



# Village of Fox Lake Planning Priorities Report

September 2015



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# Section 1: Introduction

In 2014, the Village of Fox Lake applied for assistance from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) Local Technical Assistance program (LTA). Fox Lake previously participated in LTA to develop its 2013 Greenways and Bikeways Plan and in the 2014 call for projects, the Village submitted three applications for an analysis of the Village's development review process, a new municipal zoning code, and a parks and recreation master plan.

The Village's comprehensive plan, adopted in 2012, recommended action on the issues identified in Fox Lake's 2014 LTA applications, but, nothing has been implemented to date. Since the approval of the comprehensive plan, Village leadership changed and a new community development director joined the staff. But the mayor, village administrator, and staff are energetic and ready to implement the recommendations of several recent planning efforts. Consequently, the Village and CMAP agreed that rather than pursue any one of the projects submitted for consideration in the 2014 LTA application, a more optimal strategy would be to review recent plan recommendations, engage key stakeholders, and examine the Village's assets, opportunities, and needs in a planning priorities report to determine what next steps are most critical for the Village to pursue.

## Planning Priorities Report

The planning priorities report will assist Fox Lake in determining what the Village's priorities should be moving forward. It is the result of research and analysis done by CMAP staff during the winter and spring of 2015. The report contains information gathered from a variety of sources, including ground-level observations and a review of past plans, studies, and other relevant planning documents.

A critical component of CMAP's evaluation was a series of interviews conducted with key stakeholders drawn from the community. Included in the interviews were residents, business owners, Village staff and officials, school administrators, and community leaders. Stakeholders were generous with their time and shared candid assessments of Fox Lake's current state and their reflective opinions regarding what the future of the Village may and should look like.

Although the stakeholders' interviews yielded a variety of observations, concerns, compliments, and opinions, several common themes emerged. One that seemed relevant to virtually all interviewees was the need for development that would attract visitors to downtown. Within this sentiment was the perceived need for a downtown that is more pedestrian-friendly, that features effective parking and specialty retail that would provide visitors and tourists a reason to make Fox Lake a destination stop while enjoying the amenities associated with the surrounding lakes and natural areas. The stakeholders also identified the need for a hotel, revisions for Lakefront Park, a lack of retail providing everyday staples, a desire to improve the aesthetic profile of Route 12, and an overall need to promote a positive image of the Village. Though not identified by many stakeholders, Village engineers expressed concern regarding the



Village's water infrastructure and specifically a need for to unify Fox Lake's two drinking water distribution systems.

Aside from interacting with key stakeholders, Village staff were interviewed to collect more detailed information regarding reported concerns, or to uncover critical issues that the interviews may have missed. These interviews, along with the themes encountered during stakeholder interviews, significantly informed and supported the recommendations presented later in this report.

Thus, this report is a distillation of research, findings, and recommendations for the Village of Fox Lake. Intended to be reviewed by Village leadership to assist them in prioritizing future planning efforts, it is organized under the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Context
3. Planning Studies and Milestones
4. Community Engagement
5. Recommendations

The Context section includes a presentation of key findings provide a justification for recommendations presented in Section 5. The Planning Studies and Milestones section summarizes the Village's recent planning efforts and studies. Finally, the Recommendations section presents what next steps the Village should pursue in its planning, along with a table of short- and long-term implementation actions.



## Section 2: Context

This section provides an overview of the demographic trends, employment information, land use and zoning, travel behavior, and natural resource data relevant to the lives of Fox Lake residents. So as to identify trends and draw comparisons with the region as a whole, U.S. Census Bureau data has been analyzed and compared to corresponding information for Lake County and the seven-county Chicago metropolitan region.

### Key Findings

- Fox Lake operates two separate water systems and is faced with several drinking water and wastewater treatment infrastructure challenges.
- There was consensus among stakeholders that in order for Fox Lake to be a destination for tourists and recreational users of the Chain of Lakes, the Village must make its downtown attractive through a combination of short-term strategies such as gateways, streetscaping, and parking improvements, and long-term strategies such as a hotel, niche retail recruitment and commercial development that would bring in a vibrant nightlife.
- Although Fox Lake is blessed with miles of shoreline, very little of it can be accessed by the public and there are currently no public piers for boaters to stop and dock.

### Demographic Profile and Analysis

**Population and change in population.** With a population of 10,579, Fox Lake is a small community compared to its surrounding municipalities. The population of Fox Lake rose significantly between 2000 and 2010, from 9,178 to 10,579, an increase of 15.3 percent (see Table 2.1). Fox Lake experienced a larger population gain during the decade than either Lake County or the region as a whole.

**Table 2.1. Population and Change in Population, 1990, 2000, and 2010**

	Fox Lake	Lake County	Region
Population, 1990	7,478	516,418	7,300,598
Population, 2000	9,178	644,356	8,146,264
Population, 2010	10,579	703,462	8,431,386
Change, 2000-10	1,401	59,106	285,122
Change as percent, 2000-2010	15.3%	9.2%	3.5%
Change, 1990-2010	3,101	187,044	1,130,788
Change as percent, 1990-2010	41.5%	36.2%	15.5%

Source: 1990, 2000, and 2010 Census.

**Unemployment comparison.** Like many communities, Fox Lake was hit hard by the recent economic crash of the mid-2000s. According to the 2008-12 American Community Survey, more than 12 percent of residents in Fox Lake were unemployed. This figure is considerably higher than unemployment rates for Lake County (8.8 percent) or the Chicago region (10.5 percent).

The rate of participation in the labor force is also high in Fox Lake, despite a higher median age, which is comparable to the rate in Lake County overall.

**Table 2.2. Employment Status**

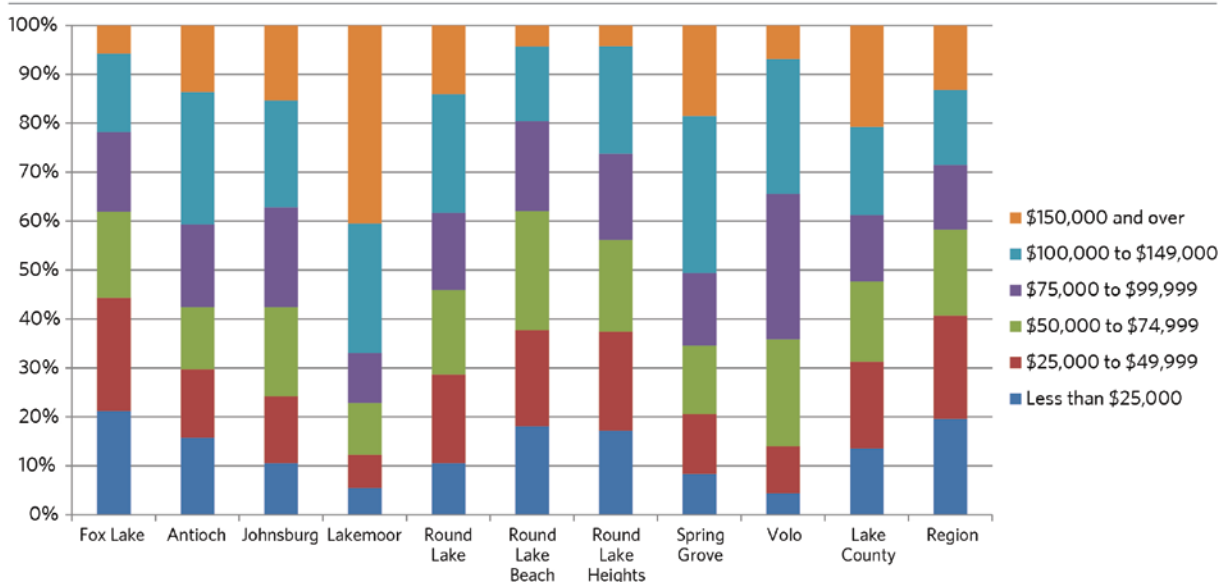
	Fox Lake		Lake County		Region	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Population, 16 years and over	8,825	100.0%	533,705	100.0%	6,573,191	100.0%
In labor force	6,067	68.7%	379,124	71.0%	4,498,245	68.4%
Employed*	5,291	87.2%	334,641	88.3%	4,013,150	89.2%
Unemployed	776	12.8%	33,545	8.8%	471,447	10.5%
Not in labor force	2,758	31.3%	154,581	29.0%	2,074,946	31.6%

Source: 2008-12 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

\*Does not include employed population in Armed Forces.

**Household income comparison.** The median household income in Fox Lake is lower than in Lake County and the region. It is also significantly lower compared to many of its neighboring communities, which range from Round Lake Heights' \$60,864 and Lakemoor's \$124,778. And although Fox Lake has fewer high earners than most of its neighbors, its income distribution is similar to Round Lake Beach, Round Lake Heights, and the region. About 44 percent of households in Fox Lake have a household income of less than \$50,000, as compared to the county, where less than one-third of households are at that income level. Despite this, business owners suggested that one reason why retail and restaurants do not locate in Fox Lake is because of the higher incomes in nearby communities.

**Figure 2.1. Household Income**



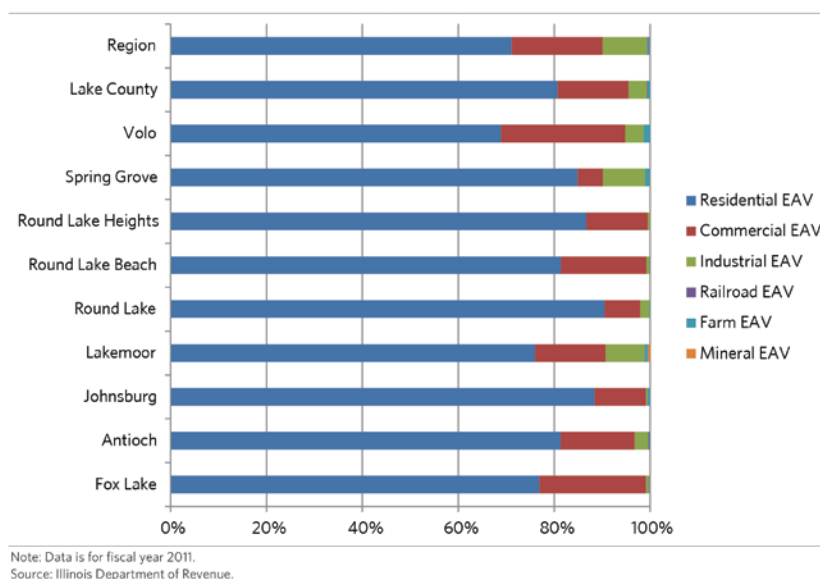
Source: 2008-12 American Community Survey.



## Economic Statistics

**Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) comparison.** The EAV, or the taxable value of a property, is estimated for a community using data from the Illinois Department of Revenue. The total property value in the Village of Fox Lake includes residential, commercial, industrial, farm, and mineral properties. Compared to some surrounding communities, Fox Lake has low industrial EAV, while residential and commercial land makes up almost all land value in the Village, 76.9 percent and 22.3 percent respectively. However, Fox Lake's commercial property has a significantly higher portion of the total EAV than that of Lake County or the region.

**Figure 2.2. Equalized Assessed Value by Property Type**



**General retail sales.** Retail activity is relatively healthy in Fox Lake, as compared to the county and the region. The Village generates \$21,958 in retail sales per capita, which is \$8,812 higher than the Lake County average (**Table 2.3**). This is largely thanks to the high number of marinas and auto dealerships operating in Fox Lake, which generate a substantial amount of retail sales from high ticket items like cars and boats.

It's important to note that retail tends to concentrate, and communities tend to specialize. While Fox Lake's marinas and car dealerships account for a significant amount of retail activity, when compared to its neighboring communities, the Village lacks small-scale retail. This mismatch results in vacant storefronts, and lack of retail options for residents and visitors.

**Table 2.3. Retail Sales**

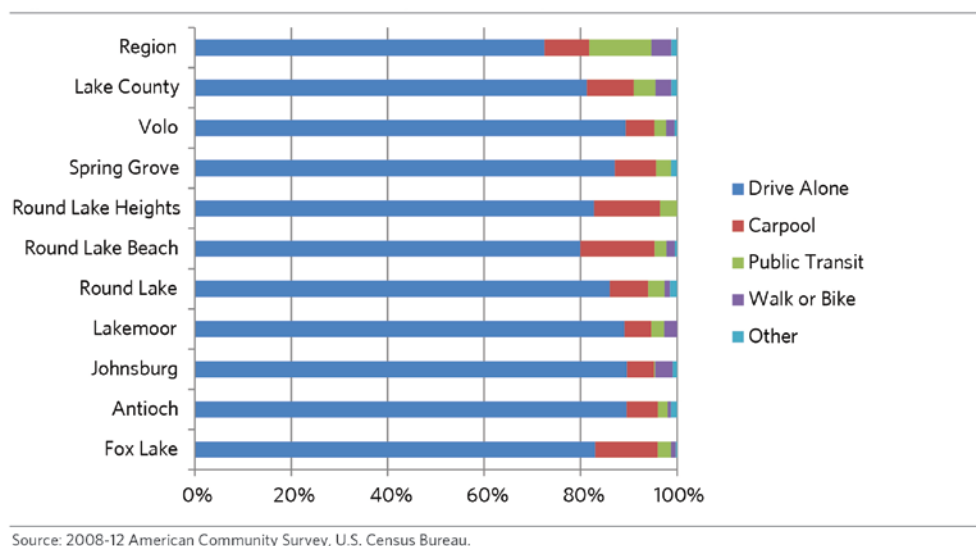
	Fox Lake	Lake County	Region
Retail sales	\$232,294,132	\$9,247,597,406	\$88,734,178,389
Retail sales per capita	\$21,958	\$13,146	\$10,524

Source: Illinois Department of Revenue.

## Mobility

**Mode share.** Despite the presence of a Metra station, over 83 percent of Fox Lake residents reach work by driving alone, with about only 3 percent commuting by transit. Commuting percentages are similar across nearby communities, where transit is low compared to Lake County and the region as a whole. However, the percentage of Fox Lake commuters who carpool (12.9 percent) is higher than in Lake County or in the region, and is significantly higher compared to neighboring municipalities, with exception of Round Lake Beach (15.4 percent) and Round Lake Heights (13.6 percent). Those two travel modes – both of which depend on a private vehicle – comprise over 96 percent of all the work trips out of Fox Lake.

**Figure 2.3. Mode Share, as a Percentage of Work Trips**



**Metra ridership.** As of 2014, 442 people were boarding at the Fox Lake station on a typical weekday. The parking lot holds 452 spaces, with a 72 percent utilization rate. About 91 percent of riders accessed the train by car, of which 65 percent drove alone, with only one percent of those surveyed arrived by bus and 6 percent walked.

**Table 2.4. Metra Boardings and Parking use**

Fox Lake Station	
Weekday Boardings (2014 count)	442
Parking Capacity (2014 count)	452
Parking Utilization	327
% Parking Utilized	72%

Source: Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics.



## Natural Resources

Located in the Chain O' Lakes region, one of the largest inland recreational waterways in the nation, Fox Lake abuts Chain O' Lakes State Park, which is 2,793 acres adjoining a 3,230-acre conservation area containing three natural lakes. The state park connects to seven other lakes and is bisected by the Fox River. Water and recreation are closely intertwined in the region and play a large role in both the history and future of Fox Lake. And although the Village has miles of shoreline, currently there are only limited opportunities for public access to the water.

**Water resources.** The Village of Fox Lake is faced with several drinking water and wastewater treatment infrastructure challenges, many of which are related to old, failing, or inadequate system components. Addressing these challenges is a critical need for both the Village and adjoining Village of Spring Grove, with which Fox Lake has entered into an intergovernmental agreement to provide potable water service and sanitary sewer service to future new developments in a particular portion of Spring Grove. To the Village's credit, staff and officials have been working with Trotter and Associates, Inc., an engineering and consulting firm, on a water and wastewater master plan since 2014. Published in spring of 2015, it identifies issues and makes recommendations as to how to address them over the next 25 years.

Fox Lake employs two water systems and its 2015 Water and Sewer Master Plan estimates capital cost expenditures of approximately \$38 million for their repair and improvements by 2040. The Master Plan evaluated these systems and recommends that the two drinking water distribution systems be unified. This plan also indicates that additional supplies will be needed to meet expected growth in demand and to replace water production lost to four of six wells that are under consideration for abandonment. Development of one new well and associated treatment is included in this estimate.

The topic of stormwater management was raised, but Village staff did not view any stormwater issues to be related, for example, to the current extent of impervious surface. Rather, any local flooding or stormwater backup that may occur is thought to be related primarily to the fluctuating levels of the nearby lakes that are adjacent to and subdivide the Village. Stormwater as an issue is not on par with the needs and plans related to drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. Thus, stormwater wasn't discussed or evaluated to the same extent as these other water-related topics.

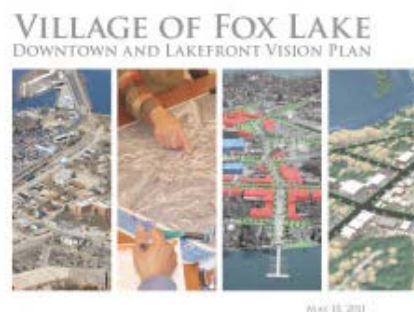
## Section 3: Planning Studies and Milestones

A critical part of the planning priorities process was a thorough review of previous planning efforts by the Village in order to inform the recommendations presented in this report. Fox Lake has been engaged in several long-range planning efforts since 2010, including the Downtown and Lakefront Vision Plan (2011), Comprehensive Plan (2012), Fox Lake Greenways and Bikeways Plan (2013), Fox Lake Station Area Planning Study (2013), and a Developer Discussion Panel Report (2015). Below is a summary of those plans and studies, focusing on their principal components.

### Downtown and Lakefront Vision Plan (2011)

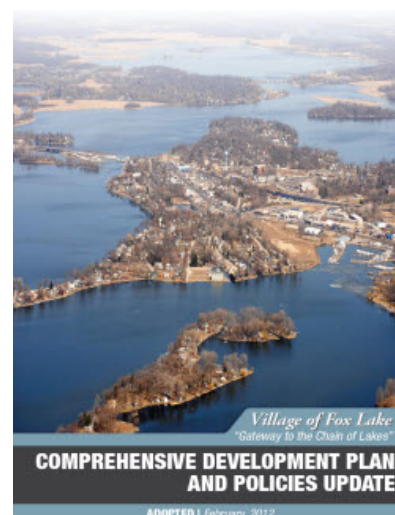
The Downtown and Lakefront Vision Plan was initiated to capitalize on the community's assets and its potential as a recreational destination and was supported by public workshops identifying community strengths, challenges, and desires. This Plan's principal objectives were to provide a framework for the restoration and improvement of key roadway corridors, to identify priority places, and to present a strategy for the development of downtown and lakefront areas. It defined a planning area of seven

districts covering approximately 300 acres that were created to both expand what could be considered the downtown and to address planning needs in greater detail than that of a downtown plan. Among priority places identified in the Plan were Lakefront Park, the intersection of Illinois Route 12 and Grand Avenue, the Fox Lake Metra Station, the Mineola Hotel property, and the Route 12 bridge gateway. Recommendations in the Vision Plan included a public pier on the west end of Grand Avenue, enhancements to Lakefront Park, mixed-use redevelopment around the Metra Station, and a parking structure to serve both the downtown core and the Metra Station. Elements of the Vision Plan were incorporated into the Village's 2012 Comprehensive Plan.



### Comprehensive Plan (2012)

The Comprehensive Development Plan and Policies Update was completed in early 2012 and replaced the Village's 2000 Master Plan. The 2012 Plan's emphasis was commercial development overall and business development in the downtown and Route 12 corridor. It singled out three sub-areas for analysis, including the North Gateway, the Route 12 corridor, and the downtown and lakefront area embodied in the 2011 Downtown and Lakefront Vision Plan. Policies recommended in the comprehensive plan were built on the following principles:



- Retain Fox Lake's small-town character and sense of community and volunteerism.
- Emphasize the unique natural features and water resources that surround the Village when considering new development.
- Provide diverse housing in terms of density, size, and design to serve a diverse range of households.
- Increase the economic attraction of Fox Lake, while providing employment and shopping opportunities and enhancing the area's tourism potential.
- Revitalize, expand, and enhance the Village center as a community focal point.
- Develop a comprehensive transportation network that provides connectivity between neighborhoods and recreational, employment, and shopping destinations through bicycle and pedestrian routes, paths, and facilities.
- Offer a balanced approach to land use in order to provide a tax base supporting high quality services and facilities.

### **Greenways and Bikeways Plan (2013)**

The Greenways and Bikeways Plan was completed in 2013 with the support of CMAP's LTA Program. This plan emphasizes access to the Village's lakefront, parks, and open spaces for both residents and visitors. It represents an extension of several recommendations from the Village's 2012 Comprehensive Plan, such as completion of a pedestrian and bike path from Millennium Park to Lakefront Park, a bikeway between downtown and Chain O' Lakes State Park, and the inclusion of pedestrian and bicycle connections to the regional trail system and local recreation amenities in all new development. The Greenways and Bikeways Plan also incorporated objectives from the 2011 Downtown Lakefront Vision Plan, including

connections between the Town Center and Grant Woods Forest Preserve and Grant High School. The Downtown Lakefront Vision Plan also identified critical roadways the Greenways and Bikeways Plan examined, particularly Route 12, Nippersink Road, and Rollins Road. The Greenways and Bikeways Plan also included redesign concepts for the Route 12 bridge to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians, installation of bicycle parking at several strategic locations throughout the Village, and the development of a municipal bike-share program. The Plan also recommended enhancing the Town Center by installing comprehensive bicycle facilities that serve users of all ages and abilities.



## Station Area Planning Study (2013)

The Station Area Planning Study was completed in the summer of 2013 under the direction of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). The study noted the station area was served by both Pace Bus Service and Metra. Its primary objective was to generate recommendations that increase ridership on Metra and Pace, while enhancing the transportation and pedestrian environment in and around the Metra station area. The plan examined an area between Nippersink Lake to the north, Grand Avenue to the south, Pistakee Lake Road to the west, and Forrest Avenue to the east.



This study area was further divided into three areas with separate recommendations for each. Major recommendations for Sub Area 1, which is the area to the north of Oak Street that contains Lakefront Park, included an enhancement of the park as a banquet/community center, the replacement of surface parking in the park, and the realignment and reconstruction of Nippersink Boulevard. Sub Area 2 contains Route 12 and is between Pistakee Lake on the west and Nippersink Boulevard on the east. Recommendations for it included downtown mixed use redevelopment with enhanced streetscape elements, the extension and realignment of Pistakee Lake Road north to Oak Street, pedestrian access to Route 12 where feasible, and façade enhancements and maintenance for existing development. Sub Area 3 is located east of Nippersink Boulevard and south of Oak Street. It contains east Grand Avenue, site of the Village's traditional downtown and its major recommendations included 1-3 story low-profile mixed-use development a trail connection to Millennium Park, and a parking structure with commercial redevelopment.

## Developer Discussion Panel Summary Report (2015)

In February 2015, a Developer Discussion Panel met in Fox Lake to provide feedback to the Village. The panel consisted of the mayor, Village staff, two developers, and representatives from the RTA and the Urban Land Institute. The panel discussed development challenges in general and ways for the Village to attract and encourage development in the downtown area near the Metra station. The panel issued a summary report for internal use. The report identified key priorities outlined in the 2013 Station Area Plan that should be addressed



immediately and provided a set of key recommendations. These included downtown streetscape and façade improvements, promoting west side lakefront uses to enhance the west end of Grand Avenue, and exploring the creation of a downtown business improvement district.

## **Water and Sewer Master Plan (2015)**

As noted earlier in this report, the Village commissioned Trotter and Associates, Inc., to develop a plan to evaluate whether the Village's drinking water system is capable of meeting current and expected demands and regulatory requirements. The Water and Sewer Master Plan was presented to the Village Board and was approved by the Board in April 2015. The plan presumes that in 2060 the system will serve a projected residential and nonresidential population equivalent of 32,069, which includes a portion of Spring Grove. Meanwhile, CMAP forecast a household population of 36,123 for both Fox Lake and Spring Grove by 2040. This is not an "apples to apples" comparison however, as CMAP's forecast includes the entire population of Spring Grove and nearby unincorporated areas. As also mentioned previously, the Water Plan's principal recommendation was for Fox Lake to unify its drinking and water distribution systems.





## Section 4: Community Engagement

The concerns, priorities, and values expressed by the community are integral to understanding Fox Lake's existing conditions. Interviewing stakeholders allowed CMAP staff to better understand the issues and opportunities facing the community, and shaped the report's recommendations. This process engaged individuals representing a wide variety of interests, and allowed CMAP staff to learn from a range of stakeholders and to better respond to their needs.

The interviews and meetings were conducted confidentially and therefore this report presents their consensus, rather than individual perspectives. During the interview process, 19 residents and stakeholders were interviewed either alone or in small groups. Interviewed individuals included institutional and neighborhood leaders, business owners, and elected officials, and included the following organizations and businesses:

### **Village of Fox Lake**

- Donny Schmit, Village Mayor
- Brian Marr, Board of Trustees
- Christine Baker, Building & Community Development
- Rocky Horvath, Superintendent, Sewer & Water Department

### **Grant Township Highway Department**

- Kim Kiesgen, Traffic Commissioner & resident
- Ruth McNevich, staff & resident

### **Fox Lake Grant Community High School District**

- Christy Sefcik, Superintendent
- Beth Reich, Business Manager

### **Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry**

- Linnea Pioro, Executive Director

### **Businesses**

- Patrick Short, business owner, 5 West Marina
- Bob Nordmeyer, business owner & resident, Ben Watts Marina
- Debbie Nordmeyer, business owner & resident, Ben Watts Marina
- David A Zipp, JP, MA, Attorney At Law, business owner, & resident
- Joe Bosco, General Manager, Fox Lake Toyota
- Steve Stasi, Business Development Director, Fox Lake Toyota
- Patricia Smarto, real estate agent, Lakes Realty Group
- Gregg Stoxen, business owner, Mars Cleaning Service
- Peter Diamond, business owner, Papagus Gyros II

Key findings are divided into Strengths, Challenges, and Goals & Opportunities.





## **Strengths**

### **Location**

One of the greatest values of living in Fox Lake is its prime location in northern Lake County. With key transportation assets like Route 12 and the Metra Milwaukee District-North line with service to downtown Chicago, business owners and residents alike expressed that it is easy to get most anywhere in the region by train or car. Fox Lake is located between Chicago and Milwaukee and is close to many nearby towns that offer different jobs and goods.

### **Schools**

Almost every stakeholder interviewed agreed that Fox Lake has excellent schools. The schools always look for improvements at all levels and their staff works hard to make the most of the resources they have. The end result is that Fox Lake students perform well. Overall, the community is very pleased with the schools' performance and they see that as an asset to attract potential new residents.

### **Lakes**

The lakes are a commonly expressed strength. For a Village that's historically a resort community the water is a great asset and main attraction. Residents also noted that they enjoy other surrounding amenities, like the state park and the bike path.

### **Sense of community**

Since Fox Lake is a small community and because many people are lifelong residents who were born and raised and are now raising their children in Fox Lake, some stakeholders shared that there is a closeness and sense of community in the Village. This reinforces the sense of safety in Fox Lake, with a network of friends and neighbors who care and are very supportive of one another.

### **Livability**

Stakeholders agreed that Fox Lake has a relatively low cost of living in comparison to other communities in Lake County. In addition, it is a small community that offers a slow pace of life that is peaceful and quiet. These all add value to living in Fox Lake, which residents describe as an enjoyable and safe place to live.

## **Challenges**

### **Aging infrastructure and lack of financial capital**

However, stakeholders were concerned with the Village's aging infrastructure. While this is a common issue in many communities across the region, this is more acute in Fox Lake because the Village has a great need for upgrades but not enough funding to address only the most urgent problems. Stakeholders acknowledge that the water mains were not designed to support existing needs and that the sewer system is at the end of its useful life. While interviewees were pleased with the Village's success at completing a number of plans, they feared that the current budget and revenue shortfalls will prevent the Village from implementing anything.



### **Need for streetscape and gateway improvements**

There were many complaints about the lack of gateway features to attract people into the Village. Also, nearly everyone expressed frustration regarding the appearance of Route 12, particularly coming in from the south into downtown. Route 12 has about a half mile of lakefront that could be very inviting for people driving past Fox Lake, instead all that drivers see are wrapped boats blocking views of the lakes. Also, the lack of signage to direct people and auto-oriented streets is seen as projecting a message that “we are closed for business.”

### **Local business support**

While some business like being in Fox Lake, others said they would move out at their first opportunity. Business owners feel that the Village could be doing more to advocate for local businesses that need help, while other stakeholders feel that the development process needs attention to help with business development. Currently, the development process is unclear and the existing zoning ordinance does not work well with the comprehensive plan adopted in 2012.

### **Lack of retail options**

There seems to be a universal dissatisfaction with the mix of businesses in Fox Lake. Several interviewees expressed frustration over a lack of retail options and the need to have to travel outside Fox Lake to access basic daily needs. Instead, residents would rather spend their dollars in town to expand the Village’s revenue and help ease the tax burden on residents.

### **Not enough public access to the water**

A common concern raised by many was the lack of public access to the water. Fox Lake has a significant amount of waterfront, but no beach or public pier to attract residents or tourists. Lakefront Park is Fox Lake’s only public access to the water and fails to meet its current potential. Residents also noted that there is no park district or recreational amenities in the Village to make it attractive for new residents and visitors to come to Fox Lake.

### **Income disparities**

A few business owners and stakeholders had comments about the Village’s income disparity. Fox Lake has a high-income population of residents who live in large homes along the lake, next to which is a growing blue collar community. However, stakeholders pointed out that a significant number of Fox Lake’s students come from impoverished families. This raises concerns, as people felt that local schools are ill equipped to address these students’ needs.



## Goals & Opportunities

### Make Fox Lake a destination again

A main priority for stakeholders was revitalizing the downtown to attract people to the Village. Interviewees recommended that Fox Lake should capitalize on its local assets to brand itself as a destination. Stakeholders suggested that the Village develop a marketing strategy to showcase its natural amenities and promote year round activities, something along the lines of, *"The end of the line is the beginning of your adventure."*

Another popular idea was the facilitation of public passage from the water to downtown businesses through the installment of public piers. This idea addresses the lack of access to the lakes by installing public piers at the west end of Grand Avenue and at Lakefront Park. Also, residents felt it is important to invest in a pedestrian friendly downtown with shared Metra parking and signage to encourage people to walk from the train to local stores and restaurants.

Many residents also expressed interest in exploring opportunities for a hotel with a banquet space for private events and lodging needs for both summer and winter activities.

### Streetscape improvements

Stakeholders felt it was important to invest in streetscape improvements to create a more presentable and inviting Fox Lake. Some recommendations include refreshing Route 12 and the downtown with seasonal decorations, landscaping, and plantings. Interviewees also recommended relocating wrapped boats from along Route 12 so that they do not obstruct the lakefront view. Business owners and residents agreed that this would improve access and the pedestrian experience, which should help attract more businesses and residents into town.

### Businesses growth

Many of those interviewed mentioned economic growth as a key necessity for Fox Lake. Several would like to see a variety of retail, including a big box store, to satisfy residents' basic needs in town. New businesses should complement each other and support the growing blue collar community. While attracting new businesses was a key goal for the community, business owners believed it was important for the Village to work with them to find ways to support existing businesses. One idea was to create an incentives program to encourage property owners to maintain their properties. In turn, this could help attract new businesses to Fox Lake.

### Retain the strong sense of community

Stakeholders were proud of the community's character and would like to maintain it. Many residents would like to see more community oriented activities that promote Fox Lake. Some suggested continuing existing events like the fireworks festival and Mayor For a Day, while others would like to see new events like a boat competition to promote the lakes. Business owners said they would be willing to give a donation to events where local businesses are involved.



### **Other topics mentioned**

There were other ideas shared during the interview process that, although shared only by a few, are important to note. These include infrastructure repairs and public transit service extensions. Stakeholders felt it was important to replace the whole water pipe system rather than fix water main breaks as needed and in the long run, it would make more sense from an economic perspective. Some suggested that Fox Lake should work with Pace to include a bus stop at Lakefront Park to improve access to the lake and the forest preserve.



## Section 5: Recommendations

Fox Lake has been both busy and vigilant in addressing the challenges it faces through significant planning efforts undertaken during the past three years. The Village should be commended for its commitment to resolving issues and exploring future development. The recommendations that follow are distilled into three issue areas based on what we saw, researched, discovered, or heard from stakeholders and Village staff. It became apparent during our research that many of the concerns and issues raised by Village staff and stakeholders during the winter of 2015 had been examined and addressed through several recommendations already advanced in plans undertaken by the Village since 2012. We found these recommendations to be sound and lacking only in a commitment to implementation.

We sought to avoid re-inventing the wheel in this report. Consequently, many of the recommendations in this report either restate or reinforce recommendations from earlier plans or studies. We believe that relevant recommendations for Fox Lake include both recommendations from previous planning efforts and those advanced by CMAP in this report. And many can be achieved in the next 1-5 years if the Village can establish a consistent approach to implementation. Furthermore, recommendations presented in this report should be integrated into annual Village budget discussions and deliberations.

This section discusses short- and long-term implementation priorities for the Village to begin working on immediately. The short-term (ST) actions should be executed within the first year and while first steps for long-term (LT) actions should be started immediately within the first year, these actions can span 6-10 years or more. Tables for each topic provide first steps with implementation partners and potential funding sources for each recommended action.

### Water Resources

As noted earlier, Fox Lake faces several drinking water and wastewater treatment infrastructure challenges, addressing which is a critical need. Among these will be implementing a unified drinking water distribution system as recommended in the recently completed Water and Sewer Master Plan. Despite this, the Village was successful in obtaining a permit to use Lake Michigan water beginning in 2015. However, both the challenge of a unified water system and the opportunity to acquire Lake Michigan water could impact the Village's development potential for years to come.

Thus, unless it has already been decided, the Village must choose whether to drill new wells and remain on a generally reliable source of shallow groundwater, or pursue access to better quality, more drought-proof Lake Michigan water. Also, a previous plan to obtain Lake Michigan water in concert with several other communities with new allocation permits has since been abandoned.



And while the logistics of obtaining Lake Michigan water may now be either more difficult or financially infeasible, with or without the collaboration of neighboring municipalities, the Village should commission a comparison of projected expenses capitalized over a 50-75 year horizon for the two sources of drinking water. Even if this has been examined in the past, a current analysis may be warranted as water source and distribution plans evolve for many nearby communities.

The Water and Sewer Master Plan similarly considered the adequacy of the wastewater collection and treatment systems for the next 25 years. It is estimated that the Village will incur approximately \$68 million worth of capital improvement expenditures by 2040 in order to address current deficiencies and accommodate expected growth.

Additionally, a Fox Lake water rate study began in April 2015. This is an appropriate and necessary action given the considerable water-related expenses that the Village must incur to maintain functional and efficient water and wastewater systems. And while its water rates were raised in 2013 for the first time since 2008, the Village has a history of maintaining static water rates. CMAP supports full-cost water pricing and recommends that regardless of which water source is chosen, the Village should vigorously emphasize implementation of full-cost pricing to ensure that their investments in infrastructure and water management are sustainable. Among many other benefits, full-cost pricing promotes water-use efficiency as well as a reduced water system loss and of associated nonrevenue water.

While recommendations regarding water resources are for a long, 50+ year, horizon and likely to be the most costly in terms of funding, the water system deficiencies present a significant impediment to the community's future and should not be deferred. Lake Michigan water should be pursued as it could provide attractive options and benefits to the Village as it charts its future.

#### Key Recommendations: Water resources

Recommendation action	First steps	Lead implementers and partners	Details/potential funding sources
Fox Lake should explore funding mechanisms for water improvements (ST)	The Village should assess results of water rate study and devise a strategy to supplement funding above and beyond what revised water rates can provide.	<b>Lead:</b> Village staff	Staff time
Collaborate with Antioch to study the feasibility of obtaining Lake Michigan water as a long-term alternative (LT)	Establish a working technical committee consisting of representatives from both municipalities that meets quarterly.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, including Sewer and Water department. <b>Partners:</b> Village of Antioch	Staff time



Implement full-cost pricing for water and wastewater treatment service and use the proceeds to help fund improvements (LT)	Consult with Village attorney to undertake proper procedures.	<b>Lead:</b> Village administration, including sewer and water department and Village attorney.	Staff time
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## Placemaking and Downtown Improvements

As noted in the discussion of community engagement, a priority many participants shared throughout was the need to establish the Village as a destination with an emphasis on its downtown. Fox Lake's downtown area, for purposes of this report, consists of West Grand Avenue, from Pistakee Lake on the west, to Rollins Road on the east, and Route 12, between Sayton Road on the South, and Oak Street on the north. Currently, Fox Lake is perceived as a pass-through community largely unnoticed to Route 12 users. The community has expressed a desire to enliven the downtown area to attract both residents and visitors. Although the Chain O'Lakes resort is a tremendous asset, its visitors spend the majority of their time on the water and do not come into town. One expressed solution would be to improve streetscapes throughout the downtown and erect attractive gateway features to create a welcoming space for visitors and residents. Fox Lake should also focus on improving the pedestrian, bicyclist, and driver experience by providing high profile amenities, improving the character of the streets, and making the Route 12 corridor more aesthetically pleasing.

If Fox Lake is to succeed in establishing the Village as a destination, it must take steps to lodge visitors and provide them with downtown retail opportunities. Currently, there is no hotel downtown or any accommodations to replace the experience of the once popular Mineola Hotel. While the presence of a Metra station is a tremendous asset that brings hundreds of commuters through downtown Fox Lake, the station has not generated transit-oriented development nearby. Fox Lake has potential to attract commuters and tourist to stay downtown, but working with existing businesses and helping new enterprises that appeal to niche retail shoppers get off the ground will be integral to the area's revitalization.

The following recommendations seek to reinforce the town center by improving gateway intersections to the downtown, improve signage for and promote patronage for uses in downtown, improve the physical environment to make biking and walking safer and more comfortable, and enhance linkage to community amenities like the Metra station and the waterfront. Many recommendations reinforce strategies and capital improvements that are presented in previous plans. Our intent here is to concentrate on priorities that can be addressed in the short term and to provide steps, where appropriate, to implement recommendations. The recommendations are presented below along two general themes: placemaking and downtown improvements.

## Key Recommendations: Placemaking

Recommendation action	First steps	Lead implementers and partners	Details/potential funding sources
Complete gateway project elements at the intersection of Grand and Route 12 (ST).	Underway	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, Public Works Department, and Community and Economic Development Department. <b>Partners:</b> Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry, businesses, community groups.	General fund, ITEP
Initiate a strategy that implements branding and streetscaping amenities that include gathering spaces, seasonal decorations, landscaped planting areas, trees, bicycle racks, benches, and trash receptacles throughout downtown Fox Lake (ST).	Prioritize streetscaping amenities that can be implemented in the next 1-2 years with the assistance of an engineering firm that can provide associated costs. Organize and sponsor annual holiday decorations and festivals to promote temporary streetscape improvements and branding.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, Public Works Department, and Community and Economic Development Department. <b>Partners:</b> the Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry, local artists, private property owners and businesses.	General Fund, ITEP, STP, IL Green Streets Initiative.
Add distinctive lighting to define pedestrian corridors and enhance the downtown at night and improve the visual connection between Metra station and Lakefront Park (ST).	The Village should hire an engineering firm to create renderings, engineering, and cost estimates. Coordinate with the public works department regarding the installation of pedestrian-scale lights at key locations.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration and Public Works Department. <b>Partners:</b> Metra	General fund, ITEP, STP
Improve pedestrian flow and safety in and around downtown through walkway improvements, and implement a wayfinding scheme that includes Village parking signage (ST).	The Village should coordinate with the public works department to analyze revenue, budgets, and prioritize potential projects that improve walkability in the Downtown.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, Public Works Department, and Community and Economic Development Department. <b>Partners:</b> the Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry, private property owners and businesses, and IDOT.	Staff time, ITEP, general fund
Work with property owners and businesses to upgrade signage, landscaping, and screening of trash	The Village should work with property owners and businesses along Route 12 along with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, Public Works Department, and Community and Economic Development	Staff time



containers, outdoor storage areas, and parking lots, particularly along Route 12 (ST).

identify improvements and upgrades that could be completed. The Village should consider the creation of a façade improvement program that could help pay for building facades, signage and parking area improvements. Also, the Village should continue to undertake code enforcement for businesses along Route 12 to ensure attractive and well-maintained properties.

Department. **Partners:** the Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry, private property owners and businesses.

Consider the creation of a downtown business improvement district (ST).	Work with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to identify best practices for how to create a BID, and also, work with the community, businesses, elected and appointed officials, and staff to determine if a BID would be appropriate and beneficial for the area.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration and Community and Economic Development Department. <b>Partners:</b> the Fox Lake Area Chamber of Commerce & Industry, private property owners and businesses.	Staff time, ULI
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### Key Recommendations: Downtown Improvements

Recommendation action	First steps	Lead implementers and partners	Details/potential funding sources
Conduct a hotel feasibility study for lodging near the downtown and Metra station area (ST).	Release a RFP (CMAP can assist with drafting one).	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration. <b>Partner:</b> CMAP	Staff time
A public pier should be installed at the west of Grand Avenue as a terminal feature for downtown (ST).	Coordinate with IDNR and IEPA. The Village should meet with property owners to consider parcel acquisition.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, and community and economic development department.	
Reconfigure parking in downtown and explore alternatives to existing parallel parking along Grand Avenue (ST).	Create a Parking Management Taskforce and work with property owners and businesses to identify potential parking improvement areas.	<b>Lead:</b> Village staff <b>Partner:</b> Residents, property owners and businesses	CMAP, general fund
Engage the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to hold a retail workshop for municipalities regarding realistic expectations for attracting retail (ST).	Convene a ULI retail workshop with several neighboring communities.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Staff <b>Partner:</b> ULI	Staff time



## Lakefront Park Redevelopment

Many stakeholders conveyed the importance of Lakefront Park as both an amenity to residents and as a potential recreational asset to draw visitors to the Village. The park is critical in that it is virtually the only place in Fox Lake where the public has access to the waterfront. Located within easy walking distance of downtown, it contains a community center and should showcase the Village. While ideally located, the park in its current state is rather nondescript. It has great potential and several recent plans have recommended attractive improvements. It should be noted the Village has been active in pursuing funding for such recommended improvements. Although the Village was awarded a grant for park improvements by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) in 2014, the grant money was rescinded by the Governor's Office in early 2015.

### Key Recommendations: Lakefront Park Redevelopment

Recommendation action	First steps	Lead implementers and partners	Details/potential funding sources
Pursue Lakefront Park redesign elements (ST).	Install a multi-purpose public pier as a cornerstone of redesign and redevelopment strategy. The Village should prioritize redesign elements over a multi-year period, based on available budget.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, public works, and Village Board.	Staff time, capital budget
Acquire adjacent properties for additional park amenities and as a means to limit vehicular thru traffic (LT).	The Village should expedite purchase of available parcels and meet with property owners to consider additional parcel acquisition.	<b>Lead:</b> Village. <b>Partner:</b> Private property owners	Park and Recreational Facility Construction
Complete the bike and pedestrian path between Millennium Park and Lakefront Park (ST).	Include this project when considering CIP priorities and implementation of the Greenways and Bikeways Plan.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, and public works.	CMAQ, ITEP, Illinois Bicycle Path Program, Transportation Alternatives Program, CDBG
Undertake a capital improvement project for Nippersink Boulevard (ST).	Create a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for Fox Lake. Once a CIP is in place, include capital projects for Nippersink Boulevard.	<b>Lead:</b> Village Administration, and community and economic development department. <b>Partner:</b> Metra, local businesses and residents.	Staff Time, LTA



## Section 6: List of Acronyms

BID	Business Improvement District
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CMAP	Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program
EAV	Equalized Assessed Value
IDNR	Illinois Department of Natural Resources
IDOT	Illinois Department of Transportation
IEPA	Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
ITEP	Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program
LT	Long-Term
LTA	Local Technical Assistance Program
RTAMS	Regional Transportation Authority Mapping and Statistics
ST	Short-Term
STP	Surface Transportation Program
ULI	Urban Land Institute





Chicago Metropolitan  
Agency for Planning

233 South Wacker Drive, Suite 800  
Chicago, IL 60606

312-454-0400  
[info@cmap.illinois.gov](mailto:info@cmap.illinois.gov)

[www.cmap.illinois.gov](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov)



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