

HABITAT HIGHLAND PARK — COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PROFILE

PART I — THE BASICS

A1 Community Demographics for General Population

Highland Park, IL, total population: 29,515

Age Distribution

Under 5 – 6%

5-17 – 18.7%

18-24 – 4.7%

25-34 – 5.9%

35-54 – 26.6%

55-64 – 15.6%

Over 65 – 22.7%

Race & Ethnic Diversity

White – 85.9%

Hispanic or Latino of any race – 7.9%;

Asian – 2.9%;

Black or African American - .8%

American Indian or Alaskan Native - .1%

Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders – 0%

Educational Attainment of Adults

High school graduates – 97.2%

Attending college – 2.1%

College graduates – 73.8%

Employment (top 7 categories):

Professional, scientific, technical services – 16.2%

Healthcare – 14.7%

Education – 11.3%

Retail – 9.1%

Finance – 9.0%

Manufacturing – 7.5%

Accommodation – 5.7%

Other categories – wholesale, real estate, administration, construction, information technology, arts combined – 29.1%

Community Income

Per capita: \$90,442 (per capita US - \$34,103)

Median household income: \$150,269 (median US – \$62,843)

Proportion individuals below poverty: 4.5%

A2 Community Demographics for Schools

Highland Park High School: in the 2021-22 academic year, Highland Park High School enrolled approximately 1,994 students. Student-teacher ratio is 14:1; minority enrollment (majority Hispanic) is 30% of student body.

Elementary Schools: in the 2021-22 academic year 3,941 students, with 335 teachers, and a student-teacher ratio of 12:1

B **Habitat Achievement Goals**

We hope to establish robust citizen and organization participation in the NWF Community Wildlife Habitat project within three years. We hope to exceed the number of household and organization participation points required for certification, and we hope to establish ongoing collaboration with the many environmentally focused groups in our geographic area. We anticipate supporting community education and cleanup events offered by existing service groups' activities and staging outreach and education events on our own.

C **Project name: HABITAT HIGHLAND PARK**

PART II **CERTIFICATION GOALS — CREATING HABITAT**

A **Community Schools**

a Public school districts

Highland Park High School (1)

Highland Park Elementary and Middle Schools (10)

b Private or Parochial schools

Pre-K-12 – 7 private schools, of which 6 are Pre-K; 1 serves students in Grades 5-12.

School grounds are potentially well suited as community Habitat sites and learning spaces. The national initiative, Green Schoolyards America, offers guidelines that align with the Part II A a and b categories of this profile.

c Other educational sites where kids learn outdoors on a regular basis

Heller Nature Center

Rosewood Beach Learning Center

Sunset Park (summer learning programs)

Hidden Creek Aqua Park

B **Community Common Areas**

Common areas and organizations that may be a good candidates for Habitat registration include:

a Neighborhood, city, county, municipal or other parks

Park District of Highland Park

Park District Natural Areas

Heller Nature Center

Rosewood Beach

HP Recreation Center + The Preserve Highland Park

Laurel Park and Rose Garden

Deer Creek Racquet Club

Sunset Valley Golf Club

West Ridge Center

Highland Park Golf Learning Center

Hidden Creek Aqua Park

Stupey Cabin

Green Bay Trailheads (near Bloom St/Port Clinton and Roger Williams/St Johns)

Berkley Prairie

Hybernia Illinois Nature Preserve

b Neighborhood areas

Moraine Township properties (e.g., Daggit and Mooney Cemeteries with rain garden)

c High-visibility, high-traffic community sites that may include government buildings, business, museums, nature centers

Highland Park City Hall

Highland Park Schools

Highland Park Library

Churches and Synagogues as identified by volunteer corps

Other – city parks are part of the high traffic sites that we will try to involve in our Habitat project

C Homes and Other Properties in the Community

a Number of households – 11,477 in the period 2015-2019, per US Census

b Number of neighborhoods – 22, per AllChicagoHomes.com

c Number of businesses — 850+ (per HP Chamber of Commerce)

PART III — COMMUNITY PARTNERS, ALLIES, ASSETS

A Community Partners

Below is a list of potential collaborators and allies for this project. Additional organizations may emerge as we contact organizations listed below and they recommend other possible collaborators. This is a “starter” list; some of the organizations may not be a good fit, but it seems useful for us to at least explore their interest. However, even if the Habitat outreach and education activities are not completely aligned with some of these organizations, many have grounds that could serve as habitats, so they merit the effort to contact them.

a-e Experts and research professionals; community foundations; government agencies; neighborhoods and HOA civic associations; non-profit organizations such as museums, nature centers, 4-H, YW or WCAs, scouts, etc.

Collapsing categories a-e above, below are potential partners for our Habitat project:

- Go Green Highland Park
- League of Women Voters of Highland Park-Highwood
- City of Highland Park Highland Park Rotary Club (sponsorship role; help with annual Habitat-related events)
- City of Highland Park’s Sustainability Advisory Group (extensive web resources to support extensive green events and outreach; policy guidance; connecting Habitat to other City initiatives)
- Highland Park High School, specifically AP Environmental Science program and Green School Initiative Club (ownership of high school-sponsored activities; development of project graphics, curricular activities)
- Park District of Highland Park (specifically, the Pollinator Program, as well as the various sites that comprise the Park District as potential habitat hosts)
- Highland Park Farmers Market (location for tabling outreach for explaining the Habitat program to consumers who visit weekly)
- Highland Park Public Library (outreach information kiosks; possible education programs co-sponsored with the library; participation of the Historical Society's Stupey Gardens)
- Highland Park Senior Center (outreach flyers, personal contact with Senior Center members to invite their participation)
- Art Center of Highland Park (grounds could develop a habitat; possible focus of art classes)
- Friends of Green Bay Trail
- Open Lands, including its Fort Sheridan Open Space Lakeshore Preserve
- Churches, Synagogues, Mosques
- HP Chamber of Commerce (possible sponsorship of outreach events?)
- Bird Conservation Network of Highland Park (Nature Programs)
- Ravinia Neighborhood Association (publishes a newsletter that we could use for outreach)
- Ace Hardware (history of offering native plants; possible demonstration site within the garden plants department)
- Lake County Forest Preserve (Berkeley Prairie and Prairie Wolf Slough in Highland Park)

- Lake Cook Chapter, Illinois Audubon Society
- Boy Scouts of Highland Park
- Moraine Township

f Local media outlets (newspapers, radio stations, TV stations)

- Highland Park Patch
- Go Green Highland Park Newsletter
- League of Women Voters Highland Park-Highwood Newsletter
- Ravinia Neighborhood Newsletter
- WTTW
- City of Highland Park eNews
- Highland Park Senior Center Newsletter
- HP Neighbors
- Nextdoor Neighbors (Highland Park)
- The Highlander
- FB groups – HP Families, neighborhood groups (e.g., Highlands, SW HP, Sunset Park, Moraine North)

B **Local Events or Projects that Habitat could Participate in or Co-sponsor to Expand Awareness of the Habitat Project**

Examples of annual events in which the Habitat project would be a good partner:

- Earth Day/Arbor Day
- National Migratory Bird Day
- National Wildlife Week
- Arbor Day
- All-City Highland Park Recycling/Cleanup Annual Event

C **Potential Locations for Hosting Educational Events or Workshops**

- The annual *Highland Park Farmers Market*, which operates in the Ravinia area from May – October every Wednesday offers a weekly venue for GGHP and Habitat tabling activity. This can include NWF flyers on the Habitat program, lists of native plants and where to purchase them, lists of landscapers and designers who support native plant landscaping, etc.
- *Highland Park Library* offers another location for tabling events, flyers, and education programs
- *Heller Nature Center* offers nature classes as part of Park District of Highland Park

D **Sites for Natural Habitat Demonstrations and How They Were Created**

We will develop a map of properties that have intentionally established natural habitats or habitat *areas* within home properties enabling organization of a garden tour for instructional purposes. Startup source of such properties: GGHP and LWV members who have developed habitat friendly environments and are willing to participate in a tour. Go Green Wilmette, a neighboring village, has developed a garden tour format that we can use. The City of Highland Park has worked closely with its GIS department to develop an online, interactive map that showcases sustainable initiatives in Highland Park. The map reflects projects as varied as solar panel installations, backyard compost projects, and pollinator gardens planted with native and non-invasive wildflowers. It is open to additional projects, and Habitat Highland Park is a natural fit.

The Chicago Botanic Garden, which borders the City of Highland Park, offers displays and teaching sites for developing native Illinois plants. The Native Plant Garden displays three distinct areas — a woodland garden with native plants preferring part shade, a prairie garden showcasing sun-loving native prairie plants, and a habitat garden designed to appeal to birds and butterflies. We will approach CBG for permission to cite the Native Plant Garden displays in literature and educational materials we develop and distribute for Habitat Highland Park.

E Program Goals (Community Education and Outreach) for the First Year

During our first two years, we hope to achieve the 250 points needed for Community Certification, approximately half of which can come from Highland Park individual homeowners, schools or community organizations who meet the four criteria for certification: wildlife and pollinators have access to a safe place to live, safe place to rear youngsters, access to food, and access to water and are willing to submit their registrations to NWF. The other half of our points must come from a) organizational activities to establish public awareness, b) deliver education programs to teach interested parties how to adopt native plants, replace turf and its chemical care with native plants, and establish wildlife habitats on their properties, and c) administrative tracking of our efforts to intentionally establish a Community Wildlife Habitat in Highland Park.

Points derived from these two classifications of activity provide clear and measurable goals for the first phase of Habitat Highland Park.

PART IV — WILDLIFE, ENVIRONMENT, AND POLICY GOALS

A What Environmental Issue or Need Does the Habitat Project help to address?

Highland Park has a unique system of ravines which suffer from erosion, Lake Michigan lakefront and beach, which also suffer from erosion and a branch of the Des Plaines River which is prone to flooding. Focusing on native plantings is one way help address erosion issues in Highland Park.

In addition, we are the concerned about water runoff into Lake Michigan which could have a negative impact on our drinking water as Highland Park pulls drinking water from Lake Michigan.

B Describe the Community Ecosystems. What is the HP Ecoregion?

The Lake Michigan coastal zone is one of the most diverse ecosystems in Lake County, Illinois. The unique landforms of ravines, bluffs, and beaches were left behind by glacial movements and the recession of Lake Chicago, a larger pre-historic lake than the present Lake Michigan. These landforms and the special coastal climate combined to induce a diverse ecosystem that included densely wooded ravines and uplands, sloped wetlands, clay bluffs and sand beaches, which host a multitude of migratory and resident bird species. First logging, then agriculture, and finally residential development removed much of the unique vegetation and also altered the landforms. Additionally, extensive watershed development has caused the ravine morphology to change, and has accelerated channel widening and deepening. These past effects establish the need for restoration actions.

In 2011, the Park District of Highland Park conducted a study of the natural areas of the city. The study produced a report on “more than 250 acres of prairie, woodlands, ravines and wetlands provide residents with more than just open space.” Few towns host 10 distinct natural habitats, ranging from the cool-water ravines of the Lake Michigan shore to rare Northern Flatwood communities to the Sedge Meadows of Skokie Valley, each with its distinct community of wildflowers, wildlife, trees and shrubs. In community parks such as Fink and Cunniff, native plants are used in raingardens, on shorelines and in ponds to provide beauty, help manage flooding and control erosion. In 2019, the US Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District, published Ravine10 Ecosystem Restoration, a detailed environment assessment and restoration recommendation of one of the many ravines as foundational ravine research. Although the report focuses on only one of the ravines, its analysis is germane to the goals of the Habitat.

The highly protected ravines and bluffs of Highland Park and Lake County constitute a complex ecosystem of natural habitats that offers a clear link to the objectives of the NWF Community Wildlife Habitat project.

C What are the *endangered, threatened, rare or migratory species* within the HP Community? Does our Habitat Project Include Efforts to Help Any of those Species?

The federally designated endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee (*Bombus affinis*) has been identified in Highland Park as recently as 2021. Highland Park is in the middle of its dwindling historic range. The Rusty Patched Bumble Bee would be helped greatly by pollen resources in home pollinator gardens and the reduction and elimination of pesticides use on home landscapes.

D What is our *watershed*? How will our efforts impact our local watershed?

The Park District of Highland Park Master Plan, reflects the lakeshore, bluffs, ravines, and public parks that physically define Highland Park. (See <https://www.pdhp.org/lakefront-planning-projects/master-plan/> .) In Highland Park, rain that falls east of Green Bay Road (which is a sub-continental divide) drains to the Lake Michigan watershed. Rain that falls to the west of Green Bay Road drains to the Mississippi River watershed. In Lake County, the Lake Michigan watershed is characterized by numerous small streams that flow through over 40 relatively steep-sided ravines into Lake Michigan. Between Winthrop Harbor and Waukegan, IL, the watershed contains a coastal lake plain along Lake Michigan, which includes a large wetland complex designated a wetland of international importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Highland Park has extensive wetlands protection and flood plain regulation that the Habitat project supports. In addition, the City explicitly protects and restricts interaction with the steep slopes of its ravine ecosystem.

The Habitat program strengthens the efforts of these regulations.

E *What are our local landscape / weed ordinances? Are they friendly to gardening for wildlife and ensuring the use of native plants?*

The City of Highland Park has ordinances restricting weeds or grass over an average height of 8 inches, but native plantings are excepted.

The topography of the City of Highland Park is occupied by an abundance of ravines and bluffs, which exhibit steep slopes and may contain unstable sediment, rock and soils. Developments in these areas are required to use construction methods that minimize the impact upon or removal of vegetation, including trees, and ensure slope stabilization and minimize erosion.

In 2020, the Arbor Day Foundation named the City of Highland Park a Tree City USA for its 41st year. As one of the longest standing members of this group, it shows the city's deep-rooted commitment to the preservation of its urban forest.

The Forestry Section maintains approximately 30,000 street and public trees throughout the City of Highland Park. Tree care includes planting, pruning, integrated pest management and removal of hazardous parkway trees. In addition, the Forestry Section manages the landscaping and grounds of over 150 City-owned properties including City Hall, train stations, and business districts. The Forestry Section is also responsible for permitting development to preserve trees during construction and the care of vegetation within ravines and bluffs for compliance with the City of Highland Park Tree Preservation Ordinance.

Since 2010, the City of Highland Park has made the use of native species central to planting initiatives. The McClory Bike Trail Pollinator Garden project aims to replace invasive buckthorn along the trail with native, pollinator friendly species (like Milkweed). Beyond a natural area, natives can also be a staple within formal landscape design. This can be seen in a number of

recent City projects such as at City Hall and an increasing number of traffic islands within the Central Business District.

Regulation of ravine plants and trees is firmly enforced in Highland Park. The Habitat project strengthens the objectives of these regulations.

F Cite any Park *Master Plan, Climate Resiliency Plan, Sustainability Plan* or other municipality-wide plan related to the environment and indicate how the Community Habitat project fits in.

Sustainable Strategic Plan

The City of Highland Park has worked closely with Green Alliance, a group of representatives from across the community whose efforts are dedicated to promoting a sustainable life in Highland Park. The City's Sustainability Strategic Plan is a 3-year plan with measurable benchmarks for achieving specific goals on improving sustainability levels. The plan also includes actions and additional considerations that provide a baseline for the City's current sustainability practices. Included in the top objectives of this plan is a section on ecosystems, which states the goal of increasing habitat by 100 acres by 2020 and achieve 30% market share for local and organic produce by 2030 through direct farmer-to-consumer sales and grocery stores.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions Goal

In 2019, the City joined the Mayor's Compact for Climate and Energy and pledged a greenhouse gas reduction target of 5% by 2023 Citywide. As part of joining the Compact, the City was required to establish a baseline for its current greenhouse gas emissions. The City of Highland Park also has a current Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Plan which incorporates a three-year Sustainability Plan (see above) that include priorities for water conservation, natural areas preservation and expansion, and other measurable priorities.

NWF Monarch Pledge, Related Communications, and Proposed Support Activities

Highland Park Mayor Nancy Rotering committed Highland Park to the following action items in 2017

- Issuance of a Proclamation to raise awareness about the decline of the monarch butterfly and the specie's need for habitat
- Hosting a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent community location
- Conversion of vacant lots to monarch habitat
- Planting of milkweed and pollinator-friendly native nectar plants in medians and public rights-of-way
- Launching or continuing invasive species removal to support re-establishment of native habitats for monarch butterflies and other pollinators
- Revising ordinances to ensure herbicides, insecticides, or other chemical used in the community are not harmful to pollinators

- Directing city property managers to consider use of native milkweed and nectar plants at city properties where possible
- Adoption of ordinances that support reduction of light pollution
- Integration of monarch butterfly conservation into the City's Park Master Plan, Sustainability Plan, and Climate Resiliency Plan

Habitat Highland Park is clearly aligned with these municipal goals and can play a significant role in expanding their adoption by individual home owners.