



JOLIET

QUALITY OF LIFE PLAN

FOR THE 4TH AND 5TH COUNCIL DISTRICTS

Executive Summary



November 5, 2007



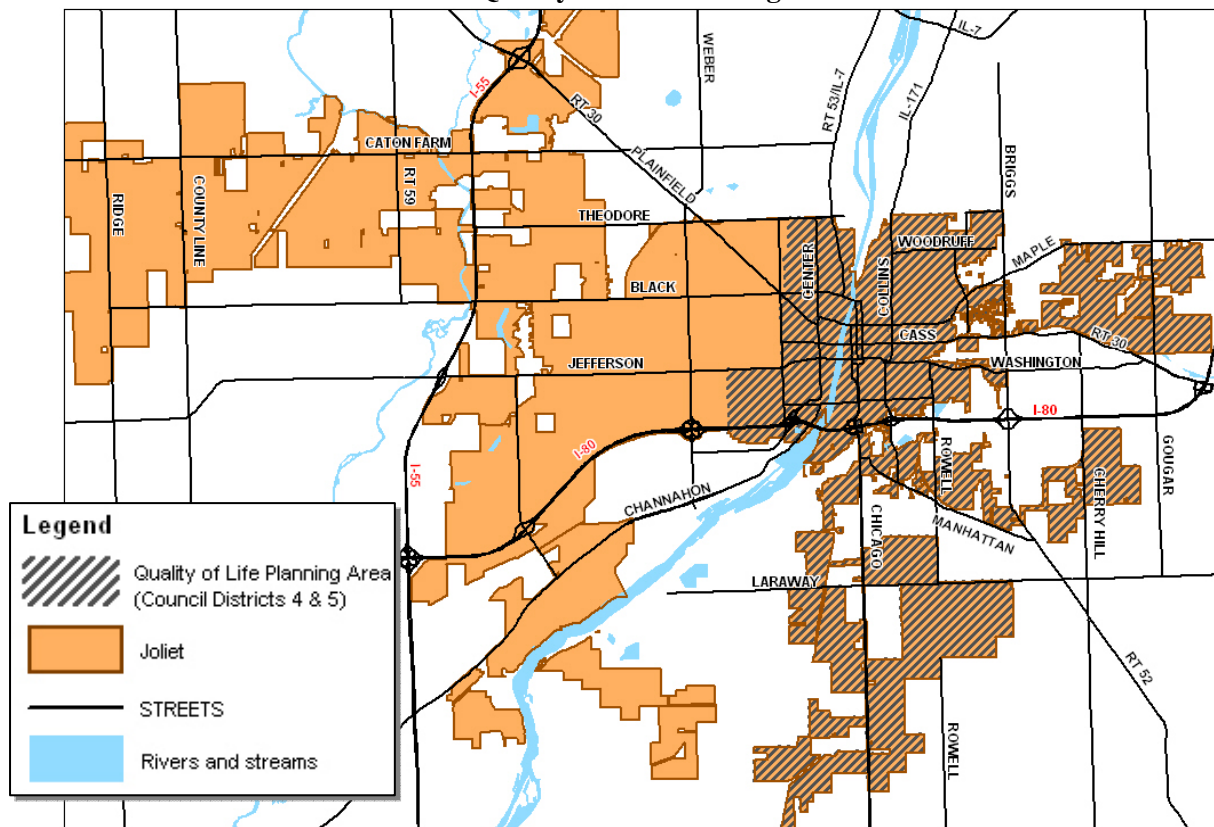
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Introduction

The Planning Area's Past

This summary presents key points of an action plan for improving residents' quality of life in the Fourth and Fifth City Council Districts of the City of Joliet (the Planning Area). The Planning Area is the historic core of Joliet. It saw the arrival of French voyagers in the 17th Century, the first mills and kilns in the 1840s, and the construction of downtown Joliet with many of the city's historic buildings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. From the 1940s to the 1970s industrial businesses with well paid labor made the Planning Area boom. Industrial salaries built the solid housing stock and vital residential neighborhoods that still make up most of the Planning Area. Industrial jobs also attracted waves of immigrants from Europe, the American South, and Latin America, contributing to the rich ethnic mix among the Planning Area's current 80,000 residents. But in the 1970s and 1980s the Planning Area was caught up in the contraction of heavy industry that devastated so many Midwestern American communities; unemployment rose to 26% and left social problems in its wake. For the last 20 years determined actions by City Government, community institutions and organizations, and individual families have steadily improved conditions in the Planning Area. The results of this process are an interlocking pattern of assets and challenges that affect residents' quality of life.

Joliet Quality of Life Planning Area



Assets and Problems

Assets: The Planning Area is the home of approximately 80,000 residents and contains assets that should provide the basis of a prosperous way of life: median home values that rose nearly 45% from 2002 to

2005, aggregate annual buying power in excess of \$3.4 billion, surrounding industrial corridors that have added some 8 million square feet of plant space per year since 2002. The Planning Area also enjoys a rich base of social capital that includes: a junior college and the presence of two universities, the offices of municipal and county government, and cooperative networks of business managers, social service agencies and community organizations.

Challenges: Yet the Planning Area is still recovering from the loss of thousands of well-paid industrial jobs during the 1980s. The area's current unemployment rate of 8.5% is more than 50% higher than the overall rates of Joliet or Will County, and jobs that do not pay a living wage are growing faster than jobs that do, leading to rising numbers of working poor families reported by more than 20 Planning Area social service agencies. More than 15 years ago major retailers followed jobs away from the Planning Area, leaving heavily trafficked commercial streets with ample space for development, and \$250 million per year in lost buying power as residents are forced to leave the neighborhood to find convenient or discounted shopping options for a variety of important goods and services. Social problems also followed job losses, and while problems in school performance, drug dependency, and crime have been declining for more than ten years, these problems remain prevalent in some Planning Area neighborhoods.

The Quality of Life Plan

Charge: In 2006 Planning Area community leaders, eager to increase the pace of neighborhood improvement, formed the Quality of Life (QOL) Task Force. The QOL Task Force and the City of Joliet administration agreed to carry out a community-based planning process with a team of consultants in order to create a holistic plan for improving the lives of Planning Area residents. The Plan would take an integrated approach to quality of life improvements in regard to housing, recreation, transportation, retail development, industrial development and employment, public infrastructure and land use, education, and human capital issues that encompassed health care, crime prevention, and the needs of youth and the elderly. The Plan would lay out a strategy for leveraging the Planning Area's assets to overcome its problems through a series of proposals for action, on three-year and ten-year time horizons.

Consulting Team: In the autumn of 2006 the City and the QOL Task Force engaged a consulting team of four organizations with complementary sets of expertise:

- *The Center for Neighborhood (CNT)*, a not-for-profit organization that conducts research and demonstration projects to help communities realize the full value of their assets, the coordinator of the consulting team;
- *The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC)*, a civic organization that draws on the expertise of the Chicago area business community to aid local governments in achieving their development objectives;
- *Teska Associates*, a planning and design firm with a national award winning track record for helping communities plan their redevelopment;
- and the *Partec Consulting Group*, a firm that specializes in advising community service organizations and public agencies as they plan and fund their programs.

Research and Community Engagement: Starting in November 2006 the consulting team met regularly with the QOL Task Force, which served as the Plan's steering committee, and with staff of the City of Joliet and:

- Conducted 115 interviews with Joliet area stakeholders including elected officials; directors of public agencies, educational institutions, professional associations, and social service agencies; business owners and managers; clergy and community leaders

- Conducted a paper survey in regard to perceived housing and market conditions that was completed by more than 500 community residents, including a statistically significant sample of the Planning Area population (8% returned)
 - Conducted a survey on resident participation in human services programs that was completed by more than 28 human services agencies active in the Planning Area
 - Reviewed the professional literature relevant to the topics of the Plan along with more than 12 studies or plans commissioned by Joliet or Will County institutions
 - Conducted four community workshops, attended by more than 500 Planning Area residents (many of whom attended more than one workshop, so that total attendance exceeded 700), to solicit resident input on the topics of the Plan
 - Convened an Advisory Group of 31 interviewed stakeholders for a preliminary discussion of the Plan's findings
 - Made a draft version of the Plan available for further comment in electronic form and in paper copies at 5 public locations with the Planning Area:
 - City of Joliet – Clerk's Office, 150 W Jefferson St
 - Joliet Public Library, 150 N Ottawa St
 - Our Lade of Mount Carmel Church, 407 E Irving St
 - Warren Sharpe Community Center, 454 S Joliet St
 - Sacred Heart Church, 329 S Ottawa St
- and provided a phone number to City staff who could answer questions about the Plan.



Community Workshops Break-out Session

With the information gathered from comments on the draft plan, the consulting team made recommendations for revisions, which were approved by the QOL Task Force and Joliet City staff. Per the date of this summary, the Plan is being submitted to the City Council which may make final revisions before establishing it as the principal guide to public policy and civic action for improving the quality of life in the Planning Area.

Key Findings and Proposals

Housing

Key Findings: The housing market of the Planning Area and the entire City is unique and complex, showing strong appreciation yet still providing affordably priced options in comparison to the rest of Will County. Planning area residents value home ownership, which they see as crucial to the maintenance of property, commitment to neighborhood improvement, and the economic advancement of individual families. Today about 62% of Planning area residents own their own homes. But the community's hopes of increasing home ownership are challenged by a combination of trends (despite the City's strong commitments to its "Local Homestead Program" and "ASSIST-ance Program").

- Between 2000 and 2005, Joliet's median household income rose 3.5% per year while city properties appreciated at 8.9% per year. Consequently more households are priced out of home ownership.
- Between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, 12 out of 18 Planning Area census tracts experienced a net loss owner households.

- The rate of property abandonment in the Planning Area (1.4% of properties) is much higher than the overall rate for Joliet (.9%) or Will County (.5%).
- More than 40% of households moving into the Planning Area rent, rather than buy a home.
- The Planning Area housing market is imbalanced, with the demand for housing priced for households earning less than \$50,000 per year being met by rental housing and a deficit of homes for households earning above \$50,000, particularly those earning between \$50,000 and \$125,000 (homes priced between \$132,500 and \$331,249). Consequently, some households are “under housed,” meaning they do not have options to step up to a higher-priced product and therefore would need to move out of the Planning Area as they become more prosperous.

Proposals: Stimulate the market for diverse housing, and help home owners buy wisely and maintain their properties through actions that include these steps:

- Attract new development by assembling and marketing land for mixed housing types, sizes, prices.
- Renew rehabilitation loan programs and focus rehabilitation efforts in mixed “Target Redevelopment Areas”.
- Sustain efforts to increase residential development in Downtown Joliet.
- Allow for and attract higher residential densities in selected areas, e.g. commercial corridors and around the Metra station. Similar activities have already been advocated in the City of Joliet’s Near West Side Neighborhood Plan.
- Engage local employers in employer-assisted housing programs.
- Supplement the City’s “ASSIST-ance” program with matching funds for investment in the Planning Area and home buyer counseling.
- Expand the Joliet Rental Housing Ordinance to regulate the rent or lease of single-family homes and duplexes.
- Accomplish housing objectives through a close working partnership between the City and the Planning Area community. The community’s role in this partnership may be carried out by a community development corporation (CDC) that would work with the City in assembling and marketing land for diverse housing development, providing home ownership counseling & financing assistance for residents, and securing state/ federal/ philanthropic funds to help support these activities.



Planning Area Housing

Recreation

Key Findings: The analysis of recreational facilities and their utilization for this section of the Plan includes a review of Planning Area park facilities with reference to current and former guidelines offered by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). This analysis demonstrates that:

- There is a very low level of participation by Planning Area residents in Park District programs and facilities located outside of the Planning Area.
- The network of mini parks and neighborhood parks owned by the Park District and the City does not provide as much play space as former NRPA guidelines recommend or as the City requires in new housing development projects. However, existing playground equipment for young children (ages 0-11) is generally in good condition, and additional play space owned by other government agencies or not-for-profit organizations could compensate for much of the deficit of play space.

- Pilcher Park provides extensive community park space for quiet adult recreational activities, but does not meet needs for active sports areas or facilities.
- Neighborhood and community level parks are not well developed with ball fields, courts, swimming pools, or other desired recreational facilities. The most significant recreational issue expressed by residents and community leaders is the lack of a pool and recreational center within the Planning Area, and former NRPA guidelines suggest that additional pool facilities may be needed. A phone survey regarding swimming pools in northeastern Illinois cities of comparable size indicates that Joliet is in the middle of the range in regard to pool facilities per thousands of residents in the population. In light of community concerns and issues regarding access to facilities and anticipated population growth, a proposal to build a pool and recreation center in the Planning Area should be thoroughly considered in a master plan for recreation in the Planning Area.



Hartman Recreation Center

- Newer developing areas are better served with park facilities because the City's subdivision approval process requires developers to provide or pay for such facilities.
- The redevelopment of the USX and Prison properties offer significant potential sites for new recreation facilities, including new playfields, a Par 3 golf course, or a community pool and recreation center.

Proposals: Proposals to improve recreational opportunities in the Planning Area must recognize that the current funding of the Park District does not permit significant new capital investments or the maintenance of facilities with high upkeep requirements, unless these are supported by user fees. So recreation system improvements will require some choice or combination of: increased Park District funding, partnership with other governmental bodies or not-for-profit organizations, or corporate sponsorships. Improvements should also be planned and executed in the context of a Master Recreation System Plan for Districts 4 and 5 that should consider the following measures:

- Target capital improvement program expenditures to areas of most need.
- Subsidize the cost of recreation programs for low-income citizens.
- Acquire more park land in underserved areas, or partner with other organizations to use existing spaces more efficiently.
- Build and maintain a recreation center with a full range of facilities, including a swimming pool, possibly at Nowell Park.
- Expand the trail system to enhance access to civic, cultural, recreation, employment and commercial centers and add recreation options.
- Develop partnerships with other providers of recreational services, including schools, and develop school/park joint use facilities where additional park land is needed.
- Create a greenway system along flood prone areas.
- Engage community residents to support local recreation programs through means such as building playgrounds, developing community gardens, and organizing park clean-up days.



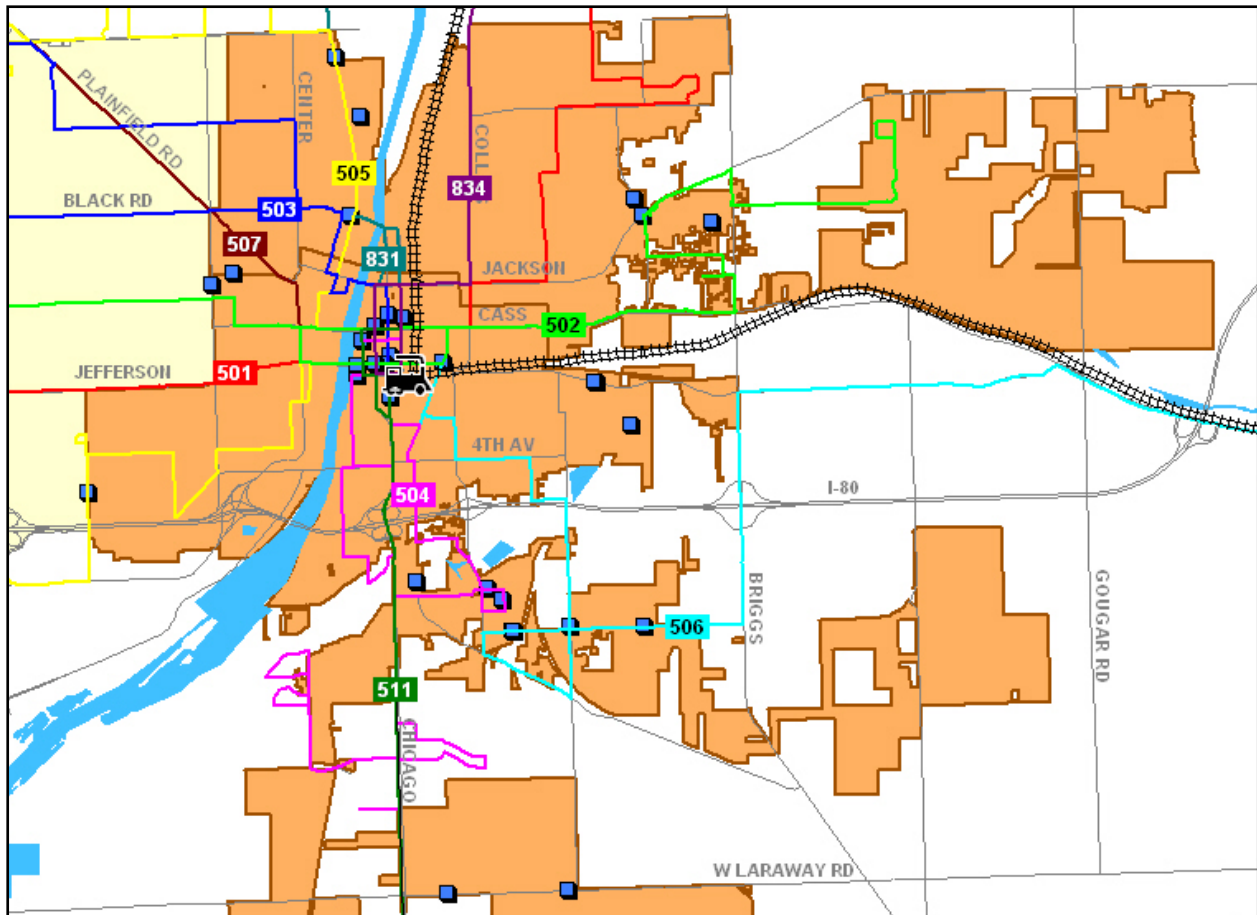
Bicentennial Park near downtown Joliet

Transportation

Key Findings: The Planning Area is a community with major geographic and transportation assets that can be leveraged to enhance residents' quality of life. However, challenges are entailed in utilizing these assets to their full potential:

- The Planning Area is surrounded by job sites, shopping centers, recreational and educational opportunities, but residents need efficient transportation access to these assets in order to use them. This access is problematic for households that do not own a car for every adult.
- The Planning Area enjoys public transportation services including Metra and Amtrak rail lines to Chicago and ten Pace bus routes. However, these services need to be enhanced and supplemented with non-conventional transportation alternatives in order to provide practical options to car travel.
- The Planning Area and adjoining districts of Joliet contain many destinations that youngsters and adults could reach by walking or biking, to the benefit of the travelers and the community. But the pedestrian and bicycle routes need to be studied and improved to ensure safe and frequent use.

Planning Area Public Transportation and Large Employers



Proposals: The City and the community, which might be appropriately represented by a community development corporation (CDC), need to work together with transit providers and other regional institutions to create viable transportation options in the Planning Area. This collaborative effort should:

- Support bus service improvements for the Joliet area proposed by Pace and funding for these improvements that is pending before the Illinois State Legislature.

- Institute a circulator bus service to supplement and connect Pace bus routes.
- Multiply & coordinate van pools, primarily to connect Planning Area workers to job sites.
- Establish a Joliet chapter of the IGO car sharing cooperative (a successful cooperative operating in Chicago).
- Improve conditions for pedestrian and bicycle travel within the Planning Area, beginning with the implementation of a “Safe Routes to School Program”.
- Support transportation proposals of regional significance: Metra extension to Elwood, Metra Star Line, Transportation Blue Print for Will County, if these proposals include public transportation connections for Planning Area residents.

Retail Market Assessment and Development

Key Findings: Proposals for retail development are based on three key points:

- *There is considerable unmet retail demand in the Planning area*, estimated at more than \$400 million per year, for a number of key consumer categories. Several distinct retail shortages are apparent – particularly a large grocery store, a produce market, coffee shop, sit-down restaurants, and general house wares – as well as banking and medical services.

Planning Area Retail Leakage and Surplus

Consumption Category	Leakage or Surplus (for given radius around the intersection of E. Washington St. and S. Briggs St)		
	1 Mile	3 Miles	5 Miles
Total Retail Sales, Incl. Eating and Drinking	\$89,752,964	\$406,260,133	\$654,946,306
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	\$21,024,881	\$100,406,202	\$72,911,912
Supermarkets/Grocery (excl. Convenience stores)	\$11,381,466	\$58,275,018	\$21,324,054
Gas Stations	\$7,788,287	\$40,063,693	\$101,057,680
Drugstores	\$3,076,011	\$25,039,840	\$4,015,138
Limited-Service Restaurants	\$4,235,861	\$6,427,713	\$19,185,352
Full-Service Restaurants	\$3,764,833	\$20,625,897	\$43,711,980
Clothing and Clothing Accessories	\$5,146,140	\$33,713,183	\$87,463,304
General Merchandise Stores	\$13,569,786	\$67,910,173	\$102,835,304
Furniture and Home Furnishing	\$1,525,746	\$7,881,633	\$23,886,803
Building Material, Gardening Equip.	\$6,457,222	\$13,256,157	\$51,899,870
Convenience Stores	\$505,872	\$1,960,906	\$2,688,135
Electronics and Appliance Stores	\$109,526	\$6,401,352	\$7,105,275
Specialty Food Stores	\$491,006	\$1,834,157	\$3,011,862
Sports, Hobby, Book, Music	\$1,935,342	\$6,464,880	\$10,882,491
Beer, Wine, and Liquor	\$2,045,812	\$5,770,987	\$6,626,497

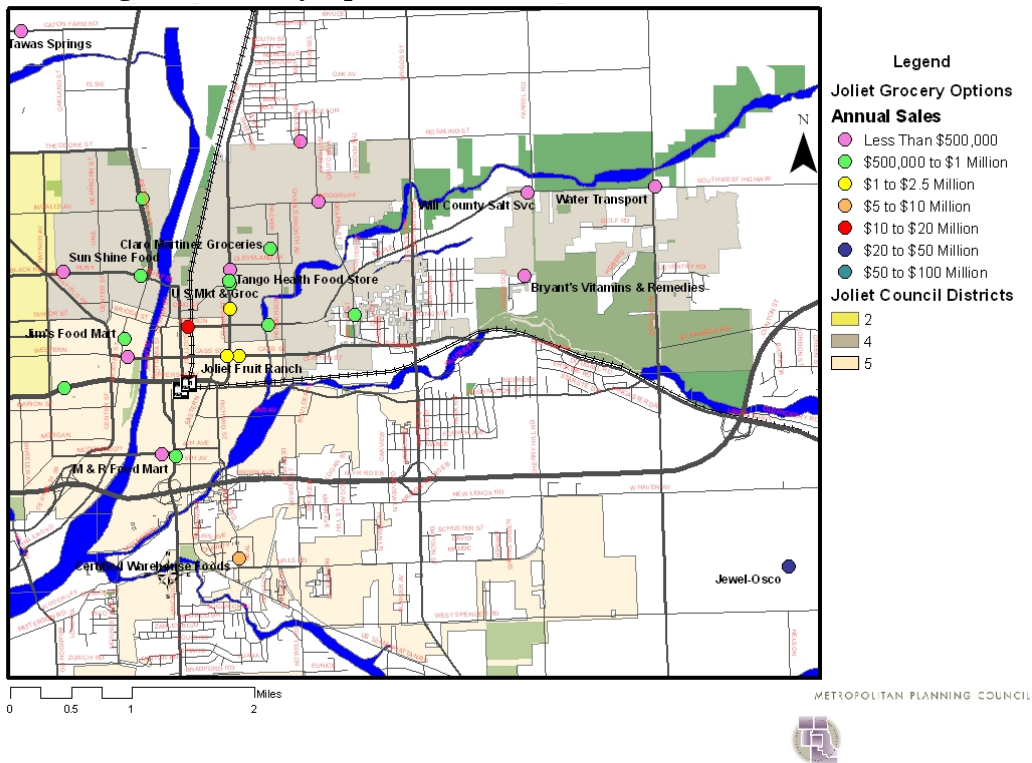
- *Many sites with substantial retail potential could be developed to capture retail opportunities:* These include sites currently vacant, occupied by extraneous industrial uses, or not yet annexed by the city. An assessment of these properties shows that there are ample opportunities for small-scale, mixed-use, infill development on major corridors and at major intersections throughout the Planning Area, as well as several areas where large-scale retail development could occur once the land was made suitable for development.
- *Neither City programs nor business organizations are focused on the economic development of the Planning Area as a primary mission.* This lack of focused support impairs business retention and business attraction in the Planning Area. Furthermore, many interview respondents, particularly those

that own their own businesses, felt there was a shortage of small business assistance available in the Planning Area. Barriers are even higher for would-be entrepreneurs for whom English is not their first language.

Proposals: In order to capitalize on the Planning Area’s potential for retail development, the City and its economic development partners should:

- *Structure and stimulate development* through measures that include these steps:
 - *Achieve the retail objectives of the QOL Plan through a City-community partnership*, in which the community’s role may be performed by a Planning Area community development corporation (CDC) that would work with the City in garnering regional/state/federal and philanthropic support and performing the work of land assembly, site marketing, and supporting small business owners.
 - *Establish specific geographies for development*, i.e., areas and/or corridors within which special districts such as a Tax Increment Financing district (TIF) or Special Service Area (SSA) will be established.
 - *Jump start the market in the Planning Area* by extending incentive programs that Joliet now uses in the City Center area, establishing a revolving loan fund for business development, providing a package of incentives particularly for infill development, and assembling land to resell for desired development projects.
- Use the development structure outlined above to stimulate the development of businesses that will meet the retail shortages experienced by Planning Area residents, notably the supermarket desired by District 5 residents for which market demand and potentially feasible sites have been demonstrated.
- Provide assistance for Planning Area entrepreneurs, through the creation of a small business development center focused on their needs, preferably developed as a collaborative effort with Joliet Junior College and the Chamber of Commerce.

Planning Area Grocery Options



Industrial Development & Employment

Key Findings: The protection and growth of well-paid industrial jobs has long been a prime concern of Joliet residents and public officials. Stakeholders are properly concerned that during the last ten years the greatest job growth in Will County has occurred in sectors with the lowest paid jobs and that virtually all social service agencies in the Planning Area report a need to serve increasing numbers of working poor households. However, research by County institutions has identified steady job growth in four fields that pay salaries above the County's mean household income: medical services, construction, some segments of manufacturing, and logistics.

Will County Employment by Industry Sector

Industry Sector	Numbers of Jobs			Job Growth	% All Jobs	% Wages
	1991	1996	2001	1991- 2001	2001	2001
Agriculture	979	1455	2351	1372	1.98%	1.00%
Mining	294	197	314	20	0.26%	0.50%
Construction	5793	9510	12487	6694	10.52%	13.00%
Manufacturing	18304	19170	19296	992	16.25%	23.00%
Transportation, Communications, Electric	6356	6389	8393	2037	7.07%	10.00%
Wholesale Trade	4062	5329	8393	4331	7.07%	11.00%
Retail Trade	17951	22574	26688	8737	22.48%	12.00%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	3495	4307	4328	833	3.65%	4.00%
Services	20930	29681	36465	15535	30.72%	25.50%
Non-Classifiable Establishments	66	45	0	-66	0.00%	0.00%
Total, All Sectors	78230	98657	118715	40485	100.00%	100.00%

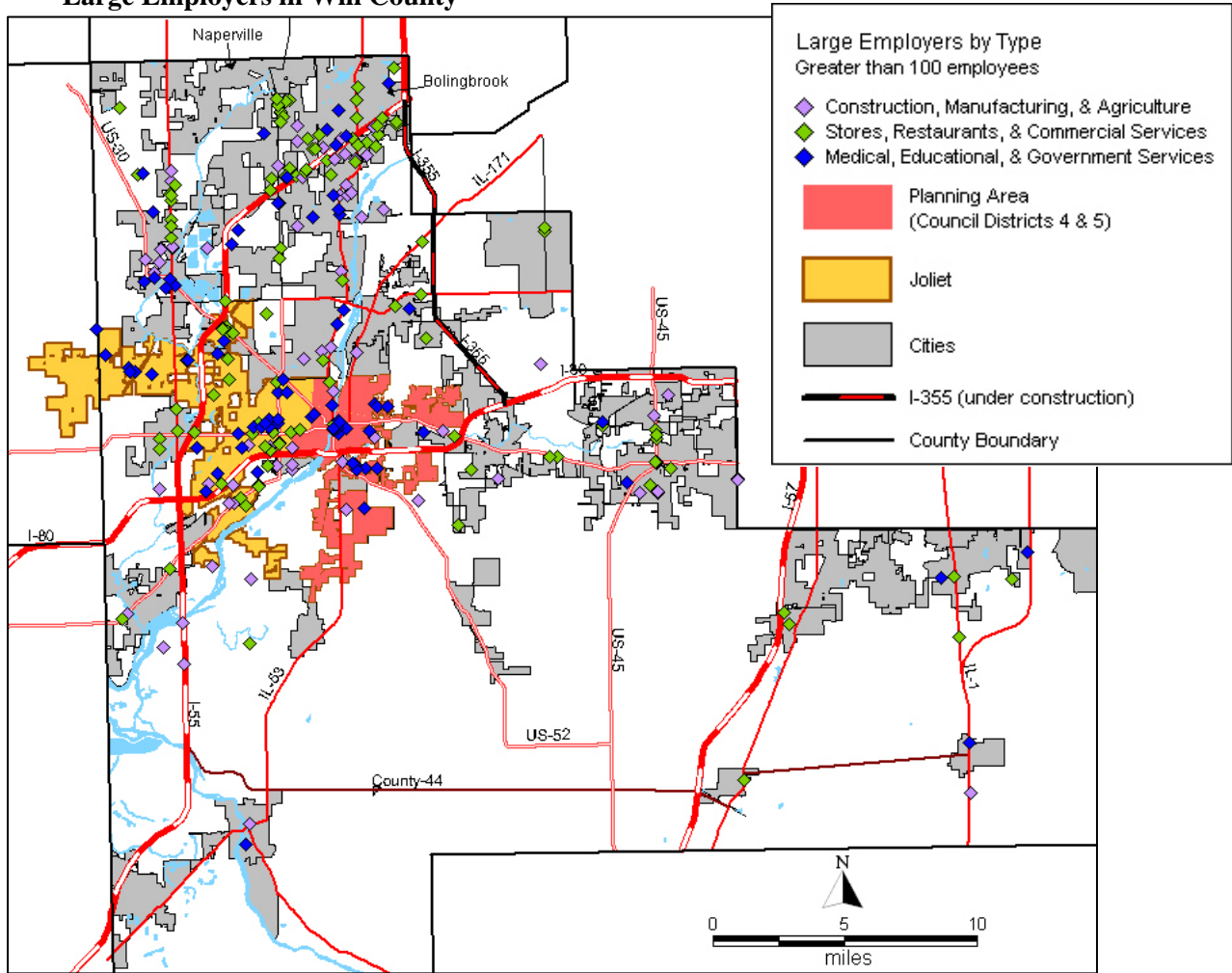
The growth of the logistics (freight movement) industry is particularly significant because logistics is the basis of the world's new industrial economy structured around supply chains, because Will County has a uniquely advantageous location for logistics operations, and because logistics careers lead to well-paid employment. The City is positioning Joliet and the Planning Area to reap major benefits from the new logistics-based industrial economy through its proposed development of more than 12,000 acres of industrial parks per the *South Side Comprehensive Plan*. An extensive system of employment training and placement services, coordinated by the Workforce Investment Board of Will County, is serving thousands of Planning Area residents annually. Yet, the workforce of the lower-income neighborhoods in the Planning Area will require further targeted assistance to benefit from planned development and existing services because significant percentages of workers in these neighborhoods have deficits in regard to education, income, transportation, and criminal background.

Proposals: To achieve optimum benefits for the Planning Area population from logistics-based industrial development in the I-80 corridor, the City should work with the community, which might be appropriately represented by a Planning Area CDC, in order to:

- Plan industrial development with a team of professional advisors that will ensure: 1) use of Foreign Trade Zones as a development incentive; 2) selection of logistics and industrial businesses that will produce quality employment; 3) adoption of environmentally sensitive and sustainable standards for industrial development consistent with standards that have been recommended in the City's *South Side Comprehensive Plan* and the nationally recognized LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards for sustainable industrial development.
- Establish a task force of Will County institutions led by the Workforce Investment Board to consider refinements in the workforce training and placement system that would make well-paid employment more accessible to lower-income residents. The issues to be examined by this task force include:
 - Ensuring optimum outreach to employers for training/placement programs

- Establishing community-based rosters of qualified workers
- Mitigating the cost of job training for lower-income trainees
- Expanding the number of on-the-job training programs that qualify for state tax credit reimbursement
- Establishing a constructive role for temporary labor contractors in the workforce development system
- Establishing more flexible procedures for “Worker Certification”
- Smoothing out gaps in supportive services for residents in job training and placement programs
- Enhancing existing programs to secure employment for ex-offenders
- Engaging the community and workforce agencies in a system of information exchange and referral tracking

Large Employers in Will County



Land Use

Key Findings: A basically sound pattern of major commercial streets and residential neighborhoods exists in the Planning Area, and most major infrastructure improvements to support existing land use patterns have been made by the City’s *Neighborhood Improvement Plan (NIP)*. However, some existing

land use land uses and infrastructure conditions need to change to facilitate the housing, recreation, transportation, retail, and industrial proposals of the QOL Plan, principally:

- Vacant, obsolete, or low-intensity industrial properties are located in proposed commercial corridors where they impede the assembly of land for desirable new retail and mixed use development.
- Extensive land areas coming into new use or soon to be annexed to the city (including the USX and prison sites) provide opportunities for well-planned developments that should meet some of the Planning Area's needs.
- The management of Silver Cross Hospital has proposed the relocation of that institution outside of the city limits. This relocation would have major impacts on opportunities and property values within the Planning Area.
- Modest investments in street design, trails, and public art could enhance distinctive neighborhood and commercial district identities.

Proposals:

A Land Use Policy Framework supports:

- Infill development in residential neighborhoods and relatively larger scale and mixed use housing in selected locations: Downtown, proposed commercial corridors, possibly current USX or prison sites
- Thorough analysis of alternatives for the proposed relocation of Silver Cross Hospital including: (1) Development in the community that would make retention of the current hospital campus or a location within the Planning Area an optimal alternative for Silver Cross; and (2) Optional plans for the redevelopment of the current Silver Cross property for other desirable uses
- Replacement of incompatible land uses and the design of districts with coherent, pedestrian oriented retail and mixed use identity along commercial corridors
- Large scale industrial development with the extension of some retail and residential corridors south of I-80 in agreement with the City's *South Side Comprehensive Plan*



Former Joliet Correctional Center

A Neighborhood Character and Improvement Plan calls for the enhancement of attractive identities for the Planning Area's neighborhoods through:



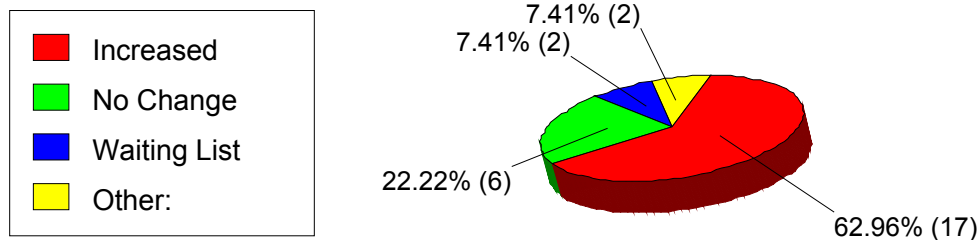
Six Corners Neighborhood Gateway

- Delineation of design standards for several types of commercial corridors
- Creation of gateway elements as transition points between neighborhoods and to provide individual identity for Planning Area neighborhoods
- Investment in infrastructure upgrades to alleviate problems in the Ridgewood neighborhood, in conjunction with investments of County, State, and Federal agencies
- Establishment of an interconnected system of pedestrian and bicycle trails providing access to major points of destination and highlighted by public art
- Restoration of two-way street patterns in Downtown Joliet

Human Capital

Key Findings: More than 80 community and faith-based organizations and public agencies offer a range of human service programs for Planning Area residents. These organizations strive to integrate their work through collaborative efforts coordinated by the United Way of Will County, the Social Services Council, and other networks that focus on more particular areas of service. Most human services agencies report increased needs for their help in recent years, attributed in part to the stresses experienced by households in which the adults work for less than adequate wages.

Since 2005, has the demand for your organization's services in the Planning Area:



Representatives of approximately half of the human service organizations that responded to a survey for the Plan felt that their programs were not well-known in the community. This impression of limited awareness was confirmed in community meetings in which dozens of residents cited community needs for services that are provided through existing agencies. Levels of awareness may also be related to limited leadership by Planning Area residents in human services organizations. Some 40% of the agencies that responded to the Plan's survey reported that 35% to 90% of their clients were Planning Area residents, but only a few responding organizations drew as many 15% of their Board Directors from the Planning Area, and a quarter or respondents had no Directors from the Planning Area. Despite the coordinated work of some 80 agencies, interviewed directors of human service agencies as well as residents in community meetings repeatedly identified several gaps in service, which were services related to domestic violence, youth development, and mental health.

Proposals: Proposals for housing, retail, and industrial development, and for improved transportation, employment, and education services are the primary ways in which the QOL Plan seeks to reduce the need for human service programs. However, the Plan also proposes that the organized Planning Area community (possibly led by community development corporation (CDC) should help to address the need for community engagement with human service organizations by maintaining a Human Services Committee that would assign members to:

- Continue to support the various collaborations and consortiums of service providers working in the Planning Area and encourage new opportunities to connect with residents.
- Establish a resident leadership initiative to increase the number of residents actively engaged and accountable in the revitalization of the community.
- Increase capacity building assistance to local nonprofits including community and faith-based organizations, utilizing the federal Compassion Capital Fund.
- Expand programs to develop leadership among Planning Area youth.
- Explore the feasibility of modifying existing programs or establishing a new program to develop the technical and life skills of out-of-school young adults interested in securing living wage employment, utilizing specific Department of Labor funding programs.

Education

Key Findings: The performance of Planning Area schools gives cause for concern:

- Both Joliet high schools, 4 junior high schools, and 4 elementary schools are on the federally established “Academic Early Warning List (AEWL)” or “Academic Warning List (AWL)”
- Elementary schools collectively have rates of mobility (moving in or out of school enrollment) and chronic truancy approximately 50% higher than the state average.
- High school graduation rates at Joliet’s Central High School campus declined for African American and Hispanic students between 2003 and 2006.
- Percentages of minority (particularly Hispanic) students have been growing while school faculties have remained largely White.

At the same time Planning Area school districts have been taking vigorous and effective action to improve the quality of education:

- Since 2003 Planning Area schools have successfully tapped the full range of funding programs available from public and private sources to improve school performance, and they have instituted a gamut of academic enrichment programs.
- From 2005 to 2006 all Planning Area elementary schools improved their performance on standardized tests, and two were removed from the AEWL or AWL.
- Unfortunately Central High School did not improve its standardized test scores in 2006. However, Central High School is engaging students in its “Career Academies” programs, which offer a challenging curriculum and career tracks that lead either to college entrance or to technical training and well-paid employment.

Proposals: Improve student performance through initiatives that will build parental and community engagement in education:

- Reduce high mobility and chronic truancy through a campaign of community education, linked to housing and workforce development programs.
- Through community and faith-based organizations, deliver a message to encourage parental involvement in children’s education.
- Create a community technology plan to increase the use of technology, with informed parental guidance, to help bridge the digital divide.
- In community events and news media discuss the challenges and celebrate the progress of educational improvements.
- Increase opportunities for young minority role models to interact with high school students.
- Expand programs to increase the number of minority teachers in the Joliet school system including: a pilot program for the long-term development of current high school students as local teachers; partnerships with Joliet area universities and with Historically Black Colleges and Hispanic Institutions; and linkages to other programs proposed in the QOL Plan such as home ownership programs.



Children for Peace Mosaic

School administrators and Boards could work with the City and an Education Committee of the organized Planning Area community (possibly coordinated by a community development corporation (CDC)) to carry out these initiatives.

Interlocking Issues

In the preceding summary several issues recur because they are necessary considerations in the proposals for multiple topic areas. These issues include:

- Formation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) for the Planning Area
- Development of Downtown Joliet
- Development of unincorporated lands adjacent to the Planning Area

Planning Area CDC: This plan identifies a community development corporation (CDC) as a type of institution that the organized Planning Area community may create to perform many specific functions that are outlined in the preceding discussions of the Plan's topic areas. But the core function that the organized community (and the CDC if that is the community's chosen instrument) needs to perform is to work with the City in implementing the QOL Plan as a whole. The organized community (possibly represented by a CDC) should act as the City's partner in the tasks of detailed planning, land assembly and marketing for housing and retail development. It should partner with other agencies and the City to improve small business, transportation and workforce development services. It should deepen community support for education and human service programs. In all these functions the organized Planning Area community should bring in resources from other levels of government, from foundations, and from fees charged for some of its services, as well as the energy, commitment and insight of community residents, and a CDC would be a particularly appropriate mechanism for the community to use in delivering these benefits. In all these functions too, the organized community (and the CDC if that is its embodiment) should maintain a holistic perspective and a long-term strategy on the implementation of the QOL Plan. Along with the City, the community's designated organization should be the guardian of the Plan and responsible for its periodic updating.

Downtown Joliet: Downtown Joliet is the center of the Planning Area as well as the center of Joliet and Will County. Proposals for the redevelopment of Planning Area neighborhoods will only succeed if Downtown is thriving, and the quality of life in the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown has a powerful impact on its viability. Accordingly, the housing proposals for the Planning Area include a commitment to achieving relatively intensive, transit oriented and mixed use housing and retail development Downtown. Retail development proposals for the Planning Area would essentially establish vital commercial corridors connecting Downtown to the I-80 expressway and include proposals for Downtown anchor businesses such as major bookstores and cinemas that require a broader base than neighborhood shopping centers. Land use and infrastructure proposals for the Planning Area include the restoration of two-way street patterns to Downtown's commercial streets.

Another important proposal now under consideration by Joliet's institutions of higher education, which this plan supports, is the creation of a shared Downtown campus. Through this shared property JJC would replace its currently inadequate Downtown building and provide a broader curriculum Downtown. St. Francis, Lewis, and Governor State Universities would offer a variety of classes for adult students. Thousands of upwardly



The Rialto Theater in downtown Joliet

mobile residents of the surrounding region would be drawn to Downtown each day and evening, providing a catalyst to establish viable housing and retail development in the Downtown area. Planning Area residents would gain convenient access to a valuable new resource.

Settled and Unincorporated Neighborhoods Bordering the Planning Area: The City of Joliet has demonstrated expertise in the acquisition and development of bordering territories for the benefit of the city and the annexed areas. However, the presence of settled, generally low-income and unincorporated neighborhoods on the eastern borders of the Planning Area represents particular challenges. Frequently infrastructure for these neighborhoods is inadequate and would require thousands of dollars per standard residential lot to upgrade to Joliet City standards. Property owners in these neighborhoods often feel that they could not afford the charges for upgrading their infrastructure and might not want their land annexed to the City for other reasons. Yet disinvested areas depress property values and discourage development in adjacent city neighborhoods.

The City is now addressing this set of problems in the Ridgewood neighborhood where it is working with County, Township, and State governments to share the costs of infrastructure improvements and bring conditions to a level that will not impede development. These efforts have been given new impetus by the proposal of Silver Cross Hospital to relocate its principal campus outside of the city of Joliet. The implementation of the City's *South Side Comprehensive Plan* and this plan's proposals for the development of commercial corridors, which include the development of land now outside the city's boundaries, could demonstrate an approach to problematic annexation situations. Commercial and relatively dense residential development, or in some cases industrial development, in planned projects will create substantial increments in property value. Existing housing units that fall within the project areas of such developments and have their infrastructure improved will also increase in value, from their proximity to new development and from infrastructure improvements. Besides sharing all possible costs with other units of government, the City could leverage the increments in property values for entire project areas to finance infrastructure improvements for the properties within these projects. This process repeated in a series of projects over a decade could go far toward eliminating conditions of disinvestment in neighborhoods bordering the Planning Area.

Implementation Steps and Schedule

Strategic Integration

Although the QOL Plan entails more than 75 specific action proposals covering a wide range of topic areas, its proposals have a similar strategic orientation, and they are interdependent. All of the proposals of the Plan are based on the principle of leveraging existing assets to solve community problems:

- Housing proposals build on Joliet's generally strong housing market and programs that the City has in place.
- Recreation proposals begin with the base of existing facilities.
- Transportation proposals involve a close partnership with Pace as a flexible public transit agency.



Collins Street Retail

- Retail proposals are founded on the two legs of large pent up retail demand and corridor locations with adequate traffic counts and sufficient land to assemble for development.
- Industrial Development and Employment proposals would capitalize on the extraordinary opportunities provided by the regional logistics industry, the City's south side land development plans, and the service capacities of the existing workforce development system.
- Land Use proposals would augment the strengths of the existing built and natural environment.
- Education proposals would give community support for effective plans that the school districts have put in motion.
- Human Capital proposals would open avenues for greater community contributions to and engagement with the extensive service provider network.

The Plan has a "bias" that quality of life improvements in the Planning Area will generally flow from economic development and that the creation of living wage jobs and wealth in the community is the foundation for improvements in service systems. However, this orientation is tempered with the recognition of many prerequisites for economic development and ways in which the conditions of a desirable community generate wealth. So the Plan considers, for example, that:

- Meeting the Planning Area's needs for a more diverse housing stock and retail amenities entails large scale business opportunities in which local residents may participate as consumers, workers, and business and property owners.
- Lack of education and training is the primary factor that bars Planning Area residents from well-paid jobs.
- Social problems related to household stability, health, addiction and crime often interrupt educations and narrow job opportunities.
- Communities that are attractively designed and provided with convenient recreation, transportation, and retail amenities uphold property values and attract economically diverse residents.

It was with appreciation of these types of interrelationships that the effort leading to this document and going forward to its implementation is designed as a quality of life project, rather than a specialized economic development plan.

Short Term and Long Term Proposals

The QOL Plan is too broad in scope – and so involves too many sets of decision makers and contingencies – for the accomplishment of its proposals to be scheduled tightly at this time. However, in the full Plan, proposals are listed and prioritized at the end of each topic section. .

Proposals are assigned a high priority if they are necessary first steps in laying the ground work for other proposals or if they can be accomplished quickly and will have an encouraging impact through the demonstration of achieved results. Proposals are assigned a low priority if they must follow the establishment of prerequisites or if they describe actions that must be made repeatedly, as part of an ongoing effort, to have effect. Generally the Plan calls for the accomplishment of high priority tasks within a three-year time frame and the accomplishment of lower priority tasks within a ten-year horizon. Every second year the City and the Planning Area community should revise this Quality of Life Plan. In these revisions allowance can be made for the results of development efforts and unforeseen events. Different initiatives can be moved up to short-term implementation status. Through this process the Quality of Life Plan will continue to be a vital guide for the Planning Area's improvement efforts.

Financial Considerations

By far the largest dollar figures involved in the implementation of the Quality of Life Plan will be private investments to create the housing and commercial development that the Plan aims to generate. These investments will be project specific, and they cannot be usefully estimated at this time, but if the Plan is realized they will certainly involve tens of millions of dollars and generate thousands of jobs. To set this development process in motion and guide it toward desired outcomes, this Plan offers 56 specific proposals for action within the next three years. Staffing or direct expenses to implement all of these proposals would require a total of approximately \$5,141,000 to \$8,745,000 over 3 years. The large bulk



Cathedral Neighborhood

of funding to carry out these proposals would be regional, state, or federal agencies of government or private foundations. Funds may also be secured from fees earned for services or from the creation of special districts within the Planning Area (such as tax increment finance [TIF] or special assessment [SA] districts.) Specific sources of funding to be approached for each proposal are noted with the summary of proposals at the end of each section of the Plan. These funds would be supplemented by the considerable in-kind contributions of community volunteers and the time of staff in partner organizations or agencies which would see cooperation with specific proposals of the Plan as activities within their basic mission.

In order to perform, manage and fund the implementation of action proposals, the core implementers of the Plan, the City and the organized Planning Area community (possibly represented by a CDC), will need to sustain staff effort. In this effort City and CDC staff will constantly be refining plans for specific projects, applying to sources of funding, marketing development opportunities, assisting home owners and small business owners, coordinating community engagement in education and human service programs and all of the other activities entailed in the Plan's proposals. The staff work and direct expense of this ongoing effort will require a budget of approximately \$500,000 per year divided between City and the CDC, which is included in the estimated range of total expenses to implement the Plan over the next three years. How this budget might be allocated among the staff of the City and a CDC will need to be determined at a future level of detailed planning.