

SYCAMORE BUSINESS *Matters*



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Updates to the City of Sycamore's Five-Year Plan

The City of Sycamore has a rich history and character that embodies the values and charm of small-town America. As the City continues to see growth in residential, commercial, industrial and tourism sectors, we place emphasis on ensuring that Sycamore maintains our identity as a small town. Toward that end, a guiding principle that is used in community development efforts is to "preserve, then enhance."

To achieve these goals while integrating growth and development, the City developed a comprehensive plan to serve as a guide to the physical, social, and economic development of the community. The plan represents the community's vision and helps direct future planning and community decisions. It includes historical references, inventory and analysis of current conditions; sets goals and objectives; and then details the process of obtaining those goals through land use standards, a downtown focus area and urban design guidelines.

While the comprehensive plan looks long term, we update and review the plan roughly every five years. Some of the broad-based planning questions that came about in the current comprehensive plan are:

- What land uses should develop within the mile-and-a-half perimeters of the City?
- What public policies should shape the development of these uses?
- How should the City preserve and enhance the quality of life within its corporate boundaries?
- Should the City's subdivision, planned development, and zoning regulations be amended to more effectively implement the plan?
- How can the City enhance its identity? What are the areas in which a uniform branding would promote Sycamore to residents, businesses and visitors (i.e. gateways, downtown, etc.)?

The plan was last updated in 2014 on the heels of the "great recession," minimizing the need for adjustments to the land use maps. This allowed the process to focus in on sub-areas and components such as the downtown, redevelopment opportunities, gateways to the City, infrastructure and maintaining public and private property in our community. While the vision of the comprehensive plan is long term, decisions made today will impact tomorrow and generations in the future. Small adjustments to goals and objectives in present day are more manageable than trying to make those modifications after an objective has moved off course for many years.

Policies, programs and projects that came about as a result of the most recent comprehensive plan include:

- Several projects, especially residential proposals, have been evaluated using the goals, objectives and criteria of the comprehensive plan to determine if the project is consistent with the long-term community vision. Land use, zoning, density and bulk building regulations are among the many factors that help determine if a project is consistent with the comprehensive plan.
- In order to promote investment in downtown buildings, the City Council approved a façade program aimed at permanent improvements. Matching grants are available for up to \$5,000 per building by utilizing hotel tax revenue from visitors who stay overnight in Sycamore. The program was recently extended to business properties within gateway areas including Route 64, both east and west of downtown and N. Main Street from the river south. This program has already supported projects including the renovation of the Carriage House apartments and improvements to County Liquors on East State Street.

The Comprehensive Plan called for exploring additional parking spots and continued improvements to the west end of the downtown. In an effort to advance both of these objectives, the City entered into a public-private agreement with Autometer utilizing Tax Increment Finance assistance for improvements to the gravel parking lot along Sacramento Street between City Lot #3 and the DeKalb County Community Foundation. The improvements included the installation of a paved surface, lighting and landscaping in the lot. The lot remains under the ownership of Autometer, but is available for public purposes after 5 pm on weeknights and after noon on weekends.

- Sycamore possesses a unique element that no other downtown offers: penny parking meters. Even as parking meter technology evolves, downtown Sycamore will preserve the tradition of penny meters as it helps shape the identity of the downtown. Shortly after the most recent comprehensive plan update, the City was able to acquire approximately 700 mechanical parking meters from the City of Joliet. These meters will provide necessary parts to keep the mechanical penny meters operating for many years.
- Branding the downtown area with consistent signage and materials was another objective that was highlighted in the comprehensive plan. New signage was installed in the public parking lots and a continuation of stone material is being used to re-face masonry signs. Look for more branding signage and landscaping downtown this summer!

Later this year, the City will begin the process of updating the comprehensive plan. The process is open to the public, and all are encouraged to participate. Stay in touch with your local government in a variety of ways: visit cityofsycamore.com, where you can sign-up to receive e-mail notices and agendas; follow us on Facebook and Instagram; and watch for information on Local Cable Channel 14. ■