



Imagine McHenry County



Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning

SURVEY RESULTS & FUTURE ACTIONS

BACKGROUND

McHenry County is among the fastest growing counties in Illinois. There exists now an opportunity and challenge to shape this growth in a manner that creates real value for current and future residents. Now is the time for the people and communities of McHenry County to work together to envision and plan for that future. For this reason, Imagine McHenry County formed to bring together the many different interests and perspectives of the County.

Imagine McHenry County sought to begin this collaborative dialogue by listening to the people of McHenry County. They wanted to hear what the people value about the county today, what their major concerns and issues are as we move forward, and what they want to see in the future.

To accomplish this, Imagine McHenry County undertook two major efforts. First, a public survey in March, 2006 that received nearly 3,000 responses. Secondly, a public forum held on May 20, 2006 where over 100 people, from different communities and different perspectives from across the county, spent a day talking and imagining together a desired future and how McHenry County could get there.

What do you like about McHenry County?

"I love the older homes and buildings, the quaint communities, the recreation & nature, the feeling of being close enough to the City to enjoy its amenities but having a small town to come home to. McHenry County is a great place to live!"

(Survey Respondent)

"I love living in the country and living on a farm. I love being able to be involved in the schools, the township, the church, 4-H, Farm Bureau, and any other organization that I have time for. There are great opportunities to meet wonderful people from all walks of life."

(Survey Respondent)

The public survey, in addition to all the critical data that was collected on people's thoughts and opinions on McHenry County, raised awareness among the public and leadership about the potential and importance of engaging residents in the municipal and county-wide effort to plan for the future.

The public forum was the first time that such a large, diverse group of participants from across the county spent a day talking and working together. Rather than finding disagreement, the participants were able to find common ground. Rather than being frustrated at an inability to work together, participants found that solutions might exist in finding consensus with others. The participants in the forum were energized by this opportunity and called for greater collaboration in the future.

ISSUES AND DIRECTIONS

Ten topical planning issues emerged during the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission's "Common Ground" process during the creation of the *2040 Regional Framework Plan*. These topic areas also proved useful for organizing forum and survey responses from the Imagine McHenry County process, linking the regional framework to a local application of planning themes. By approaching McHenry County's future in terms of these issues, specific actions can be more easily identified, and areas for additional planning can be prioritized. Imagine McHenry County can also use these areas to assess future progress as the County works toward this shared future.

These topic areas are¹:

- COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT
- DIVERSITY & EQUITY
- EDUCATION
- HOUSING
- JOBS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- OPEN SPACE & ENVIRONMENT
- PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE
- PUBLIC SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE
- QUALITY OF LIFE
- TRANSPORTATION

¹ The topic areas are arranged in alphabetical order, and are not meant to imply a prioritization of issues. Though certain topic areas received more write-in comments than others, a formalized ranking of the importance of these topics was not assessed.

The *2040 Regional Framework Plan* provides a set of implementation measures that may be undertaken on the local level to achieve the goals identified in the Plan. These strategies from the *Regional Framework Plan* have been used to inform some suggested approaches for the residents of McHenry County to move toward the future they have envisioned.

Forum and survey results in all topic areas can be related to the overarching theme of *Balance and Sustainability*. This broad category encompasses an overall concern with balancing growth and development with preservation of existing resources for the sake of long-term, stable prosperity. (“Sustainability” can be expressed as a combination of market forces, social fabric, and the environment.) *Balance and Sustainability* concerns itself with the overall “big picture” of how the natural and built environment can complement each other, and should be kept in mind as a thread that runs through all of the topic areas listed below.

❖ COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT

Significant responses in this area were related to the maintenance of a unique identity for each place. Rapid development can result in a perceived standardization of the landscape, and diminished perception of what one respondent called the “preservation of a sense of place.” Respondents are also very much interested in preserving business diversity, and especially protecting locally-owned businesses.

In particular, the notion of **historically appropriate development in existing centers, maintaining architectural integrity, and respecting the unique characteristics of McHenry County communities** surfaced often in responses. Residents clearly value the iconic and characteristic images of their town centers.

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

Regulations ill-fitted to historic, compact development patterns can inhibit redevelopment and infill and work against a community’s goals to revitalize downtown areas. Modern zoning regulations frequently do not allow for compact, mixed-used developments and may require more parking than is necessary on most days. Updated zoning ordinances, perhaps including the application of overlay districts where appropriate, can minimize these

FOR MORE

IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR
COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT
*IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040
REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:*

- #1: Encourage Redevelopment, Reuse, and Infill (p144)
- #4: Promote Livable Communities (p164)
- #5: Promote Economic Vitality (p170)
- #7: Promote Compact, Mixed-Use Development (p182)

obstacles and add incentives to encourage quality redevelopment through such measures as allowing shared parking arrangements, reduced setbacks, and a mixture of commercial and residential uses. Design guidelines, pattern books, architectural review procedures, and historic preservation ordinances are all potential tools to help preserve and contribute to community features and cultural legacy. Incentives can also be promoted, such as encouraging Infrastructure upgrades through the use of mechanisms such as Tax Increment Financing, and promoting federal tax credits available for the rehabilitation of historically significant structures.

❖ DIVERSITY & EQUITY

Workshop comments reflect a minority concern that the Latino/Hispanic voice in McHenry County is not heard. In fact, the small number of survey participants who self identified as Latino/Hispanic (35) did appear to have a unique perspective on jobs and economic development issues in particular, compared to other respondents. Perhaps greater efforts to involve this community in planning decisions should be considered.²

The general and largely abstract nature of responses in this area is perhaps in itself informative. While there was some specific concern expressed to better integrate the growing Latino/Hispanic population into the community and in future planning efforts, it is also clear that residents can **further explore the strengths of diversity and the expanded benefits derived from a variety of cultural experiences.**

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

Creating more affordable housing opportunities integrated throughout a community can go a long way toward increasing the diversity of neighborhoods. “Monocultures” of housing types can be discouraged through a community’s development review and approval process, and policies may be adopted for new development which encourage more creative and diverse development proposals.

² For the purposes of analysis, survey respondents were divided into 14 non-exclusive demographic groups across gender, age, transit use, income, employment status and ethnicity. The table below identifies the percentages of respondents in each group:

52%	Female	48%	Male
9%	Under 35 Years Old	91%	35 Years Old and Better
4%	Metra Commuters	96%	Non Metra Commuters
11%	Decline to State Income	20%	Income Under \$50k
39%	Income between \$50k and \$99,999k	30%	Income \$100k or More
75%	Employed	25%	Not Employed
1%	Latino/Hispanic	99%	Not Latino/Hispanic



In addition, specific efforts can be made to reach out to a variety of groups to solicit input on future planning actions. Barriers to participation may need to be identified, such as language barriers or developing a cultural sensitivity to certain meeting times or venues. Additionally, investment in infrastructure improvements or other public amenities communicates loudly to the value placed on members of a community when such investments are made in their neighborhood.

FOR MORE

IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR
DIVERSITY & EQUITY
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040 REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:

- #3: Provide Affordable Housing Opportunities (p158)
- #5: Promote Economic Vitality (p170)
- #6: Promote Diversity and Inclusiveness (p176)
- #10: Ensure that Transportation Facilities are Context-Sensitive with Natural Resources, Historic Resources, and Community Values (p196)

❖ EDUCATION

Many feel that their children are not receiving the best quality of education, with 68% expressing a concern about the availability of quality schools. The school system is both asked to improve in terms of quality (better schools) and fund raising (different taxation system), suggesting that citizens feel that their property taxes for financing schools are a heavy burden and that they don't receive good service in exchange

Respondents felt property tax should be relieved from the burden of school support by allowing other forms of taxing to contribute to school funds with appropriate support on the state level, and with taxes such as income or sales perhaps contributing to school funding. A minority would also like to see impact fees increased or, as was stated by one respondent, "pushed onto the pocketbooks of developers."

Responses related to this topic convey the complexity of funding high-quality education without unduly burdening the residential tax base. Overall, results suggest **a variety of innovative funding strategies ought to be explored.**

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

Many communities throughout the region have wrestled with the imposition of impact fees, recognizing that although new development can help pay for its increased demands on the school system, those costs are ultimately passed on to the new residents themselves. Such strategies are therefore dependent upon

how residents feel about new residential growth, and whether this is to be encouraged or discouraged. Nevertheless, other communities in the Northeastern Illinois region have enacted additional fees to cover the transition between a new home purchase and the time property taxes are levied. In any event, the relationship between education and new development is complex, and as a community further defines its values related to increasing its residential base, this will help inform what strategies may or may not be appropriate.

An additional planning consideration is the physical integration of education within a community. Design principles that include walking and biking in new development, and investment in these types of infrastructure improvements, encourage non-motorized daily travel options accessible to those not old enough to drive, with additional health benefits as well.

FOR MORE

IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR **EDUCATION**
*IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040 REGIONAL
FRAMEWORK PLAN:*
#4: Promote Livable Communities (p164)

❖ HOUSING

Workshop participants and survey respondents appear to differ on the issue of affordable housing in McHenry County. Workshop comments express a strong interest in developing and/or preserving affordable housing, while survey respondents ranked it a very low priority for local government. Respondents earning less than \$50k did rank the availability of affordable housing highly as a valued feature of the county, but did not rank it high on the list of government priorities.

21% of all the respondents felt overly burdened by the cost of their housing. Half of dual-income households would prefer to work less, but fear being under an economic burden. Half of the single-income households are concerned that a second household member will have to begin working in order to maintain their current standard of living.

These results are clearly related to the provision of **a range of employment opportunities in reasonable proximity to residential communities offering a variety of housing options**. Recent studies have brought out the relationship of transportation costs to housing affordability, and reducing commuting expenses can have a dramatic impact on housing attainment. Responses suggested that there is less interest in direct government intervention for providing affordable housing, but government nevertheless can play a role in creating an environment for the market to provide a range of options.



POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

Regulating authorities can do this by encouraging, for example, appropriate densities and housing opportunities at locations near jobs and transit either through incentive-based development programs, or simply by reducing barriers to more intensive development in appropriate places.

In addition, impact fees for new affordable housing projects may be waived or reduced. Flexible zoning codes may be adopted that allow for an attached or detached accessory dwelling unit on a single family lot, or an inclusionary zoning program may be adopted which may require a developer to include a certain percentage of affordable options when building or re-developing market-rate housing.

Administratively, a streamlined approval process could be implemented for

affordable housing proposals, where the time-savings to the developer may help offset the reduced profitability that may be involved in an affordable housing development.

<i>FOR MORE</i>
IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR HOUSING
<i>IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040 REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:</i>
#2: Achieve a Balance Between Jobs and Housing (p150)
#3: Provide Affordable Housing Opportunities (p158)

❖ JOBS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The bulk of survey respondents think that local government should be doing much more to ensure the availability of good jobs in McHenry County. Exceptions include Latino/Hispanic respondents, those who are not employed (for any reason) and those earning less than \$50k per year. Latino/Hispanic survey respondents are more interested in creating a climate friendly to small business than in ensuring the availability of good jobs.

One interesting indicator of economic stability involves married couples for whom one spouse works outside the home. When asked whether the respondent was concerned that both partners may “have to work outside the home in the future in order to maintain your current standard of living,” response rates in the affirmative ranged widely from 35% to 79% depending on the respondent group. Most concerned are respondents under 35 years old, Latino/Hispanic respondents, and respondents earning less than \$50,000 per year. Least concerned are Metra users and respondents earning more than \$50,000 per year.



Responses indicate a desire for more employment opportunities, even if this means more intensive development in the way of compact employment centers, or even, in certain areas, allowing building heights in the range of 5-6 stories, higher than typically found in the area. At the same time, there is an expressed preference for *local* jobs when feasible, based more on entrepreneurial opportunities and less on an influx of national chains. This preference for a **strong local economy, centered in appropriate locations**, has the further expressed benefit of **helping to reduce automobile trips and overall commute times**.

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

As discussed above, barriers to building housing near employment locations can be reduced by providing certain incentives for development or by making appropriate alterations to existing development policies to allow a mixture of uses. Continuing or strengthening employer-assisted housing programs in McHenry County will also help employees purchase a home near their job. Promoting redevelopment and infill can help achieve a better housing/jobs balance, either by providing housing stock near existing employment centers or by redeveloping brownfields (such as a former factory) or greyfields (such as a former shopping mall) to bring employment opportunities nearer to existing residences.

<i>FOR MORE</i>
IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR <u>JOBS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</u> <i>IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040 REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:</i> #2: Achieve a Balance Between Jobs and Housing (p150) #5: Promote Economic Vitality (p170) #8: Promote Telecommunications Infrastructure and Technology (p186)

❖ OPEN SPACE & ENVIRONMENT

This is a highly significant topic for both workshop participants and survey respondents based on the number of comments received. It had the highest number of write-in comments at the workshop, and survey respondents universally ranked “Clean Water” and “Clean Air” 1st and 2nd, respectively, out of a list of 16 categories. In addition, preserving agriculture and a rural atmosphere is particularly important to survey respondents who are at least 35 years old.

The results suggest that respondents are interested in **preserving and maintaining McHenry County’s rural character as experienced through its natural environment and agricultural heritage**. Additional dialogue is needed to what extent McHenry County wants to maintain agricultural as a way of life versus preserving natural areas that preserve quality of life, as these call for



different strategies. There is also a concern that increased development threatens the quality of that natural environment.

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

Large strides toward protecting water resources can be made by addressing non-point source pollution (that is, pollution such as oils, chemicals, bacteria, etc that is carried by rainwater and snowmelt into lakes, rivers, wetlands, and underground sources of drinking water). To help reduce such runoff, development regulations can require the minimizing of impervious surfaces (such as parking pavement), and encourage the provision of features that will help retain and filter runoff (such as the use of permeable paving, green roofs, and rain gardens). Watershed planning efforts can be undertaken to ensure that flooding is reduced and water quality enhanced. Similarly, a community may produce an inventory of natural features that can be identified during the development process to minimize degradation of these resources during platting and grading.³

As green areas are identified in comprehensive plans, attention can also be made to connecting those green areas in order to enhance their functionality and provide linkages for recreation and wildlife. Such connections help prevent the fragmentation of habitats that would otherwise contribute to a loss of biodiversity (that is, a reduction in the total range of genes, species, and ecosystems in an area).

Natural landscaping, both in terms of native or “beneficial” landscaping, can be encouraged through demonstration projects and overall public policy. The adoption of a natural landscaping ordinance can ensure that functional and intentional use of natural landscaping is not confused with a lack of proper maintenance or weed control.

FOR MORE

**IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR
OPEN SPACE & ENVIRONMENT**

*IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040
REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:*

- #13: Protect Water Resources (p208)
- #14: Plan for Sustainable Water Supply from Ground, Surface, and Lake Michigan Sources (p216)
- #15: Protect and Enhance Biodiversity (p220)
- #16: Enhance and Connect Green Areas (p226)
- #17: Preserve Farmland (p232)

Finally, a variety of agricultural preservation techniques can be employed by the County or its communities to preserve farming activity. Right-to-farm legislation

³ The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has completed an environmental impact assessment model for McHenry County based on the Land Use Evolution and Impact Assessment Model (LEAM). This model, though exploratory, could be incorporated into future planning efforts to assess environmental impacts from various development scenarios. Incorporated into a development review process, McHenry County could be equipped with a significant tool to ensure minimal impact on the environment, and to examine the impact of future land use decisions.

and the general education of new residents can help prevent conflicts between farming operations and residential growth. A program for the purchase or transfer of development rights can be explored as a way to allow a farm owner to receive the development value of farmland while keeping that land in agricultural production. Through creative and reflective design, the adoption of conservation design principles for new development can help ensure that rural character is respected even in new subdivisions, that and natural features are preserved and enhanced.

❖ PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE

75% of respondents want officials to do more to ensure the availability of good jobs in the County. Nearly an equal amount (72%) want government to do more to encourage public participation. This suggests the opportunity for greater partnership and collaboration between government and its citizens.

Among the 14 identified demographic groups, nine potential roles for government were ranked as follows:

- *Ensure the Availability of Good Jobs in McHenry County* ranked 1st or 2nd for MOST groups.
- *Provide Adequate Transportation Options with McHenry County* ranked 1st, 2nd, or 3rd for MOST groups.
- *Ensure the Availability of Housing Choices for all Income Levels* ranked 8th or 9th for ALL groups.
- *Create a Climate Friendly to Small Business* ranked 7th or 8th for MOST groups.
- *Provide Adequate Transportation Options to and from the Chicago Region* ranked 8th or 9th for MOST groups.

Based on qualitative results, the Planning & Governance topic area could be broken down into three subcategories of future action:

- Intergovernmental cooperation.

The deepest frustration that the respondents express is that different government agencies are often either in opposition or simply not communicating with one another, especially when it comes to environmental issues that require a geographically broad approach – citizens would like their elected officials to look at the county as a whole rather than as a group of individual municipalities.

- Taxation

Citizens would also want a change in the tax structure: they want taxes lowered and better distributed and they want schools to be financed by various kinds of



taxes to relieve the burden of property taxes, which may mean collaboration with other counties and other entities to effect changes on the state level.

- Civic involvement

Community involvement has a vital role in the new image of McHenry County. Citizens want an **opportunity to have their voices heard and build coalitions within their communities.**

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

The three subcategories listed above all touch on the importance of collaboration and cooperation among governmental entities and the public. A variety of innovative tools have been employed throughout the northeastern Illinois region to help this kind of civic engagement to take place. Indeed, the Imagine McHenry County visioning process is an important step toward the kind of responsive involvement that respondents say they want.

As Imagine McHenry County has sought to engage the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission/Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning to help identify these issues among County residents,

FOR MORE

IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE OF
PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE
*IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCE FROM THE 2040
REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:
"A Model for Implementation" (p130)*

McHenry County is also participating in a regional discussion that affects all of northeastern Illinois. The *2040 Regional Framework Plan* provides a model to help link the regional framework to a local community's vision, where individual communities are empowered to do good planning through the strength of regional resources, and the region is in turn enhanced by strong local planning. By identifying common threats and opportunities, communities within McHenry County are better equipped to resolve intergovernmental conflicts and take advantage of opportunities for collaboration.

❖ PUBLIC SERVICES & INFRASTRUCTURE

The main concern in this topic related to water shortage and quality: citizens wish to manage water withdrawal and quality by recharging ground water. People are concerned with providing sustainable clean water to the entire county.

The other issue people mention is the improvement of transportation's infrastructure: larger roads, new roads, bridges, bypasses, etc.



Obviously, the provision of adequate public infrastructure encompasses a wide variety of publicly-provided services, but overall the results reflect residents' concern that they **receive value from publicly-funded investments both now and into a sustainable future**. The focus on water supply is consistent with other regional efforts underway, and reflects a growing awareness of the need to better understand water recharge phenomena and employ best practices to ensure groundwater recharge.

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

Because of the nature of aquifers and groundwater recharge, future water supply is an issue that affects more than any one community. Regional efforts are underway to develop a regional water supply plan, and the involvement of McHenry County communities in this larger regional effort will help ensure its success and usefulness.

Transportation facilities are best planned through the use of Context-Sensitive Solutions, which takes greater assessment of the natural resources, historic resources and community values impacted by those facilities or planned projects. Not only are negative impacts of transportation improvements minimized through this approach, but transportation facilities themselves are enhanced by better respecting the surroundings in which they are located, reducing conflicts, improving performance, and respectfully grafting these facilities into the community's fabric. To help achieve this ideal, all stakeholders should be involved early in the process of transportation project planning.

Natural areas within transportation corridors can better handle stormwater runoff from the new impervious surfaces by utilizing boulevards or other green corridor planning options.

While not specifically captured in the survey, planning for infrastructure should also include provisions for telecommunications and technology. Such investment planning not only ensures an equitable distribution of technological accessibility to all residents, but also helps ensure the community's future economic prosperity.

FOR MORE

IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR
PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040 REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:

- #8: Promote Telecommunications Infrastructure and Technology (p186)
- #10: Ensure that Transportation Facilities are Context-Sensitive with Natural Resources, Historic Resources, and Community Values (p196)
- #12: Maximize Use of Existing Infrastructure (p204)
- #13: Protect Water Resources (p208)

❖ QUALITY OF LIFE

Preserving a sense of community and a “small town feel” is particularly important to workshop participants as well as survey respondents who are 35 years old and older. At the same time, there is the desire expressed by many residents for the amenities provided by a more urban environment.

These two concepts may be discussed as a **desire for a manageable scale** while recognizing the possible necessity of a **more compact development pattern** in order to achieve the benefits of both. While a “small town feel” may have different meanings to different people, the implication is a development pattern that promotes a certain amount of connection and character.

A survey question relating to desirability of certain community types is instructive:

- Among 14 identified demographic groups, ALL ranked a community type with “moderate” level of development as *most* desirable.
- ALL groups ranked a community type with a “low” level of development as *least* desirable.
- MOST groups ranked a community type with “high” levels of development as 2nd most desirable.

Such results indicate that there is a desire for continued development within community centers, but some wariness of this development growing beyond its bounds too quickly.

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

A general preference for rural lifestyle combined with the desire for the amenities of a more compact community core are not necessarily antithetical. Such desires can be reconciled by acknowledging the importance of clearly defined communities to which one can “go into town” to enjoy the benefits of a central place while retiring to a residence removed from its center. In order for that center to thrive, however, a certain amount of residential density within the community center must be accommodated.

Encouraging compact development patterns and a mixture of uses will help these kind of activity centers to establish themselves and to thrive. Communities and neighborhoods can be defined with visual clues such as signs, landscaping, and light posts. Outdoor dining, seating areas,

FOR MORE

IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY'S QUALITY OF LIFE
*IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040
REGIONAL FRAMEWORK PLAN:*

- #2: Achieve a Balance Between Jobs and Housing (p150)
- #4: Promote Livable Communities (p164)
- #5: Promote Economic Vitality (p170)
- #7: Promote Compact, Mixed-Use Development (p182)

public gathering places and the like can all contribute to perceived activity on the street which tends to promote more of the same kind of energy and activity. Tax credits, façade easements, and grants for historic preservation help to preserve the uniqueness of a place and maintain an established community identity.

An enhanced quality of life is related to a complex interrelationship of a variety of community elements, but a healthy economic environment is one necessary foundation. Coalitions and partnerships with local civic organizations and business associations can help promote and support small and locally owned businesses, and the facilitation of a local sourcing network to link local buyers with local suppliers will help build a strong local economy. As unique community identities are celebrated, the arts, tourism, and other market activity generators can be promoted.

❖ TRANSPORTATION

An important transportation distinction is between transportation *within* the county and transportation *between* the county and the Chicago region. For most survey respondent groups, good transportation within McHenry County is very important, and respondents were satisfied with accessibility to downtown Chicago. One workshop participant commented on the need for “trains that run east-west, [and] bus transportation within the towns running on a regular schedule.”

On the whole, McHenry County residents appear concerned with the relationship of transportation to development and the environment, not just the creation of new or improved transportation options in isolation. This reflects a growing awareness of **the interrelatedness of the transportation system with other land use patterns**. Imagine McHenry County’s addressing of these interrelationships will be valuable in helping to understand the complexity of these issues on the regional scale.

POSSIBLE PLANNING DIRECTIONS

Coordinated land use and transportation planning is essential to the success of both. A developing land use pattern that is not well planned will result in overloading some routes while underutilizing others. Likewise, transportation projects that do not respect existing land uses can cause some land uses to atrophy due to poor accessibility or the negative impacts of traffic. Fundamental to successful future planning is to acknowledge this relationship and involve land planners with transportation engineers and vice versa. Impact fees may be beneficial where legally permissible, in order to ensure that necessary transportation improvements are timed with new development.

Good connectivity is essential to good transportation. A network of streets, such as is found in a “grid” street pattern, is preferable to a street system that requires funneling of traffic onto a single, large collector. The grid need not be rigid (that is, resembling a precise checkerboard), but the connectivity of the street network is important. Some innovative zoning codes have linked development regulations to specific street types in order to create a certain character and ensure a compatibility of land use to street function.

The impact of parking on a community cannot be overstated. Parking itself is a land use, and as such can negatively affect other land uses when poorly placed, or enhance certain land uses when placed strategically and respectfully. Large surface parking areas can create both real and perceived barriers to pedestrians and bicyclists. Shared parking should be encouraged wherever feasible between uses that may have dissimilar hours of operation in order to reduce the need for individually large lots. To preserve community character, parking should not be the visually dominant land use, but can be placed behind buildings in order to allow for a clearly defined streetscape, with buildings facing the street.

Finally, new development can be designed in such a way as to support transit wherever appropriate. For example, a compact development centered around a rail station provides easy accessibility to potential residents, but also enhances the economic vitality of stores and businesses located near a daily commuter facility. New subdivisions and office campuses can also be designed in such a way as to provide easy and efficient access for shuttles and buses, rather than trying to accommodate such modes of transportation as an afterthought.

FOR MORE

IMAGINE MCHENRY COUNTY AS A PLACE FOR
TRANSPORTATION
*IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY REFERENCES FROM THE 2040 REGIONAL
FRAMEWORK PLAN:*

- #9: Promote Walking and Bicycling as Alternative Modes of Travel (p192)
- #10: Ensure that Transportation Facilities are Context-Sensitive with Natural Resources, Historic Resources, and Community Values (p196)
- #11: Coordinate Land Use and Transportation (p200)
- #12: Maximize Use of Existing Infrastructure (p204)

A SHARED FUTURE

Through the Imagine McHenry County survey and forum, residents have taken an important step in self-assessing their likelihood of achieving their desired future. Many of the people in the County not only want to see change occur; they also want to contribute to the process of change. 77% of respondents are interested in helping shape the future of McHenry County. Some, however, foresee obstacles to their participation in the County: 35% believe they don't have enough time to make a commitment, and 23% don't believe that they can make a difference in the future of McHenry County.

A little more than a third of the respondents (36%) are not even sure how to get involved. Perhaps this is the most changeable of these responses, as Imagine McHenry County can ensure that the input received translates into real and tangible results.

In Illinois, municipalities guide the majority of land use decisions. It is critical that all of McHenry County's communities join together under a common banner to seek the greater welfare of the county under shared goals for the future. To be successful, regional prosperity must be seen as being in their own self-interest, without negating the individual character of each community, and preserving those features which make each community unique – something the residents themselves desire.

McHenry County as a whole must take positive, achievable, and measurable actions with a clear through-line of responding to the needs identified through the survey and forum. As residents see their concerns addressed and their neighbors involved in solving common problems, a momentum will build, begun by bringing the community together and carried forward by the strength of a clear vision for the future.

How can we work together?

“Realization that we share the same issues, municipalities and counties - not whole at odds.”

(Workshop Participant)

“A vision of what we want to be, a plan to implement that vision and the political will to make it happen. A public process that holds us accountable to that vision.”

(Workshop Participant)

