

growth

diversity

respect

opportunity

interaction

**Town of Cortland
Comprehensive Plan**





Cortland Comprehensive Plan

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March 13, 2006, Uptown/Civic Center Sub-Area Plan (Ordinance No. 2006-53)

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February 26, 2007, Future Land Use Plan, conservation development practices (Ordinance No. 2007-07)

Preface

This Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for the Town of Cortland to build upon and to address all aspects of community development that may arise in the future. It is not the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan to predict the future; rather it is to provide a vision, or direction, for the community to move toward. For this reason, this document is intended to be dynamic and respond to changes that will occur in the community over time. In the process the Town has the ability to allocate resources and to determine priorities, usually in advance of need as opposed to reacting to unanticipated needs.

The Comprehensive Plan represents a destination the Town is expected to move towards over time. It is not a finish line to race towards.

The adoption of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan does not complete the process. In many respects, the planning process only begins with the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan identifies many tasks the Town will need to undertake in the future to achieve the collective vision. In fact, there is much work ahead for the Town. But the Cortland Comprehensive Plan can help provide the direction and focus necessary to keep the Town moving toward its vision.

The intention of the community is not to limit or prohibit growth and new development, but to encourage it and allow it to flourish only if growth and development provides positive contributions to the quality of life in Cortland and the quality of municipal services provided by the Town.

Like many of its counterparts in DeKalb County, Cortland is beginning to experience tremendous development pressure. Already having adopted a Comprehensive Plan and experienced in implementing a plan, the Town is, perhaps, more prepared than other communities in the County to deal with the growth and development decisions that are facing the County and Cortland in particular. Nevertheless, the Town will be facing in the immediate and distant future unprecedented community development decisions.

The Cortland Vision

What will Cortland be like or become in the future?

Residents want Cortland to accommodate growth and development in order to make Cortland a vibrant, thriving community bound together by close neighborhood relationships among its people, and to provide an array of services and amenities for residents and visitors. Additionally, residents desire to maintain a community wherein individuals and families can be provided a safe and secure neighborhood; where there is diversity and respect; where children are provided opportunities for growth and development; and, where residents can be assured that the value of their property will be maintained.

The vision for Cortland includes providing all people with choices and options for housing, travel, recreation, cultural activities, and employment opportunities; and providing for their basic personal needs. Essential to this vision is a community that is visually attractive and appealing, and where interaction among residents is encouraged and is a daily routine.

Cortland will be a community where environmental stewardship is part of the culture and the land is considered a resource, not a commodity. The community places a high value on conservation of natural resources and applying “green building” principles to new construction and land development practices.

Residents want Cortland to be a place where there is an open exchange of information among its residents, business owners and government; where the local government is fiscally responsible, yet attends to the community’s needs for expanding services and amenities; and, where they can be filled with pride about calling Cortland home.

Issues and Opportunities

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to state the shared vision of the community, identify major forces affecting the local government and its citizens, set goals and standards, and serve as a series of guiding principles and priorities to implement the vision.

LOCATION

Cortland is located immediately east of the city of DeKalb and adjacent the DeKalb-Taylor Municipal Airport. The community is located near the Interstate 88 and Peace Road interchange and is easily accessible to Chicago and the Fox Valley suburbs to the east.

The Union Pacific Railroad (UP), formerly the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad, cuts across the community. The UP is a high speed mainline track from Chicago to points west and across the Mississippi River. Grain elevators in the central business district along the railroad are the last remnants of Cortland's roots as an agricultural market.

Cortland sits atop a flat plain overlooking the East Branch of the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River to the northeast. The topography is flat with little relief except near the named and unnamed drainage ways in the landscape. A high seasonable water table causes periodic saturation of the soils and an extensive agricultural drainage system drains the soil and makes it suitable for modern mechanized farming operations. The topography and soil characteristics make it suitable and productive for crop farming. Woodlands are scarce in the Cortland planning area and are concentrated along the Kishwaukee River.

The Town sits at the leading edge of a growth corridor extending westward from Aurora-Naperville along Interstate 88, as well as from the Fox River communities from Elgin to Aurora. Once considered remote, Cortland is increasingly being pulled into the expanding exurban area of the Chicago metropolitan area.

EXISTING LAND USE

Cortland occupies a small amount of land. Development in Cortland is concentrated around the railroad crossing at Somonauk Road and north and south along Somonauk Road. Recent additions such as the Cortland Estates, Neucort Lakes and Heatherfield neighborhoods are separated from the community by farmland and other rural land uses.

Commercial land uses in Cortland are sparse. A cluster of commercial uses is located at the intersections of Somonauk Road and IL 38 and Loves Road and IL 38, and in the area of the railroad crossing on Somonauk Road. The "downtown" area also is where the Town Hall, library and post office are located.

Industrial land uses are located along IL 38 at Loves Road and a small area on Elm Street along the railroad. Industrial uses in Cortland tend to be small machine shop-type enterprises. A wood truss assembly plant and a concrete products plant are the largest industrial operations in Cortland, today. A commercial grain storage operation in the downtown continues to operate despite constraints posed by the small irregularly-shaped site.

At present, much of Cortland's land area is in agriculture land use. This is somewhat misleading because the existing agriculture land use is temporary and belies what the future land uses will be once the undeveloped parcels are developed. This is due to a number of recent annexations which have expanded the Town's boundaries in anticipation of future development. The agriculture land also distorts the percentage of land use for residential land

uses. If the agriculture land use is removed from the tally, residential land uses account for fifty-percent of the land area in Cortland (31% single-family, 19% multiple-family). Regardless whether agriculture is considered in the overall land use distribution, single-family land use accounts for 62% of all the residential land in Cortland.

Table 1. Existing Land Use Distribution, Town of Cortland

	Acres	Percent
AGRICULTURE	646	56%
CIVIC/INSTITUTIONAL	7	1%
COMMERCIAL	33	3%
INDUSTRIAL	47	4%
PARKS & OPEN SPACE	48	4%
SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	158	14%
MULTIPLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	96	8%
UTILITY & RAILROAD	79	7%
VACANT	39	3%
Total		100%

DEMOGRAPHICS¹

From 1970 to 2000 Cortland's population grew an average of three-percent per year (Table 2)¹. During this time, DeKalb County's population grew an average of 0.80 percent annually. When examined in further detail Cortland's population grew by 1.5 percent from 1970 to 1980 but declined by more than 14% from 1980 to 1990. The Town's population experienced its greatest rate of growth in the following decade. Between 1990 and 2000 the population grew by more than 114%. The Town's current population is estimated to be 3,025 persons.

Table 2. Town Population 1970-2000.

	1970	1980	1990	2000
Population	1,138	1,155	963	2,066

Age group distribution (Table 3) is broken into six broad demographic categories: 0-4 years, 5-17 years, 18-24 years, 25-44 years, 45-64 years, and 65 years and older. A closer examination of this information reveals that the greatest rates of increase occurred in the 5-17 years (204%), 25-44 years (120%), and 0-4 years (117%) age groups. Even the 65+ age group showed a significant increase of 11% from 1990.

¹ All demographic data is obtained from the 1990 and 2000 US Census, Bureau of the Census

Table 3. Population Distribution by Age Groups (1990-2000)

	1990	2000
0-4 Years	86	187
5-17 Years	177	539
18-24 Years	73	149
25-44 Years	352	773
45-64 Years	173	305
65 + Years	102	113
Total	963	2,066

By examining the population distribution by age groups it is apparent the population of Cortland is getting younger. In fact the median age of the population in Cortland fell from 31.0 years of age in 1990 to 28.4 years in 2000.

According to US Census information, roughly one-third of the Cortland population in-migrated from other locations in DeKalb County in 1990 (Table 4). By 2000 only one-sixth of the Cortland population in-migrated from other locations in DeKalb County. The data reveals that by 2000 Cortland already had become a receiving city for the outward population migration from the Chicago suburbs. Transfers from other states and foreign countries remained unchanged during the period between 1990 and 2000.

Table 4. Population In-Migration (1990-2000)

Residence 5-years prior to Census:	1990	Percent of Population	2000	Percent of Population
Same house	427	49%	972	53%
Other house:				
In same county	275	31%	301	16%
In same state	98	11%	382	21%
In different state	73	8%	159	9%
Puerto Rico	0	0%	0	0%
Foreign Country	5	1%	19	1%
Elsewhere	0	0%	0	0%
Total Population	878		1,833	

Education attainment rose dramatically among adults 25-years of age or older between 1990 and 2000 (Table 5). The ratio of adults holding a college degree rose from 23% in 1990 to 29% in 2000.

Table 5. Education Attainment (1990-2000)

	1990	2000
Less than 9th Grade	42	44
Some High School, no diploma	88	110
High School, including equivalency	236	346
Some college, no degree	120	414
Associate degree	53	84
Bachelor's degree	67	187
Graduate or professional degree	25	81
Total Adults 25-years of age or older	631	1,212
Mean Education Attainment (years):	12.54	13.75

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The average median household income in Cortland rose from \$36,858 in 1990 to \$57,361 in 2000. The total number of households in 1990 was 353. The total number of households in 2000 was 686.

HOUSING UNITS

In 1990 there were 366 housing units in Cortland, of which 13 units (3.5%) were vacant. Of the 353 occupied housing units, 281 units were owner occupied and 72 units (20%) were renter occupied. By 2000 there were 723 housing units, of which 22 units (3.0%) were vacant. Of the 701 occupied housing units in Cortland in 2000, 501 units were owner occupied and 200 units (28.5%) were renter occupied. The sharp increase in the ratio of rental units is due, in large measure, to the addition of the Cortland Estates Apartment complex during this period.

Single-family dwellings are the predominant housing type in Cortland (Table 6). In 1990, single-family dwellings accounted for 291 (85.3%) of the total dwelling units in Cortland. In 2000, single-family dwellings amounted to 527 (75.3%) of the total dwelling in the Town. The drop in the ratio of single-family dwellings in 2000 can be attributed to the addition of the Cortland Estates Apartment complex and other multiple-family dwellings during this period.

Table 6. Occupied Housing Characteristics (1990-2000)

	1990	2000
1, Detached	278	496
1, Attached	13	31
2	42	43
3 or 4	5	27
5 to 9	0	81
10 to 19	0	13
20 to 49	0	0
50 or more	0	9
Mobile Home or Trailer	0	0
Other	3	0
Total Housing Units	341	700

The median value of a house in Cortland in 1990 was \$79,800. Median house value rose to \$134,000 in 2000.

EMPLOYMENT

The Cortland workforce, that is, the number of adults 16-years of age or older in Cortland, grew by more than 110% between 1990 and 2000. Changes in employment of the Cortland population mirrored changes occurring nationally during the same period. Table 7 compares the changes in workforce employment by industry. The only industry showing a decline in employment among the Cortland workforce is "Mining." Service industries registered huge changes in employment with "Entertainment and Recreation Services" growing by nearly 2,000% from 1990 to 2000. Large gains were felt in "Construction," "Public Administration," "Service," and "Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries."

Table 7. Population Employment by Industry (1990-2000)

	1990	2000
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries	10	20
Mining	5	4
Construction	38	114
Manufacturing	152	204
Transportation, Communication & Other Public Utilities	27	52
Wholesale Trade	25	48
Retail Trade	94	122
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	26	47
Service	116	379
Entertainment and Recreation Services	2	37
Public Administration	12	44
Total:	507	1,071

Shifts among occupations in the workforce also mirrored national trends. White-collar occupations among the Cortland workforce registered the largest gains between 1990 and 2000 (Table 8). “Professional, Specialty and Technical” and “Sales” occupations saw gains of 370% and 400%, respectively, during the period. “Farming, Forestry and Fisheries” and “Service Occupations” occupation categories experienced absolute declines in employment of the Cortland workforce.

Table 8. Population Employment by Occupation (1990-2000)

	1990	2000
Managerial Occupations	43	118
Professional Specialty & Technical Occupations	40	188
Sales Occupations	55	277
Service Occupations	155	154
Farming, Forestry, & Fishing Occupations	4	2
Precision Production, Craft & Repair Occupations	110	129
Operators, Fabricators & Laborers	100	203
Total	507	1,071

Public Participation

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to document the process for engaging the community in the development and preparation of the Comprehensive Plan.

IMAGE PREFERENCE SURVEY

An Image Preference Survey was conducted as one of the opportunities for public involvement in the process for preparing the Cortland Comprehensive Plan. This consensus building technique was used to draw out community values on various community development and growth issues, and to identify community preferences for design, appearance and relationships of various types of land development which may not exist in Cortland, today.

The purpose of the Image Preference Survey is to use images to establish a common terminology, an understanding about critical design issues, and to forge a consensus about choices affecting the future. The numerical scores assigned to the images are indications of core community values and are used to help focus the vision citizens have for the future of Cortland. From this vision are derived the principles, strategies and decisions to guide future growth and (re)development in Cortland. The most positive images, in effect, influence the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Image Preference Survey was administered in June, 1996 to fourteen residents. In February 2004 an abbreviated version of the Image Preference Survey was administered to the Planning Commission and Board of Trustees as a follow-up to the original Survey and to verify that community preferences had not changed markedly from the original Survey.

Survey participants were shown approximately 120 images representing all types of land development found in Cortland and elsewhere in the region. These images were supplemented with images from other regions of the country to provide a greater breadth of choices to show a variety of alternatives and solutions used elsewhere for similar development types. The “appropriateness” of an image for Cortland was not a consideration in the selection of the images. The images were intended to cover the entire range of development applications and represented good and bad examples. Images in each category were shown in random order. The images were grouped into the following categories:

Commercial and Office	Accessory Apartment	Street and Alley
Landscape	Civic	Mixed Use
Parking	Industrial	Single-Family
Multiple-Family	Parks	

Participants were instructed to assign a numerical value to each image on a scale reflecting their level of approval or satisfaction of the image with -5 representing complete disapproval and +5 representing complete approval. Zero indicated a neutral response. In this Survey all positive scores are considered positive or desirable; all negative scores are considered negative or undesirable.

The range of values for similar or like images represents varying degrees of approval or disapproval of the various elements or features in the images. The differences in numerical values are relative and do not represent orders of magnitude. A +2.00 is three points from complete approval or acceptance, but is two points better than no opinion. The difference between a score of +2.58 and a score of +2.69 or +2.12 among similar images is small

enough to be negligible, but the comments and explanations provided by participants for the images is insightful and exposes community values. Survey participants who attended the *charrette* provided clarification or the reasons why an image was given a positive or negative score or why similar images received disparate scores.

After the scores were tabulated, the average scores were reviewed with Survey participants to determine why certain images received the scores they did, and to identify the specific features in the images that contributed or detracted from the score they were given. In this manner, Cortland residents could express their particular likes and dislikes about particular images and filter out images that may have inadvertently prejudiced the scores. For example, if an image was too dark and prevented viewers from understanding what was in the image or from forming an opinion or reaction, or the image contained some particularly attractive or beautiful floral display or architectural element that was an obvious prejudicial element, the group determined whether the image and score were valid and should be used in the findings.

Cortland residents are loyal to the community; however, this loyalty did not restrain participants from constructively criticizing certain images of development in Cortland. The highest scores in the Image Preference Survey were given to open space and well-landscaped images, pedestrian-scaled shopping areas and images of tree-lined mature neighborhoods. Even images that included no pedestrians but showed an otherwise inviting and pedestrian-friendly environment scored high, such as Image No. 8 (+1.23).

Images of unpaved areas, unscreened service alleys and outdoor storage areas, and unpaved parking lots such as Image No. 78 scored very low. Survey participants generally viewed unscreened service yards such as Image No. 151 (-2.79) negatively. Lack of landscaping or other screening measures, along with general lack of maintenance or visual interest, contributed to the low scores of these images.

Participants overwhelmingly favored landscaping across all of the categories. Also, images of development incorporating pedestrian friendly design, proportions, and amenities scored higher than those that did not. Favorable images were not limited to old or “historic” scenes. The use of land or buildings did not influence scores as much as the appearance of the pedestrian and/or public realm.

Generally, the Image Preference Survey found that Cortland residents prefer development that incorporates the following characteristics and attributes:

- Well-designed buildings, recognizable front doors or main entrances, and appropriate use of architectural detail and material color, and being able to recognize the use and purpose of the buildings
- Organization and order
- Pedestrian access, friendly environments
- Meaningful landscaping and well maintained and manicured landscaping
- Visual interest
- Screening cars from view or hiding parking lots altogether
- Designated pedestrian access across parking lots
- Buildings oriented toward the street, not to parking lots
- Site amenities using water
- Safety
- Proximity of houses to one another is important; don't like houses too close together

- Avoid garagescapes; garages need to be recessed or removed from the front of houses
- Front porches are highly desirable

COMMUNITY PLANNING CHARRETTE

Key to the public input and community involvement process was the Cortland Community Planning Charrette. The *charrette* was a highly focused, hands-on, collaborative, inclusive daylong event that transformed residents into planners and visionaries for Cortland. Fourteen residents participated in the *charrette*, all but two having no previous involvement with the local government. Prior to beginning their work in drafting their plans for Cortland participants reviewed selected images from the Image Preference Survey and were provided a primer on town planning principles and techniques. Each of the *charrette* teams presented their plans and recommendations to the group. The consultant took the *charrette* plans and prepared a “consensus plan” incorporating the common ideas and recommendations, as well as recommendations that provided interesting potential. The Consensus Plan was presented and reviewed by *charrette* participants and the Cortland Plan Commission at which point additional changes were recommended and incorporated in the Future Land Use Plan.

The intention of the community is not to limit or prohibit growth and new development, but to encourage it and allow it to flourish but only if growth and development provides positive contributions to the quality of life in the community and the quality of municipal services provided by the Town.

Change will be accepted in Cortland only if it contributes to these community **goals**:

- Physical expansion of Cortland is consistent with the Town's compact form;
- Growth and development cannot exceed the availability or capacity of municipal utilities and services;
- New neighborhood development reflects the current building relationships, scale, and uses;
- New development respects adjacent and surrounding agricultural operations and needs.
- Development and growth provide a positive contribution to the maintenance of Cortland's small town character, qualities and appearance;
- Growth and development create opportunities for new employment, shopping, recreation and community interaction in Cortland;
- New development allows Town government to efficiently and effectively provide basic infrastructure and services for the optimum level of public services for the health, safety and general welfare of all residents and does not harm or undermine the Town's financial health or creditworthiness; and,
- Growth and development contribute to the improvement of the quality of life in Cortland.

To achieve these goals, the following **policies** shall govern the physical change, development, and improvement of the Town and its neighborhoods.

1. Future neighborhoods shall be designed and developed with the pedestrian as the principal design determinant. Sidewalks shall be provided along all streets, tree banks—or parkways—separating sidewalks from streets shall be provided, and buildings shall be oriented toward the street and have pedestrian proportions and details, e.g. porches within conversation distance of the sidewalk, storefront windows adjacent the sidewalk.
2. A diversity of uses, building types and street types shall be provided on each block, in each neighborhood.
3. The influence of the motor vehicle shall be diminished by placing garages off alleys or setting garages back from the front building line of the house, placing parking lots behind commercial buildings, and designing streets to calm traffic.
4. An interconnected network of streets shall be established. Streets shall connect from neighborhood to neighborhood. Cul de sac and permanent dead-end streets shall be avoided. Block lengths shall be kept to a reasonable distance to facilitate pedestrian circulation.

5. A park shall be provided within a five-minute walk of every residence in Cortland.
6. Mixed-use buildings shall be concentrated in a new Downtown and in neighborhood commercial areas.
7. Storm water management shall be provided in all new neighborhoods. Overland drainage ways shall remain in or near their natural state and alignment. Storm water management facilities shall be introduced in existing neighborhoods expeditiously and economically.
8. Native landscaping material shall be used wherever possible to reduce irrigation and maintenance costs, to add beauty to the landscape, contribute to storm water management, and reinforce the Town's rural character.
9. Leapfrog or strip forms of development shall be avoided. The Town should attempt to reduce or deflect development pressure on adjoining farmland by encouraging development of the Town in a compact, dense form, and allow for careful, purposeful expansion of the Town's boundaries, neighborhoods and municipal services.
10. Developers shall be required to contribute to park, school and municipal infrastructure improvement costs.
11. Development along IL 38, Somonauk Road, Barber Greene Road, Airport Road should contribute to the appearance of the community. Development along these highways shall establish and maintain a gateway character helping to distinguish Cortland from various other communities along these highways.
12. Alleys shall be encouraged in order to improve the appearance of the streetscape, especially along high-density residential and commercial streets and to provide access to parking.
13. An inventory of parcels at key locations for industrial development shall be set aside to provide the Town with local employment opportunities and diversification of the Town's tax base for the near-term and the long-term.
14. Adequate municipal utility capacity shall be maintained to accommodate non-residential users.
15. The Town considers the relationship between the Cortland Comprehensive Plan and the DeKalb County Unified Comprehensive Plan as integral to the achievement of the community vision and will support the DeKalb County Unified Comprehensive Plan and DeKalb County's efforts to implement its plan.
16. In order to maintain the efficiency of the countywide thoroughfare network, development of property along County highways in the Cortland planning area shall conform to corridor access policies mutually adopted by the Town and County.

17. New neighborhood development shall be designed in accordance with conservation development principles, whereby a relatively low overall density is maintained on a given tract of land but development is concentrated in one or more locations and surrounded by open space that is used for farming, recreation, wastewater irrigation, or all of the above.
18. Residential and commercial buildings constructed in Cortland should reflect the Midwestern rural vernacular, e.g. Victorian, Italianate, gothic, Romanesque, Craftsman, and use outside building materials that are indigenous or traditional for agricultural and rural development, e.g. limestone, brick, wood, and metal.

Land Use and Natural Resources

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to translate the community vision into physical terms; provide a general pattern for the location, distribution, and characteristics of future land uses over the next generation; and serve as the element of the Comprehensive Plan upon which all other elements are based.

The Cortland Future Land Use Map is derived from the *charrette* plans prepared by residents during the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan. Generally, the *charrette* plans recommended a predominantly residential land use in Cortland in the future with two industrial “districts” established to provide local employment opportunities and to diversify the tax base. Commercial “districts” were identified in critical locations in the community.

Perhaps, the most significant recommendation to come out of the Cortland *charrette* was the community’s preference for mixed-use residential neighborhoods and conservation development principles. While residents were not opposed to non-single-family building typologies in Cortland, they expressed a general disdain for large concentrations of any particular non-single-family building typology, e.g. two-family, multiple-family, apartment buildings. This preference mirrors the socially and civically acceptable practice of scattering isolated or small groups of non-single-family building typologies throughout Cortland neighborhoods. This, in part, explains the absence of “multiple-family” or “medium-” or “high-density residential” land use classifications on the Cortland Future Land Use Map.

Conservation development principles apply to all the land uses on the Cortland Future Land Use Map. Generally, the average density north of North Avenue is two dwelling units per acre; between North Avenue and Interstate 88 the average density is four dwelling units per acre. Higher net densities in the developed portions of property and tracts of land will result. Open space uses, farm land, recreation, conservation, wastewater irrigation, shall account for forty-percent to fifty-percent of the development site. The Cortland Community Design Guidelines and building typology ratios (below) shall be applied in all conservation development areas. **The maximum density will ultimately be determined by the amount of open space and building typology ratios provided on any given development parcel.**

The Cortland Future Land Use Map identifies eight basic land use categories: mixed residential, central business district, commercial, industrial, parks and open space, civic, and agriculture.

Agriculture. Despite the amount of territory designated for future neighborhood development, agriculture is the preferred use of land in much of the planning area. Cortland respects agribusiness and the livelihoods represented by the fertile farmland surrounding the community.

Mixed Residential. This land use classification designates the areas suitable for residential development in a manner that emulates the established neighborhoods of Cortland. In this land use all residential building typologies are permitted **but non-single-family detached building typologies or uses may not exceed the following maximum ratios: two-family: 12%; other attached single-family: 12%; and multiple-family: 8%.** Provisions for housing for the senior population are encouraged and are not limited by these ratios. The ratios are expressed as a maximum of the total number of dwelling units planned for any given tract of land having at least ten acres of land area. The location, scale and design of non-single-family building typologies will be determined by the detailed land development standards to be adopted in the Cortland Zoning Ordinance.

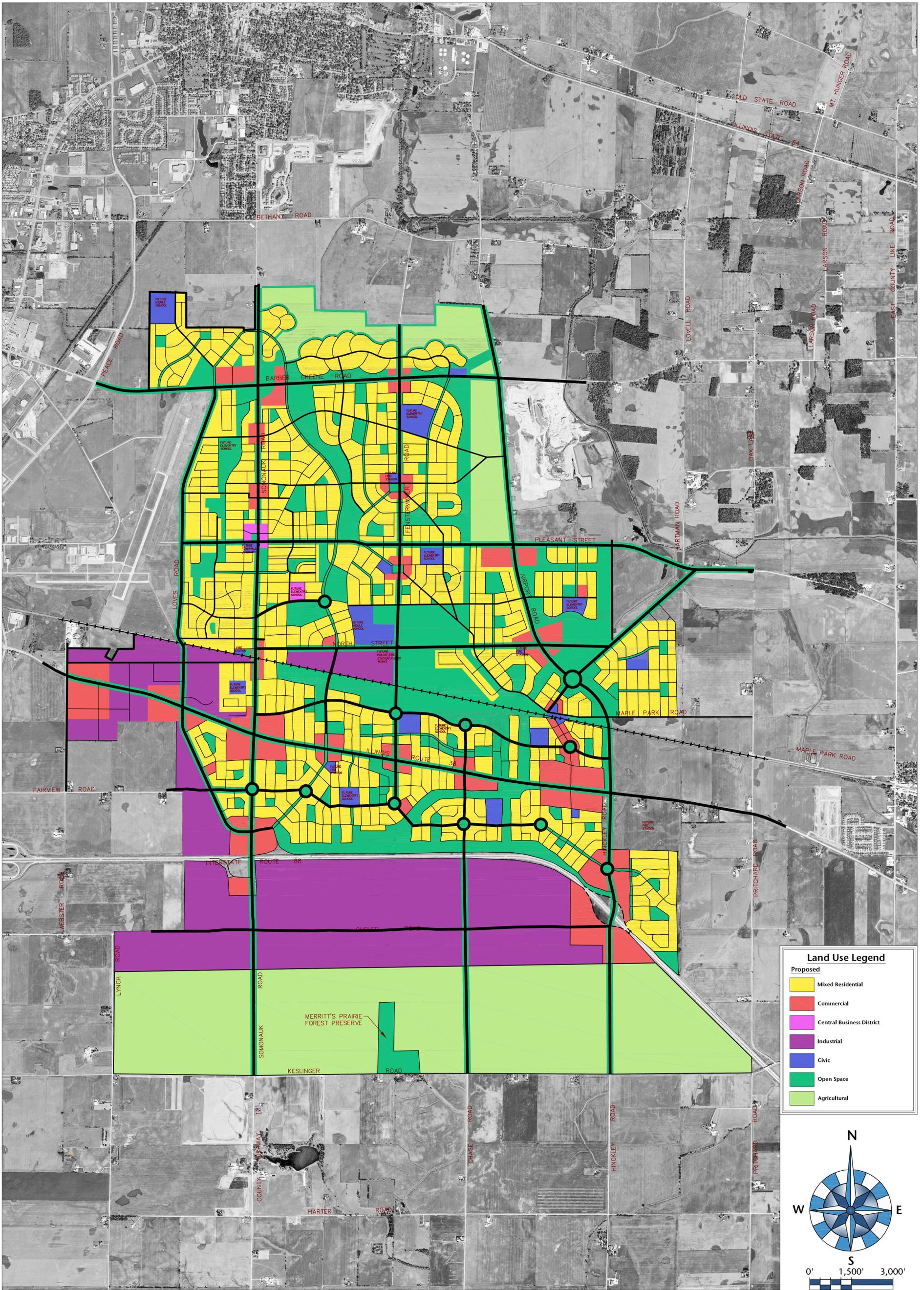
Commercial. This land use designates the preferred locations for retail, food service, personal and business services, offices, and automotive related uses. Mixed-use buildings, i.e. buildings having retail or food services or offices on the ground floor and offices and/or residential dwelling units on upper floors, are encouraged in these designated areas.

Industrial. This land use classification designates the areas suitable for industrial uses, including manufacturing, assembly, warehouses and logistics operations.

Parks and Open Space. This land use designates the preferred locations for public parks and private open spaces for active and passive recreation. This land use applies to formal public squares, facilities for programmed recreational activities, linear trails along major thoroughfares and drainage ways, and to natural areas and conservation areas.

Central Business District. This land use designation applies to the existing downtown and also the "Main Street" commercial area on Somonauk Road at Pleasant Street. The distinction between this land use and the commercial land use is the central business district also provides a central location for civic functions such as the Town Hall, post office, library and is somewhat centrally located for the future expansion of Cortland.

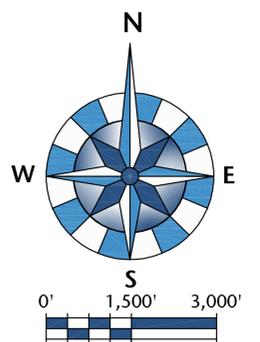
Civic. This land use classification designated locations for existing and future civic uses, including government facilities, churches, schools, libraries, day care, post offices, police and fire headquarters and sub-stations, and other community buildings.



Land Use Legend

Proposed

- Mixed Residential
- Commercial
- Central Business District
- Industrial
- Civic
- Open Space
- Agricultural



Comprehensive Plan • Future Land Use Plan

Town of Cortland

Sheet 1 of 1



Dated: December 5, 2006

Drawing Number: 98002_Land use plan 12-1-2006
© 2006 Land Vision Inc.

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Amended February 26, 2007
Ordinance No. 2007-07

Circulation and Transportation

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to consider all relevant modes of transportation and to establish the framework for the acquisition, protection, and preservation of existing and future rights-of-way.

The road network in Cortland is an expansion of Ezra Pound's original layout for the railroad. The road network around Cortland is primarily the rural section road system and circulation in and around Cortland is predicated on the automobile. The section road grid is disrupted by the UP Railroad, the DeKalb-Taylor Airport, Interstate 88, and the Kishwaukee River.

The growing emphasis on rail transportation in the Chicago metropolitan area and certain rail transportation initiatives by the Regional Transportation Authority's (RTA) commuter rail division, Metra, such as the extension of commuter rail service to Elburn six miles to the east and the STAR project which will provide a circumferential commuter rail route around the Chicago suburbs, will offer new commuter rail opportunities and options for Cortland residents in the future. At present, there are no plans to extend commuter rail service to Cortland or any other community in DeKalb County but Cortland should not conclude that such service will never be extended to the Town in the future.

In the meantime, the Town should use its position and authority to determine where future roads are located so that future additions to the community can be seamlessly woven together and reduce the overall impact on the road network.

IL 38 runs roughly parallel to the Union Pacific Railroad in the planning area and is the primary east-west arterial thoroughfare. It connects the Town with DeKalb and Rochelle on the west and Elburn, St. Charles and Wheaton on the east. The railroad is a divisive element in the Town's thoroughfare network disrupting the continuity of the network and concentrating traffic to a few grade crossings. The Town should protect the remaining railroad crossings from closure and plan for additional crossings because the railroad crossings (or lack, thereof) will alter traffic and land use patterns in the community.

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is reviewing environmental and engineering information pertaining to the preparation of a feasibility report for the Prairie Parkway, a limited access highway connecting I-88 with I-80. A link between I-88 and I-90, and beyond, also is contemplated, but is not included in the current study. A centerline was recently recorded for the highway between I-88 and I-80 but could be moved westward into DeKalb County as a result of engineering, environmental or political considerations before the highway is designed and constructed.

At present, the corridor is situated between Plano and Yorkville to the south and is not projected to travel north of Interstate Route 88. Whether Cortland will experience any direct benefit or adverse impact from the new highway is difficult to predict at this time. What is certain is the highway would improve Cortland's accessibility in the region, thereby improving economic development prospects in the future.

An interchange on Interstate 88 at Hinckley Road is identified on the Future Land Use Plan Map. At the present time, a developer is negotiating with the Illinois Toll Highway Authority to construct an interchange at this location. Presently, the developer has permission to prepare preliminary engineering and design plans for the interchange. The Authority has made no commitments to fund the improvement.

Para-transit service is provided in Cortland by Voluntary Action Center.

Community Facilities

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to provide an inventory of community facilities and to ensure that public facilities are provided as needed.

At present, the following public facilities or uses are located in Cortland:

- Town Hall
- Fire station
- Public Works building
- Cortland Community Park, Hetchler Park, McPhillips Park, Welsh Park, and Suppeland Park
- Post Office
- Library
- Cortland Elementary School
- Water tower
- Township Highway Department yard and buildings
- Wastewater reclamation facility

The Town has a public water distribution system and a sanitary sewage collection system. The DeKalb Sanitary District treats the sanitary waste from Cortland. Public storm water management system and facilities are present in the community.

At some point in the future the population of Cortland will grow sufficiently to warrant construction of new elementary schools, parks and other municipal facilities. The Town should begin preparing for this eventuality by developing a capital improvement program to itemize the park and other municipal improvements the community is likely to need, along with budget estimates and dates the facilities may be provided. The Town should use the annexation agreement as a tool to obtain necessary school, park and other municipal improvements.

The Town should work with the United States Postal Service to retain the post office operations and functions in the downtown. The Post Office is the community “front porch” and this use should remain in the historical core or heart of the community and continue its social meeting place function in the center of the community. The Post Office, along with the Town Hall and Library, is one of downtown Cortland’s “anchor tenants” and relocating it to an outlying location will be detrimental to the inherent functions of the downtown.

At present, the Town’s water and wastewater systems have adequate capacity to accommodate existing development in Cortland. New growth will require expansion of these facilities and the Town will need to monitor the available capacity in each system in order to begin expansion of the facilities in advance of need.

The Town is constructing a state-of-the-art wastewater reclamation facility that will employ land application technologies for sanitary waste disposal. The facility is considered the cornerstone for the community’s environmental ethic that permeates all aspects of community development.

Growth of the community will also place demands on the space needs for Town government, the library, and police and fire facilities. The present facilities are adequate for the present size of the community and for the near-term but will become inadequate as the community grows and expands. Growth will eventually require the addition of one or more new fire stations, and the Comprehensive Plan identifies several locations to reserve or set aside for future facilities.

Telecommunications Infrastructure

Telephone, personal wireless communication devices, and the Internet are a few of the types of communication being revolutionized, today. The tools and technologies being developed and implemented today will have repercussions on the future and could materially affect quality of life and economic development in Cortland in the future. The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to coordinate telecommunications initiatives in the region and encourage investment in the most advanced technologies.

The deregulation of the telecommunications industry and the providers of telecommunications services has shifted the burden of providing the latest in telecommunication technology and service on local governments.

Citizens are no longer guaranteed the latest advances in telecommunications service or facilities. Local governments will need to be vigilant about the services being provided in the community to be certain businesses and residents are being provided the very latest telecommunications technologies and to remain competitive in the economic development sphere.

Because Cortland, alone, does not possess the resources necessary to develop, attract, or retain the telecommunications infrastructure necessary to keep it competitive for economic development purposes, it should seek to partner with other communities in DeKalb County, or the IL 38 corridor, to ensure that the latest advances in telecommunications are provided in the Town and in DeKalb County.

Housing

The purpose of this element of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan is to document present and future needs for housing in Cortland, including, affordability, visitability, and other special housing needs; identify the barriers to housing in Cortland; assess the condition of the local housing stock; and, develop strategies, programs and other actions to address the needs for a range of housing options in Cortland.

Cortland's housing stock is primarily single-family in character. There are a few buildings designed or used for more than one family, but these are the exception in the Town. The housing inventory is generally in good condition, but a collection of dwellings in the original town are substandard with respect to their size or the facilities provided in them or the level of maintenance performed on the structures over the years. Ongoing building and property maintenance code enforcement will be needed in the Town to prevent the condition of the housing stock from deteriorating and materially affecting the appearance and value of all property in the Town.

The housing stock is varied: large and small, old and new. In addition to single-family homes, two-family, attached single-family, apartments, and other multiple-family building typologies are present in Cortland. Maintaining a diverse mix of housing, such as size, value, type (single-family, multiple-family, rental) as the community grows and develops will be one of the Town's biggest challenges in the future.

Owning a house remains the American dream. Whether it remains a dream or is attainable for many people depends upon local government practices, as much as job security and mortgage interest rates. Small decisions, such as the minimum lot size or whether or not to permit multiple-family or apartment development in a community, materially affect whether a community and its housing practices are exclusionary or not.

The demand for housing in the future is likely to be much different than the past fifty years. Today, the majority (76%) of homebuyers are non-traditional families, including single persons, single parents, empty-nesters, same-sex households, married couples with no children, and others, with single women representing the largest segment (26%) of the non-traditional house buyer. The type of house a single women wants (size, amenities, yard, garage, neighborhood environment) is undeniably different than the traditional nuclear family or the empty-nester wants. The increasing differentiation among the buyers in the market will continue to bring new and different housing choices to Cortland in the future.

The Cortland Comprehensive Plan emphasizes development of mixed-residential neighborhoods that provide a wide range of housing types in close proximity to each other to provide neighborhood stability and offer choices and options within the neighborhood. Mixed-residential neighborhoods are a key to Cortland's character and the quality of life in the community and replicating this neighborhood planning concept in new neighborhood development in Cortland is the focus of the Comprehensive Plan.

Economic Development

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to coordinate local economic development initiatives with those of the State of Illinois. An assessment of the community's strengths and weaknesses with respect to attracting and retaining business and industry is a focus of this element.

In its heyday, Cortland provided a vibrant market for residents in the Town and in the outlying farm country. But changes in business, technology and other social factors saw a long period of decline for the Town. Today, business, technology, and social factors continue to change and offer some economic hope for Cortland in the future.

In order for any new retail business development growth to occur in Cortland, the population will need to grow in order to support new businesses. To put this challenge in perspective, a rule of thumb in the commercial development profession is a community needs approximately six hundred homes to support a mini-mart or convenience store, and six thousand homes to support a small grocery store.

As it sits, today, Cortland barely has a sufficiently large population to support a limited range of basic commercial enterprises. Because Cortland sits near the IL 23 corridor in DeKalb (city) where most retailers are concentrated, the Town will be at a competitive disadvantage to attract significant amounts of retail development until its population increases enough to attract the attention of commercial developers and merchants.

In the meantime, the current businesses and services in Cortland will remain only as long as they are economically viable. Until Cortland accumulates a critical mass of population to support new business growth and development, it is unlikely there will be significant new business development in Cortland in the near term.

The prospects in the long-term are much more favorable. As the community grows and increases its population and begins to accumulate an inventory of commercial and industrial development sites Cortland will begin to see all manner and form of retail, food service, office and employment opportunities established in the community. The increase in variety and diversity of shopping, dining and employment opportunities in Cortland will provide a positive effect on quality of life concerns in the Town, as well as broaden the tax base.

Key to any economic development initiative in Cortland will be establishing and maintaining sufficient capacity in the municipal sewer collection system and sanitary waste treatment operation and water distribution system, and a cooperative, "can-do" business environment. Without this infrastructure, Cortland's economic development prospects will be exceedingly small and limited. The nature of the environment the Town government cultivates for business growth and development will bear directly on the success of economic development initiatives in the Town.

It has been suggested that Cortland begin forging relationships with surrounding farmers to develop a network of farms that could supply farmer's markets in Cortland in the future, or grow "fuel crops" for biofuel production. Incorporating agricultural products and farm production in an economic development strategy is consistent with Cortland's stewardship ethic.

Natural Resources

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to identify and define the natural resources in the community with respect to water, flora and fauna and to assess the relative importance of these resources to the community.

Given that Cortland is situated in the midst of an active farming landscape, the *land* is the natural resource in the community. The landscape in the planning area is flat and is well-drained, contributing to its suitability for farming activities.

While storm water is slow to drain and ponding is a common occurrence after storm events, there are no regulatory floodplains in the Cortland planning area, except along the Kishwaukee River and portions of the Union Ditch.

Woodlands are not present in the Cortland planning area.

The following endangered species have been documented in the Cortland planning area²:

- The Iowa Darter (State-threatened), in headwaters of East Branch of the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River.
- The Woolly Milkweed (State-threatened), a perennial plant found in dry prairie remnants
- Another aquatic species found in the Kishwaukee headwaters is the threatened Slippershell Mussel, *Alasmidonta viridis*, although the species remains undetected in Kishwaukee headwaters in DeKalb County.
- Other plants nearby, but outside the planning area include the Dog Violet, *Viola conspersa* and Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid, *Platanthera leucophaea* (Federal-endangered)

While the Kishwaukee River is one of the highest quality streams in Illinois, the East Branch of the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River is a channelized stream in much of Cortland's planning area. The Union-Pierce Drainage District has created several water projects over the years, including the Union Ditch No. 1 and Ditch No.2 that traverse Cortland's planning area. These streams are channelized in the farm fields to expedite drainage and to improve mechanical farming operations.

Where ever practical and feasible, native plantings should be used in open spaces, utility corridors, and selected road right-of-ways. Native plantings should also be encouraged on private property, not only to provide habitat for wildlife, but to reduce water consumption since native plantings are drought tolerant and often remain green during the worst periods of drought.

Best management practices (BMP's) should be applied to storm water management projects throughout the Cortland planning area to reduce long-term maintenance costs, decrease stormwater run-off, and improve water quality in downstream creeks and the East Branch of the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River.

² Source: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Agriculture Preservation

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to identify the means and methods for protecting farmland in the community and developing markets for agricultural products.

Given the role of agriculture in DeKalb County—as well as Cortland's heritage—agriculture protection is an underlying component of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan. While agriculture is the dominant industry in the County, technology and economics have reduced the direct ties to agricultural production that once existed in Cortland. Nonetheless, agriculture remains a key force in the County's economy, a dominant feature on the landscape, and a defining feature of the communities in the County, including Cortland.

To this end, the Cortland Comprehensive Plan attempts to provide a framework with which the Town can aid or assist in the protection of farmland from premature development and the nuisances caused by development in Cortland. The areas of the Future Land Use Plan that identify agriculture land uses provide reasonable assurance that farming activities will remain there during the life of this Plan, at least for the next generation or so.

A key agriculture preservation strategy is to make farming economically viable in the face of development pressures. The way to keep farming viable is to develop markets for agricultural products. The Town supports research and technology used to develop new uses for agricultural products.

Community Design (Principles)

The purpose of this element of the Comprehensive Plan is to identify the key community design principles and strategies for achieving the community vision with respect to its physical form and appearance.

In many respects, the design principles that follow are a record of the physical form of Cortland and its neighborhoods, today. This is not a yearning for nostalgia, nor an exclusionary strategy. Instead, the design principles grew out of the Image Preference Survey and community planning *charrette* and reflect what citizens in Cortland accept and desire.

Principle One

Pedestrian scale shall be the common denominator in neighborhood development in Cortland in order to create a positive comfortable public realm and facilitate interaction among neighborhood residents.

HUMAN SCALE PROPORTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

The human scale is the relationship between the dimensions of the human body and the proportion of the spaces people use. The surface textures, activity patterns, colors, materials, lighting, and other details of the built environment underscore this.

SEMI-PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

“Good fences make good neighbors.” While public life is essential to a community, a sense of privacy is also important. Semi-private areas, such as porches and front yards defined by short fences or shrubs, are encouraged to create a transition zone between the public domain of the street and the private domain of the house or shop.

COMMUNITY SPACES

Every neighborhood needs places where people can meet. The sense of community is enhanced by the physical characteristics of common spaces. Community centers, cafes, plazas, and even kiosks are places where people can meet in formal or informal situations.

A MIX OF HOUSES AND PEOPLE

A mix of housing types shall be distributed throughout Cortland neighborhoods. The sense of a safe, socially healthy, and visually interesting place is enhanced by the provision of a range of housing types and sizes to accommodate households of all ages and sizes. The location of various housing types within a neighborhood creates physical variation and contributes to the diversity of the population.

FACILITATE PERSON-TO-PERSON INTERACTION

Face-to-face interaction is a fundamental human need. Neighborhoods in Cortland must be designed with this need in mind. To reinforce the human scale, the design of a place should facilitate the creation of neighborhood bonds, and a sense of community while insuring individual privacy.

WALKING AND THE PEDESTRIAN

The walking distance between home and various neighborhood facilities must be a fundamental factor in design and layout. A movement network which supports and encourages pedestrian movement is a design element which creates a sense of place. The movement network must be designed to be attractive, safe and comfortable for pedestrians of all ages and levels of mobility.

Principle Two

Neighborhood development in Cortland must complement the natural features of the landscape and respect the natural and man-made environment.

INDIGENOUS VEGETATION

As part of the ecological renaissance, indigenous vegetation should be used to the fullest extent in the landscaping of development in Cortland and the restoration of the landscape in and around Cortland.

MANAGE STORM WATER RESPONSIBLY

Storm water collection and management should rely less upon pipes and constructed basins and more upon overland drainage and natural landscape features and plants intended to convey, store and release storm water flows. The emphasis on infiltration rather than collection of storm water demands a conscientious effort from design to construction to reduce impervious surface, disturbances to soil structure, and preservation of natural hydrology and hydrologic conditions. The use of certain plants and restoration of landscape features, e.g. wetlands, contributes to more environmentally friendly storm water management systems and reduces the impact on adjoining farmland and Union Ditch and Kishwaukee River and their tributaries, and ultimately lower operating costs to the Town.

MANAGE THE INTERFACE BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Agricultural activity around Cortland is a significant element of the landscape and the local economy. It is also the defining feature about Cortland. Agriculture represents livelihoods for many people in Cortland and the conflicts between agriculture and neighborhood development need attention.

DEVELOP LAND ACCORDING TO ITS SUITABILITY

Development should occur only on land most suitable for development and be developed only to the degree that will cause the minimum negative environmental impact.

WALKING AND BICYCLING

The ability to walk and bicycle to reach recreation, shopping, and job destinations in Cortland can significantly reduce the consumption of energy and pollution emissions. Walking and bicycling also allow for greater interaction with nature and neighbors, the observation of seasonal and daily changes, and an appreciation of such features as clean air and streets. Facilities and conditions to enable and enrich walking and bicycling opportunities in Cortland must be incorporated into neighborhood development plans.

Principle Three

Neighborhoods in Cortland, and all development within them, shall be designed along pedestrian dimensions and distances through compact form, layout, and streetscape characteristics.

WALKING SCALE SHALL DEFINE THE SIZE AND FUNCTION OF A NEIGHBORHOOD

Residents of Cortland's neighborhoods should be able to walk to the center of the community or to the center of their neighborhood. Neighborhood residents should not be dependent upon their automobiles for most of their daily trips. They should be able to walk from home to school, recreation, shopping, to places of employment, civic facilities, and, perhaps, in the future, transit opportunities that may exist in Cortland. A pedestrian neighborhood is defined by walking distances that are comfortable to the average person. For an adult, a five-minute walk (1/4 mile) is deemed to be the optimum walking distance between home and the core of the neighborhood, e.g. a park, square, civic building, or commercial area, and shall be the determining dimension for neighborhood size.

LOCATING INTENSITY OF USES

Community size is influenced by walking distances, but it need not be limited by them. The highest intensity of use (scale, floor area, density) must occur in the core of the Town or its neighborhoods. The highest densities should be found mixed into the core areas and immediately adjacent them. Density and intensity of use should decrease as one reaches the edges of individual neighborhoods and the primary development area of the Town. Open spaces, parks, very low density uses, large boulevards, or natural features should be used to separate neighborhoods.

TRANSIT LINKAGES TO EXPAND PEDESTRIANISM

The provision of transit alternatives can significantly expand the pedestrian domain. Transit stops are important design elements of the core and can be very important places in the community and individual neighborhoods. Cortland neighborhoods and core areas shall be located and designed to accommodate transit services in the future.

A NETWORK OF WALKWAYS

A network of interconnected pedestrian walkways is an essential basic design feature in a neighborhood. The pedestrian network must link and connect home with shopping, school, transit, recreation, and employment opportunities in the neighborhood and beyond. Sidewalks and off-street paths must be continuous, safe, and they must be clearly delineated and understandable.

CONTINUITY

People are generally willing to walk greater distances if they are provided with a continuous and pleasurable experience. The placement of trees, the treatment of building facades and parking, the use of interesting pavement, fences, hedges, and architectural details all contribute to the pleasurable experience of walking through the neighborhood and shall be employed in all types of development in Cortland.

SIDEWALK WIDTH

The width of a sidewalk should be in direct proportion to the projected volume of users.

SECURITY IN THE PEDESTRIAN REALM

Sidewalks should be separated from traffic on the adjoining street. A parkway, or tree bank, between the street and sidewalk having trees planted at regular intervals to increase the sense of security for the pedestrian shall be provided in all neighborhoods regardless of the uses or street characteristics. On-street parking should be encouraged to calm traffic and significantly contribute to the security of the pedestrian.

EDGES

The sidewalk edge away from the street should be treated as a boundary and help to define the pedestrian realm. In residential areas a low fence, wall or hedge can be used to define edges. In residential areas where building setbacks are shallow, the first floor of residences shall be elevated two to four feet above the sidewalk grade for the privacy of the inhabitants of the dwellings. In commercial areas, buildings should be brought up to the sidewalk with the first floor no more than six inches above the grade of the sidewalk.

STREET LIGHTING AND STREET FURNITURE

Street lighting and other street furniture, e.g. benches, planters, trash receptacles, etc., can increase the positive experience of walking in Cortland neighborhoods. Street lighting and street furniture should complement the pedestrian realm. The use of lighting should vary with the land uses on property adjoining the sidewalk and the amount of pedestrian traffic. Benches should be provided throughout the Town, even in residential neighborhoods, to provide places to rest.

SIGNS

The pedestrian experience and visual appearance of Cortland can be enhanced by the quality of signs. Signs designed for the pedestrian can be smaller in area but need not be shorter in the amount of information contained on them.

BICYCLE PATHS

Bicycle paths, although not strictly pedestrian, have a critical role in complementing the pedestrian network. Most streets in Cortland can accommodate bicycle traffic. However, paths along major highways or the railroad connecting Cortland to points of interest in DeKalb (city) or more distant places such as Malta or Maple Park, or Hinckley, Genoa or the Fox River may be considered in the future.

Principle Four

Open spaces of all types and sizes for visual and aesthetic qualities, recreational, ecological, agricultural and economic functions shall be provided within, as well as on the periphery of, neighborhoods and the Town.

REAR YARDS

Private open spaces are essential to the basic function of any household. A modest, yet private, landscaped rear yard is a necessary requirement for most housing types in Cortland. Yard sizes and layout will vary with housing types. Lots with small yards should be compensated by being located in close proximity to parks.

FRONT YARDS

The space between the public sidewalk and the front of the dwelling is a transition space. Even the smallest front yard acts as a transition between the public street and the private dwelling. The front yard is a semi-public space and a contributing element to the neighborhood's open space network. Front yards should be defined by a low picket fence or hedge along the public sidewalk.

PUBLIC SPACES

Public open space within Cortland neighborhoods provides spaces for formal and informal gatherings, as well as passive recreation and is an essential element of the neighborhood and feature of the community. In Cortland, public open spaces should take on many forms and functions. Public open spaces must serve all age groups in Cortland and be integrated with the pedestrian network in the Town. Public open spaces must be physically accessible and visible to the public.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATION

Public open spaces in Cortland must include opportunities for passive and active recreation. Active recreation facilities should be sized commensurate with the expected population within the service area of the public open space.

PERIPHERAL SPACES

Peripheral open spaces should define the edge of Cortland, or individual neighborhoods. Peripheral open spaces enhance the sense of place by making Cortland identifiable in the landscape: they create a sense of exit and entry. Open spaces on the periphery of Cortland can preserve environmentally sensitive lands or land used for agriculture.

THE PARKWAY (TREE BANK)

Parkways are the open space that lies between the sidewalk and the street. When thought of as part of the Town's open space system, parkways extend internal and peripheral open spaces into the network of streets. Parkway serve to separate and define roadways and sidewalks and will vary in width depending upon the street type and the intensity of adjacent uses.

Principle Five

Cortland must have a central core or focus. Every neighborhood in Cortland must have a core or community focus.

THE CORE

The Core is the focal point for the community and each neighborhood. It provides potential places for employment, shopping, social activities, and is the place for people in the neighborhood or community to interact or congregate. Pedestrian presence is critical; it signals the vitality of the community or neighborhood.

The size of the Core will vary with the number of dwellings in the neighborhood and the elements found in the Core of one neighborhood will vary from those found in another neighborhood. The Core may contain commercial, residential, civic buildings, public open space of some type or function. It should be the activity center which unifies the community or neighborhood, and its character often becomes the image of the community or neighborhood as a whole.

The Core requires:

- A central and integrated location for equal access by foot, car or transit
- A balance of residential and non-residential uses
- Retail uses in proportion and scale to housing
- Employment space in proportion and scale to housing
- Civic and social facilities
- Specific design standards for streetscapes and facades
- Vertical elements that render it immediately identifiable in the landscape

Location

The Core should be designed to provide a central place such as a square, green, plaza, or a crossroad. The Core symbolizes the center of the community or neighborhood and, to the extent possible, is surrounded by the community or neighborhood. The Core must front onto a street or streets within the primary movement network. Where possible, buildings in the Core should define the space or spaces.

Balance

The Core must have an appropriate balance of housing to other uses such as retail and services, civic and social, offices and open space. The amount of retail and office space should be compatible with the number of housing units and potential users within the primary walking area. Civic and social spaces such as churches, libraries, post offices, community buildings, and schools are appropriate uses in the Core since these uses tend to be major focal points for community and neighborhood activity.

Design

In order to foster and enhance the purpose and function of the Core, essential design elements need to be included in the design and location of the Core. The Core should have buildings of a greater scale and at a higher density than the remainder of the neighborhood. Buildings in the Core should range from two- to four-stories in height. Generally, one-story buildings should be avoided. Buildings in the Core must be closely spaced and the street

level reserved for personal services and retail businesses. Mixed-use buildings with retail on the ground floor and offices or living units on the upper floors are the preferred building typology in the Core.

Parking must not be permitted in the front of buildings unless it is located on the street. Landscaped parking lots shall be placed behind buildings in the Core.

When retail uses are located in the Core, retail must front on a street providing pedestrian and vehicular access. Retail requires a seamless or continuous frontage of shop windows and entrances to maintain pedestrian interest. People must not be forced to pass in front of blank walls or parking lots as they walk between stores.

The Core should have a traditional Main Street appearance with architectural details such as large display windows, awnings, decorative street furniture, small projecting signs, transoms, and cornices. The Core should have a high point; it should be visible from a distance. This vertical landmark, such as a steeple, cupola, or bell tower, will serve as that focal point and should also form the visual termination of a street or the square at which the Core is located.

Principle Six

Streets create the form and scale of the community and must accommodate the pedestrian and the motor vehicle.

STREETS SHALL CREATE A POSITIVE COMMUNITY IMAGE

The first impression we form about a community or a neighborhood is influenced greatly by the street. Streets are the foundation of the settlement pattern in Cortland and are the most important public spaces in Cortland neighborhoods. Their thoughtful design is crucial to the creation of a positive community image.

STREETS SHALL FORM A NETWORK

A dense network of interconnecting streets will influence pedestrian and vehicular circulation, provide a sense of knowing where you are, and more evenly distribute traffic. A network of streets provides order and legibility to the neighborhood. Every street shall be connected to at least two other streets. A dense network of interconnecting streets provides multiple alternative routes, eliminating traffic-jammed arterial streets.

A HIERARCHY OF STREETS SHALL BE ESTABLISHED

The street network relies upon a hierarchy of streets. A variety of street widths shall be provided to accommodate various levels of traffic.

ALLEYS

The use of alleys in Cortland is encouraged to improve the visual appearance of the streetscape and to provide access to off-street parking. The use of alleys is strongly encouraged along streets having multiple-family residential and/or mixed-use buildings along their frontages.

DESIGN FEATURES

In order to provide a positive experience, streets in Cortland shall incorporate the following:

- Except for high volume roadways, the width of roadways is typically narrow to discourage high travel speed.
- Buildings front directly on streets
- On-street parking is encouraged to increase safety for pedestrians and to calm traffic.
- Street trees must be planted in the parkways (tree banks).
- Small curb radius must be used at intersections to slow traffic and reduce width of roadway at crosswalks.

Principle Seven

Variation within the design conformity creates the most visually positive communities.

VARIETY AND VARIATION SHALL BE USED IN NEIGHBORHOODS

Variations on basic patterns are necessary to discourage sameness and dullness. Individuality of each building may exist within a commonality of design in the neighborhood. There must be differences in building form, mass, façade treatment, and details.

Variation and variety can be achieved by applying any and all of these techniques:

- **Lot width.** Lot widths of different sizes encourage variation among building masses. Lots of different widths should be dispersed, but lot sizes generally increase from the center of the community to the edge.
- **Lot Depth.** Varying lot depth will affect the configuration of the block and the street network.
- **Blocks.** A variety of block lengths and configurations is recommended in Cortland neighborhoods.
- **Alleys.** Alleys are recommended especially for lots and blocks containing narrow single-family lots, attached single-family, multiple-family, mixed-use, and retail uses.
- **Build-to Lines.** A build-to line defines the proportions of the street by prescribing where the mass of a building must be located. Unlike a setback line which establishes the distance from which a structure must be located, the build-to line established a mandatory location for a structure relative to the street. Porches, balconies, bay windows, and other building projections would be permitted to encroach upon the build-to line to provide dimension and rhythm to the streetscape.
- **Build-up Lines.** Variety can be accomplished with building height, with taller buildings placed at points of interest and at corners. Roof lines and ridges can also vary with some ridges being perpendicular to the street and others parallel. The addition of porches, roof projections, chimneys, and garage placement also contribute to variety. A build-up line specifies a cornice height that defines the street proportion. Build-up lines should vary.
- **Non-residential Uses.** Variety and variation can be accomplished by the introduction of non-residential uses in the neighborhood. Civic and social uses can be located in the neighborhood in functional and serviceable locations and yet, provide visual variation. The development of the Core also adds to the variety and variation of a neighborhood or community.
- **Housing Types.** A variety of housing types within a neighborhood, a block, or along a street frontage contributes to variety and variation. Non-single-family structures should be dispersed throughout the neighborhood, not concentrated in one location or be of a large scale.

Principle Eight

A mix of land uses, housing, jobs, and incomes creates a more balanced community, reduces traffic and maintenance costs, and creates better fiscal balance for Cortland.

MIXED- AND MULTIPLE USES

Mixed- and multiple uses are encouraged in Cortland neighborhoods. A mixture of compatible uses provides greater proximity for residents and creates opportunities for shopping, employment and interaction among neighborhood residents. Mixed- and multiple uses should be located in or very near the neighborhood core. Mixed-use refers to different uses located in the same building. Multiple uses refers to different uses located adjacent each other, typically in separate buildings.

HOUSING ABOVE RETAIL

Housing above ground-level retail uses is strongly encouraged in core areas.

HOUSING MIX

Homogenous neighborhoods must be avoided. A mix of housing types and price ranges should be provided throughout the neighborhood to help achieve the desired visual quality and market, economic and social mix necessary to create the most desirable neighborhoods. Housing is not static. Small houses can grow into larger ones, garages can be added onto or expanded. Add-on opportunities in residential neighborhoods contribute to the variety, diversity and resilience of neighborhoods.

ATTAINABLE HOUSING

Neighborhoods must accommodate attainable housing for families of low and moderate incomes. Attainable housing must not be concentrated in one project, one area, or one neighborhood.

LAND USE BOUNDARIES

Land use boundaries should run at the rear of parcels rather than down the middle of the street. Both sides of a street should have matching land uses in order to create more harmonious streetscapes. Schools, parks and other civic buildings and uses would be exceptions to this rule.

LARGE FLOOR AREA USES

Large single purpose uses such as warehouse supermarkets, home improvement centers and discount department stores, should be located on the edges of neighborhoods along arterial highways or in industrial areas.

Principle Nine

Cortland is committed to maintaining its character and quality of place and the character and quality of place within its individual neighborhoods.

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CODES

The level of property maintenance on a given parcel will influence property values throughout the neighborhood. Consequently, prevention of visible deterioration of property in Cortland neighborhoods is imperative. Enforcement programs should be constant, consistent and equitable.

PRESERVATION OF CORTLAND'S HERITAGE

Historic structures, neighborhoods and landscapes should be preserved and enhanced. Historic preservation contributes to the richness, diversity and visual interest of Cortland's neighborhoods and helps to differentiate neighborhoods from one another. Historic preservation efforts are compatible with neighborhood development and should be encouraged.

MAINTAIN A SENSE OF SECURITY

A fundamental human need is security. People must feel secure in their community. The greatest security is in knowing the people who live and work in the community. Neighborhood design and layout must promote personal interaction and neighborliness while assuring privacy.

PROVIDE A HIGH LEVEL OF PUBLIC MAINTENANCE

The appearance of public buildings and land, the frequency and quality of maintenance of public roads and sidewalks, and the speed with which repairs to public facilities are made contribute mightily to the public's satisfaction with living in or visiting a community. The Town government should provide a consistently high level of maintenance on all of the public facilities for which it is responsible, and serve as the exemplar for property design and maintenance in Cortland.

Plan Implementation

Adoption of the Comprehensive Plan is not the end of the planning process. Rather, it is the beginning of a long and continuous process of responding to the recommendations in the Plan as well as changing community needs and opportunities presented to the community. The purpose of this element is to identify specific actions the Town will need to accomplish in order to achieve the goals of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan.

The strategies for implementing the recommendations of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan can, at best, only be viewed as a set of directions or tasks. Additional study, analysis and community input will be required in order to implement recommendations related to many elements of the Comprehensive Plan, such as housing, economic development, and telecommunications infrastructure.

- **Establish a land use and boundary agreement with the City of DeKalb, and the Village of Maple Park.**
- **Adopt the Model Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), or amend the Town Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance to match the community design principles in the Comprehensive Plan.**
- **Adopt and enforce property maintenance standards.**
- **Exhaust all means to remove the mobile home community at the gateway to the Town.**
- **Participate in regional economic development initiatives.**
- **Continue to monitor capacity of the Town water and wastewater systems.**
- **Prepare a New Downtown Master Plan for the new downtown.**
- **Prepare a revitalization plan for the current central business district.**
- **Support initiatives to extend commuter rail service to DeKalb and lobby for a station in Cortland.**
- **Develop a Thoroughfare Master Plan to identify strategic thoroughfare network improvements and funding sources and cost allocation.**
- **Develop a Water System Master Plan to identify key water system distribution improvements and the costs associated with the system.**
- **Develop a bike trail system to provide off-street trails to connect Cortland neighborhoods with various destinations and points of interest in Cortland and in adjacent communities.**
- **Incorporate best management practices into stormwater management regulations and land development regulations to reduce the amount of stormwater run-off and improve water quality.**
- **Initiate and maintain a dialogue with commuter rail transportation officials to include Cortland in future plans to bring commuter rail service to DeKalb County.**

Appendix

UPTOWN/CIVIC CENTER SUB-AREA PLAN

**An Amendment of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan, Adopted March 13, 2006,
Ordinance No. 2006-53**

UPTOWN/CIVIC CENTER SUB-AREA PLAN

The purpose of the Uptown Sub-Area Plan is to establish a vision and adopt an illustrative concept plan for the development of a dense mixed-use neighborhood at the intersection of Pleasant Street and Somonauk Road in Cortland.

Consistent with the Community Design element of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan, the Uptown sub-area plan envisions this new neighborhood as a mix of retail, offices, food services, business and personal services, banks, civic, lodging and residential uses arranged along pedestrian-friendly streets with high quality architecture, street furnishings, public art, fountains, and public spaces. Upper floors of the buildings, particularly in the mixed-use core, will have offices and residential dwellings. Residential uses adjacent the mixed-use core will be high density preferably with a mix of attached and detached single-family residential dwellings and multiple-family buildings.

In addition to the forty acre, more or less, tract of land at the northwest corner of Somonauk Road and Pleasant Street, the Sub-Area Plan includes portions of Amdur's Addition, Neucort Lakes and Cambridge Homes' Richland Trails. The commercial frontage of Amdur's Addition is expected to include a full-service grocery store and pharmacy and a hardware store which are accommodated in the Concept Plan. The Somonauk Road frontage of Cambridge's proposed Richland Trails neighborhood is expected to become the site for the new civic center which will include a new library and Town hall buildings and a civic park.

The mixed-use core is intended to provide a wide range of retail, personal and business services, food services (restaurants, cafes, delis, etc.). Outdoor seating and dining areas will be provided to make the environment more hospitable for pedestrians. Additionally, shop fronts will be brought up to the sidewalk to allow pedestrians the opportunity to window shop as they stroll along the sidewalk. A mix of parking choices will be provided. On-street parking will be available along all streets, except Somonauk Road, and parking lots will be placed in the interior of blocks. Parking structures and underground parking are also envisioned as possible parking alternatives.

The introduction of food service uses and a full-service grocery store in the Uptown plan is dependent upon the prohibition against the sale of liquor in the community being lifted. The prospects of attracting these types of businesses is extremely limited if the business cannot sell alcoholic beverages for consumption on the premises or packaged liquor for off-site consumption. The absence of food service uses serving alcoholic beverages will not stop the development of the Uptown neighborhood, but would severely limit the dining experience options for residents and visitors.

Civic uses are also envisioned in this neighborhood. A civic center complex, consisting of a new Town Hall and library buildings and a civic park, is one of the anchors of the proposed development. The civic park adjacent the civic center buildings is envisioned as a formal public space with gardens, fountains and memorials, and perhaps a band shell or other structure for public events. A plaza joining the two civic buildings is envisioned

as a place for public art and fountains and as a gathering spot or location for civic events and ceremonies.

Other public spaces are strongly encouraged in the Uptown neighborhood. Small parks and squares should be provided as focal points, social gathering places, and neighborhood character defining features. The open spaces in the neighborhood should be of high quality design and materials. The amenities and landscaping among the various open spaces in the Uptown neighborhood should not be identical; variety among the open spaces is strongly encouraged.

A formal square is the centerpiece of the new commercial core. Located north of Pleasant Street, the square would provide a focal point and gathering place. It is envisioned that the square would be a formal landscaped space with seating, a fountain and/or memorial sculpture. Immediately to the south of the square is a plaza that faces the proposed civic center buildings. This civic center plaza is intended to have the same purpose as the square but have a different look and feel from the square.

The use of public art in the Uptown neighborhood is strongly encouraged. Public art may take many forms. In addition to sculpture, public art may be in flat surfaces such as building walls or sidewalks, it may be static or kinetic, it may be interactive, it may involve water or light, it may be in the landscape.

In addition to the residential dwelling units anticipated in the upper floors in the retail core, housing is an integral part of the neighborhood vision. High-density single-family dwellings, such as townhouses or condominium buildings, are encouraged in the neighborhood; particularly along the north side of the Uptown neighborhood adjacent the Heatherfield neighborhood. The residential buildings constructed in Uptown are required to comply with the Community Design principles of the Comprehensive Plan. Namely, garages must be rear-loaded and building facades must incorporate architectural elements and features that contribute to a pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

Other housing choices will be considered in Uptown. Live-work units and accessory dwelling units are encouraged where appropriate in the neighborhood. Accessory dwelling units are small one-room dwellings usually situated over a detached garage and have their own exterior entrance and parking space. Depending upon the building typology used in Uptown accessory dwelling units may be an extremely limited opportunity. A live-work unit is a building typology in which the first floor of the dwelling is the commercial or workspace portion of the dwelling and may share floor space with the household kitchen and bath and the living areas are provided on upper floors, often in a loft-like setting.

Additionally, some residential dwelling units can function as flex-space in the Uptown neighborhood. Selected buildings can be designed in a manner that will enable the ground floor to change from residential to commercial without structural alterations of the building or the building façade at a later date as the neighborhood matures and demand for additional retail or office space grows in Cortland.

Architecture in the neighborhood is expected to emulate the classic Midwestern vernacular: Victorian, colonial, prairie school, and craftsman styles. A mix of styles and building materials is strongly encouraged. Themes are not encouraged since these quickly become dated and lose their appeal. Overuse of a particular exterior building

material is discouraged. Uniformity in building facades, which is all facades having brick or wood or metal as the primary material, can become visually dull and unappealing. The appropriate use of architectural features such as box and bay windows, turrets and towers, spires, oriels and porches are strongly encouraged to provide visual interest and to establish readily recognizable landmark buildings for visitors. The reproduction of historic architectural vernacular styles is not required; successfully applying historic architectural vernacular styles with modern technology and building materials is desired and strongly encouraged. Application of energy efficiency and green technologies to buildings in Uptown is strongly encouraged.

The Uptown neighborhood must be a pedestrian-friendly environment. Wide sidewalks to accommodate strollers, window shoppers and persons sitting at outdoor dining areas or on benches are required. In addition to sidewalks and seating areas the physical environment must be scaled for the pedestrian. Shop windows should not have reflective glass and entrance doors should be recessed. There should be adequate but not blinding illumination of walk surfaces. Signs should be scaled to be read by the pedestrian, not necessarily the motorist. On-street parking should be provided to provide a measure of protection from vehicles moving on the street. Streets should be designed to allow the free flow of traffic at greatly reduced speeds. Facilities for bicyclists should be provided.

In summary, Uptown should become a destination that people will want to visit. The Uptown neighborhood is intended to be a compact area having a lot of activity, diversity of uses and provide a variety of visual and physical experiences for visitors and residents of the neighborhood. It is expected to evolve into the town center as Cortland grows over time.

The Uptown neighborhood will be connected to adjacent neighborhoods by the existing thoroughfare system and new thoroughfares to come. Connecting Uptown to surrounding neighborhoods is essential to it becoming a neighborhood, not an isolated shopping center. The ability of nearby residents to walk or bicycle or drive to Uptown without needlessly traveling on Somonauk Road or Pleasant Street will contribute to the seamless connection of Uptown with adjacent neighborhoods and reduce the dependence on the automobile for short trips in Cortland.

Uptown will be connected to the Town's developing off-street bike trail network. Trails proposed along Somonauk Road and Pleasant Street will provide direct access to Uptown. The bike trail connections that will occur along the Somonauk Road and Pleasant Street trails will enable virtually every Cortland resident to travel to and from Uptown on the future trail network.

The development and evolution of the Uptown neighborhood should not be construed as abandonment of Cortland's downtown along Somonauk Road between North Street and Chestnut Street. Uptown and downtown Cortland can co-exist. While similar in composition they will assume different roles in the community over time. For example, Uptown will become Cortland's civic center and the downtown will evolve into a commuter rail hub when commuter rail service is extended to Cortland and beyond in the future.

In order to implement the Uptown Sub-Area Plan, the Town will need to consider adopting a new zoning classification and land development regulations to apply specifically to this area.



UPTOWN SUB-AREA CONCEPT PLAN

1" = 100'
07.18.05



Land Vision, Inc.
116 W. Main St., #208
St. Charles, Illinois 60174

**DOWNTOWN CORTLAND / “MAIN STREET”
VISION PLAN
SUB-AREA PLAN**

**An Amendment of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan, Adopted December 18, 2006,
Ordinance No. 2006-73**

**DOWNTOWN CORTLAND / “MAIN STREET”
VISION PLAN
(SUB-AREA PLAN)**

PREFACE

Downtown Cortland is envisioned as a mixed-use pedestrian environment that will serve, both aesthetically and socially, as the front porch of the community. Pockets of long-standing residential buildings will be protected and allowed to grow in character, while alternating pockets of business uses, retail, medical offices, food services, and second-floor dwellings, will be established in order to meet the needs of the residents. As the Town grows, the Downtown Cortland will be a community-oriented area that allows old and new residents to come together, reinforcing Cortland’s “small town” rural character.

The adoption of the Downtown Cortland /”Main Street” Vision Plan is not the end of the process. Rather, it is the beginning of a long, rewarding, sometimes frustrating, commitment of community resources, both public and private, and will. The Downtown Cortland Vision Plan is intended to provide guidance in the evaluation of future decisions on land use, development and infrastructure investment, transportation, and other issues in Downtown Cortland.

The Downtown Cortland /”Main Street” Vision Plan is not a prescription for maintaining the status quo. Rather the Vision Plan is the physical embodiment of a vision for what Downtown Cortland could become. This vision includes some rather bold suggestions that may, at first, seem unrealistic but nonetheless force every downtown stakeholder to think about Downtown Cortland in new and creative ways. How fast the vision is realized depends upon the commitment of the Town government, downtown property owners and merchants, not to mention the strength of the local economy.

The Downtown Cortland /”Main Street” Vision Plan is intended to be a sub-component of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan. As such, the Vision Plan accepts the goals, objectives and policies of the Comprehensive Plan as the organizing framework for the future development of the Town and, in much greater detail, focuses on the specific opportunities and challenges presented by Downtown Cortland.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the Downtown Cortland /"Main Street" Vision Plan (Sub-Area Plan) is to establish a vision and adopt an illustrative concept plan for the (re)development of a dense mixed-use neighborhood in the Somonauk Road corridor from Pine Street on the north to Lincoln Highway (State Route 38) on the south.

Consistent with the Community Design element of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Cortland /"Main Street" Vision Plan envisions Downtown Cortland as a mix of neighborhood-scale retail, offices, food services, business and personal services, banks and residential uses arranged along pedestrian-friendly streets with high quality architecture, street furnishings, public art, and public spaces. Upper floors of new buildings along Somonauk Road will have offices and residential dwellings. Residential uses adjacent the mixed-use core, that is, Somonauk Road, will remain the present mix of attached and detached single-family residential dwellings.

The mixed-use core is intended to provide a limited range of retail, personal and business services, food services (restaurants, cafes, delis, etc.). Outdoor seating and dining areas will be provided to make the environment more hospitable for pedestrians. Additionally, shop fronts will be brought up to the sidewalk to allow pedestrians the opportunity to window shop as they stroll along the sidewalk. A mix of parking choices will be provided. On-street parking will be available along Somonauk Road and off-street parking lots will be provided behind buildings fronting Somonauk Road.

Civic uses are also envisioned in this neighborhood. While a new civic center complex, consisting of a new Town Hall and library buildings and a civic park, is contemplated in the proposed "Uptown" neighborhood at Cortland Center Road, one of the anchors of the proposed Downtown/"Main Street" redevelopment can be transforming the current Town Hall building into a historical museum. Additional candidates for museum-treatment and tourism include the Town's agricultural heritage and its relationship with the railroad.

Other public spaces are strongly encouraged in the Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood. Small parks and squares should be provided as focal points, social gathering places, and neighborhood character defining features. The open spaces in the neighborhood should be of high quality design and materials. The amenities and landscaping among the various open spaces in the Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood should not be identical; variety among the open spaces is strongly encouraged. While the railroad is a physical barrier between the two halves of the Downtown, this barrier could be enhanced and transformed into an amenity. For example, placing covered seating at the railroad crossing would help to focus the railroad crossing as a "gateway" and the pedestrian seating would offer a respite for pedestrians crossing from one side of the railroad to the other.

The use of public art in the Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood is strongly encouraged. Public art may take many forms. In addition to sculpture, public art may be in flat surfaces such as building walls or sidewalks, it may be static or kinetic, it may be interactive, it may involve water or light, it may be in the landscape.

In addition to the residential dwelling units anticipated in the upper floors in new retail buildings along Somonauk Road, housing is an integral part of the neighborhood vision. Maintaining the present dwellings in the neighborhood is a key to the successful

rejuvenation of Cortland's "Main Street." The residential buildings constructed in Uptown are required to comply with the Community Design principles of the Comprehensive Plan. Namely, garages must be rear-loaded and building facades must incorporate architectural elements and features that contribute to a pedestrian-friendly streetscape and reflect Cortland's agricultural heritage.

Architecture in the Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood is expected to emulate the classic Midwestern vernacular; Victorian, colonial, prairie school, and craftsman styles, but with an emphasis on traditional agricultural styles, materials and details. A mix of styles and building materials is strongly encouraged. Themes are not encouraged since these quickly become dated and lose their appeal. Overuse of a particular exterior building material is discouraged. Uniformity in building facades, which is all facades having brick or wood or metal as the primary material, can become visually dull and unappealing. The appropriate use of architectural features such as box and bay windows, turrets and towers, spires, oriels and porches are strongly encouraged to provide visual interest and to establish readily recognizable landmark buildings for visitors. The reproduction of historic architectural vernacular styles is not required; successfully applying historic architectural vernacular styles with modern technology and building materials is desired and strongly encouraged. Application of energy efficiency and green technologies to new buildings in Downtown/"Main Street" is strongly encouraged and would be consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood must be a pedestrian-friendly environment. Wide sidewalks to accommodate strollers, window shoppers and persons sitting at outdoor dining areas or on benches are required. In addition to sidewalks and seating areas the physical environment must be scaled for the pedestrian. Shop windows should not have reflective glass and entrance doors should be recessed. There should be adequate but not blinding illumination of walk surfaces. Signs should be scaled to be read by the pedestrian, not necessarily the motorist. On-street parking should be provided to provide a measure of protection from vehicles moving on the street. Streets should be designed to allow the free flow of traffic at greatly reduced speeds. Facilities for bicyclists should be provided.

In summary, Downtown/"Main Street" should become a destination that people will want to visit. The Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood is intended to be a compact area having a lot of activity, diversity of uses and provide a variety of visual and physical experiences for visitors and residents of the neighborhood. It is expected to mature into Cortland's "Main Street" as the community grows over time.

The Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood will be connected to adjacent neighborhoods by the existing thoroughfare system and new thoroughfares to come. Connecting Downtown/"Main Street" to surrounding neighborhoods is essential to it becoming a neighborhood, not an isolated shopping center. The ability of nearby residents to walk or bicycle or drive to Downtown/"Main Street" without needlessly traveling on Somonauk Road will contribute to the seamless connection of Downtown/"Main Street" with adjacent neighborhoods and reduce the dependence on the automobile for short trips in Cortland.

Downtown/"Main Street" will be connected to the Town's developing off-street bike trail network. Trials proposed along Somonauk Road and Love Road and the future Richland

Parkway will provide direct access to Downtown/"Main Street". The bike trail connections that will occur along the Somonauk Road and Love Road and the future Richland Parkway trails will enable virtually every Cortland resident to travel to and from Downtown/"Main Street" on the future trail network.

The development and evolution of the Downtown/"Main Street" neighborhood should not be construed as competition with Cortland's proposed Uptown neighborhood at Somonauk Road and Cortland Center Road. Uptown and downtown Cortland can co-exist. While similar in composition they will assume different roles in the community over time. For example, Uptown will become Cortland's civic center and the downtown will evolve into a commuter rail hub when commuter rail service is extended to Cortland and beyond in the future.

In order to implement the Downtown/"Main Street" Sub-Area Plan, the Town will need to consider adopting a new zoning classification and other land development regulations to apply specifically to this area.

The boundaries of the study area were loosely set at the outset primarily to let the community determine the extent of change. Participants set the limits for redevelopment on a limited number of parcels having frontage along Somonauk Road. Change in the adjoining neighborhoods was not a consideration. In fact the only consideration participants gave to the adjoining neighborhoods was preservation, i.e., protection, of the adjoining neighborhoods from redevelopment in the Somonauk Road corridor.

INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Cortland /"Main Street" Vision Plan is a sub-area of the Cortland Comprehensive Plan. This "vision plan" establishes the community's collective aspirations for the Somonauk Road corridor between Pine Avenue on the north and Lincoln Highway on the south. Vision plans provide a detailed picture of what to achieve. Comprehensive Plans tend to be more abstract and avoid the level of detail typically found in a vision plan. By adopting this vision plan for Downtown Cortland as a sub-area plan within the Town's Comprehensive Plan, we can provide a much finer-grained view of Cortland's overall future development within the overarching framework of the Town Comprehensive Plan.

Vision plans have other unique characteristics differentiating them from comprehensive plans. For example, vision plans are usually limited in their scope, being focused on a specific site (a site plan) or a limited defined area (a college campus, or a block, neighborhood, or a corridor). Vision plans also tend to provide specific recommendations on physical design issues and detailed recommendations for the improvements or changes needed to achieve the desired objective(s). While land use recommendations may be included in a vision plan, determining appropriate land uses is not the principal function of a vision plan. A vision plan usually accepts the land uses given and provides detailed recommendations for alteration or improvement of the physical environment.

Comprehensive plans, on the other hand, tend to be more expansive in their scope, dealing with large territories, with their policies and recommendations, including land use, generally addressing issues in the abstract leaving specifics to be decided at a future point in time.

Vision plans provide the basis for rational decision-making, but do not replace the decision-making process, nor take the place of a community's zoning and subdivision regulations or other ordinances regulating the use and development of land in the community. It is the intention of the Town to prevent speculative re-zoning and so-called commercial land grabbing. This vision plan will be used to determine what public and private investments should be made in Cortland's Downtown neighborhood.

A good deal of detailed thought, public comment, and site evaluation has gone into the Downtown Cortland /"Main Street" Vision Plan, as you will see.

Existing Conditions Analysis

Background

The Town of Cortland, established in 1865, is located near the center of DeKalb County. A farming-oriented county, ‘the bread-basket of America,’ DeKalb has rich agricultural soils and heritage. Cortland was one of the principal towns in the county from its inception until the early 20th century, when many businesses relocated to the City of DeKalb, three miles to the west. Also important in the early history of Cortland is the role of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, carrying grain and other produce to market in Chicago.

There is some enduring mystery why Cortland did not develop the classic downtown architecture and infrastructure found in other DeKalb County communities, for example, two-story commercial buildings, masonry construction, and commercial buildings in close proximity to one another. One possibility is that business investment shifted to DeKalb. Another theory is that, because Cortland never had a significant downtown fire, the buildings were never changed from wood to brick, and that wooden buildings were easier to replace than brick buildings. Still, some of the houses and the Town Hall have survived and are over one hundred years old. Other buildings were moved, reconstructed, reused, and changed over the years to create the downtown that stands today.

Another byproduct of Cortland’s early development practices is the small size of the downtown lots. The lots on Somonauk Road, between Elm and Chestnut are as narrow as twenty-five feet. Other lots are between 50- and 75-feet wide, with varying depths. Only a handful of lots are large enough to support today’s typical retail building with the requisite off-street parking. Many of the others would have to be combined in creative ways to permit redevelopment.

While Cortland has had a healthy community life and enjoys the acquaintance of many long-time residents, as well as the energy of many newcomers, some aspects of the community seem to be in decline. It was reported in some interviews that the old post office boxes, all located centrally at the Post Office, allowed the residents to socialize and encouraged older residents to get into town frequently to pick up their mail. Since the post office instituted home delivery, recently, related traffic has gone down, but so has the social life it engendered. Similar issues were raised about the small number of restaurants (2) and public gathering spots, which don’t provide enough opportunity for interaction among residents. The lack of foot traffic, though improved with the sidewalks that were installed from North Avenue to Lincoln Highway (SR 38), is not enough to support retail shops. The presence of the Union Pacific railroad tracks and the increasing amount of train traffic is a divisive presence in the downtown creating two adjoining districts, which cannot be altered.

Still, there are several valued community events and places that serve their users well. The Library, doing yeoman’s duty in the old, eight hundred square foot converted fire barn, was recognized as central to the community life of the town, with the new patio between the Library and Town Hall a welcome asset. The Volunteer Fire Department and Police Department were also recognized in a survey as providing excellent service. The Cortland Parade and fall festival is an event that draws residents of all ages to the

Community Park, which in its turn serves the children of the town year-round. Such events as the town-wide garage sale in the spring, school sports activities, and smaller gatherings through the year make Cortland a wonderful place to be.

In the midst of all this, Cortland residents turned out in large numbers to participate in the Downtown planning process, and provided many excellent suggestions and valuable feedback. In response to sparks of interest from private land-owners and developers, the Downtown Vision Plan was needed to guide and fan the interest, providing support for the future growth of the Downtown neighborhood. A Downtown Redevelopment Sub-Committee of the Town Board is being organized to work with the Illinois Main Street organization and carry the Downtown Vision forward. Today downtown Cortland is considered a diamond in the rough, and it will require everyone's patience and help to realize it's potential.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- “Small town” character and appearance
- Walking scale neighborhood
- All portions of original Town are within a five-minute walk of Somonauk Road; nearly all of Cortland is within a ten-minute walk of the Downtown.
- Somonauk Road improved with decorative lights, new sidewalks, on-street parking
- Proximity of Community Park
- Community is protective of downtown in current state

Weaknesses

- Proximity to DeKalb Ave (IL-23)
- Accessible to IL 38 but not visible
- Small, irregular shape lots
- Multiple property owners
- Railroad divides core area
- Small roster of businesses
- Small number of commercial buildings and lack of critical mass

Opportunities/Assets

- “Small town” character and appearance
- Nearby new development
- Increasing vehicular traffic/county highway (growing market)
- Increasing number of residents (growing market)
- Community has a history (possible tourism applications)

Threats

- Increasing number of commercial locations in Cortland, DeKalb and Sycamore
- Some environmental clean-up sites
- Lack of traditional commercial buildings/no established commercial identity
- Bedroom community thinking

Market Analysis

Cortland is part of the DeKalb/Cortland/Sycamore trade area, which shares customers and suppliers between the three communities and attracts customers from the surrounding area. Currently the majority of retail and office providers are located primarily in DeKalb and secondarily in Sycamore, both 5-10 minutes driving distance from Cortland. Cortland has one sit-down restaurant, one take-out (no drive in) restaurant, one bank, two gas station/mini-marts, and several industrial businesses located in or adjacent the Downtown.

The majority of Cortland's contribution to the market comes from its industrial park, west of the Downtown area, and from the retail and industrial business along Lincoln Highway located south and west of Downtown. Cortland has also dedicated land for commercial purposes along Route 38 and land to the north along Somonauk Road which will eventually host neighborhood shopping and food service uses and the proposed Uptown neighborhood, Cortland's retail and civic center. The library, post office, and Town Hall are expected to move to larger facilities in Uptown in the next five to seven years. All of these developments will impact the Downtown, as will the growth in Cortland's overall population from 3,000 to more than 12,000 persons within the same time frame.

Both DeKalb and Sycamore have significantly larger populations than Cortland, and have long been primary market locations. A number of Cortland residents talked about finding everything they need only ten minutes away. DeKalb has allowed large format, i.e., "big box," retail to congregate along State Route 23 between Peace Road and Barber Green. DeKalb is also working on their own downtown plan, which involves rehabilitating the old storefront buildings along State Route 38, hoping to re-establish boutique retail uses. Sycamore has maintained their storefronts along State Route 64 in better condition and has a number of long-standing retail, restaurant, and service businesses.

Land Use and Zoning

The existing land uses in Downtown Cortland are illustrated in Figure 1, Existing Zoning and Land Uses. As you can see, there are scattered commercial uses (outlined, unshaded), often in older, difficult-to-maintain buildings. The commercial uses do not fill up the existing areas zoned for commercial development. The same is true for the industrial areas. There are also some properties proposed for commercial use that lie outside the commercially zoned areas. A majority of the commercially zoned land is used for civic purposes (outlined, hatched), such as the fire station, post office, Town Hall and library. There are also several single family homes in commercially zoned areas.

Another item of note is that a number of single family homes exist in the two-family zoning, and several multi-family buildings (outlined, cross-hatched) are found in single-family zones. This is not a problem for the current land uses, because a mix of housing uses is important in any community. However, if anything were to happen to these buildings, due to their existing non-conforming status, they could not be re-established in their current locations.



Figure 1. Existing Zoning and Land Uses

Transportation Analysis

There is a direct relationship between land use and transportation. Roads are fixed determinants of land use. Consequently, the characteristics of a road (speed, access, lighting) will exert great influence upon the design and type of development that occurs along the road. Density, too, affects transportation. Low density, measured as dwelling units per acre or floor area ratio, generally is responsible for high trip generation rates. As a rule, as density increases, walking becomes a more viable option, provided pedestrians have a nearby destination to walk to and the walking environment is attractive, safe, and pleasurable.

Downtown Cortland is currently centered on the railroad crossing at Somonauk Road. The railroad essentially divides the Downtown neighborhood into two halves, since between 70 and 100 trains use the railroad on a daily basis. Also, according to a recent study of Somonauk Road driving conditions, a daily average of 2,077 vehicles traveled along Somonauk Road south of North Avenue and a daily average of 2,314 vehicles traveled north on Somonauk Road. Out of this number, an average of 117 trucks use the route daily. The PM peak hour traffic volumes on Somonauk Road at the North Avenue intersection are 175 vehicles headed south and 220 vehicles headed north. (Source: Somonauk Road Corridor Access Study, KLOA, Inc., June 2005 draft).

With the stoppage of vehicle traffic for rail traffic, the cars and trucks frequently get backed up a block or two, and have been known to back up as far south as South Avenue (4 blocks) during peak travel periods. This periodic inconvenience to motorists can be detrimental to shop keepers, too, since the trains stop potential customers from reaching Downtown shops and the long queues of traffic make turning movements and crossing Somonauk Road difficult after the trains pass.

One of the recommendations of the draft traffic study is to create alternate routes parallel Somonauk Road to accommodate traffic as the population of Cortland grows. The town is already investigating the feasibility for a railroad overpass at Loves Road that may induce some of the truck traffic to go around Downtown Cortland. Overpasses are also contemplated at Fenstermaker Road (extended) and Airport Road farther east of the Downtown. The overpasses will also allow emergency vehicles to get across town without waiting for the trains to pass. The Downtown would not be isolate by the overpasses the since the thoroughfare system planned in Cortland provides multiple connections between all types of thoroughfares.

As a direct result of the housing development on the east side of Somonauk, a new collector thoroughfare called Richland Parkway will be constructed. Richland Parkway will connect Barber Greene Road with State Route 38, with an at-grade railroad crossing. This eastern alternative will help funnel local neighborhood traffic away from Somonauk Road. While some concern was expressed at public meetings that these alternative routes will take traffic away from the existing Downtown businesses, this contention doesn't appear to be supported by similar examples in DeKalb and Sycamore. The alternate routes are intended to provide choices and options for crossing the railroad and not to diminish Downtown Cortland as a destination for residents in other parts of the Town.

Urban Design Analysis

The purpose of the Urban Design Analysis is to identify the already important elements of an area in order to ensure that they are maintained and/or strengthened in the public consciousness. Urban design analysis is based on a vocabulary of urban form that people inherently understand but do not necessarily label as such.

The Urban Design Analysis addresses a number of characteristics and design issues, but largely focuses on the pedestrian experience. If the public space is not safe, attractive, inviting and comfortable for pedestrians it will not attract pedestrians and without pedestrians it is doubtful an effective downtown re-investment program can be achieved.

Cortland's Downtown is characterized by a lack of a street wall arising from a collection of frame buildings that are in varying states of repair, underutilized properties, and a lack of appropriate buildings to house new business. As we shall see in the following analysis, this condition is not conducive for downtown development and deprives the downtown of the necessary critical mass and the necessary elements or puzzle pieces that can stimulate investors and excite the public and make Downtown Cortland a vibrant, vital people place.

Street walls

Street walls are the facades of buildings along the street sidewalks. The street wall contributes to the enclosure of the public street, defining the public realm, and helping make the pedestrian feel comfortable on the street or sidewalk. Think of the public street as a public room and the buildings along the street are the walls enclosing the public "room." Consequently, building materials, building height and architectural details at the sidewalk level become important considerations in designing buildings along downtown streets. For example, walking along storefronts with large shop windows is more interesting and pleasurable for pedestrians than walking along a blank wall or a parking lot.

The value of the street wall as an urban design element can be illustrated by comparing State Street (State Route 64) in downtown Sycamore with East State Street in Sycamore. While downtown Sycamore has all of the urban design elements commonly associated with a downtown or "Main Street"-type of environment, the area east of the downtown is less so, primarily because the buildings are set back from the sidewalk and the pedestrian experience is diminished.

Building height contributes to the comfort of the street and needs to be proportional to the width of the street. Very wide streets should have three- or four- story buildings or wide parkways to accommodate shade trees that can be used to reduce the scale of buildings. One-story commercial buildings should be avoided except on the narrowest streets or in particularly unique contexts. With few exceptions, building separation and setbacks along the street frontage should be avoided when retail or restaurant uses are located at street level.

Urbanity requires the delineation of public space by buildings. Spatial definition is not a result of architectural style or ornament, or of decorative urban furnishings. Successful spatial definition is achieved by two physical conditions: bounding buildings are aligned

in a disciplined manner; and, the defined space does not exceed a certain ratio of height to width.

The condition of alignment occurs when the facades of buildings cooperate to delineate the public space, as walls form a room. Urban building articulation must take place primarily in the vertical plane or façade. Appendages such as bay windows, porches, balconies and loggias, which do not obliterate the primary surface of the façade wall, are not destructive to the alignment.

The condition of enclosure generated by the height-to-width ratio of the space is related to the physiology of the human eye. If the width of a public space is such that the cone of vision encompasses less street walls than the opening to the sky, then the degree of spatial enclosure is slight. The ratio of one increment of height to six increments of width is the absolute minimum, with 1:3 being a good effective minimum, if a sense of spatial enclosure is to result (Figure 2, Street Wall Proportions and Techniques). As a general rule the tighter the ratio, the stronger the sense of place, and often, the higher the real estate value. Spatial enclosure is particularly important for shopping streets, which must compete with shopping malls which provide the very effective spatial definition. In the absence of spatial definition by facades, disciplined tree planting is an alternative. Trees aligned for spatial enclosure are necessary on thoroughfares that have substantial front yards.

Except for special buildings or physical features, street walls should be uninterrupted by parking or open spaces, e.g. front and side yard setbacks. Where the street wall is interrupted a fence, wall, hedge or some other vertical element continuing the plane along the street should be provided. Plazas and courtyards would be examples of the exception to this general rule.

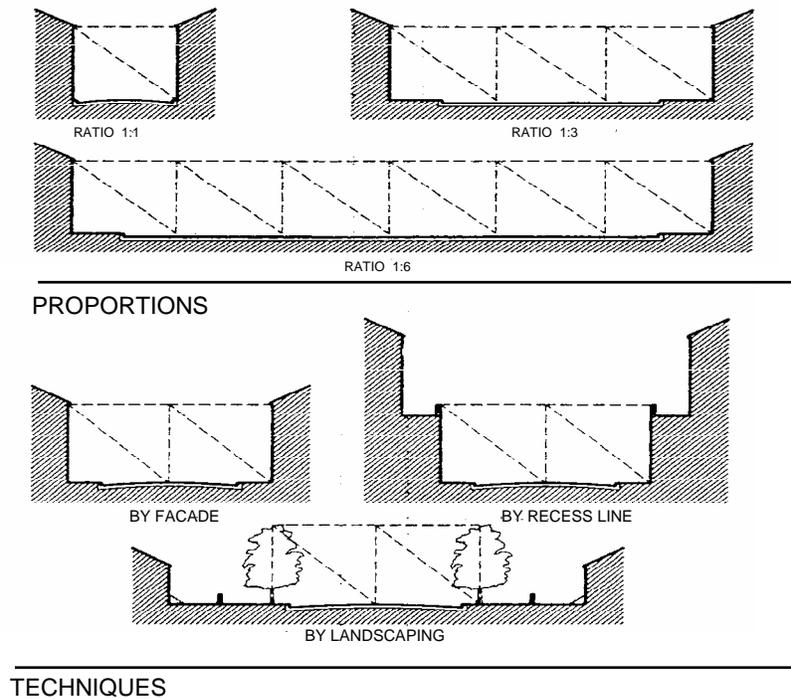


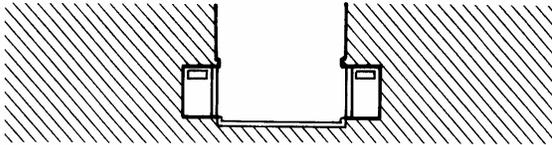
Figure 2. Street Wall Proportions and Techniques

Plazas and courtyards are urban design elements the Town can incorporate in its downtown redevelopment plan. As a design feature, plazas and courtyards are reserved for special spaces, usually civic in nature or purpose. Where civic buildings are set back from the street, the space between the street and buildings wall should be designed as a public plaza or courtyard. A plaza is generally a pedestrian open space between a building and a street. A courtyard is an open pedestrian area enclosed by buildings on at least two sides and may or may not have street frontage. Generally, both plazas and courtyards have a hard surface and may be improved with landscaping, seating areas, fountains, artwork, and other pedestrian amenities or attractions.

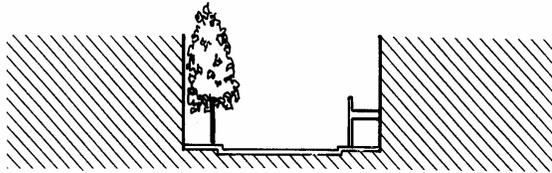
There are seven frontage types that create street walls (Figure 3). The predominant frontage types in Downtown Cortland are the shopfront, and the front lawn. The Town Hall is the only example of a stoop frontage. The front lawn and the porch and fence frontage types are predominant in the adjoining neighborhoods. The arcade, forecourt, and the dooryard types do not currently exist in Downtown Cortland or the surrounding neighborhoods. These frontage types are not inappropriate but their introduction to Cortland should be carefully considered and limited to short street frontages or unique development sites in the downtown.

The front lawn and the porch and fence frontage types are not the recommended frontage type in a downtown environment. This frontage type places the building façade too far from the sidewalk and provides nothing of interest for the pedestrian. One of the attractions of downtown streets is the ability to stroll along the sidewalk and window shop. The front lawn and the porch and fence frontage types deprive pedestrians of this opportunity.

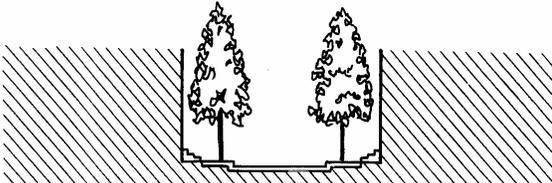
Block frontages dominated by parking lots and driveways crossing the sidewalk are obstacles for pedestrians and discourage pedestrian activity. Blocks lacking a continuous street wall do not create an inviting pedestrian environment and generally present a poor visual appearance resulting from the disconnectedness of the buildings and out-of-scale open spaces between and about the buildings.



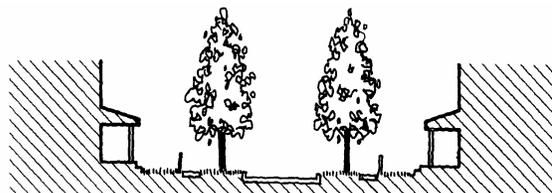
ARCADE The building façade overlaps the sidewalk while the storefront remain set back from the street. This type is excellent for retail use, but only when the sidewalk is fully covered so the pedestrian cannot bypass the colonnade. An easement for the right-of-way encroachment is required.



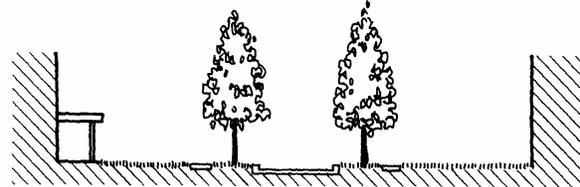
SHOPFRONT The façade is aligned directly on the front lot line with the entrance at grade. This type is conventional for sidewalk retail. It is often equipped with an awning or colonnade. A transition line should separate the signage from the façade above. The absence of a setback discourages residential use on the ground floor, although it is appropriate on floors above.



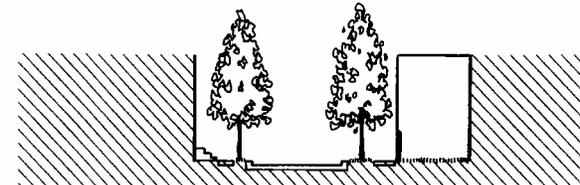
STOOP The façade is aligned directly on the front lot line with the first floor elevated to secure privacy for the first floor windows. This type is suitable for residential uses such as rowhouses and apartment buildings. An easement may be necessary to accommodate the encroaching stoop. This type may be interspersed with the shopfront type.



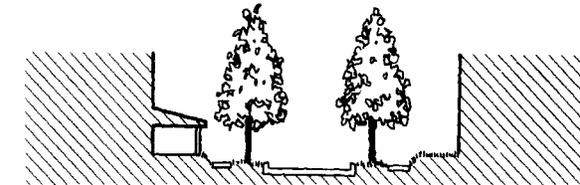
PORCH AND FENCE The façade is set back substantially from the front lot line with an encroaching habitable porch. The porch should be within a conversational distance of the sidewalk. A fence at the front lot line demarcates the boundary of the yard.



FRONT LAWN The façade is set back substantially from the front lot line. The front lawn thus created should be visually continuous with adjacent yards and should be unfenced. The ideal is to simulate buildings sitting in a rural landscape. A front porch is usually not appropriate since no social interaction with the street is possible at such a distance. The large set back can provide a buffer from heavy traffic.



FORECOURT The façade sets back and is replaced by a low wall at the front lot line. The forecourt thus created is suitable for gardens, vehicular drop-offs, and workshop (un)loading. This type should be used sparingly and in conjunction with shopfront and stoop types, as a continuous blind wall is boring and unsafe for pedestrians. Trees



DOORYARD The façade is set back from the front lot line, with an elevated terrace or garden between. This type can effectively buffer residential quarters from the sidewalk while removing the yard from public use. The terrace, when roofed, is suitable for restaurants and cafes as the eye level of the sitter is comfortably level with that of the passerby.

Figure 3. Frontage Types

Building Figure Ground

The amount of ground surface area occupied by buildings in Downtown Cortland and adjoining neighborhoods is shown in Figure 4. It is clear that many of the older buildings stand at the edge of their properties or even encroach upon property lines. This is typical of older settlement, such as the downtown neighborhood. Currently, however, Cortland's zoning code does not permit small or no setbacks, but promotes generous setbacks instead and renders many of the existing buildings in the neighborhood non-conforming. This creates difficulties for businesses that may want to expand, because they have to maintain inappropriate setbacks that interfere with their ability to provide both floor area and parking. There is also a conflict for any buildings that may be destroyed and could not be rebuilt in their current locations. Another effect is to inhibit reinvestment in a building that is non-conforming because property owners are prohibited from making any improvements which affect more than half the building's square footage or more than half of its value. Residents living in non-conforming residential buildings are similarly affected.



Figure 4. Building Figure Ground

Paths and Corridors

Paths and corridors are the channels along which the observer customarily or potentially moves. They are the predominant urban design element. For many people, they observe and experience the Town while moving through it, and along paths and corridors other urban design elements are arranged and related. Paths and corridors are linear in nature and have a distinct character or appearance defined by their surroundings. Corridors tend to be multi-modal and are unified or identified by design or land use characteristics. Paths tend to be more exclusive and decidedly pedestrian in scale (if not purpose). Paths are not always as well-defined as corridors and need not necessarily follow streets or established trails, such as a bike trail.

Another initiative of the Town of Cortland is to require the developers of new neighborhoods to connect bike trails thru their neighborhoods and with existing paths nearby. A number of people in Cortland use bicycles for recreation and for evening and weekend local errands. However, the existing sidewalk system is not thorough enough to meet the needs of the community, particularly to the north of Downtown Cortland. An important project that would provide immediate benefits will be connecting the NeuCort Lakes neighborhood with the sidewalk on the east side of Somonauk Road that ends at the Olsen homestead.

Conflict between transportation modes is prevalent in corridors and paths. Downtown Cortland is no exception. Each mode of travel in Downtown Cortland is at conflict with others: automobile and pedestrian, pedestrian and bicyclist, bicyclist and automobile. The response to these conflicts has been to separate the various modes; cars on paved surfaces, pedestrians on sidewalks. In an urban environment, such as Downtown Cortland, paths and corridors, particularly street corridors, must be designed and maintained to accommodate all modes of transportation, particularly the pedestrian, and should be designed, first, from the pedestrian's point of view.

The sidewalks that have been constructed along Somonauk Road in the Downtown are adequate, but not great, for pedestrian comfort and safety. Although they are a significant improvement over what existed before, the sidewalks are six feet wide, which is too narrow for a small group of people to walk abreast, too narrow for bikes and pedestrians to pass each other with comfort and too narrow for storefront signs or seating.

Wayfinding to and around Downtown Cortland is lacking. Streets leading to Downtown Cortland should have special signage and banners, to complement the lampposts to help establish the street as a special corridor and a special place in Cortland. Directional signs throughout the community would help wayfinding, business identification and neighborhood identity. For example, a "business district" highway sign at Route 38 and Somonauk Road and Barber Greene Road and Somonauk Road would direct passersby to Downtown Cortland.

Edges

Edges are linear elements and are not considered paths by the observer. They are boundaries between two elements or phases of urban design. Edges may be barriers, or seams, the lines along which two distinct regions or neighborhoods are related or joined together. Edges are most effective when they are coincident a side or rear property line, although streets can be an effective edge with appropriate building orientation.

As an urban design element, edges are helpful cues to people for understanding when they have arrived or departed a particular neighborhood, node, or district. Edges are important to a downtown in defining the center's intensity of activity and the mix of land uses and how well this transitions to the surrounding predominantly residential neighborhoods.

The few Edges in Downtown Cortland are easily recognizable:

- The UP Railroad (seam)
- Mary Aldis Lane and the alleys separating commercial and residential uses (barrier)
- The parking lot between Sam's and neighboring residential uses (barrier)
- West Benson Avenue (barrier)

Edges are important to a downtown in defining the center's intensity of activity and the mix of land uses and how well this transitions to the surrounding predominantly residential neighborhoods. The common practice of converting residential structures to commercial purposes is sometimes economical but visually confuses the visitor: where does the downtown begin or end? Because this practice has not taken root in Cortland, this technique should be avoided as an urban design technique and economic development strategy in the future.

Landmarks

As an urban design element, landmarks are a visual reference point and are usually a simple defined physical object: a building, storefront, sign, or natural features that a pedestrian or motorist can use as a reference point as he negotiates the urban landscape. Landmarks, in this sense, are not a reference to historic characteristics or attributes about a building or place. They can include significant buildings or buildings in a significant location, i.e. terminating a vista.

Landmarks, as an urban design element may be distant (seen over the top of smaller elements, e.g. a church steeple), or local, being visible only in restricted locations of from certain approaches. They are used as clues and seem to be increasingly relied upon as a journey becomes more and more familiar. Landmarks in Downtown Cortland include:

- The grain elevator.
- Town Hall and Library
- The Cortland Mobile Home Park
- Casey's
- The railroad crossing

Nodes

Nodes are readily recognizable clusters of like or similar uses or a collection of different uses clearly differentiated from its surroundings. In Downtown Cortland there are four identifiable nodes:

- The “Auto Node” comprised of Casey’s gas station and Griner’s Auto repair shop and the Town garage
- The “Civic Node” formed by the Town Hall, Library and Post Office
- The “Retail/Service Node” on Somonauk Road at Benson Avenue
- The “Industrial Node” comprised of the grain elevator, Johnson Canvas and the industrial uses along the north side of Elm Avenue

Public Participation Process

Stakeholder Interviews

In an effort to gather information directly from the businesses on Somonauk Road, particularly since several are owned and operated by folks from out-of-town and would not have representatives at the meetings, we sat down with a number of individuals to talk about their plans. Often, people are reluctant to discuss their private property plans with the community in general, and rightly so. Nonetheless, some very pertinent information about the future of some businesses in the community was gathered and incorporated in the Downtown Vision Plan. Additionally, several residents along Somonauk Road were interviewed privately and their personal feedback about development interests and concerns were also incorporated in the Vision Plan.

Image Preference Survey

The Image Preference Survey was administered in July 2006. Overall there were about 34 participants in the Survey and most were property owners in the Downtown neighborhood. The participants were shown images or photos of development found in and around northern Illinois. These images were combined with images from other regions around the country to provide a greater variety of choices. The images were intended to cover a broad range of small town, or “Main Street,” development applications and to represent good and bad examples. The images were grouped into the following categories: Commercial, Parks and Open Space, Streets and Alleys, Parking, Single Family, and Multi-Family. The participants were instructed to rate each image on a scale with -5 representing complete disapproval and +5 representing complete approval. Zero indicated a neutral response.

All positive scores are considered positive or desirable. All negative scores are considered negative or undesirable. The values represent varying degrees of approval or disapproval of the images. The most positive images, in effect, are the building blocks for the Plan.

These ten photos show three major items: some type of water feature, parks, and inviting and pedestrian-friendly downtown areas. Image No. 101 (+4.23) and Image No. 16 (+3.85) were the two highest scores. The other favorable images dealt with vibrant downtowns with landscaping, and people as shown in Image No. 69 (+3.61) and Image No. 18 (+3.32). Images that scored the lowest were photos showing empty stores, storefronts, and streetscapes that lacked landscaping. Also included were commercial parking lots that also lacked landscaping and variety, busy intersections, and signs. Images that incorporated pedestrian friendly designs and landscaping scored higher than those that did not. The higher rated images included a variety of new and old designs. The use of land or buildings did not influence scores as much as the appearance of the pedestrian or public realm.

Several key characteristics came forward from this exercise. Participants had concerns about:

1. Scale of new buildings and businesses. Participants welcomed the idea of small “Main Street-type” businesses along Somonauk Road but could not support large businesses in large buildings in the neighborhood. Large footprint commercial uses were considered out of character with Downtown Cortland.
2. Drive-up windows were also considered undesirable in Downtown Cortland.
3. Outdoor dining opportunities rated high in the survey and was a desirable feature of “Main Street” in Cortland.
4. Small-scale signs and signs that were indirectly illuminated scored better than freestanding signs or internally illuminated signs.
5. Participants considered awnings or some weather protection for pedestrians essential to a positive pedestrian environment along store fronts.
6. Landscaping was considered an essential element in off-street parking lots.
7. Traditional architecture and building forms received higher scores than the contemporary or unusual. Participants expressed a strong desire to establish a “Cortland-style” that differentiated Cortland from other communities and identified agricultural building styles as an acceptable model for new commercial and residential construction in the Downtown and throughout the community.
8. Building height that exceeded two stories was not well-received by participants. Generally, survey participants accepted the traditional mixed-use building typology but resisted images that showed mixed-use buildings having three stories or more. Participants indicated that a few exceptions could be tolerated, but as a rule, two-stories was the acceptable height limit.
9. Finally, participants gave strong positive score to images showing well-maintained properties.

Visioning Questionnaire

A community survey was handed out to attendees of the Image Preference Survey meeting, in order to determine social issues and priorities for Cortland residents. The residents were asked to rate the quality of services, identify desirability amenities, identify the town's assets, and prioritize goals. The concerns that stood out and were repeated in a number of surveys included:

- Fire service issue south of the railroad, with the recent house fire on Maple Street fresh in people's minds.
- Lack of Child Care and/or Senior Care services
- High taxes

There were a number of interesting comments, such as:

- "I think Cortland has the potential to be a great place for moderate income families to live. Concerted effort needs to be taken to bring in retail and food industry businesses in an effort to bolster economic growth for the community. Additionally, diligent effort needs to go into development of family-focused recreation areas."
- "Make sure the money is spent to bring future economy, beauty and comfort. Make sure everything is well calculated, engineered thought and organized with potential."
- "Schools too small and outdated. Need a middle school."

In tallying the results, several strong preferences were revealed. Cortland's strongest assets were:

- Sense of Community (44%),
- Personal and Family Safety (41%),
- Farms (29%), and
- NIU (26%).

The most important issues facing the Town of Cortland in the next ten years were

- Development (73%),
- Maintaining Rural Character (47%), and
- Schools (38%).

The three primary characteristics of a small town were:

- Neighborliness (58%)
- Being able to walk safely and comfortably around the neighborhood (53%)
- Familiarity with Residents (44%)

Of the list of businesses to be added to the Town, choices were rated from highest to lowest:

- Grocery Store (13)
- Bakery (13)
- Medical Clinic (11)
- Coffee Shop (9)
- Professional Offices (9)
- Restaurants (8)
- Farmer's Market (8)

- Sandwich Shop (6)
- Dentists, Chiropractor, etc. (4)
- Florist (3)
- Hardware Store (3)
- Fast Food Restaurant (2)
- Clothing Store (2)
- Hobby Store (1)
- Inns and/or Hotels (1)

Charrette

The *charrette*, or design workshop, is a process in which residents are given the opportunity to participate in the physical development of the Vision Plan for Downtown Cortland. The *charrette* is designed to encourage freethinking and creativity. This not only helps the community to get involved but it also produces wonderful ideas and recommendations.

This exercise was intended to determine the extent of change residents could accept for Downtown Cortland in the future. The *charrette* was conducted over a three day period at the Cortland Town Hall. A number of residents took advantage of the open process and came in to look at the plan, discuss options, and give direction to staff about their preferences. Staff used the opportunity to prepare the maps used in the urban design analysis, pull together the ideas of the residents, and evaluate the results of the Image Preference Survey and the Community Attitude Questionnaire. The end result was the preparation of a draft consensus plan (Figure 6) illustrating the physical changes recommended for Downtown Cortland and a list of recommendations or action steps for the public and private stakeholders to implement. The final Vision Plan is depicted in Figure 7.

Downtown Cortland Vision Plan

Quality of Life

- Lower speed limit through Downtown
- Crosswalks and pavement striping
- Pedestrian safety signs
- Meeting space/community room/gathering spaces/social connections
- Child care
- Senior care
- Complete sidewalk network (start with North Somonauk Road to NeuCort Lakes neighborhood)
- Provide bike trail connections

Appearance

- Porches
- Seating areas along Somonauk Road
- Traditional building typologies
- Towers/turrets/steeples
- Dormers/gables
- Traditional architecture, preferably agricultural forms and appearance
- Commercial buildings directly up to sidewalks
- Gardens
- Landscaped parking lots
- Street trees
- High level of public and private maintenance
- Sidewalks and curbs
- Fountains
- Banner signs and awnings
- Two-story height limit
- Keep commercial on-street parking out of adjoining neighborhoods

Goals and Objectives

- Spark private investments/reinvestment to raise visual appeal and property values
- Reinforce Somonauk Road as Cortland's "Main Street"
- Create an inventory of parcels for commercial (re)development opportunity
- Provide community places where old and new residents; young and old can gather at will
- Add/redevelop buildings selectively as the Town grows
 - When property owner is ready
 - Must meet above "useful", "community", and "visual appeal" criteria
- Bring zoning in line with existing and desired uses; adjust codes to reflect "useful", "visual" criteria
- Create off-street parking
- Minimize encroachment of non-residential uses in adjoining neighborhoods
- Allow for modest expansion of the "downtown"

Recommendations

- Make Downtown Cortland a pedestrian-friendly environment
- No drive-up, drive-thru uses in Downtown
- Provide seating at railroad crossing
- Remove the non-conforming status on various downtown properties
- Allow for modest physical expansion of downtown to the north and south
- Exploit Somonauk Road for commercial development purposes while protecting adjoining residential neighborhoods and properties from commercial encroachment
- Allow neighborhood-scale business operations in the corridor; building footprint and parking must fit within lot(s) fronting on Somonauk Road.
- Keep Downtown physically well-connected to all portions of Cortland as the thoroughfare network expands and matures
- Redevelopment and new development along Somonauk Road shall be limited to the locations identified on the Vision Plan
- Redevelopment shall respect the “edges” established by the Vision Plan

Implementation Strategies

- Reduce speed limit within the downtown.
- Provide a high level of public maintenance along Somonauk Road
- Establish design guidelines incorporating the Downtown/Main Street urban design analysis and an emphasis on an agricultural vernacular
- Amend Town Zoning Ordinance to:
 - remove the non-conforming status of various residential and commercial downtown properties;
 - revise permitted uses in the Downtown;
 - establish development standards and requirements consistent with community vision for Downtown
- Establish land development regulations that permit redevelopment in accordance with the Vision Plan by right
- Use Downtown and Community Park as venues for community and civic functions and events
- Provide directional signage on Somonauk Road at State Route 38 and at Barber Greene Road
- Establish a streetscape amenity fund for interested persons to make donations for seating benches, planters, banners, etc.
- Enforce codes and ordinances (traffic, property maintenance, zoning)
- Transform Town Hall building into a historical museum or seniors meeting/activity building
- Use Town’s agricultural and railroad heritage as museum/tourist activities in downtown.
- Encourage adoption and implementation of Illinois Main Street organizational principles and practices
- Extend Elm Avenue west to Loves Road
- Redevelopment of designated parcels shall be governed by the carrying capacity of the parcel(s) on which redevelopment is contemplated, that is,

the size of the parcel shall dictate the amount of off-street parking, the amount of floor area, the number of dwelling units, if any.

- Encourage a unified approach to redevelopment of the collection of irregularly-shaped parcels at the northeast corner of Somonauk Road and State Route 38.

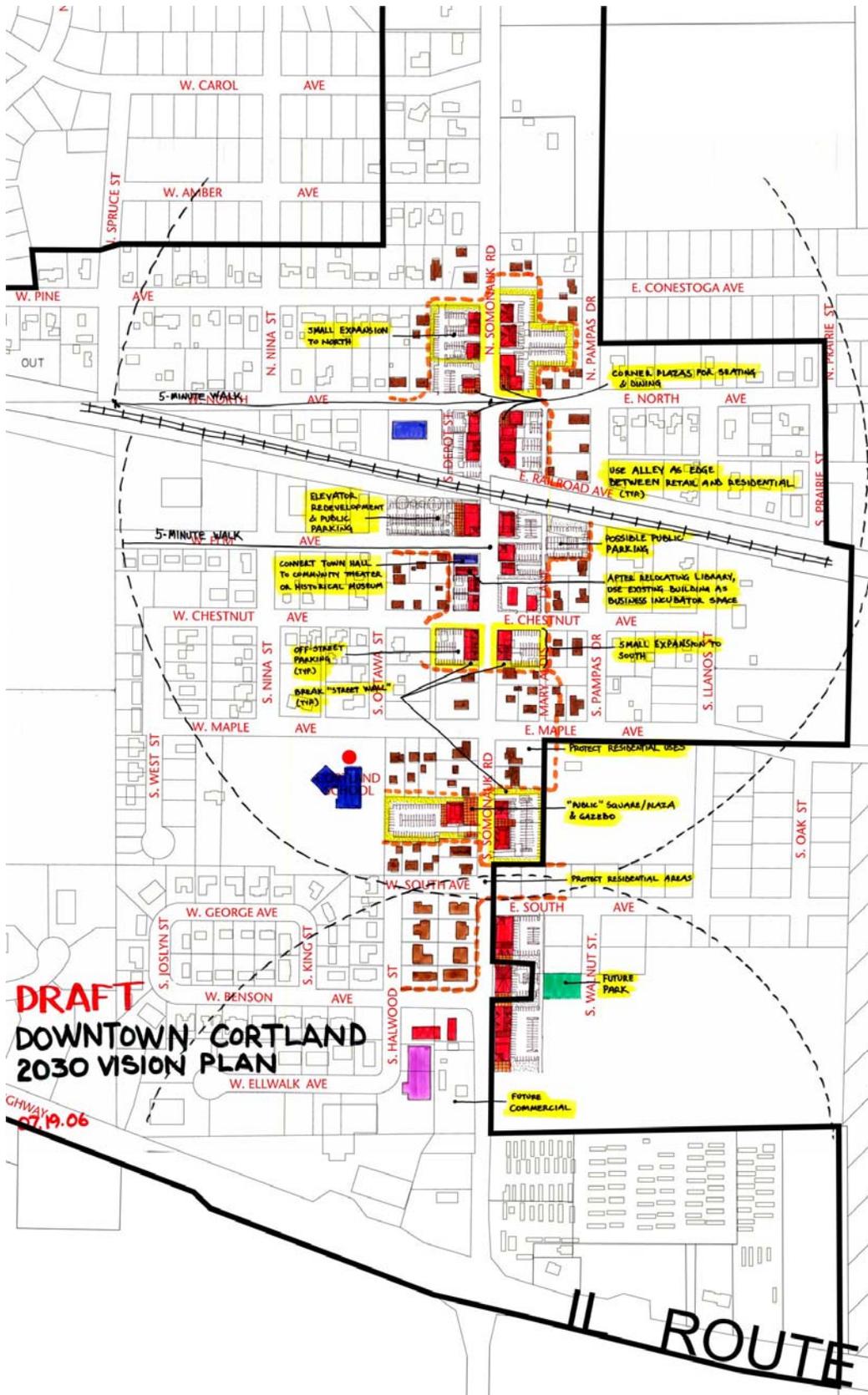


Figure 6. Draft Consensus Plan

Appendix

Charrette participants

The Downtown / “Main Street” Vision Plan is due, in large part, to the participation and involvement of these members of the community:

Mary Benson	Tom Horazak	Shawn McAllister
Mary J. Benson	Marian Huffman	Reba Mullis
Carl Bocklund	Rhonda & Randy Huffman	John Murray
Anita Bumgarner	Nelda Kazazi	Rhonda Richards
Jim Burke	Greg & Stacey Kubitz	Jerry Sanchez
Tom Codel	Anna Dee Lastick	Mike Siewierski
Barb Coward	Joan Lee	Jay Staley
Dan Davis	Paulette Lindgren	Valdomero Velez
Bonnie French	Miliojka Lishkim	Sandra Wantenbe
Doris Hetchler	Harold Malone	Rev. Wendy Witt