

CHAPTER 4 – DIRECTION

We have collected and analyzed objective data in Chapter 2 and decided how we will be involving our community in Chapter 3. Now it is time to decide what direction we should be taking ... to set goals and figure out how we are going to achieve them.

DECISIONS

When we consider all the things that happen in Skokie every day, the immensity of it all can be dizzying.

Just think about your day. You wake up in your home – a place to live. You may cook, shower, use the toilet – utilities. You may take kids to school – education. Or, travel someplace on a road, on foot, on a bike, in a bus, on a train – transportation. Where are you going? To work? To buy something? To do something for fun? To meet someone? – employment, commerce, recreation, interaction. What if you can't get or do what you want in the Village? Where do you go?

Many of us take it for granted that clean water comes out of our taps and flows away when we're done with it, that we can get back and forth to places, that there are places to work, places to shop, places to live, places to get medical care, places to play, and places to learn.

It is time to ask ourselves ... What do we have? What do we want? Are we sure that is what we want now that we have better information or understand the consequences? Are some of those things more important than others?

FINDING OUR WAY WITH SO MANY PATHS TO FOLLOW

With so many choices, we need to prioritize. We don't need to come up with all the solutions right now, but we should set some guidelines for more in depth discussion in later chapters – transportation, housing, public facilities, and land use. We got help from the community in order to set these directions in a few ways ...



First, Staff analyzed many statistics, which can be found in Chapter 2 and Appendix A. Second, a citizen survey was conducted in the fall 2003 by National Research Center, Inc. This survey was sent to 1,200 randomly selected households with an amazing 45% response rate. The survey covered a broad range of topics about how our residents perceive the Village. Areas of particular interest for planning purposes from this survey include behaviors and feelings about:

- Population, retail, and job growth
- Traffic and transportation
- Housing and homelessness
- Youth needs
- Taxes
- Community initiatives
- Use of Village, Park District, Library, transit, internet, cable, and social services
- Quality of a broad array of services provided in the Village.
- Success of redevelopment projects
- Commuting patterns

The results of the citizen survey are summarized in Appendix B.

Also in 2003, Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University conducted a study of community needs for United Way of Skokie Valley through phone interviews of human care service providers, community residents, and government representatives.

The study covers the following areas:

- Affordable housing
- Elder care and transportation services
- Quality day care
- At-risk youth
- Mental health support
- Single parent support
- Homelessness
- Domestic violence
- Ethnic outreach

All the data from these sources was compiled by our Planners, reviewed by the Plan Commission, and adopted by the Village Board. The directions set forth below form the basis of future policy decisions in four broad sectors – transportation, housing, public facilities, and land use. Specific implementation strategies, plans, and objectives for each of these will be addressed in their own chapters later in this plan.

TRANSPORTATION

How we get from place to place is very important, so important, in fact, that it is one of the major determining factors in promoting or inhibiting land use. We know that more and more Skokie households have either one or no car (48% in 2000). We also know that 1 in 4 got to work some other way than driving alone without another passenger (our citizens survey results were consistent with the census). Our citizen survey told us that only 15% thought traffic congestion was a major problem and 34% thought it was a moderate problem. Skokie residents are open to using public transit – 43% had ridden a bus in the last year, but 18% thought bus and rail service were fair or poor. 27% don't know how to rate the quality of bus or rail services. 62% thought the level of public parking was good or excellent. 67% ranked traffic and transportation as a very important or essential community issue. Skokie has excellent access to highways and rapid transit, increasingly walkable neighborhoods, and a good street system. Combining all the data from these resources, we have established 7 future planning directions for transportation in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Future Planning Direction for Transportation

 T1	<p>Rapid Transit – Our location and access to rapid transit strategically places Skokie in position to provide access to jobs, retail, housing, services, and entertainment opportunities locally and regionally by rapid transit, and that we will promote, maintain, and enhance when possible, the economic, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits of this resource.</p>
 T2	<p>Bus Transit – With more and more Skokie residents without their own personal vehicle and the necessity of this resource as a means for people to link to other modes of transportation, such as rail, walking, biking, or other buses to meet daily needs, we will promote, maintain, and enhance when possible, the economic, environmental, and quality-of-life benefits of this resource.</p>
 T3	<p>Bicycle – As awareness of alternative modes of transportation increases in the Chicago metropolitan region, we will work to provide and maintain a safe network of bicycle routes and paths that seek to connect parks, schools, employment, shopping centers, Downtown Skokie, recreational facilities, municipal facilities, transit, and other community destinations.</p>
 T4	<p>Pedestrian – Now that safe places to walk are again becoming important as more people are dependent on travel by a means other than car, that the number of children in the Village is again increasing, and that we begin to rethink how we move around the Village, we will work to provide a network of pedestrian places that is complete, safe, inviting, and interesting.</p>
 T5	<p>Vehicular – Acknowledging that cars will be important in our short- and long-term future, that Skokie is part of a regional vehicular transportation network, and that not all people use a personal vehicle to move within and through the Village, we will work to maintain a comprehensive street network that is sensitive to the needs of cars, buses, and trucks that is balanced with the needs of pedestrians, bicycles, and trains.</p>
 T6	<p>Parking – Since adequate parking is an important, but not the only, component of successful retail, service, and employment centers, we will work to provide adequate and safe on- and off-street parking that meets the needs of vehicles in a way that does not compromise the needs and safety of pedestrians, transit users, and bicyclists.</p>
 T7	<p>Alleys – Since alleys provide efficient and unobtrusive access to vehicle storage, garbage pick-up, and utilities, preserve on-street parking through the elimination of curb cuts, reduce the amount of pavement through the elimination of lengthy driveways, and minimize conflicts with pedestrians, we will work to maintain, enhance, and encourage the use of those alleys in areas that have access to the alley network.</p>

HOUSING

Housing is the largest use of land in the Village and provides shelter for all who live here. Housing has been on the minds of many in the Village more recently, with some questioning the level of development, others the cost of the units, and others the type of units. The census showed us that rental housing has become slightly more affordable in the Village, but owner-occupied housing has become significantly less affordable. More than 26% of homeowners and 37% of renters paid more than 30% of their before-tax income for housing in 1999. The 30% level is established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as "housing stressed". The United Way survey indicated that 23% thought that affordable housing was a problem, while 31% thought the problem was not being addressed. However, Skokie is still ahead of most metropolitan communities in providing access to affordable housing. The State of Illinois now requires that at least 10% of each municipality's housing stock is affordable to low income households. In 2004, the State of Illinois established that 17.3% of Skokie's housing stock was affordable to low-income households. There are 59 municipalities in Illinois that do not meet the 10% requirement, 10 of which are exempt because their populations are under 1,000 people.

In 2003, 44% of Skokie residents thought that access to affordable housing in the Village was fair or poor and 59% thought affordable housing was a very important or essential community issue. Interestingly, only 8% thought that the teardown of older single family homes was a major problem and only 5% thought unmaintained properties were a problem. 54% thought condominium and townhome redevelopment projects were somewhat or very successful, compared to only 22% who thought they were somewhat or very unsuccessful. Only 27% thought our population growth was somewhat or much too fast. Combining all the data from these resources, we have established 4 future planning directions for housing in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Future Planning Direction for Housing

 H1	<p>Accessibility – Because lack of accessible housing impacts employers who need access to entry level employees, public sector employees who are unable to live in the communities they serve, parents and families who spend more time commuting to employment, and seniors, single-parent families, and young people who struggle to find homes that they can afford, we will be conscientious of these impacts when making land use decisions and policies and work to maintain, and when appropriate enhance, the amount of housing accessible to these groups in the Village.</p>
 H2	<p>Choice – With increasing housing costs, growing diversity in age and income, and lifestyle changes that impact our housing needs, we will provide and enhance choice in terms of style, structure, and price so that local and regional demand for housing can be met.</p>
 H3	<p>Location – Since more people should benefit from public goods such as transportation, open space, recreation, employment, schools and services and less people should be impacted by negative externalities such as noise and odors, we will seek to locate more housing near public goods and less housing near negative externalities.</p>
 H4	<p>Change in Development Patterns – A community that is not in growth or renewal is in decline, and as such, provision should be made to allow for the appropriate renewal of housing so that the housing stock remains in demand to protect the value of neighborhoods, provides increased opportunities for greater numbers of people to benefit from public goods, and does not have an overall negative impact on other cornerstones of the Village’s economic health – employment, a diversified tax base, and places to buy goods and services.</p>

PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Every community requires a wide array of public facilities and services to function properly and maintain the health and well being of its residents and businesses. Facilities and services are not just provided by the Village of Skokie but also by multiple school districts, the Skokie Park District, Cook County, State of Illinois, the federal government, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, the City of Evanston, the Skokie Public Library, private corporations, and many non-profits and foundations. Even though the Village government is not always the agency responsible for providing a particular facility or service, we acknowledge that we need to coordinate with other providers to be sure that these facilities and services are adequately serving Skokie's needs.

In 2003, 66% of Skokie residents thought that recreation opportunities were good or excellent, while only 12% thought they were fair or poor. However 50% of Skokie residents reported that no one in their household ever used a Skokie park and another 32% said a Skokie park was used only once or twice over the prior 12 months! It seems that a perception of high quality does not necessarily translate into a high rate of use.

Skokie has a reputation of having excellent schools providing education to an increasingly diverse population – ethnically, racially, and economically. This has added additional challenges to providing educational services. The way we look at and provide education has also changed over the years. Learning is now lifelong, and we need to examine if those needs are being met publicly or privately from preschool well into adulthood. Although the citizen survey did not cover educational issues, the last 50 years has shown us just how much educational facilities have been changing, with schools and school buildings opening, closing, and being expanded, colleges and other institutions of higher learning offering degrees and technical training coming to Skokie, the tremendous growth of the Skokie Public Library, and the number of child day care facilities increasing.

The Police and Fire Departments are very highly regarded by Skokie residents, with over 70% reporting good or excellent quality in terms of performance, ambulance and medical services, crime prevention, and fire prevention and education. Both departments have received top ratings from their respective professional associations.

The Village's basic utilities systems (water, sewer, garbage, communication, natural gas, refuse collection, and electricity) are already established and well maintained. Our challenge is to keep our systems current as technology and regulations change. The Village's Public Work Department has a top rating from American Public Works Association and is committed to maintaining the Village's utilities and public services at their highest possible level.

In general, residents are pleased with the services offered in the Village. In many areas, the Village provides more services to residents than other municipalities of

comparable size. These services include free ambulance service, twice a week garbage pick up for single family homes, and snow plowing of sidewalks. Overall, 87% of residents rate the quality of services provided by the Village as good or excellent. Our citizen survey also showed that only 15% of respondents thought that services to low-income people were fair or poor, 14% thought services to youth were fair or poor, and 7% thought services for seniors were fair or poor. The challenge to planners is to determine the greatest areas of need in a changing community and the most efficient way of meeting those needs with the finite resources available. As long-time residents age and the number of elderly increase, we can expect that the need for services for the elderly will also grow. Similarly, as new families with young children move to the Village, and ethnic and cultural diversity grows, the service needs for families may change. The Village may need to reevaluate the many existing services we provide. We may also find that facilities and services for some groups have been well served by other agencies and that additional municipal funding is not necessary, or funding may be redirected. Many of the nonprofit agencies that serve Skokie residents are not located within the Village, but provide services on a regional basis to several suburban communities.

The emergency services, civic buildings, utilities, and social and health services sections will be completed after the Village Board adopts the 2005-2009 Consolidated Plan, a requirement for federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. The Consolidated Plan will include a broad range of information collected from extensive analytical research and interviews with many local agencies.

Table 4.3 Future Planning Direction for Public Facilities and Services

 P1	<p>Parks and Open Space – Because parks and open space add to the health, welfare, and quality of life of people in Skokie, we will work with the Skokie Park District and those other public and private entities to provide an adequate level of facilities and services and distribute those facilities and services within the Village.</p>
 P2	<p>Education – Since educational facilities must accommodate lifelong learning to provide a qualified workforce for the 21st century, we will strive to provide a network of educational opportunities in Skokie from early childhood development through adulthood that is high quality, accessible to those wanting to use it, and meets the needs of an increasingly diverse population.</p>
 P3	<p>Emergency Services – The Village will continue to maintain the high quality of its nationally accredited Fire and Police Departments, including basic protection needs as well as preparation for natural disasters, terrorism response, and the monitoring of any need for expansion as population increases warrant.</p>
 P4	<p>Utilities – With our basic utility systems established and well maintained, we will continue to maintain the high quality of our nationally accredited Public Works Department and will accommodate changes in these networks, especially in the areas of communications and stormwater control.</p>
 P5	<p>Social and Health Services – As Skokie’s amenities continue to attract new residents to the community, living costs continue to increase, and our service needs change with an older, younger, and more ethnically diverse population, we will provide the necessary support to maintain residents in the Village, and respond to the community’s changing social service and health needs.</p>

LAND USE

As a practically fully developed community (and some experience under our belts about how well uses work and in what combinations in our Village) the time has come to take another look at the way we use our land so that it is used efficiently and developed in a way that is safe, aesthetically pleasing, economically viable, environmentally sensitive, and meets the needs of the community as a whole, not just the needs of a small number of individuals.

This goes beyond simply looking at the traditional uses of residential, commercial, and industrial land. Land can be used in many ways, and the division between these uses is becoming less clear. The places we want to live are different now from where and how we had wanted in the past. The places and ways in which we do things have changed, too. Products and services exist now that were not even dreamed of 30 years ago, and they will continue to change. The places we work and make things are not the toxic polluting places of the past ... and some of the things we make are not even "things" but are ideas and information. We are learning that some of the traditional ... old ... ways of putting uses together weren't so bad after all. We also found that keeping uses separated had some unintended consequences.

Planners try to compile, classify, study, and analyze land use data to identify trends, forecast space and infrastructure requirements, provide adequate land area for different uses, and develop and revise plans and land use regulations. Then we are able to develop a sustainable land use pattern that meet our changing land use needs. To achieve this, our use of land needs to be controlled yet flexible so that we may best guide the future development and redevelopment of public and private property.

Table 4.4 establishes 6 future planning directions we will take to decide the use of land. It does not identify specific places for land uses. These will be addressed in Chapter 8 – Land Use where maps that are more specific based on these general directions will be developed.

Table 4.4 Future Planning Direction for Land Use

 L1	<p>Residential – Because Skokie remains a desirable place to live, we will maintain an adequate supply of residential housing types for those who currently live and those that want to live in Skokie, by continuing to provide for the improvement, modernization, and redevelopment of existing homes, by encouraging the reasonable redevelopment of non-residential land in a manner that does not unduly compromise retail, service, and employment needs, by preserving many housing options and accessibility to many people so that the future health and vitality of the community can be maintained, and by locating residential uses in a way that maximizes access to public benefits.</p>
 L2	<p>Retail Sales and Services – Since Skokie is a regional leader in retail sales and services, the revenue and employment generated from these uses enhances the fiscal diversity and economic health of the Village, and a broad array of services adds to the overall quality of life for those who live and work here, we encourage the enhancement and redevelopment of appropriate locations in a way that is sensitive to the economic, transportation, and social demands of the Village.</p>
 L3	<p>Manufacturing and Wholesale Trade – Skokie’s access to good transportation and labor, as well as a diversified tax base, makes the Village a good location to operate a business, and we will preserve land for these uses to maintain the economic diversity of the Village and continue its status as a regional employment center.</p>
 L4	<p>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation – Every community needs places for people to play and renew themselves, and as such, we will provide places for people to “recreate” – relax, broaden their life experience, and have fun.</p>
 L5	<p>Institutions – Since strong institutional uses – schools, government buildings, places to receive care, places to express spirituality, associations, and non-profits – give the Village stability and add to its sense of place, we will work to provide locations for these uses in a way that does not negatively impact the community or existing development.</p>
 L6	<p>Mixing Uses – As land becomes scarce and attitudes, technology, and uses change, mutually beneficial use combinations will be considered that will provide a net benefit of multiple community objectives.</p>