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Report on Joint Northfield and Winnetka Willow Road Plan and Work with The Lakota Group

Villages Work Together on Willow Road Plan

An important new Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) design policy and a joint effort by the Villages of Northfield and Winnetka have launched a new design process for Willow Road. As recently noted in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Pioneer Press*, the Villages of Northfield and Winnetka have joined together to develop a new community-led process, working under a new IDOT policy meant to give greater weight to the impacts road design and planning have on maintaining and enhancing community character and quality of life. This new community-based process, referred to as Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) or context sensitive design, will be facilitated by The Lakota Group and conducted in conjunction with Senator Schoenberg's office and the Illinois Department of Transportation.

This design process will build upon the important work and data previously developed by the Village of Northfield and IDOT, which culminated in a consensus plan in 2005. While this plan was not implemented, it created a strong basis for shared community sentiment and goals, both of which will be brought into the Villages' joint collaboration on the Context Sensitive Solutions process. This new IDOT process seeks to allow communities to verbally and visually establish their own shared vision and values for roadway planning and design through open communication, interdisciplinary approaches, reviews of all modes of travel, quality design and aesthetic solutions. *Fundamentally, CSS seeks to consider the communities' shared character and address quality of life issues.*

While Willow Road is a State Strategic Regional Arterial Roadway, it is also a "Main Street" or "Front Door" to Northfield and Winnetka. "It is a road that connects our neighborhoods with area schools, religious institutions, open space and recreation facilities and, in the case of Northfield, the downtown business district," notes Scott Freres. Scott is a principal with The Lakota Group, the Chicago-based urban design and planning firm that the Villages engaged to facilitate the dialogue with residents and stakeholders.

Group Establishes Goals and Objectives

"Our end goal," reports Scott Freres, "is to retain the flavor of these communities through sound planning, big picture thinking and a positive approach to the issues. We believe that good planning and design will set a desired engineering course in motion, one that reflects the communities' shared goals and principles."

These fundamental goals and principles for this context-sensitive planning process will be formulated, shaped and used to develop a range of ideas and evaluate solutions with the communities. The project Steering Committee, which is made up of a core group of leaders from Northfield and Winnetka, including Northfield's Village President John Birkinbine and representatives from park, school and other Village commissions and boards - Peter Fischer, Scott Turban and Fred Gougler from Northfield with Village Manager Stacy Sigman as liaison - has developed the first draft of these fundamental goals and principles. (*See the other side for a listing of the "Core Fundamental Planning & Design Principles."*)

**Residents Invited to Attend Community Workshops - 7 PM Wednesday, Sept. 19
and Oct. 17 at the North Shore Senior Center, 161 Northfield Road**

Steering Committee Brings Willow Road Knowledge and Wide Range of Leadership

The involvement of several Steering Committee members on previous Willow Road projects has provided the team with a breadth of knowledge and history that allows the team to continue moving forward and focus on alternatives within the goals of Context Sensitive Solutions and design.

In addition to understanding vehicular traffic volume and movements, this design process will look at opportunities for creating safe, well-designed bicycle and pedestrian linkages and better open space connections. Appearance and character issues such as screening, landscape treatments and signage will also be explored.

"We have an opportunity here to create a model for good regional planning and sustainable design solutions for a Strategic Regional Arterial Roadway, one that respects both the needs and characters of the communities with those of maintaining appropriate levels of safe traffic movement," says Freres. "IDOT has reshaped its thinking and it's time to revisit this issue within a limited time frame."

Workshops Give Residents Chance to be Involved

The Committee and consultants will use the summer months to gather data, develop strategies and establish a dialogue with as many area leaders and stakeholders as possible. A community-wide workshop is planned for 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, September 19 at the North Shore Senior Center, 161 Northfield Road in Northfield to get residents' input into the design and evaluate visual preferences and opportunities. This will be an opportunity for residents to offer initial design ideas and to evaluate preferences rather than simply comment on proposed or existing design concepts.

A second community workshop will take place at the North Shore Senior Center at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 17, where the planning team and Steering Committee will bring forward a range of ideas, solutions and imagery to gain further community input.

Core Planning & Design Principles

Safety

Provide new roadway solutions that are equal to or better than existing vehicular and pedestrian safety conditions.

Transportation Linkages

Create, enhance and promote safe and secure new and future unified pedestrian and bicycle linkages, routes and crossings.

Access Points

Provide safe traffic patterns and access to and from adjacent neighborhoods and businesses.

Environmental Context

Reduce and improve environmental impacts through sound sustainable design and best management practices.

Open Space

Enhance area character through aesthetically pleasing landscape solutions and other "green" open space practices.

Context Sensitive Approach

Build upon and more clearly define IDOT's definition and guiding principles for Context Sensitive Solutions to individual community character, roadway design and planning.

The planning team and Steering Committee intend to bring this planning and design process to fruition with a Preferred Preliminary Willow Road Enhancement Plan in late 2007 or early 2008. The Steering Committee will present their findings and preferred plan directions to both Village Boards for adoption and subsequent follow-up discussions with IDOT and Senator Schoenberg's office.

For more information on the Illinois Department of Transportation's Context Sensitive Solutions initiative, log on to <http://www.dot.state.il.us/css/home.html>. For more information and updates on the Willow Road Lakota Study, log on to www.northfieldil.org.

