



PLANNING FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES: CASE VIGNETTES

LINKING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE RESEARCH PROJECT

CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

DEPT. OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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Village of Lombard, Illinois

The Village of Lombard is a family-friendly city in northeast Illinois that promotes family togetherness by providing accessible recreation and social outlets for all segments of the residential population, regardless of their socioeconomic situation. “The key is free.”

PUBLIC ARTS CONSORTIUM

One way that Lombard has been able to provide free, outdoor activities for residents has been through the village’s Public Art Program. This program provides funding for the purchase of artwork to be displayed on and around Village-owned property in an effort to create a sense of place while aesthetically enhancing the village’s downtown area. The village also joined a sculpture consortium with other local municipalities wherein public art pieces could be displayed and rotated amongst the participating communities. Lombard’s participation in this program earned it the designation of “Illinois Arts-Friendly Community” for 2008.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Lombard has also strived to provide free parks and recreational opportunities for residents. Lombard recently opened a water spray park in a pocket park as a free facility for children in the downtown area. The park is open when the temperature is above 70°F. The village also maintains a community garden that allows families to grow their own healthy food over the summer for a nominal fee. The garden is housed within a larger city park, Madison Meadow, which features other opportunities for environmental stewardship via a wetlands area and a tree nursery. The park also boasts athletic courts and fields, fishing, boating, ice skating, disc golf, a walking trail, and a sheltered picnic area.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Lombard designated its downtown a “TIF district” for the purpose of expanding and enhancing the

downtown area. When the district faced its 23-year expiration recently, the city moved to renew the district for another 12 years. They also earmarked any surplus funds to be used for the expansion of the city school district’s kindergarten program from half-day to full-day. The result of this initiative has been to expand opportunities for childhood learning and development at no additional cost to parents.

ACTORS AND CHALLENGES

Many of Lombard’s family-friendly initiatives have been government-directed using the input of community stakeholders. The village has been particularly successful in maximizing public/private partnerships. In the case of the water spray park, a local bank donated the land, the parks department bought and installed the equipment, and the village provided site amenities for the property. With the public art initiative, \$80,000 was donated by private sources and matched with \$80,000 in public funds. Lombard has also enjoyed success with public/public partnerships (intra-government agencies). As part of an intergovernmental agreement with school districts Lombard created pass-through dollars that would provide for money to go from TIF allocations back to school districts to provide for additional educational services. This initiative was a “win-win” scenario for multiple public agencies with tangible benefits for all parties. Most importantly, actions were transparent for the public and show them that government agencies can work together, thereby bolstering trust in public agency decision-making.

SOURCES

www.lombardparks.com

Contributor from the Village of Lombard: William Heniff, Director of Community Development

Compiled by Kathleen Hoover, Kevin McAvey

These case vignettes are part of a larger initiative on Planners’ Role in Creating Family-Friendly Communities, directed by Professor Mildred Warner. This research is funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Additional issue briefs and case studies can be found on our website. <http://economicdevelopment.cce.cornell.edu>

City of Rockwall, Texas

PARTICIPATION

Rockwall, Texas is a vibrant community located in the fastest growing county in the U.S. by population (US Census Bureau, 2006). The city stands out for involving residents -- particularly families -- in the planning process, while funding and implementing initiatives that meet families' needs and ultimately benefit the community at large. One example is when the city decided to increase park facilities (and other infrastructure) as one of its "7 Focus Areas." Planners held multiple focus groups with various "end users," particularly families, to identify what aspects they most desired for recreational, educational and other purposes. These meetings resulted in a new 50-acre sustainable community park slated to be co-located with a new elementary school and future high school.

CONSIDERING SPECIAL NEEDS FAMILIES

Rockwall also appreciates the desires of its special-needs families. One way they do this is through parks and recreation programs, like the Special Needs Open Gym. This free, community program provides a safe place for children to interact with one another and participate in many different activities while the parents meet as a support group. The Open Gym program is open to all ages and meets the last Friday of the month in the evening so both parents and children are able to attend. Currently over 200 families in the community are involved.

ART IN PUBLIC SPACES

Finally, the community is a member of Art in Public Spaces, a program that places quality works of art in public places. Residents believe that public art encourages a sense of community ownership and pride of public spaces, while acting as a landmark and gathering place. These pieces also encourage outdoor activities, appreciation for nature, and creative thought and learning. The city also places Artists in Residence for area schools during the academic year. Through a partnership with local elementary school PTA programs, various professional visual and performing artists immerse themselves with students from five elementary schools in areas as diverse as opera, filmmaking, photojournalism, story telling, expressive percussion and creative math.

SOURCES

<http://www.rockwall.com/Parks/index.asp>
<http://www.rockwallartinpublicplaces.com>

Contributor from Rockwall: Michael Hampton, AICP, Planning and Zoning Manager

Village of Weston, Wisconsin

The Village of Weston, WI is small, with a population of around 13,500. Its median household income is a little over that of the nation at \$46,000 (Census, 2000), and its population is young, with nearly 70% under 45 years of age. This last statistic arose from the Village's 2006 internal evaluation, the results of which surprised many, according to Dean Zuleger, Village Administrator. It showed that the community had shifted from a "bedroom baby boomer community to a largely Gen X and Millennial stand alone community." In response to these changing demographics, Weston took proactive steps to meet "the needs of [its] youngest taxpayers," launching the "New Generations Initiative."

NEW GENERATIONS INITIATIVE

The Initiative, started in 2008, proactively aims to meet the needs of these young families by both fostering community involvement and enhancing their quality of life. Village staff partnered with neighborhood associations to identify young leaders to invite to "Future Weston," a public service academy, in preparation for service on the Village's standing committees. Staff also worked to make local government accessible to the "two click" generation by designing a state-of-the-art website, linking community members through networking sites such as Facebook, hosting online chat forums on important public issues, and webcasting Village Board meetings. The opinions of less-accessible teenagers were also sought out by staffers through visits to "third places" and local hangouts. Such proactive steps have helped to connect young families and professionals to Weston's government.

The Village has also engaged issues ranging from affordability (keeping taxes low) to business development (trying to attracting shops attractive to this group and high-tech ventures for employment) to neighborhood development (creating a "sense of place" around clean, safe, walkable and green neighborhoods) and safety (red zone traffic policing, child-crime education, and fast medical response times) to further meet the needs of Weston's young families. Weston's efforts have demonstrated how even small municipalities can successfully attract and retain this important demographic.

SOURCES

<http://www.westonwisconsin.org/>
http://www.westonwisconsin.org/media/New_Generations1.pdf

Contributors from Weston: Dean Zuleger, Village Administrator; Jennifer Higgins, Community Development Director/ Zoning Administrator