Since its incorporation in 2001, the Village of Homer Glen has sought to preserve and enhance the quality of the natural and built environment through the establishment of design standards for residential and non-residential uses.

The following Design Guidelines consist of three components: (1) Landscaping Standards; (2) Tree Preservation; and (3) Conservation Subdivision Ordinances. Tree Preservation and Conservation Subdivision Ordinances have been in place in the Village since 2006. One of the key implementation steps from the Comprehensive Plan will be to establish new landscaping standards in accordance with the guidelines in this chapter.

The Design Guidelines have been prepared as a result of the goals included in the 2018-21 Strategic Plan to ensure the preservation and enhancement of the character and quality of the urban and rural landscape and, as a result, the overall economic and environmental sustainability of the Village.
PROCESS

Throughout the process to prepare the Comprehensive Plan the Village has sought out the opinions, perspectives and ideas of various stakeholders in and outside of the Village through various engagement activities, as highlighted in the timeline on the right.

With regard to the development of the design guidelines, focus group discussions were held with Village elected and appointed officials, residents, business and property owners, and public agencies (schools, townships, county), to gain first-hand knowledge of issues to be addressed and desired outcomes. This information was provided to the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and members of the Village Board at two separate workshops in August and October 2019.

Input from these various stakeholders was combined with the expertise and experience of the Consultant Team, analysis of specific Village ordinances, review of design standards from comparable local communities and other model guidelines across the country, including recommended best practices from publications by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, American Planning Association, and from widely recognized authorities and practitioners.
GREEN VISION

Adopted in 2004, the Green Vision represented a forward-thinking plan that resulted from a collaboration of ideas and commitment of the Homer Glen community to protect its natural resources in the face of mounting pressure to develop open land. The visioning process was led by a steering committee comprised of business and community members, local government officials, and individuals representing environmental organizations.

As one of 16 communities in Illinois that received the 2002 Governor’s Green Communities Demonstration Grant, Homer Glen was able to “identify environmental challenges and plan for a sustainable future.” Homer Glen’s Green Vision Statement and goals, as summarized below, are consistent with the Vision Statement and guiding principles of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

GREEN VISION STATEMENT

“Homer Glen will be an attractive, distinctive, and environmentally sustainable community that protects its valuable water resources, natural landscapes, wildlife habitats, open spaces and agricultural settings essential to the well being and quality of life of Homer Glen residents.”

GOALS

(1) Maintain an attractive and distinctive community.
(2) Preserve natural resources, habitat, and wildlife.
(3) Protect and enhance open space.
(4) Promote a healthy parks and recreation system.
(5) Provide a coordinated transportation network.
(6) Promote and protect high quality water resources.

DARK SKIES

Just as Homer Glen is a leader in conservation design and tree preservation, the Village is renowned for its outdoor lighting ordinance, adopted in 2007. In 2011, the International Dark Sky Association designated Homer Glen as an International Dark Sky Community, the 4th in the World and 1st in the State of Illinois.

The Village promotes the preservation of the night sky by hosting annual stargazing events and through continued enforcement of the Village’s outdoor lighting ordinance. This commitment to dark skies will continue to play an influential role in guiding sensible growth in Homer Glen.

“Our commitment to minimizing light pollution in our community is a great asset and one that contributes to our quality of life. Once lost, we can never get it back, so thank you for your continuing efforts in protecting our environment.”

- Ken Lomasney, Homer Glen
LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

The recommended landscape guidelines provide information on Homer Glen’s desired landscape treatments for private and public properties to be used by developers and Village officials in the preparation and review of site development plans. The landscape guidelines are an essential tool in the preparation of plans that require the Village’s approval such as site plans, special use permits, planned developments, and major and minor site plan amendments.

Landscaping as an essential element of good urban design provides for the needs of all citizens, minimizes potential conflicting land uses, integrates the built environment with the natural environment, and provides for the “greening” of the urban landscape. Urban environments, by their very nature, progressively become areas where the density of development continually changes the character and rural qualities of Homer Glen. As a result, the urban landscape will assume a vital function in making new development areas a practical, pleasing, and attractive environment in which to live and invest.

Landscape requirements are intended to improve the overall aesthetic quality and environmental health of Homer Glen. A well-designed landscape plan creates pedestrian-friendly accessibility and brings a human-scale to the built environment. Landscaping softens an urban environment, decreases the impact of large parking areas, screens undesirable site service areas, buffers between non-compatible land uses, replaces vegetation loss due to development activity, and improves the general character and quality of a community.

Landscaping functions to preserve and enhance the environmental qualities of a site. While landscaping is intended to accent and enhance buildings, it is not to be used as a screen for uninspired building architecture. Landscapes that exemplify water conservation design concepts are also encouraged.

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish minimum landscape design standards without dictating specific planting styles, planting themes, or planting arrangements.

To ensure continual and long term project results, each project shall give consideration to the site and landscape design elements listed in the graphic below.
LANDSCAPE GUIDELINES

TRANSITION/BUFFER YARDS
Providing for the appropriate amount of space and landscape material in transition or buffer yards is determined by the adjoining land use. Consideration should be given to the following when establishing transition/buffer yard planting requirements:

• Provide minimum planting densities, types of materials, and separation requirements for various land use types. A combination of overstory trees, evergreen trees, ornamental trees, and large shrubs should be used.
• Include a landscape berm of no less than three feet in height when adequate space is provided.
• Consider reducing the required number of plant units if a solid fence structure or a berm, a minimum of six feet high with a maximum slope of 3:1, is used.
• Consider allowing for varying types of transition yards based on plant density.
• Provide credits for existing mature and desirable vegetation in lieu of required plantings.

INTERNAL PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
Ease of circulation within and to a site for pedestrians should be clearly delineated and enhance with landscaping to enhance the experience and quality of each project. Consideration should be given to the following when establishing internal pedestrian access planting requirements:

• Ensure that adequate pedestrian walkways exist along storefronts, within parking areas, and along the site perimeter to promote walking and biking.
• Provide for a combination of canopy trees, shrubs, and ornamental grasses to create a safe walking zone and relief from the sun.
• Include pedestrian amenities, such as seat-walls along with planting areas and separate seating areas and areas with shaded canopies for larger projects.
• Consider the use of bollards and seat-walls and other landscape design elements to protect pedestrian areas, particularly in parking lots.

FOUNDATION & PERIMETER AREAS
Foundation plantings are intended to complement the architecture of a building and create a human scale along the building’s edge and pedestrian areas. Foundation landscaping should be provided around the perimeter of a building to minimize the “hard edge” that is created where the building meets the pavement and to break up large building masses. Consideration should be given to the following when establishing foundation and perimeter planting requirements:

• Require foundation plantings along all fronts and sides of buildings and any rear portion of buildings visible from public streets.
• Plant foundation landscape areas with a balance of understory and evergreen trees, shrubs, annual and perennial flowers, and ground covers, designed to provide year-round colors. The majority of required foundation trees, shrubs, and ornamental grasses shall provide year-round visual interest.
• Utilize foundation landscape plantings to soften large expanses of building walls length and height, accent building entrances and architectural features, and screen mechanical equipment adjacent to buildings.
• Ensure foundation planting areas adjacent to the building edges are wide enough to include a combination of medium or large scale trees, shrubs, and groundcover.
• Provide perimeter landscape setbacks as follows:
  - Landscaping should define entrances to parking lots and buildings.
  - Where parking areas about public streets, a planting area should be provided and treated with a mixture of canopy trees, shrubs, and groundcover.
  - Canopy trees should be installed such that the first lateral branches are not less than 7 foot height.
  - Perimeter plantings should be provided around all parking areas. Where parking areas about residential properties, a planting screen should be provided. These areas should be treated with evergreen trees, opaque masonry or wood fences, or a combination of planting and fencing.
Sustainability and conservation landscaping both strive to work with nature to reduce air pollution, increase water quality, lower water consumption, utilize native plants, and reduce the usage of pest control. Sustainable sites not only mitigate negative impacts on the environment but are also a mutual benefit to the site itself and the people who use it. Consideration should be given to the following when establishing sign planting requirements:

- Ensure at least 75% of the area of the landscape bed around a ground sign is occupied by vegetation, which should have year-round interest and include shrubs, ornamental grasses, and perennials; turfgrass is not permitted.
- Provide plantings large enough to cover or soften the base of the sign without blocking the sign copy.
- Naturalized landscape area entirely planted with context-appropriate naturalized landscaping, which temporarily collect and store stormwater runoff in a ‘wetland’ type area. Landscaping should include native canopy trees, understory trees, and shrubs.
- A 15 foot wide naturalized landscape area established above all retention and detention pond high water levels in order to slow runoff, filter pollutants, recharge aquifers and enhance water quality.
- Native landscaping that tolerates wet/dry conditions and attracts wildlife
- Shallow pond slopes to support native plantings and attract wildlife.
- Pedestrian connections to these natural areas.
- Pedestrian overlooks and other seating areas that overlook ponds and are immediately adjacent to trails.

On-site stormwater management detention ponds, wetlands, and floodplain areas should be enhanced to provide unique natural amenities to the site. Where naturalized landscape areas are installed around stormwater retention/detention facilities, the areas must remain as naturalistic as possible, resemble natural water features, provide habitat and stormwater management benefits, and improve water quality. The following should be incorporated into the design of the detention ponds:

- Use permeable paving such as pervious concrete, pervious paving, and permeable pavers (including pervious subsurface materials) to the extent practical in hardscape areas to reduce stormwater runoff and allow for groundwater recharge. Suggested locations for permeable paving include driveways, parking lots, drive aisles, alleys, and paving surfaces in plazas where practical. Stormwater requirements in the subdivision code should be evaluated to account for the reduction stormwater runoff due to the use of permeable paving.
- Where infiltration is possible, design vegetated swales with a subsurface infiltration trench to allow for infiltration. Vegetated swales or bioswales conveying stormwater should be provided along the edges of streets along parkways where practical.
- Divert stormwater runoff from impervious areas such as roofs and paths to landscape areas and infiltration basins/swales where water can seep into the ground.
TREE PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

In concert with several other initiatives adopted by Village officials soon after Homer Glen’s incorporation in 2001, Tree Preservation standards were established in 2006 as a method to preserve the character, environment, and quality of the Village in face of rapid development trends. Tree preservation regulations are an important part of the process to prepare plans that require the Village’s approval such as site plans, subdivisions, special use permits, planned developments, and major and minor site plan amendments.

The Tree Preservation standards work in conjunction with a number of existing Village plans, policies, and guidelines. Tree Preservation regulations are to be used in conjunction with and should support natural area preservation objectives and standards outlined in the Village’s Conservation Subdivision Ordinance (with the proposed modifications as outlined in this Chapter 11), proposed landscape guidelines, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Green Vision Program, and Subdivision and Site Development Ordinance. These documents should be used together to ensure that Village objectives and requirements are met on a project.

TREE CITY USA

In addition to the Conservation Design Ordinance, the Village approved its Tree Preservation Ordinance in 2006, primarily to prevent new development from clear cutting of trees and provide incentives to save large, mature trees. Best management practices must be taken to protect trees identified for preservation. Homer Glen’s commitment to tree care and preservation led to the Village being recognized in 2008 as a Tree City USA.

This recognition is a genuine reflection of Homer Glen’s stewardship of a sustainable community, which will be crucial as the Village plans for future growth. Recommendations that support the Village’s tree preservation efforts are provided at the end of this chapter.
Regulations Apply to Any Lot
(CURRENTLY 5 ACRES OR GREATER)

- Consideration should be given to applying standards differently based on land use type (Commercial vs Residential vs Agricultural), and coordination with new landscape standards.

- Clarification should also be made to indicate that properties that have approved landscaping or tree preservation plans are not subject to the requirement to secure a tree removal permit and thus not subject to the tree preservation requirements.

Conservation & Preservation Easements; Conservation Trust

Changes to Existing Structures

- This is a needed addition to the code as current regulations did not address these conditions.

- Consideration should be given to eliminating the requirement that an owner must also verify that an improvement is 50% or more of the assessed value of the building as shown on a tax bill.

Environmental Protection Overlay Districts

- An Environmental Protection Overlay District could link to a master open space plan. Local examples include the Plainfield Open Space Plan and Kendall County Trails and Greenways Plan. Will County, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), and Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) have web-based resources regarding greenway and open space planning.

Restitution Required

- Consideration should be given to adding permissible tree removal with Building Activity Areas of commercial properties as is allowed for residential areas without payment.

- For tree loss outside the Building Activity Area on commercial sites, consider increasing the payment amount to double or triple the current amounts to act as a further deterrent. The Building Activity Area for commercial sites should include required parking areas.

Certification of Compliance with Approved Plans

- In lieu of requiring multiple follow-up inspections by Village officials, consider requiring a final tree and/or landscape plan that is certified by the owner’s arborist that all trees on the preservation plan are maintained in good health after construction. Only require one final inspection prior to final occupancy permit, or eliminate this requirement.

Master Open Space Plan

- Development of a master open space plan providing for both an inventory of open spaces to protect and a plan for the inter-connection of such spaces can be an important guide to developers and the Village.

- An open space plan could be the basis for modifying the application of the conservation subdivision requirements, such that only lands that include open space areas identified in this plan would be subject to conservation regulations. These areas could be deemed environmentally sensitive.
CONSERVATION SUBDIVISIONS

Conservation design is a land use development approach intended to manage growth and allow for targeted sustainable development while protecting the area’s natural and environmental features. As illustrated in the two graphics on the right, conventional development (top) typically maximizes the number of lots and overall lot size, with limited consideration of the natural environment. Alternatively, conservation design (bottom) often maintains the same number of lots but reduces the average lot size to enhance protection of sensitive natural elements and integration into site design.

Whether part of a concerted effort to pursue conservation design or otherwise, Homer Glen is no stranger to building with respect to nature. De Boer Woods and Mallard Lakes serve as prominent examples of local residential developments that successfully design with nature. Conservation design, with recommendations suggested in this chapter, should continue to be a common practice, as it strikes a balance between residential development and preservation of the natural environment.

Source: Manitoba Manual for Conservation Subdivision Design
Following the adoption of its first Comprehensive Plan in 2005, the Village adopted its Conservation Design Ordinance in 2006 to provide an innovative policy to support the protection of the natural environment and open space. At its initial adoption, the ordinance was viewed as one of the strongest such policies in the nation and is still positioned as the only ordinance in Illinois to require mandatory compliance by developers, with no incentives or bonuses afforded.

In general, the Conservation Design Ordinance requires 20% to 50% of new residential development of at least 10 acres to be set aside as permanent, dedicated, and publicly-owned open space. Cluster development is the typical approach utilized to maximize open space, when adjacent properties can be strung together and connected via trails. Other benefits include protected wildlife corridors, scenic vistas, and less impervious surfaces, which lead to reduced flooding and improved recharge of groundwater aquifers.

Since the adoption of the Conservation Design Ordinance, there has not been a subdivision of 10 acres or more able to meet the standards of the ordinance. This has resulted in very little growth in new residential development in Homer Glen. While the ordinance contains elements that should be retained, Chapter 11 outlines potential amendments that the Village can explore to make the ordinance less of a hindrance and advance sensible growth in the future.

**CONSERVATION GUIDELINES**

**CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION EASEMENTS**

Conservation easements allow homeowners to preserve their land while continuing to own it. They are a legal agreement between a landowner and a government or non-profit agency that limits the use of land to ensure that the conservation goals for the property are permanently upheld. Goals might include limiting development rights, preservation, or the right to subdivide for landowners. An easement can include all or a portion of the landowner's property.

The Village may require all final tree preservation areas be placed within a conservation or tree preservation easement providing further protection through easement provisions recorded on each lot or subdivision. Amendments to easements would only occur with Village approval. Such easements may also provide property owners with tax benefits lowering tax payments. Monitoring and enforcing easement provisions must also be considered. Several well-established organizations that have been operating in the Barrington Area of the far northwest suburbs of the Chicago area have been responsible for the management of conservation easements.

**CONSERVATION GUIDELINES**

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION OVERLAY DISTRICTS**

In addition to or in replacement of the general application of tree preservation regulations, the creation of a Tree Preservation Overlay District may offer a viable alternative. Rather than imposing tree protection on all individual lots, areas of dense tree cover are mapped, which becomes the basis for establishing an overlay protection district.

An overlay district is a type of zoning district that is superimposed over the underlying “base” zoning districts in order to protect a particular resource or guide development within a special area. The overlay district can be any shape or size that is rational to its purpose, and it essentially adds a layer of safeguards, standards, or incentives that may not have been considered in the Zoning Code. The base zoning requirements still apply, but the overlay district standards add an additional layer of standards.

The purpose of the overlay district is to provide the Village with an additional level of review and regulation that controls how land development permitted by the zoning districts should occur in sensitive or unique environmental areas.

The establishment of overlay districts should follow the guidelines and recommendations that result from the adoption of a Master Open Space Plan, as recommended on Figure 11.2: Key Policy Issues.
Homer Glen's Conservation Subdivision design standards were established in 2006, along with tree preservation regulations as a method to preserve the character, environment, and quality of the Village in face of rapid development. These design standards are intended to protect natural resources and preserve open space over time as a requirement of future residential development at no cost to taxpayers. Homer Glen’s approach to requiring all residential developments to conform to the overly restrictive requirements of conservation subdivisions has resulted in no new residential subdivisions in the past decade.

Open spaces are preserved as a result of the design flexibility afforded by the conservation subdivision standards, such as the reduction in required lot sizes and through carefully planned clustering of homes in proximity to large parcels of inter-connected open space lands.

Conservation subdivisions can be a significant tool in expanding housing options. Once the net density in a conservation subdivision is determined, a mix of housing types within a development should be allowed to permit developers to be more responsive to local market demands/needs and provide housing for the full life-cycle of individuals seeking to move to Homer Glen or remain in later retirement years. This flexibility enhances a developer’s ability to develop sites within shorter time frames bringing needed housing on the market sooner.

In addition to open space and tree preservation, other policies to promote sustainability should be considered, such as LEED certification in building construction and net-zero energy consumption. These objectives may be appropriate for planned unit developments on sites under 10 acres or with less tree cover, which could also be incentivized.

**CONSERVATION APPROACHES**

During the process to evaluate current code provisions, Village officials should consider other potential approaches to achieving the goals of the community, as noted below, in-lieu of requiring all residential development to comply with conservation subdivision standards. Specific recommendations are summarized on the next page.

- Mapping of areas of dense tree coverage, conservation easements, stormwater facilities, and areas identified as greenways in the master open space plan.
- Exclusion of commercial corridors from the application of conservation subdivision standards (overlay districts).
- As discussed in the Consultant Team’s review of the tree preservation regulations, developing a conservation easement program, as is done in several communities in the Barrington, IL area, may be a viable option to securing additional open spaces.
- Density bonuses are the most common tool used in-lieu of mandatory conservation requirements as an incentive for developers to choose the conservation subdivision approach over traditional development.

**CONSERVATION GUIDELINES**

**OPEN SPACE CONNECTIVITY/MASTER OPEN SPACE PLAN**

Rather than making the conservation subdivision regulations mandatory, a greenway/openspace plan could be the basis for modifying the application of the conservation subdivision requirements. Open spaces should be connected from one neighborhood to the next, where feasible, creating an extensive, interlinked ‘green’ network. The new open space areas not only allow the Village to further protect environmentally sensitive lands and community character, but also allow additional trails, walking paths, and parks to be built for the benefit of all residents. Connected open spaces promote and protect wildlife through the establishment of greenway corridors. Many of the Village’s scenic vistas can be saved, helping to preserve rural character.
Although the commitments to maintaining community character and environmental quality through conservation design practices remain as important policies, existing conservation subdivision regulations do not adequately balance preservation and environmental quality while permitting new economic development to enhance the Village’s tax base.

**Application Options**

- Open Space Plan (emphasis on preservation of significant natural resources), as the basis for applying conservation regulations.
- Permit as an optional form of development with density incentives.
- Exclude the mixed use parcels along 159th Street and create an overlay district.

**Recommendations for Further Consideration**

- Allow for greater flexibility in lot size standards.
- Conservation subdivisions should be designed as ‘density neutral’ developments.

  The density allowed in a conservation subdivision should not exceed the number of homes that could be built in a standard subdivision with compliance with all of the Village’s development regulations. Often, the determination of the maximum density is based on a ‘Yield Plan.’ The yield plan is a conceptual level drawing showing the conventional subdivision lotting allowed using the lot size and dimensional requirements of the zoning and subdivision codes, and unbuildable lands (floodplains, wetlands, stormwater management areas, protected natural areas, etc.).

- Provide flexibility in the ability of developers to arrange units. With greater flexibility more open space preservation is possible. The required open space should not be restricted to about 90% of the residential lots within a subdivision.

- Provide density bonuses for uses like workforce housing.

**Developer Fees**

- Reducing developer fees in conservation subdivisions can be an incentive tool.

**The conservation design regulations are overly restrictive, resulting in no new growth of subdivisions in the past ten years. This has handcuffed the entire community’s growth.**

**Flexible Design Requirements**

- The Village may consider providing flexibility as to when conservation subdivision design is required, such as allowing site with less than 10% tree cover under standard subdivision regulations, while maintaining a minimum open space requirement of 20% of the net land area. This should be applied to all residential zoning districts. The current open space requirements ranging from 20% to 50% of the net lot area is overly restrictive as it is required in addition to land set aside for a park.

- Park land may be counted toward the required open space requirement provided the land dedicated to the park is usable and does not include any environmentally sensitive areas.

**Ownership & Maintenance**

- The regulations establish that after 5 years the conservation open space may be dedicated to the Village with no continuing obligation for maintenance or payment of costs. Over time this could place a significant burden on staff and Village financial resources. The Village’s preference is private ownership with public access easements. Consideration should be given to requiring the creation of a Special Service Area applied to all conservation areas.