



*Highland
Park,*
ILLINOIS

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HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS

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HONORING THE PAST,
BUILDING THE FUTURE

"Highland Park, Illinois, is no stranger to progress. In the decades since our 1869 founding, two towns combined to become one, farms made way for homes, a military academy and a four-story hotel have been replaced, traffic is no longer one-way on Central, two train lines are now one...Throughout Highland Park's history, we have embraced change and seized opportunities to strengthen our City for years to come."

- Mayor Nancy R. Rotering

This mature, ambitious city on the North Shore of Chicago celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2019. Business View recently spoke with Highland Park City Manager, Ghida S. Neukirch, Assistant City Manager, Rob Sabo, and Business Development Manager, Carolyn Hersch, to learn what's happening development-wise, and what fuels Highland Park's vision for the future.

ON BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Highland Park has a comprehensive and





aggressive business development strategic plan with four strategies for business attraction and retention purposes, and a multitude of initiatives for stimulating business and economic development in the community. The plan was developed based on feedback from City Council, staff, property owners, businesses, and other professionals in and around the community.

Neukirch explains, “That’s the umbrella that guides our efforts for a two-year period. It’s reviewed and updated regularly. One specific initiative is in the central business district. After a study, and working with our commission and our business community, the city modified our zoning regulations, and we now provide for an opportunity

for greater density development in the downtown district, while still being thoughtful of the quality of life and the impact of that development on the community. We went from 15 to 65 units per acre in the central business district to invite additional development and put pedestrian traffic on the streets to support our businesses.”

The initiative has been well received, and the city is seeing results of the rezoning from several developments that are currently underway, and others in the pipeline to be planned. There are \$14 million worth of infrastructure improvements planned this year; including updating roads and bike paths to spur development activity and attract people to the community.



Highland Park has nine Business Districts, and works closely with businesses and property owners in each of them. Neukirch gives an example, “In the downtown district, we have urban design guidelines that steer redevelopment. As those properties are being redeveloped, we see buildings with more of an urban/suburban feel, as opposed to Briergate, which is more of our light industrial district. We’ve worked with property owners there for gateway signage – making modifications to our sign code, making sure that the signs meet the needs of the businesses. It’s being proactive in working with property owners and businesses to understand what their needs are and to address the distinct attributes for each of those districts.”

Sabo notes, “Highland Park is unique in its location as a North Shore community on the Lake Michigan, so it has wonderful beachfront access. Along the lines of transportation, we have close



AT A GLANCE HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS

WHAT: Suburban city in Lake County, Illinois; population 29,763

WHERE: 25 miles north of downtown Chicago

WEBSITE: www.cityhpil.com

access to major state highways, i.e. 294; we’re along the Skokie - Hwy 41 corridor; and we have three metro stations within the community. We also have Pace (metro Chicago suburban bus division) running through the community, and we offer a free ride connector service to senior residents.”



The city's population hovers around 29,000, with healthy redevelopment taking place. An affluent, highly-educated community, Highland Park has much to offer: a stable economic base, a low crime rate, top-rated schools, and a lower sales tax than bordering municipalities. Highland Park Hospital (a University of Chicago affiliate and NorthShore University HealthSystem provider) is a major employer in the community.

LEADERS IN SUSTAINABILITY

Highland Park's Sustainability Strategic Plan is available for viewing on the city website, and well worth a look. It's an extremely robust, 20-year plan that sets forth several different initiatives, many of which are already accomplished. Sabo notes, "This

year, we're in the process of setting up a three-year sustainability plan to keep pushing ourselves forward. We do offer sustainability processes – for instance, we're leaders with respect to composting. We recently entered into a refuse and recycling contract, both for residential and commercial, that allows people to co-mingle yard waste with compost materials, and we're really trying to promote that in the community. We also have a recycling center in the north part of the city that collects electronic waste, as well as Styrofoam, shoes, and textile goods.

"We really do take a leadership approach to our environmentally conscious programming. Since 2010, we've accomplished over 100 different impactful sustainability projects. On an ongoing



basis, community education and awareness of various sustainability practices is a big one for us, because we see ourselves as a green community; it's part of our culture – organizationally and as a municipality."

DIVERSIFICATION MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

The Green Bay Trail and the Robert McClory Bike Path run all the way from Chicago up to Wisconsin, and right through Highland Park's downtown. Hersch says, "Not only is our downtown walkable, but it's a vibrant shopping district;



IAMMA OUTSTANDING MANAGER AWARD

City Manager Ghida Neukirch was recognized with an Outstanding Manager Award by the Illinois Association of Municipal Management Assistants for her extensive contributions to the City and the municipal management profession. Ghida works closely with the City Council and the City's executive management team to oversee daily operations. Her leadership has resulted in numerous accomplishments including maintaining the City's AAA bond rating, completing a municipal consolidation of fire and EMS to provide services to the nearby City of Highland, and the completion of multiple public works projects, including new sidewalks, miles of water main replacements, and road repairs, among many others.

Congratulations Ghida!





“We are a community that really embraces and supports the arts. Throughout the city, you’ll find various pieces of public art for the residents to enjoy. Our sesquicentennial is in 2019, and we are planning major programming for that.”

ROB SABO
ASSISTANT CITY
MANAGER

an upscale urban center filled with one-of-a-kind shops, national names, and unique restaurants. Our city’s other eight business districts range from quaint neighborhoods and charming shops and bistros, to frontage along the highway lined with car dealerships, service businesses, and national retailers.”


Located on Roger Williams Avenue between Green Bay Road and St. Johns Avenue, the charming and quaint Ravinia Business District is home to diverse restaurants, retailers, arts & crafts shops, service businesses, medical providers, and other office users. The proximity of the Ravinia/Metra train station and the renowned Ravinia Festival (a world-class summer

venue for the performing arts that draws more than 500,000 attendees over 87 nights from May until late September) create wonderful opportunities for entrepreneurs and seasoned businesses.

Indeed, it’s diversification that makes the city special. Favored as the heart of the North Shore, Highland Park offers excellent business prospects, along with the mix of residential tranquility, first-rate cultural and entertainment venues, and the natural beauty of beaches and parks. Sabo gives a nod to the thriving cultural scene, “We are a community that really embraces and supports the arts. Throughout the city, you’ll find various pieces of public art for the residents to enjoy. Our sesquicentennial is in 2019, and we are planning major programming for that.”

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