

**CHAPTER OUTLINE**

- I. Chapter Focus
  
- II. Findings
  - A. Character and Heritage: Natural Elements
  - B. Character and Heritage: Manmade Elements
  - C. Character and Heritage: Social Elements
  - D. Accommodating Orderly and Balanced Growth
  - E. Establishing and Communicating a Cohesive Community Image
  
- III. Goals and Objectives
  
- IV. Implementation Statement

## **I. CHAPTER FOCUS**

The physical and social characteristics that exist in the community define its character and heritage. They give the community its identity; residents and visitors know and understand it as a unique place. These community characteristics have been handed down to us from previous generations. They do not remain static, however; they are added to and changed as the community grows and changes. This is the “community image”; people’s perception of the physical and social elements present in the community at a particular point in time.

Both natural and manmade physical elements help define the community image. Some of the prominent natural elements include the river, open space and vegetation. Manmade elements include buildings, roads, and neighborhoods within the community. St. Charles’ role within the region is also part of its image. What are we known for -- what do people find in St. Charles that they do not find elsewhere? All of the physical elements comprise the tangible environment of today’s St. Charles and provide models for future community design.

The social elements that contribute to community image include St. Charles’ history, institutions, organizations, and lifestyles. Communicating these elements to the public is critical to community image.

We should preserve the elements that contribute to St. Charles’ image for future generations to enjoy. Those physical elements that do not contribute to a positive community image should be eliminated, modified, or replaced by more appropriate designs. Development and improvements to existing facilities should be done in harmony with the community’s image. To accomplish this, we need to identify, reinforce and promote a cohesive community image that will be perceived and understood by all.

## II. FINDINGS

### A. Character and Heritage: Natural Elements

As in the early 1800's, the Fox River continues to attract people to the community. In earlier days the river's attraction was its economic vitality; now its ambiance and recreational potential are key. The Fox River is the community's most recognized landmark, serving as the major focal point of community location. It also provides visual and mental relief from man-made development. St. Charles would have a very different image if the Fox River did not exist, or if it could not be seen and enjoyed by the average person. St. Charles is fortunate that private development has not closed the river from public view and use.

The topography that follows the river lends a unique interest to St. Charles lacking in most other communities in the region. Areas of unique vegetation, such as Jones Woods and Person Creek Fen along the Fox River, add to the perception that St. Charles has a natural setting.

St. Charles has long enjoyed borrowed open space. For many years the City was surrounded by active farmland. People visually borrow this farmland and make it part of St. Charles' image. Scattered vacant sites within the community also have contributed to the perception of open space as part of St. Charles' character. Many of these sites, particularly the ones along major roads, have been or shortly will be developed. As farmland and vacant sites are developed, the perception of open space is weakened. A drive along Main Street now presents an image of only intermittent open space or green areas.

### B. Character and Heritage: Manmade Elements

Under the influence of regional and local forces, St. Charles has evolved from a pioneer village to a blue-collar industrial town to the diversified community of today. From the early flour mills along the Fox River to the present commercial centers and industrial park, two dominant elements have remained: St. Charles is an activity hub of the Fox Valley, and downtown is the center of the community.

St. Charles' physical environment has been greatly enriched by several community benefactors. The most prominent of these were Lester and Dellora Norris and Colonel Edward J. Baker. Some of the landmarks they were responsible for include:

- The City of St. Charles Municipal Center.
- The Henry Rockwell Baker Memorial Community Center.
- The Arcada Theater.

- The Hotel Baker.
- The St. Charles National Bank (now Old Kent Bank).
- The St. Charles High School Complex, the John Baker Norris Recreation Center and the Norris Cultural Arts Center.
- Community Churches.
- Main Street Bridge (as reconstructed in 1928).
- Pottawatomie Golf Course and Pool.

The extent of these landmarks testifies to the benefactors' commitment to the community and the significance of their legacy. St. Charles is fortunate that much of its physical heritage is still in place. In addition to the those attributable to the Norrises and Colonel Baker, prominent community landmarks include:

- Dunham-Hunt House
- School House at Burlington and Wasco Roads
- Driessen Building
- Old Church Inn
- Charleston Guest House
- Wildrose Farm (House & Buildings)
- Old Hospital (on 2nd Avenue north of railroad)
- Idle Hour Theater (Clancy Building)
- Garfield Farm
- Old Post Office
- West Main Photo Shop
- Fox Island Square

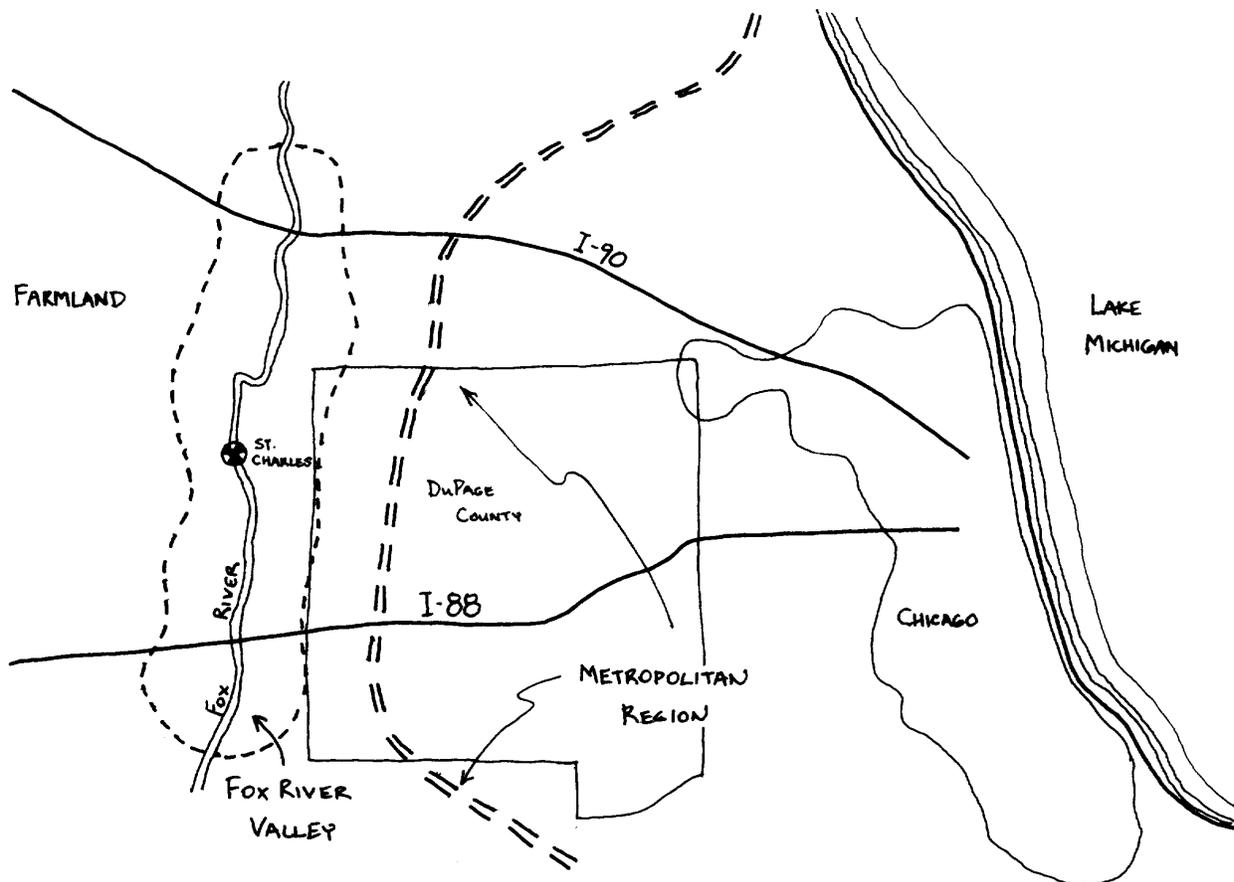
The recently created Historic Preservation Commission will help to preserve St. Charles' manmade heritage. The Commission's mission is to educate City officials and citizens as to the benefits of historic preservation, to advise property owners as to appropriate techniques for improving their properties, and to advocate historic preservation within the community. The Historic Preservation Commission will help to raise community awareness about the importance of preserving our heritage.

St. Charles' growth and character have been influenced by its location within several spheres of influence, as illustrated in Figure 3-1. These include the metropolitan region, the City of Chicago, the Fox Valley, and the farmlands to the west. The metropolitan region, and in particular DuPage and northern Cook Counties, have offered increasing employment and trade opportunities for St. Charles. Being an hour away from one of the largest cities in the world has yielded great economic and social opportunities to St. Charles from the beginning. If not for the historic role of Chicago in the development of the midwest, St. Charles would not exist in its present form. As part of the Fox Valley, St. Charles has participated in an identity that is related to, but independent of, the "Chicago

suburbs". The area's farmlands contribute to the rural and open space character of St. Charles.

Tourism, large scale commercial development, upscale housing -- all demonstrate that St. Charles is playing an increasingly larger role in the metropolitan arena. At the same time, the metropolitan area is having a greater influence on St. Charles. St. Charles' image can be strengthened by its relationship with the metropolitan area if it can retain its unique character and adapt regional influences so that they are in harmony with its image.

**FIGURE 3-1  
SPHERES OF INFLUENCE**



**C. Character and Heritage: Social Elements**

St. Charles' early social characteristics were established by early settlers -- Hoosiers and New Englanders who brought the values of hard work and independence to the Fox Valley. These settlers founded the Village of Charleston and laid the foundations for today's community. Their values are still reflected in the community's desire to be self-sufficient and independent.

Education and religious belief have always been a strong part of St. Charles' heritage. Projecting these elements helps maintain a strong community and preserve its resources and values.

From the early flour mills in 1837 to the present, a significant part of St. Charles has been devoted to industry. Industry located here initially because of the river, and workers found a place to live and raise their families in the neighborhoods.

Historically, one of St. Charles' strengths has been its socioeconomic diversity. In recent years St. Charles is increasingly an affluent, white collar community. This is another indication of the influence of the metropolitan area. In itself, nothing is wrong with increasing affluence. If it causes displacement of people who have been part of the community, however, it damages our heritage. Ideally, we can have increasing affluence while preserving our socioeconomic diversity.

With the heritage of past community benefactors in place and a wider variety of services provided by local government, people may be less inclined to realize the importance of contributing to the enrichment of the community. If we fail to continue to build our heritage, however, the community we hand to our children will suffer. The many organizations and groups actively involved in improving the community and providing needed services attest to St. Charles' recognition of this fact.

**D. Accommodating Orderly and Balanced Growth**

When asked what they most liked about living in St. Charles, most residents talked about the community's small town or home town atmosphere. They convey the feeling that St. Charles is not just the geographic location of their home. They enjoy living in St. Charles; they have made a conscious decision to live here and strongly identify with a specific neighborhood. Long term as well as newer residents feel a strong sense of belonging; in a mobile society that sense is comforting. The scale of St. Charles is easy for people to comprehend. Hence, they sometimes feel hostile towards growth that threatens that scale. They have come to St. Charles for a specific life-style and are now afraid that their life-style may be changed.

In statistical terms, of course, St. Charles ceased to be a small town a long time ago. The fact that people still identify with it as such says that, so far, growth has managed to preserve the sense of place. If this is to be the case in the future, then growth must be balanced.

Balanced growth must be concerned with both land use and population. St. Charles has been able to remain an independent City and not be engulfed by the larger metropolitan region because of its healthy balance of commercial, residential and industrial areas. Residents have always been able to live, work and shop in St. Charles. This balance of land uses has greatly contributed to the quality of life in St. Charles and it should be maintained.

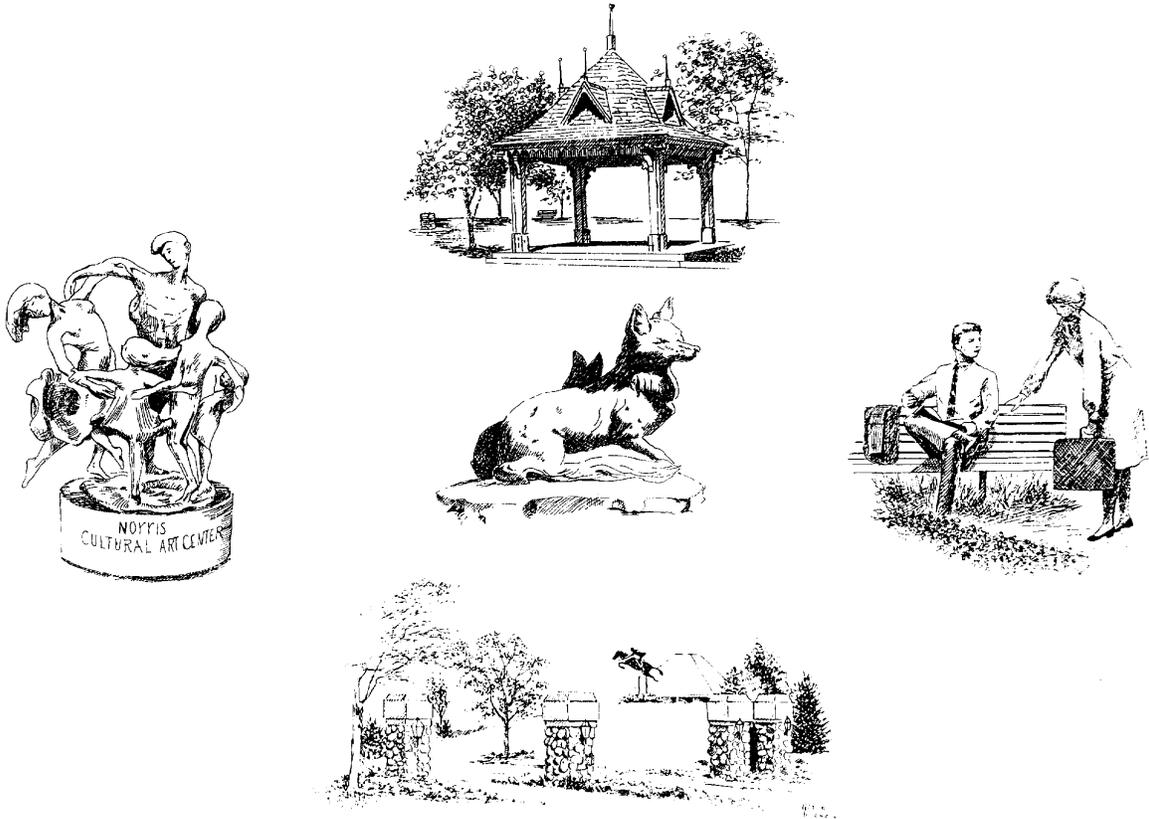
Population balance, having a variety of age groups and income groups, is important to the viability of any community. In order to insure that variety, the City must continue to encourage developers to provide a mix of housing opportunities. Currently, the community has a relatively young population. As housing opportunities and costs shift upward, as is currently taking place, the younger home purchaser could be priced out. This kind of shift could upset the City's population balance.

The City's balance of land uses and population is at a critical juncture. The community is starting to extend to its limits of growth which are dictated by adjoining jurisdictions and by the limits of water and sewer capabilities. Balanced growth needs to be carefully considered when reviewing the future development of St. Charles.

**E. Establishing and Communicating a Cohesive Community Image**

Having a unique, cohesive community image distinguishes St. Charles from other communities and distinguishes one part of town from another. For example, the downtown area should project a different feeling than a particular residential neighborhood or a corridor area. People are much more comfortable with a community when they can easily relate to its scale and comprehend its layout. Compatible land uses and a sense of place ensure long term community cohesiveness.

As a community grows and evolves, older buildings and amenities are sometimes compromised or destroyed. If this occurs, we begin to lose touch with our heritage. Once we begin to lose our heritage, our community image, we find it difficult to distinguish one community from another. This is increasingly an issue as the same fast food restaurants, service centers and commercial establishments can be found along "the strip" from coast to coast. As time goes on, commercial architecture that fails to consider the community's heritage threatens the character of more and more communities.



In the past, the City was able to take things for granted; the community acquired its identity easily. Neighboring farmers provided open space, local benefactors gave the community local landmarks and the City was far enough from Chicago to avoid being engulfed by the metropolitan region. Now, the farms are major developments, the benefactors are no more and the metropolitan region is knocking on the City's eastern door.

The buffer between St. Charles and the Chicago suburbs is shrinking: St. Charles' identity could be fused with the other suburbs. It is more important now than at any other point in St. Charles' history to establish and communicate a cohesive community image: An image of what St. Charles is and what makes it different from other communities. That image should center around four basic premises:

- 1) Integrated open space and green areas.
- 2) Home Town atmosphere.
- 3) Strong sense of community.
- 4) Balanced and orderly development.

Translating these premises into physical form requires clear but flexible guidelines and effective implementation. Establishing design standards, historic preservation review, and landscape standards is the first step; the City must also devote sufficient resources to administering and enforcing them. Potentially, design standards could include the following elements:

- Building Design
- Relationship of building to site
- Relationship of project to adjoining area
- Landscape and site treatment
- Signs
- Lighting
- Street furniture
- Miscellaneous structures
- Maintenance

Design standards should be based on and accomplish the following design criteria:

Harmony Harmony is the relationship, without conflicts, between nature and the built environment, and between the components of the built environment.

Order Order can be viewed as a consciously created pattern of relationships between different natural and man-made parts.

<u>Scale</u>	Scale is the relationship of proportions between various components of the environment. “Human scale” is the relationship of these proportions as measured against the physical dimension of human beings.
<u>Visual Interest</u>	An environment with order alone can become monotonous, whereas, a lack of order can result in chaos. An ideal condition, therefore, is an environment with neither monotony nor chaos, but variety within an order.
<u>Identity</u>	Identity is the quality associated with distinctness. Being recognized or having an identity is a basic need. Most people like to individualize their homes or prefer a certain style of car. Larger environments (like communities) need to express an identity, too. It gives people a “sense of place”.
<u>Separation of Uses</u>	This criteria strives for separation of uses that are incompatible. It can be achieved by either not allowing incompatible uses to be located adjoining each other, or visually separating them by the use of landscaping techniques such as fences, planting trees and berms.

These design principles were adapted from Physical Environment Through Urban Design, a document produced by the College of DuPage in 1987.

### III. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- A. Preserve St. Charles' distinct identity as an independent City, while interacting within various neighboring spheres of influence.**
  - 1. Through continued economic and cultural development, maintain St. Charles as an activity hub in the Fox Valley.
  - 2. Maintain high development standards with added emphasis on open space.
  
- B. Preserve the Community Heritage of St. Charles.**
  - 1. Encourage historical and architectural preservation including regulatory changes.
  - 2. Develop guidelines to ensure architectural harmony between existing, remodeled and new structures within the City.
  - 3. Initiate community projects relating to community heritage involving local clubs, organizations and residents.
  - 4. Maintain a community cohesiveness through the avoidance of any activities, names or comparisons that would lead to an East/West community division.
  
- C. Protect and enhance the natural aesthetic qualities of the community.**
  - 1. Retain and preserve all actual and visual river front open space.
  - 2. Wherever possible secure additional public space and river frontage, through dedication of land, monetary contribution and other means.
  - 3. Aggressively enforce and strengthen regulations regarding setbacks, sign controls, landscaping, open space etc.
  - 4. As part of the project review process, insure that private and public open spaces fit the context of the area.

**D. Provide for future growth and appropriate land use while maintaining and enhancing the Home Town atmosphere of St. Charles.**

1. Maintain the City's current balance of commercial, residential and industrial development.
2. Encourage individual neighborhood identification through specific plantings, signage, and other amenities.
3. As part of the project review process, insure that new projects are within a reasonable scale for the area.

**E. Preserve and enhance a consistent identifiable physical community image.**

1. Develop a greenway system for and around St. Charles, interconnecting large public open spaces and smaller private open/green spaces.
2. Develop an identifiable image of St. Charles as a spacious, Home Town community in control of its own destiny. The image needs to be theme oriented to allow incorporation into private and public projects.
3. Actively seek public input in community project specific neighborhood design.
4. Promote the image of St. Charles through wise land management, and the development of unique amenities involving signage, walkways, lighting, visual green spaces, definable business and residential boundaries, courtyards, public art and landscaping.
5. Develop design standards or appearance codes for the City of St. Charles.

#### **IV. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT**

If the community wants to preserve, enhance and project a specific image, it must take active steps toward that goal. That image needs to be incorporated into every aspect of the community. To be successful, image can't be an afterthought or considered only where convenient. As the various sections of this Plan are implemented, community image has to be in the forefront.

The strongest means for the development and promotion of a specific community image are design standards or appearance codes. Many different items and areas need to be addressed. This will be accomplished through individual studies and projects.

A cohesive community image evolves over the course of time. Its power to change our lives and our community for the better are limited only by our imagination and ingenuity. To quote Daniel Burnham, "Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men's blood. Make big plans, aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us." And our daughters and granddaughters.