunteer-run, non-profit Business Alliance can deliver support services with funding from outside institutions.

Additional structures exist to support tourism and business development, including Convention and Visitors Bureaus, or CVBs, who coordinate with the statewide tourism body—Enjoy Illinois. Chicago's North Shore CVB and Discover DuPage are two active CVBs in the area. To date, the City of Park Ridge has elected not pay the fees to join a local CVB.

ELMHURST CITY CENTRE



SOCIAL

- 10k followers on **Instagram**
- 2.3k followers on **Facebook**

STAFF

- Full-time social media & admin
- Two additional part-time staff

FUNDING:

- Funded by **SSA Tax District**

SUPPORTED BY

- Discover Dupage CVB

BUSINESS SUPPORT

- Manages downtown **website** and **social media**
- **Maintains physical realm**, including landscape maintenance and plantings
- Hosts **seasonal events** such as weekly live music, shopping nights out, and music festivals
- **Coordinates public art initiatives**, such as seasonal installations
- Sends out bi-weekly **email newsletters**
- Coordinates **Elmhurst City Center Gift Cards**

STRUCTURE



GLEN ELLYN DOWNTOWN



SOCIAL

- 1.1k followers on **Instagram**
- 3.6k followers on **Facebook**
- 1.5k followers on **Twitter**

STAFF

- No paid staff
- 10 member volunteer board

SUPPORTED BY

- Discover Dupage CVB

BUSINESS SUPPORT

- Manages **website** and business directory
- Promotes businesses through **social media**
- Distributes **Shoppers Club Newsletter** on the 1st of each month to promote businesses and special events
- Plans and executes **10-12 events** per year, where members can participate for free.
- Manages downtown **snow removal** services
- Hosts monthly membership meetings

STRUCTURE



- Alliance between the Village of Glen Ellyn, the Glen Ellyn Economic Development Corporation, the Village of Glen Ellyn Central Business District Retail Merchants, and the Glen Ellyn Chamber of Commerce
- The Alliance of Downtown Glen Ellyn is a **separate entity from the Village of Glen Ellyn**

FUNDING:

- Funded by The Village of Glen Ellyn
- Additional funding from businesses who join as members and sponsors

DOWNTOWN EVANSTON



SOCIAL

- 12.9k followers on **Instagram**
- 11k followers on **Facebook**
- 5.9k followers on **Twitter**

STAFF

- Full-time Executive Director
- Part-time Business Development & Marketing Manager
- Work with consultants, as needed

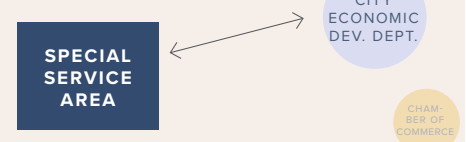
SUPPORTED BY

- Chicago's North Shore CVB

BUSINESS SUPPORT

- Manages **downtown website and social media** to promote local businesses via media outreach
- **Maintains physical realm**, including trash collection, landscape maintenance, and planting
- Hosts **seasonal events** (5-6 annually), such as Thursday Night Markets, Sidewalk Sales, Holiday Tree Lighting
- **Sponsors placemaking initiatives**, such as street pole banners, outdoor seating, seasonal decor and lights, and temporary installations.
- Sends out **email newsletters** bi-weekly (versions for businesses and residents)

STRUCTURE



- **501(c)-(6) non-profit corporation**, Board of Directors of property owners, business owners, and residents
- A Chamber exists but programming is limited to business-to-business networking
- Coordinates with **North Shore CVB** for regional marketing and alignment with Enjoy Illinois

FUNDING:

- Funding by **SSA Tax District**
- Some additional support from **local institutions** (universities, hospitals, employers, etc.)
- **Annual budget** is approximately \$600,000

LEMONT DOWNTOWN



SOCIAL

- 2.6k followers on **Instagram**
- 4.8k followers on **Facebook**

STAFF

- **Consultants on retainer**
- Coordination with Village Economic Development Director and Marketing Director

SUPPORTED BY

- Heritage Corridor CVB

BUSINESS SUPPORT

- Manage **social media** and **website**, including an events **calendar** and regular **blog posts**
- Sends out a **bi-weekly newsletter** with upcoming events and business features
- Hosts quarterly **merchants meetings** open to all to connect new businesses to resources and promotions
- Support **marketing and coordination of events** put on by businesses and organizations
- Runs **ads** in local publications; distributes **print collateral**
- Runs **digital marketing campaigns** on Google and social media

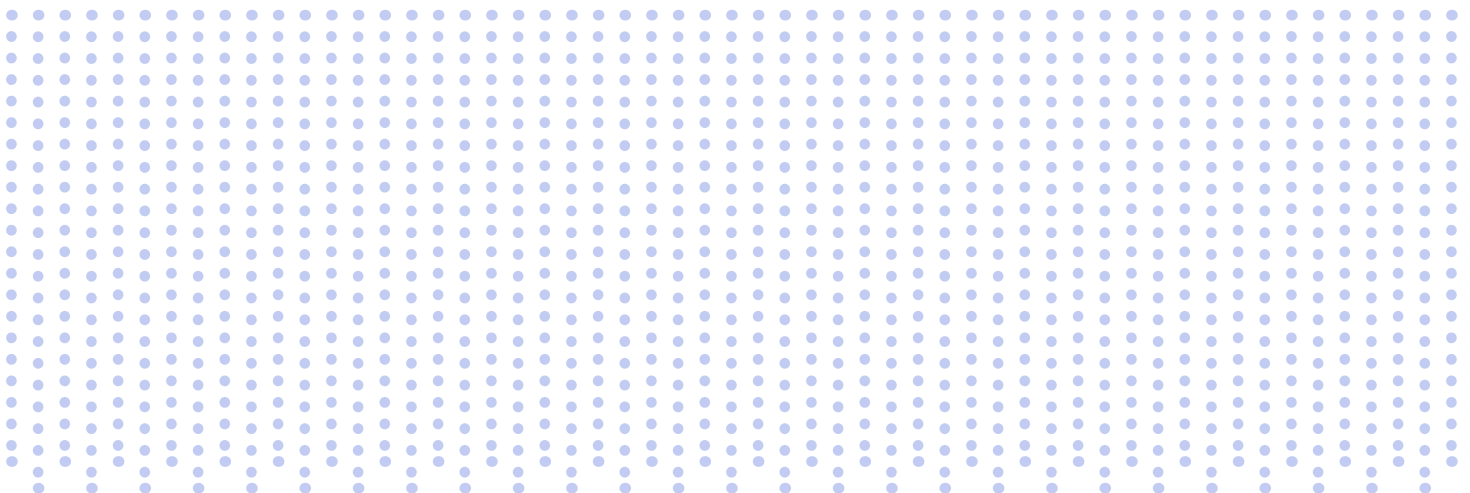
STRUCTURE



- Run out of the Village's **Economic Development department**
- Managed by marketing consultants
- A Chamber exists for the area but focuses on business networking and a few signature events (summer Car Shows)
- Coordinates with **Heritage Corridor CVB** for regional marketing and alignment with Enjoy Illinois

FUNDING:

- Funded by **Village of Lemont**
- **Annual budget** to support Lemont Downtown marketing, consultant retainer, and associated expenses approximately \$150k





SHORT-TERM *Recommendations*

SECTION FOUR:

The following short term initiatives should be executed in 2023 to bring attention and visitors to Park Ridge businesses and build interest in longer-term investments.

PROGRAMMING & EVENTS

Back-to-School Scavenger Hunt

- Coordinate with business owners to design a scavenger hunt through Park Ridge's districts.
- Participants will enjoy Park Ridge swag.
- The goal of the program is to bring people into businesses they haven't visited before, and share photos of their experience online.

Hot Cocoa Walk

- Organize a Hot Cocoa Walk for shoppers to visit retail locations throughout Uptown.
- In addition to special items at each business (cookies, cocktails, ornaments), program additional entertainment elements such as live music or food trucks.
- The goal of this event is to attract visitors and residents and lead to additional sales for retail businesses into the holiday season as a supplement to the existing Winterfest.



MARKETING

Shop Local Maps & Signs

- Design custom maps that highlight the businesses in Park Ridge's three districts.
- Install maps in existing Uptown Kiosks, as well as A-frame signs throughout the districts.

Small Business Photography & Stories

- Capture images of 20-30 small business owners in their establishments. Pair images with brief stories about the business.
- Share images and stories on social media throughout fall into the holiday season.

PUBLIC REALM

Street Pole Banners

- Install district-specific street pole banners in Uptown, North Park and South Park. Hang double banners in key locations.

3D Type Installation

- Rent or purchase big 3D type that spells Park Ridge. Install in central location on display for 2-4 weeks.
- Advertise the letters as a photo opportunity-- leading to photo sharing across social media.
- The goal of the initiative is to draw people to walk around the district to visit the letters while they are there.



LONG-TERM *Recommendations*

SECTION FIVE:

RECOMMENDATION 1:

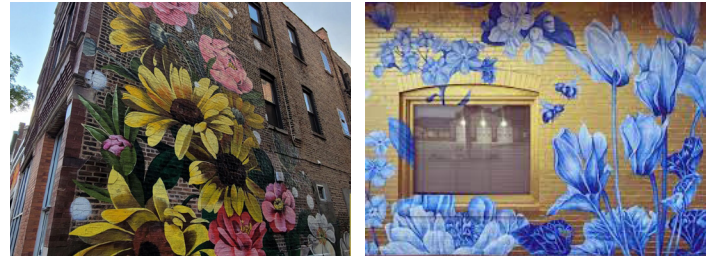
Create a funding mechanism and structure for ongoing business district management.

- Consider establishing a Special Service Area (SSA) in the Uptown and South Park districts.
- Conduct a feasibility study to determine boundaries and input from property owners.
- Coordinate with the Chamber to create a non-profit organization to manage the SSAs.
- Update the 2018 Market Study analysis to reflect the post-pandemic economy.
- Create an Economic Development Strategic Plan as part of the City's comprehensive planning work.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Improve the public realm to attract shoppers and visitors to all districts.

- Continue ongoing COW policymaking discussions on murals and public art programs and reach consensus on a path forward.
- Establish grant programs to match property owner investments in facade improvements.
- Coordinate with Public Works to install landscape planters throughout the core of the business districts. Contract with a landscaping agency to plant and maintain as needed.
- Solicit a signature mural in each district.



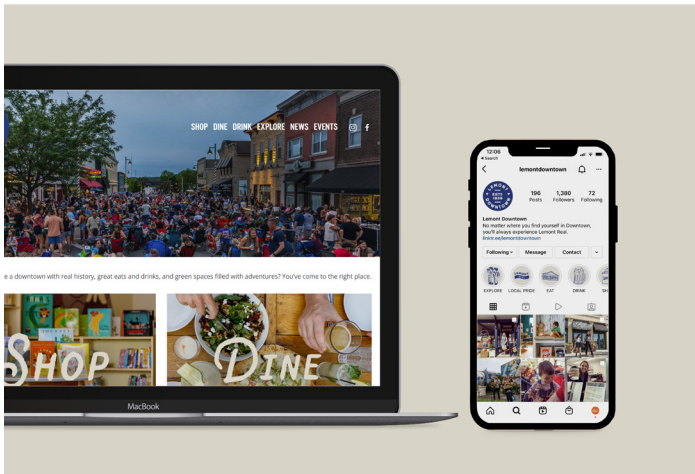
Examples of signature public art piece by artist Ouizi and Anna Murphy.

- » Determine a high-visibility location within each district that has property owner buy-in.
- » Create an RFP that outlines the character of each district and any desired content (i.e. if the murals should say "North Park") as part of the artwork.
- » Send the RFP to a handful of preselected artists whose styles align with the Park Ridge brand.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Increase the number of regular events hosted in the business districts.

- Work with Chamber and other volunteer organizations to plan additional events.
- Focus on events that can happen on a monthly or quarterly basis, such as First Friday Sip & Shops, Wine Walks, Sidewalk Sales, etc.
- Create a streamlined process for businesses wanting to host events; identify key City staffers to manage the process; and potentially identify matching support for event-related entertainment (i.e. live music, food trucks, etc.)
- Identify and foster relationships with special event partners from the Chicago region.



A marketing website for Downtown Lemont features local itineraries and business spotlights.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Create a tourism website to host promotional materials and information about Park Ridge and its business districts.

- Host a directory of businesses in each district.
- Publish blog posts that highlight the stories of the people behind the businesses.
- Create itineraries for different types of visitors and experiences.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Implement a marketing campaign to advertise Park Ridge as a shopping and dining destination for surrounding suburbs and city neighborhoods.

- Consider target audiences when crafting content (see Marketing Strategy).
- Run ads in key print locations (consider train ads, billboards, and magazines).
- Run digital marketing campaigns through social ads.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Showcase the people and products behind Park Ridge's local businesses.

- Hire a photographer on retainer to capture images of Park Ridge's businesses and business owners.
- Post content featuring local businesses to social media.
- Share 3-4 particularly interesting local spotlights with local publications and in print and e-newsletters.

RECOMMENDATION 6: Invest in outdoor dining as central to Park Ridge's character.

- Work with business owners to make the outdoor dining pilot permanent, beginning with the 2024 season.
- Invest in short-term and long-term solutions for outdoor dining safety solutions in the public realm.
 - » *In the short term, work with Police & Fire on safety solutions (such as barricades) that are also visually appealing.*
 - » *In the long term, explore redesigning Main Street as a shared street or "woonerf".*



Enclosed seating area design can be multi-functional, serving as safety barriers, planters, and signage.

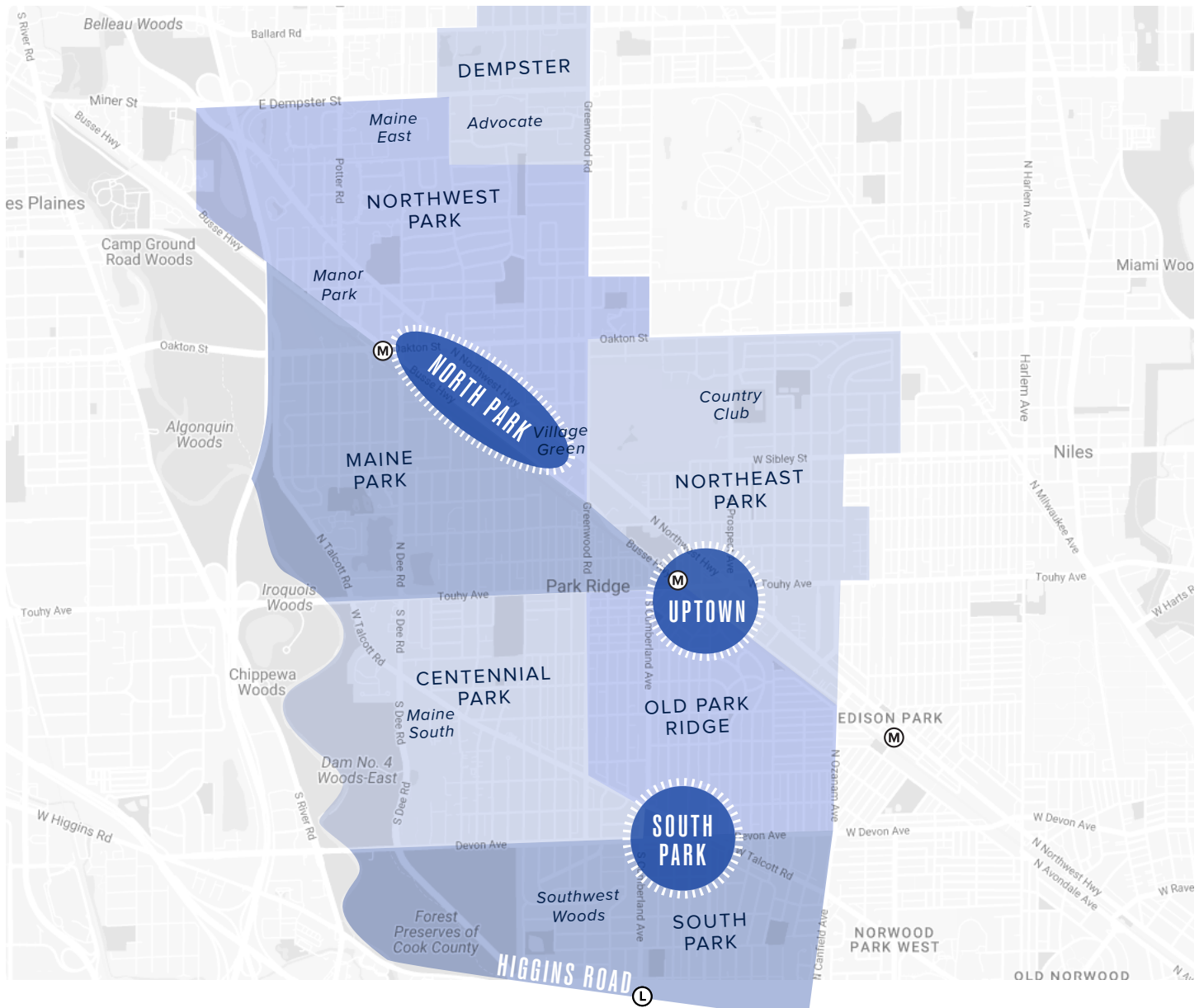


SECTION FIVE:

District Identities

A CITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS

While Park Ridge's neighborhood are defined by the boundaries of major roadways, its business districts happen at the intersections of these neighborhoods and roadways. By creating standard names around the neighborhoods and business districts, unique identities begin to form and further solidify over time. The map below outlines Park Ridge's three core business districts and its relationship to surrounding neighborhoods.



UPTOWN

CHARACTER

Uptown is the downtown and heart of Park Ridge. This area is destination-worthy, filled with iconic architecture and a mix of uses. Many noted throughout this process that it has greatly improved over the last 20 years, but there is still work to do in terms of updating the public realm and infusing a broader mix of retail and restaurants.

DIFFERENTIATOR

When people think of Park Ridge, they immediately think of its Uptown District. It is the community's main destination for visitors and residents, hosting outdoor dining options and a mix of businesses.

BUSINESS MIX

Many businesses call this area home, including the landmark Pickwick Theatre and a wide range of boutiques and salons. It is where the majority of Park Ridge's dining establishments are located and where outdoor dining is most active.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Market this area as your primary destination for visitors.
- Regularly update existing kiosks to reflect business offerings in the area.
- Invest in large and small scale public art and placemaking initiatives around Uptown's corridors.
- Reach consensus on outdoor dining and Main St.

"Uptown is a huge draw for Park Ridge. The summer when Main Street has the tables set up is especially enjoyable."

"Getting better but still 30% left to go to reach it's full potential."

"I love the restaurants on Main Street."

QUOTES FROM SURVEY



SOUTH PARK

CHARACTER

South Park is a laid back and up-and-coming neighborhood district. The building facades have a distinct retro urban feel. The area has amazing potential as a neighborhood district that can offer an alternative to Uptown.

DIFFERENTIATOR

This district provides more affordable opportunities for local small businesses to grow and enhance its neighborly character. With close proximity to surrounding neighborhoods, it has the opportunity to be a go-to location for area residents.

BUSINESS MIX

Eclectic mix of local shops and chain businesses, with ample opportunity to house additional restaurants and retailers. Ash & Willow and Triple Scoop'd serve as anchors within the district. Businesses are well-organized, and a business alliance exists for the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Replace existing gateway sign on Devon Avenue with larger and improved signage.
- Install street pole banners to add to sense of place.
- Add planters and pedestrian infrastructure on Devon Ave. between Courtland Ave. and Cumberland Ave.
- Consider South Park as an alternative location for special and community events.
- Evaluate strategies for parking management.

“So much potential. There are a couple of great restaurants, but it is hard to park. The addition of Triple Scoop'd is an example of how great local businesses can shift the strip.”

“Small but a busy little corridor.”

QUOTES FROM SURVEY



NORTH PARK

CHARACTER

This auto-oriented corridor is convenient with mid-century vibes. It is home to generationally-owned businesses such as Kiko's Flowers and Lola's Diner. It currently lacks a sense of place and pedestrian infrastructure. Despite that, it remains occupied, busy, and serves needs of residents in the north end of town.

DIFFERENTIATOR

This area hosts a wide range of affordable retail spaces on the parallel corridors of Busse and Northwest Highways. With the Dee Park Metra Station at the north end of the corridor and Village Green on the southern end, there is opportunity to invest in additional residential development between the two to bring foot traffic to the corridor.

BUSINESS MIX

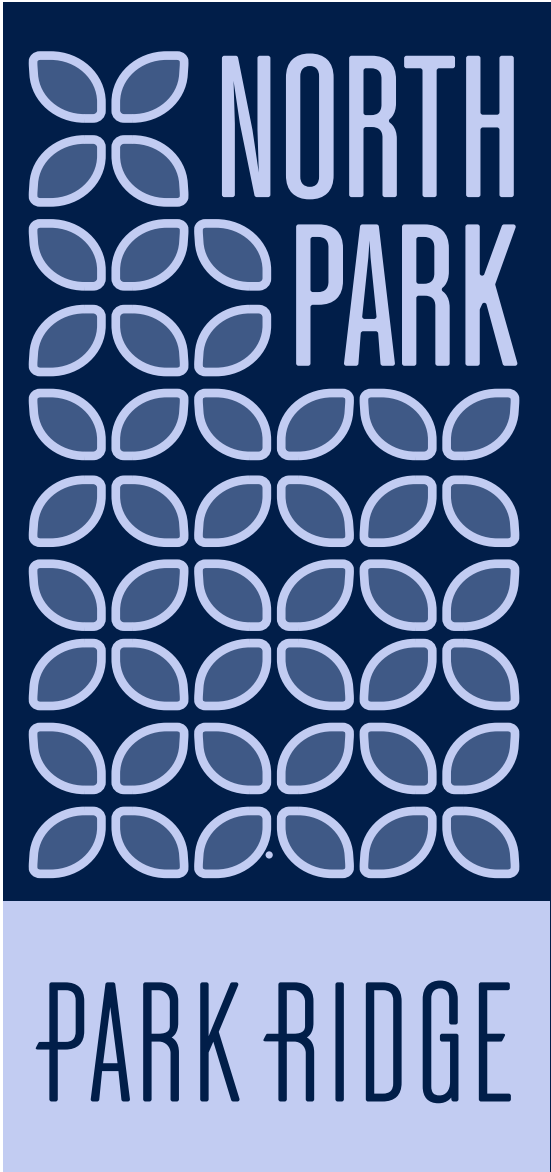
The Village Green shopping center anchors this area with a range of family-friendly service, retail and food options. Business owners within the Village Green have organized successful events there in years past.

RECOMMENDATION

- Lean into the convenient, mid-century character through additional business attraction.
- Install street pole banners to create a sense of place.
- Add elements such as planters and benches along Busse Hwy to improve pedestrian experience.
- Draft a sub-area plan for the district as part of the City's ongoing comprehensive planning.
- Identify strategies to better leverage the Metra station and Village Green as anchors for the North Park neighborhood.

"Don Juan's Cantina is a welcome addition."

QUOTES FROM SURVEY



All
Together.

