

WINNETKA CAUCUS PLATFORMS

2023

Village Platform

Plank #1: Jurisdictional Transfer of Green Bay Road

- Almost 82% of respondents are in support of the plan to purchase Winnetka's portion of Green Bay Road in order to implement the next phase of the Downtown Master Plan, with more than a third "very willing."

Due to the overwhelming support for the transfer of Green Bay Road, the Village should enter discussions with the State of Illinois, establish the scope of the plan, and disclose budgets and funding sources as soon as they are available.

Plank #2: Residential Guidelines

- An overwhelming majority (75%) want the creation of residential design guidelines similar to the ones the Design Review Board uses to determine the appropriateness of commercial buildings.
- 34% of respondents want the Village to maintain the existing 38% structure-to-lot-size ratio, while 30% want limits set, preferring size of construction (21%) to size of lot (9%).
- A plurality (21%) wants the Village to further clarify what is meant by the Comprehensive Plan's call for "contextually consistent" building within single-family neighborhoods, and if necessary, review both its standards for granting a Plat of Consolidation and the Village Code.

The Village should develop residential guidelines, review its standards for granting Plats of Consolidation and their implications for zoning. More work is needed to attempt to define what is meant by "contextually consistent," and in doing so, the Village should strive to find a balance between overbuilding and overregulation.

Plank #3: Business Development

- 68% of respondents would like Winnetka to have a traditional bakery, followed by a brew pub, a deli/butcher shop, and a stationery store.
- Aside from big box and discount stores, the majority of non-Winnetka shopping is done in small boutique retailers such as restaurants, bakeries, pharmacies, and hardware stores. Price sensitivity is often mentioned as a prime reason shoppers go elsewhere.
- Specialty foods are the top priority for Indian Hill, followed closely by a hardware store.

While not specifically polled, it should be noted that the community signaled a desire to see an increased number of food options in the village. Specifically: specialty foods, fast foods, and family/kid-friendly restaurants either take-out or dine-in. The desire for brew pubs featured prominently, although less so than in previous years. This food-related theme was echoed in the responses to the Post Office site plan as well.

Residents want to do business in Winnetka. The Village should direct the Business Development Department to continue its efforts to bring businesses to Winnetka that meet residents' needs as identified in the survey responses, while addressing their desire for more affordable options.

Plank #4: Senior Housing

- A majority of responses feel it is important or very important for the Village to provide "age-restricted housing," preferring independent living over assisted living.
- 60% would not make use of senior housing, yet 53% want the Village to actively pursue developers to fill this housing gap.
- Those in favor of "age-restricted housing" don't think the Village should pay for it and reference the need for downsized housing for empty-nesters and older Winnetkans as well.

The results strongly suggest the Village should encourage developers to propose age-restricted housing for Winnetka, but not subsidize it. The discrepancy between desire and uptake should be further explored. The Village should continue to study its zoning regulations to provide more high-density single and multi-unit housing options for seniors as well.

Plank #5: Environmental Stewardship

- 46% of respondents opt for "watchful waiting," when asked if the Village should develop a comprehensive climate action plan, while 35% feel it is an immediate need. This moderate approach is echoed in the majority of residents (53%) who "look for green alternatives and implement the ones that work for us without greatly changing our lifestyle."
- The majority would pay for an increase of no more than 5% for the development of renewable energy.

Evolution, not revolution. The Village should stay the course, echoing the desire of the majority of residents, and continue to implement sustainable alternatives as they become available, feasible, fit within the Village's overall business plan, and address the residents' willingness to pay. In addition, there is a significant gap between the Village's efforts and the residents' awareness of it: The Village is engaged in a number of initiatives across all departments and should keep residents better informed of its efforts. The Village should also include resident input as it moves closer to the State's 2035 coal elimination mandate.

Plank #6: Post Office Development Plan

- 45% said they would support the concept as presented, while 39% have not fully formed an opinion.
- Residents' top three choices for amenities were for "Food and retail experiences such as farmers market, holiday market, food trucks/wagons/carts" (78%), "Entertainment including summer music series, concerts by local artists, performances by buskers and local schools, touring companies like Shakespeare in the Park" (65%) and "Boutique retail, small format restaurants, gastropubs" (52%).
- Parking preferences, ranked in order, are surface parking with almost half the votes, followed by no parking, with multi-tiered/semi-surface underground parking, similar to the Hubbard Woods train station, last.

Those in favor of the post office development concept are almost equal in number to those who “don’t know yet.” The Village should make a concerted effort to raise awareness of both the conceptual design and the process. In addition, concerns about overbuilding, noise and duplicating other venues will need to be explored and addressed.

Winnetka Parks Platform

Plank #1: Waterfront Improvements

The WPD has meaningful support (83% of respondents) from the community in moving forward in its effort to improve and reopen Elder/Centennial beach. As a priority, significant and immediate attention and financial support should be focused on repair and preservation of the beaches/bluff/tableland, as well as work related to safety/security and restroom facilities. Additional consensus building is necessary to determine what, if any, additional amenities/scale/scope/cost the community will support beyond the work referenced above (with fewer than 40% of respondents currently in favor of exploring those additional steps).

Plank #2: Public Private Partnerships

The Park District has strong support (65% of respondents) in pursuing “public-private partnerships” where appropriate, assuming full transparency regarding the individuals involved, and any (real or perceived) conflicts of interest. Comments suggest that, in the case of current public-private partnerships under discussion, a heightened level of scrutiny will continue to be sought by residents, which merits more rigorous attention to disclosure and transparency on the part of the Park District Board.

Plank #3: Green Space

The community views existing green space as a valuable and limited resource that should be protected. Only 20% of respondents support the WPD in using its discretion to sell existing green/park space. Green space owned by the Park District should be preserved. Exceptions may be supported by the community in the following limited circumstances: sales related to transactions with other municipal entities, sales of greenspace in which the proceeds are reserved for the future purchase of additional green space.

Winnetka-Northfield Public Library Platform

Plank #1: Library Home Branch and Usage

- The survey reveals that participants often use multiple library facilities including Northfield (19.72%), Winnetka (88.71%) and the e-Library (30.41%)
- Very few survey participants use the Northfield facility “most often” (4.72%) or consider the Northfield facility their “home branch” (3.19%).

The Library Board is currently reviewing plans for a large investment in the Northfield branch. In light of this and the survey results, the Library Board should seek to understand the significance of these statistics. The Board should address lack of Northfield resident response to the survey and the disparity between primary use and secondary use with particular emphasis on the economics of maintaining both facilities.

Plank #2: Strategic Direction

- 38.41% of participants indicate they are interested in the Library District providing services like our North Shore peers.
- 38.07% of participants are interested in their library providing services that are “best-in-class” for our tax base.
- 19.09% of survey participants believe the Library District should provide basic services to the community without significant cost to taxpayers.

The Library Board should assess and define (a) peer library services; (b) “best-in-class” library services; and (c) services usage versus cost to determine where the Library District exists today and support the plan for what the Library District wants to be in the future.

In reviewing peer and “best-in-class” libraries, the Library Board should bear in mind the areas in which there is currently significant usage:

- Most participants (79.84%) continue to borrow both physical and digital material
- 32.77% attend programming, virtual or in-person
- 23.03% sit and read or work
- 22.35% visit the Youth Department

The Library Board should also pay attention to services currently not used significantly to determine how to improve adoption and with an eye to cost considerations versus usage.

Plank #3: Third Place Demand

- 54.41% of participants work full/part-time off site
- 45.16% of participants were interested in enhanced study / work away from home options

These results suggest that there exists demand for a “third place” source of services or programming. However, more work is required to determine exactly how to address this need. The Library Board should conduct further due diligence to understand the needs of this group and the potential to satisfy this demand.

Plank #4: Library Park Use

Many survey participants had no opinion or felt no change to the Library Park was needed (37.66%). This indicates the further development of Library Park is a low priority item.

D36 School Board Platform

Plank #1: Definition of Progressive Education

The School Board should codify the Winnetka vision of Progressive Education. Most Winnetka respondents who have had experience with Winnetka Public Schools were either very satisfied (44.5%) or satisfied (37.2%). While over 80% of residents report being very or somewhat familiar with Progressive Ed, the comments reveal a need for a more standardized definition of what it looks like in practice. There are now multiple federal and state demands which did not exist when the philosophy was first implemented in Winnetka. The comments from the community also indicate that some may believe “progressive” is a political term. An updated definition will help accurately convey the Winnetka approach.

Plank #2: Educational Approach

The D36 Board should look for ways to promote Winnetka’s unique philosophy. Forty percent of respondents did not know about Winnetka’s educational approach before moving to the Village. The high satisfaction rate with our schools indicates Progressive Education as it is practiced in Winnetka is a strong selling point to future residents.

Plank #3: Standardized Test Scores

A majority of residents (61.7%) believe D36 schools are doing a good job of instilling a love of learning and preparing students for high school and beyond. Test scores, however, are a major area of focus for residents: over 86% of residents say test scores are either very important or important, and over 53% would like to see more data on standardized test performance. The D36 School Board should address community concerns and seek to provide better clarity on D36 standardized test performance.

Plank #4: High School Readiness

The School Board will focus on defining what readiness for high school means and how it is measured. It will seek to provide clear and comprehensive data on performance across key measures. Finding a way to gather test scores or other academic markers, or surveying D36 graduates after their freshman year regarding academic, leadership, and social–emotional experiences may be helpful tools or tactics.

Plank #5: Data Sharing and Access

The School Board will address the community’s desire to see benchmarking data that would indicate how well D36 prepares its students relative to other New Trier feeder schools. The Board will also clearly define policies regarding comparative data sharing including when, where and why data is shared, what data is shared, and how it is acted upon in the classroom and at the school decision-making level. The Board will seek to provide residents with more data regarding standardized tests and self-reported success beyond high school (e.g. satisfaction with college options, career, income, confidence, life-satisfaction levels).

Plank #6: Sexual Health Education and Culturally Responsive Learning Standards and Plans

More than a third of the survey respondents want more information on the Sex Education and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion topics to be covered in school. The Board will seek to provide clearer explanations of which topics will be covered, which are required by the State of Illinois, and what options are available to parents who would like more information or to opt their children in/out.

Village-Wide Platform

The following platform applies to all four taxing bodies.

Civility, Collaboration and Efficiencies

In the past year, there has been considerable frustration and confusion among residents as a result of what appears to be actions within and between Village taxing bodies that are contrary to the spirit of collaboration, goodwill and cost-effective efficiency. It is essential that the Village Council, the School Board, the Library Board, and the Parks Board confer and work internally and together in a civil, collaborative fashion for the greater good of the Village. Coordination between taxing bodies should be institutionalized and efforts to achieve cost-effective efficiencies through that coordination should be routinely reported back to the respective taxing bodies and to the community to enhance accountability on this initiative.