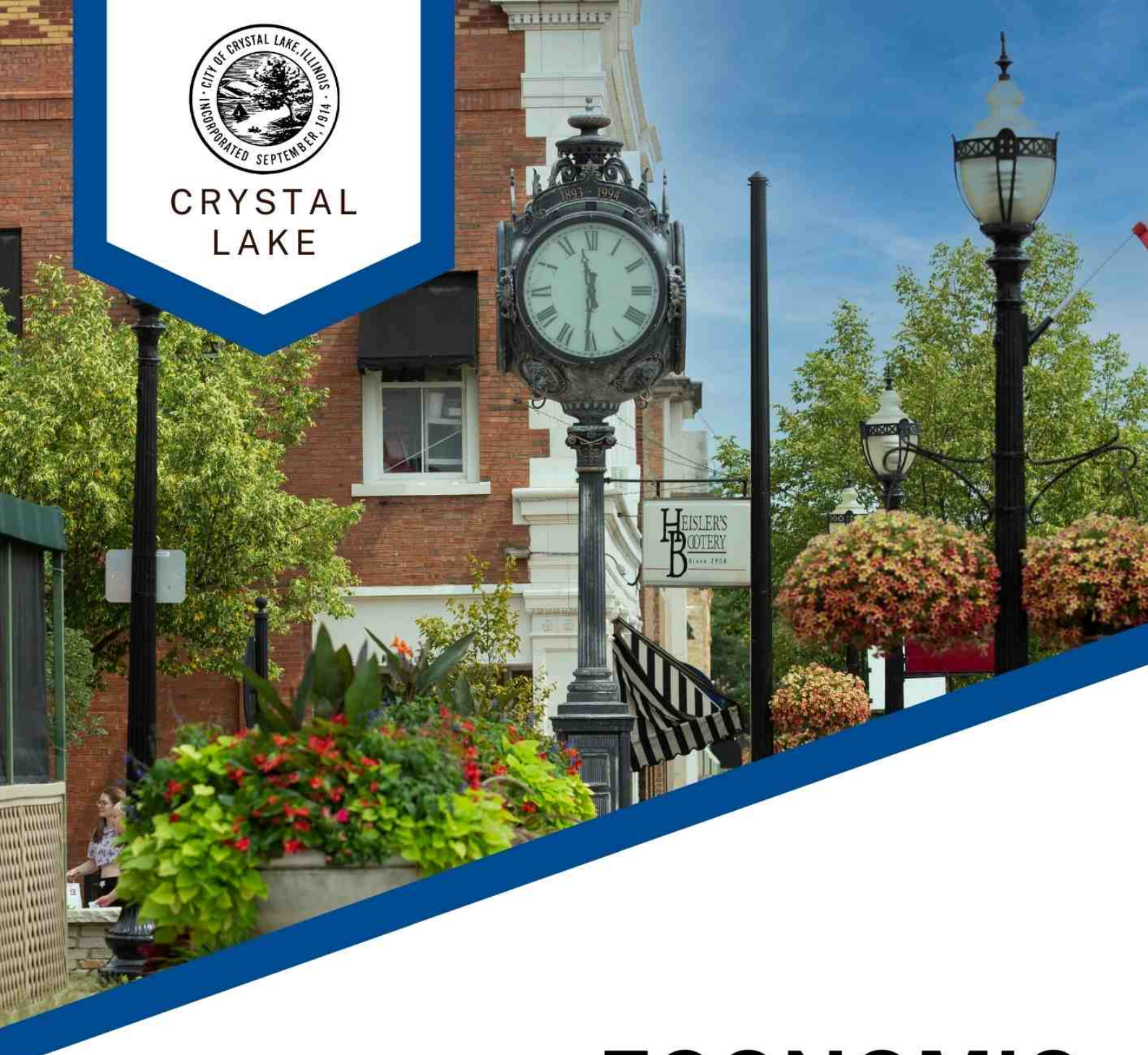




CRYSTAL  
LAKE



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPEMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

EST. 2023

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# Crystal Lake At a Glance

## Economic Vitality



*Crystal Lake is a thriving city with vibrant and bustling commercial corridors along with excellent educational, recreational and cultural opportunities!*

### **Location and Transportation**

Location is one of Crystal Lake's greatest assets. With easy access to transportation and shipping hubs, while maintaining a small-town atmosphere that is attractive to companies and families who value excellent schools and recreational opportunities.

Located 50 miles northwest of Chicago, Crystal Lake offers the amenities of a major city and the safety and friendliness of a small town. Two Metra train stations are located in Crystal Lake, which provide service to Chicago along the Union Pacific Northwest line.

O'Hare International Airport, Chicago-Rockford International Airport, and Lake in the Hills Airport are all within an easy distance from Crystal Lake.

### **Demographics**

Crystal Lake has over 40,000 residents with an average household income of more than \$113,000. In a five-mile radius, there is a population of over 125,000.

Crystal Lake boasts two of the best public school systems in the region, a highly rated community college, technical schools, job placement programs to help corporations find qualified

personnel and an SBA program through McHenry County College offering business and workforce training along with financial resources.

Of the residents that live in Crystal Lake, the community contains a highly educated workforce with 41% of the residents having a Bachelors, Graduate or Professional degree. This excellent educational base provides a highly competent labor and management pool for manufacturing, industrial, healthcare and commercial businesses, further fueling the City's growth and commercial expansion.

### **Recreational Amenities**

Crystal Lake is truly a great place to live, work and play! Crystal Lake is home to many outdoor recreational amenities from Three Oaks Recreation Area, which offers visitors picnic areas, hiking trails, fishing, a playground/spray park, sandy beaches for swimming , boat rentals and The Quarry Wakeboard Park.

In addition, the Crystal Lake Park District oversees 238-acres of parks and trails, including two beaches, and numerous recreational facilities. Additionally, the McHenry County Conservation District offers miles of bike paths on the Prairie

Trail that runs thru Crystal Lake and all the way up to Wisconsin.

### **Housing**

Crystal Lake is a community with a healthy growth rate offering many housing types. Home buyers and renters are offered a wide variety of choices to fit their budgets, lifestyle and expectations. Residents of all ages, incomes, and lifestyles find Crystal Lake a comfortable and convenient community they can proudly call home. Property values remain high, neighborhoods are well maintained, and community services are top notch.

Fueled by a highly desirable lifestyle, new home construction in Crystal Lake has added over 1,000 units ranging from apartments, townhomes, age-restricted housing and single-family homes which bringings new individuals and families into the area. The City continues to ensure there are quality developments for a well-balanced and prospering community.

Additionally, Crystal Lake was recognized by Livability as one of the best communities to live in for offering an affordable lifestyle near Chicago.



## **Business Climate**

When looking at the City of Crystal Lake it is important to understand the the elements that create a rich and successful economic environment. Over 90% of the businesses located in Crystal Lake are classified by the SBA as small businesses (<20 employees).

There is manufacturing sites, office space and over 2.5 million square feet of retail space in the immediate trade area to accommodate current businesses as well as future growth.

The bustling downtown retail and restaurant area complements the city's business and shopping centers to give a variety of choices for businesses of all types and sizes.

## **Downtown**

Crystal Lake has a vibrant and active downtown which is the heart of the city bringing the community together and providing a place for hosting fun, family-friendly events all year long including the Farmers Market, Johnny Appleseed Festival, the Festival of Lights Parade, Ladies Night Out and more.

## **Strong Business Community**

Crystal Lake is proud to be the home of thriving manufacturing and industrial firms, professional offices, hospitality sites, unique dining, entertainment and recreational businesses and a wealth of retailers that create a destination for success. With countless additional opportunities, Crystal Lake is the premiere and sought after choice. Crystal Lake is the largest community in McHenry County. It is made up of over 3,791 businesses providing a workforce of over 27,194 employees. When it comes to business, Crystal Lake offers an affordable lifestyle, easy access to Chicago and the surrounding suburbs, a vibrant retail and restaurant market, a wide range of job opportunities and excellent schools, making our community a hot spot for development in the Chicagoland area.

## **Strong and Steady Sales Tax Base**

Crystal Lake continues to be a strong magnet for national and regional retailers. According to the Illinois Department of Revenue in 2022 retail sales were over \$1.4 billion putting Crystal



Lake in the Top 20 for Chicagoland Metropolitan Area Retail Sales.

### **Supportive City Government**

The City of Crystal Lake supports a high quality of life for its residents and a thriving business environment for its commercial investors. The city values a strong and diversified tax base and encourages a cooperative synergy among commercial, industrial and residential development, creating an optimum and sought after area.

The City's staff and elected officials are dedicated to creating a cooperative atmosphere to aid the establishment of new businesses and expansion of existing businesses in the area. A strong dedication to its business environment and exceptional services is key in the growth of our business community. By promoting business investment and redevelopment, the city offers unique opportunities for success and provides valuable links to state and regional resources for both new and expanding companies.

Effective economic development is a dynamic process that requires constant attention. Retention, attraction and promotion activities require multiple steps and policies to achieve the desired outcomes. Economic Development strategies must be incorporated with land use, housing, transportation, historic preservation and environmental decisions. All of these elements must be balanced to maintain the City's character and high quality of life.

Remaining aware and focused on the impact of economic development is a key element in the process of maintaining a strong community.

### **Conclusion**

Crystal Lake has so much to offer including an award-winning public library, schools, state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, and live entertainment opportunities at the Raue Theater and Dole Mansion.

The City works to attract developments that utilize design elements that foster and create a timeless environment creating a strong foundation for the city to continue to grow and develop in future years.

Crystal Lake has a long history of innovative and successful efforts to improve the economic climate of the community. The City has directly benefited from these efforts and it is important for the community to maintain this progressive approach to economic development to ensure the community's strength and success in the future.

The City's Economic Development Strategic Plan provides an overview and acts as a guide to anyone interested in learning about the community's pro-business commitment. It includes strategies for business attraction, recruitment, retention, marketing and partnerships.

# Economic Development Goals



City of  
Crystal Lake



# What are the Economic Development Priorities?



All priorities of the Crystal Lake Economic Development Plan are designed around the vision of promoting Crystal Lake as a top community. Through effective and efficient marketing, communication, and collaboration, as well as, the retention and expansion of local businesses, the City of Crystal Lake believes it can achieve and maintain a strong, successful and supportive community.



# Marketing

## Promoting the Current and Attracting the Future

It is in the best interest of the City to continue enhancing and expanding our marketing efforts to improve Crystal Lake's image that contributes to gains in economic development and citizen pride. Marketing the community to new businesses and promoting existing businesses has produced many benefits to not only the businesses but to the community as a whole. Marketing is a key component for supporting the business community, without marketing, businesses cannot survive. Marketing also bleeds into the community by creating a positive image that then attracts additional businesses. The City also receives the benefit of enhanced revenues through increased property and sales tax.

Marketing campaigns help to tell a community's story, develop our brand and shape our community through the audiences that we target. A good marketing campaign raises awareness of what makes a city a good place to live, work, dine, and play.

The City of Crystal Lake recognizes many ways in which marketing can benefit the community and works to:

- Position Crystal Lake amongst other municipalities in the Chicagoland Marketplace.
- Heighten the awareness and positive perception of Crystal Lake in the marketplace.
- Use success stories to attract specific markets to build awareness and spur growth.
- Build pride and confirm beliefs of current residents and businesses.
- Help attract new businesses.

Crystal Lake markets itself through multiple mediums and by using many different platforms. One initiative the City has recently started is the "Clearly Crystal Lake" campaign. Clearly Crystal Lake is a rebrand of the original "I-Shop Crystal Lake" which was used as a marketing tool since 2007. The fresh new look of Clearly Crystal Lake was rolled out to demonstrate the reasonings why Crystal Lake is clearly the choice for existing businesses and new business looking to enter the market. There are many advantages for locating in our unique community.



# Marketing Goals



## Goal - Marketing Communications Plan

Identify target audience and how we can reach them.

Review existing economic development efforts and determine key messages, marketing tactics, and measurements of effectiveness for the campaign.

## Goal - Creative Campaign

Continue to build a Crystal Lake image library with photos around Crystal Lake and of businesses.

Continue consistent branding and attraction with imagery and messages.

Creation of social media, print ads, press releases, and digital displays.



# Marketing Goals

## Goal - Media Buys/Placement

Select and manage purchase of media.

Coordinate media proposal solicitation and handle media buys.

Provide reports to ensure media is properly placed.

## Goal - Pursue Methods of Publicity and Promote Crystal Lake to Consumers

Encourage people doing business in Crystal Lake to patronize local hotels, restaurants, stores, and parks. Communicate Crystal Lake as a forward-thinking, business-friendly community for all.

Promote events, tourism, business, and recreational opportunities.

# Business Attraction

Building on success by continued growth and diversity.

The City of Crystal Lake and countless community partners continue to stress the importance of making sure the City is attracting its next business partner. The City has employed creative strategies to recruit new businesses to the community. City staff is actively involved in real estate organizations to promote, market and network with brokers, developers and business owners about Crystal Lake.

The City starts by identifying the City's strongest growth sectors and specifically targeting and marketing these areas. Finding the right tenant to occupy a space is no simple task, and the choice made here can create long term foundations for the Crystal Lake business community.

To help with this element of business attraction, the City maintains a network of real estate brokers, developers, restauranteurs and retailers with access to a diverse range of businesses. These connections help

Crystal Lake attract and maintain a balanced market with a healthy number of national, regional and local brands. The City also maintains an *Available Properties Map* to assist in finding a location.

The City uses targeted mailing campaigns directed at outside office and manufacturing businesses, brokers, restaurants, and retailers to share about positive growth and development occurring in Crystal Lake.

City staff also directs individuals to our [ClearlyCrystalLake.com](http://ClearlyCrystalLake.com) website that provides videos and testimonials of current businesses to give individuals a feel of what it is like to be part of the Crystal Lake community. When appropriate the City may also use economic incentives in the recruitment process.

Being on the outer edge of the Chicagoland area, Crystal Lake understands that it must find new and innovative ways to stand-out and the City is continually working to stay ahead of the curve with the next new attraction idea.





# Business Attraction Goals

## Goal- Attract New Businesses

Communicate the benefits of the strong local business community.

Focus attraction efforts on long term, high quality businesses that will bring jobs to the community.

Continue to identify and solicit businesses in the city's strongest growing sectors.

Increase marketing efforts and presence at ICSC and other trade shows to represent Crystal Lake.

Continue to solicit commercial and industrial businesses to areas where they are most likely to succeed.

# Business Retention

Investing in our community today for a stronger tomorrow.

Even though the City puts great emphasis on attracting new businesses to our community, we also make sure to guarantee that our current businesses are properly cared for and assisted. Reaching out to existing businesses has allowed the City to develop relationships that have yielded positive results, typically benefiting both the business and the City.

One of the key ways in which the City supports the current commercial and manufacturing community is through business calls and visits. Getting out and meeting with businesses is the best way to understand what is going on in the business community. These meetings allow the City to connect with the business, understand their needs, promote their business and help to provide resources to networking opportunities, employment resources, and training opportunities.

The City created a Business Resource Guide on City's website to help businesses with commonly asked questions and as a guide to resources.

Business awards and recognition is another aspect of business retention. This can range from recognizing a business for a milestone anniversary or major investment in the community.

To help cultivate an environment of economic growth for businesses, the City shares all of these important awards in the city newsletter that goes out to all the residents and on the City's social media platforms to promote, recognize and honor the business for their accomplishment to the entire community.

Additionally, the City provides the Clearly Crystal Lake social media platform to encourage residents to support local businesses and allows existing businesses in the community to advertise and promote their business.

Crystal Lake prides itself on providing businesses a high level of customer service and continues to be there for businesses when businesses need us the most.





# Business Retention Goals

## Goal - Encourage Business Reinvestment

Establish and promote grant and funding opportunities that encourage reinvestment.

## Goal - Support the Existing Business Community

Provide information and direction to businesses about available resources.

Promote businesses on social media platforms.

## Goal - Honor Businesses on their Accomplishments

Present milestone anniversary plaques, proclamations and community investment awards.

Nominate Crystal Lake businesses for other outside organizational awards.

# Businesses Expansion

Sustainable growth for generations to come.

The Crystal Lake community has seen many local businesses grow with the City and reach new heights. Helping new businesses through the building process or assisting in finding a new location for business expansion, is one of the many services that the City uses to help local businesses remain in our city.

City staff continues to actively remain up to date on available sites in the community, sites that may become available and businesses that are looking to sell. Our attention to the status of properties throughout the city allows staff to offer location assistance and match businesses looking to expand with their ideal site location.

The City of Crystal Lake also provides financial assistance to expanding businesses

that remain within the City of Crystal Lake. The City's grant program has been instrumental in retaining some of our existing manufacturers and even assisting restaurants with the expansion and addition of outdoor seating which has grown in popularity since the pandemic. The City has and will continue to use grants in an effective way that is fiscally responsible for the taxpayer and beneficial for the businesses.

Assistance for business expansion is not just limited to the options highlighted above, the City also helps partner businesses with McHenry County College who offers on-site training programs and various employment resources to assist growing businesses in finding employees and training existing employees on new tasks.







# Business Expansion Goals

## Goal - Retain Existing Companies

Encourage companies to keep employment hubs in Crystal Lake in order to retain good employees.

Promote community pride and commitment.

Support streamlined application and approval processes.

Provide assistance and connections such as real estate brokers for sites, MCC for training and resources for expanding jobs.

## Goal - Increase Municipal Revenue Sources by an Increase in Sales Tax Revenue or Other Revenues

Support employers who expand and therefore increase daytime population, which supports local restaurants and retailers.

Encourage companies that are sales tax generators to grow and expand at their current location.

# Partnerships

Uniting the community to provide great services.

The City of Crystal Lake recognizes the fact that it is not alone in making the City a great place and that other groups, individuals and organizations play a key role in a successful community. In an effort to take advantage of these connections and key players the City invests in make lasting partnerships.

Some key groups that the City currently looks to work with in the community includes McHenry County Economic Development Corporation, McHenry County College, Naturally McHenry County, Downtown Crystal Lake/Main Street, McHenry County Workforce Resource Team, Manufacturing Pathways, the Small Business Association and the Crystal Lake Chamber of Commerce.

Working with these groups have been advantageous for the City in professional development endeavors. These partnerships offer a wide range and in-depth resources for businesses

which enable us to better assist our business community by providing a higher level of service.

The City and city staff maintain leadership positions with several local organizations to represent the businesses in the city and promote the objectives of the community within these organizations.

Amongst the many benefits that come from partnering with these organizations, the City has been able to use these partnerships to promote small business growth, grow employment bases, and expand our promotion of Crystal Lake tourism.

Companies locating in Crystal Lake have significant opportunities to share ideas and communications through community organizations. The Crystal Lake Chamber is vital and active, Downtown Crystal Lake helps small businesses flourish and collaborate, and McHenry County College's business development sector offers business courses and training seminars.



# Partnership Goals



## Goal - Expand Collaborative Efforts

Continue to collaborate and develop relationships with stakeholders on the development and the refinement of economic development strategies, policies, and activities.

Increase resources to assist employers with finding, hiring and retaining employees.

## Goal - Continue to Seek Out New Partnerships and Strengthen Existing Ones

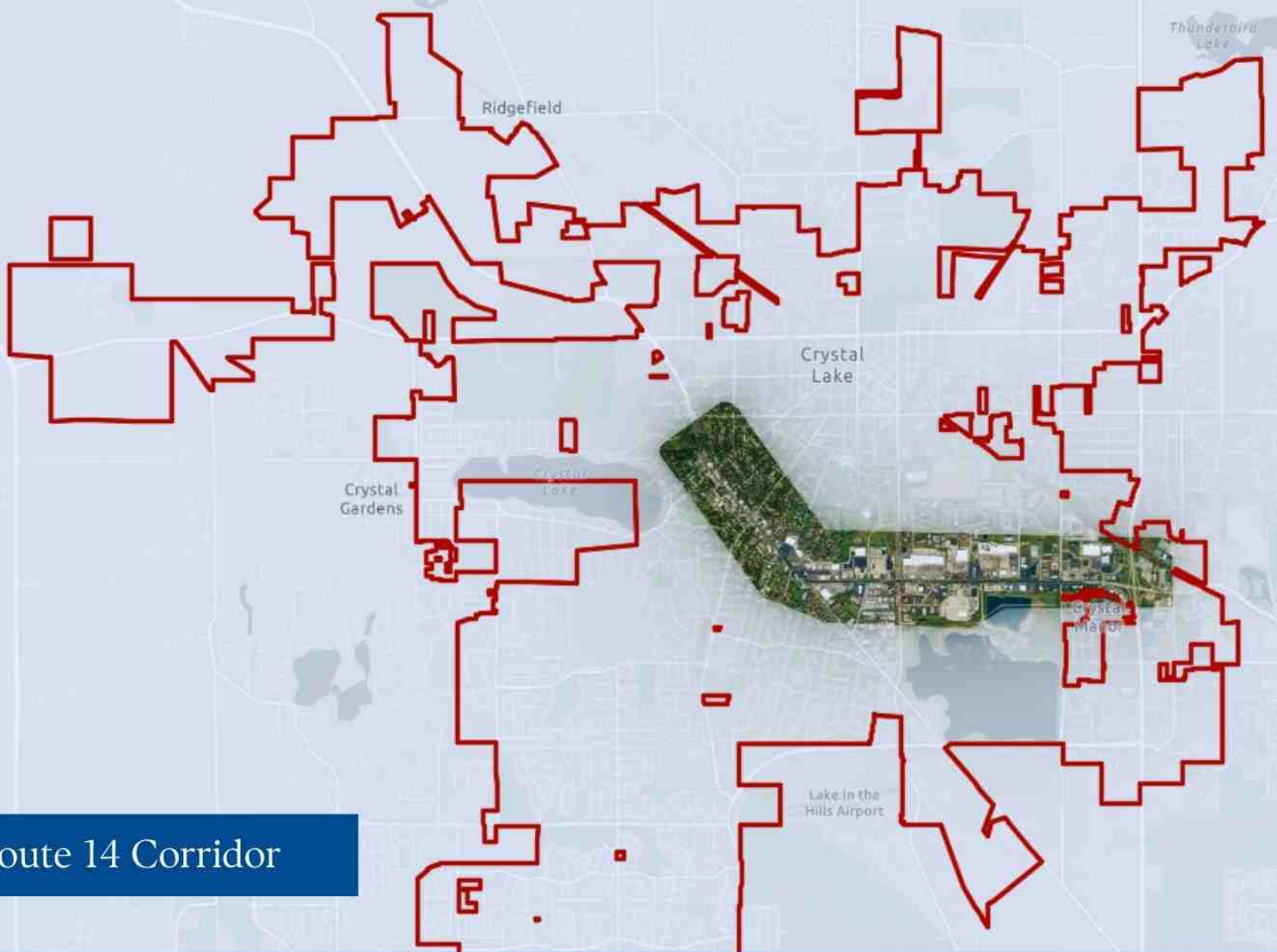
Continue to remain active in existing organizations to grow our network of partners.

# Key Business Corridors



**City of  
Crystal Lake**





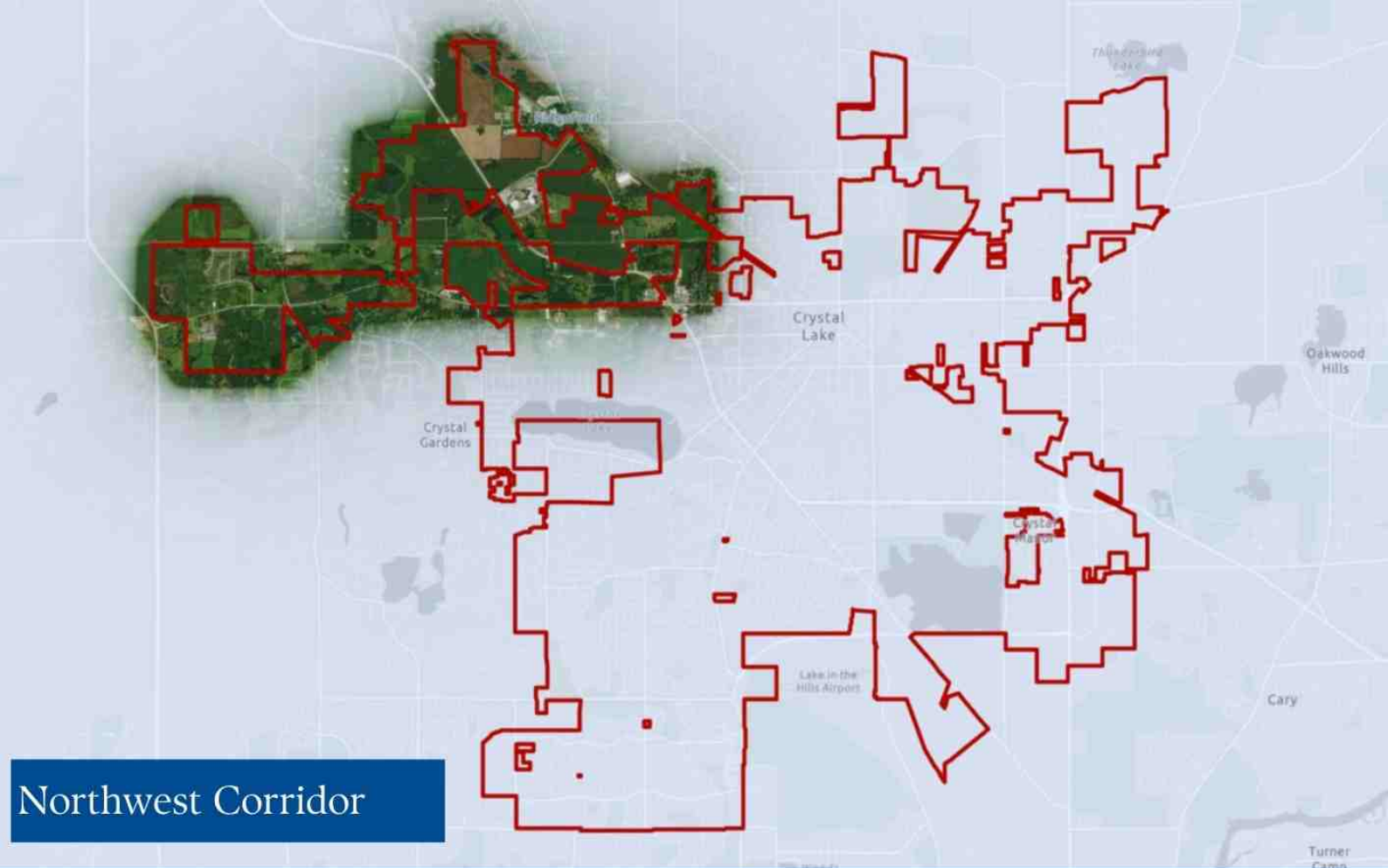
## Key Corridor Initiatives

- Focus on filling large, highly visible vacant spaces.
- Attract new commercial development.
- Retain existing restaurants and retailers.
- Support auto dealers in this area.
- Promote this area to brokers and other developers to continue growth and reinvestment.

## Corridor Description

The Virginia Street and Northwest Highway (Route 14) is the City's key commercial corridor. The section along Virginia Street is considered the City's second downtown and has a rich blend of locally owned restaurants, retailers, and service businesses with residential and office uses on the second floor. Public spaces in this area have planters and sitting areas connected with sidewalks to maintain and stimulating a pedestrian friendly environment.

The area along Northwest Highway has a strong regional and national commercial presence. This area has the majority of the mid-size and big-box retailers along with sit-down and fast-casual restaurants.



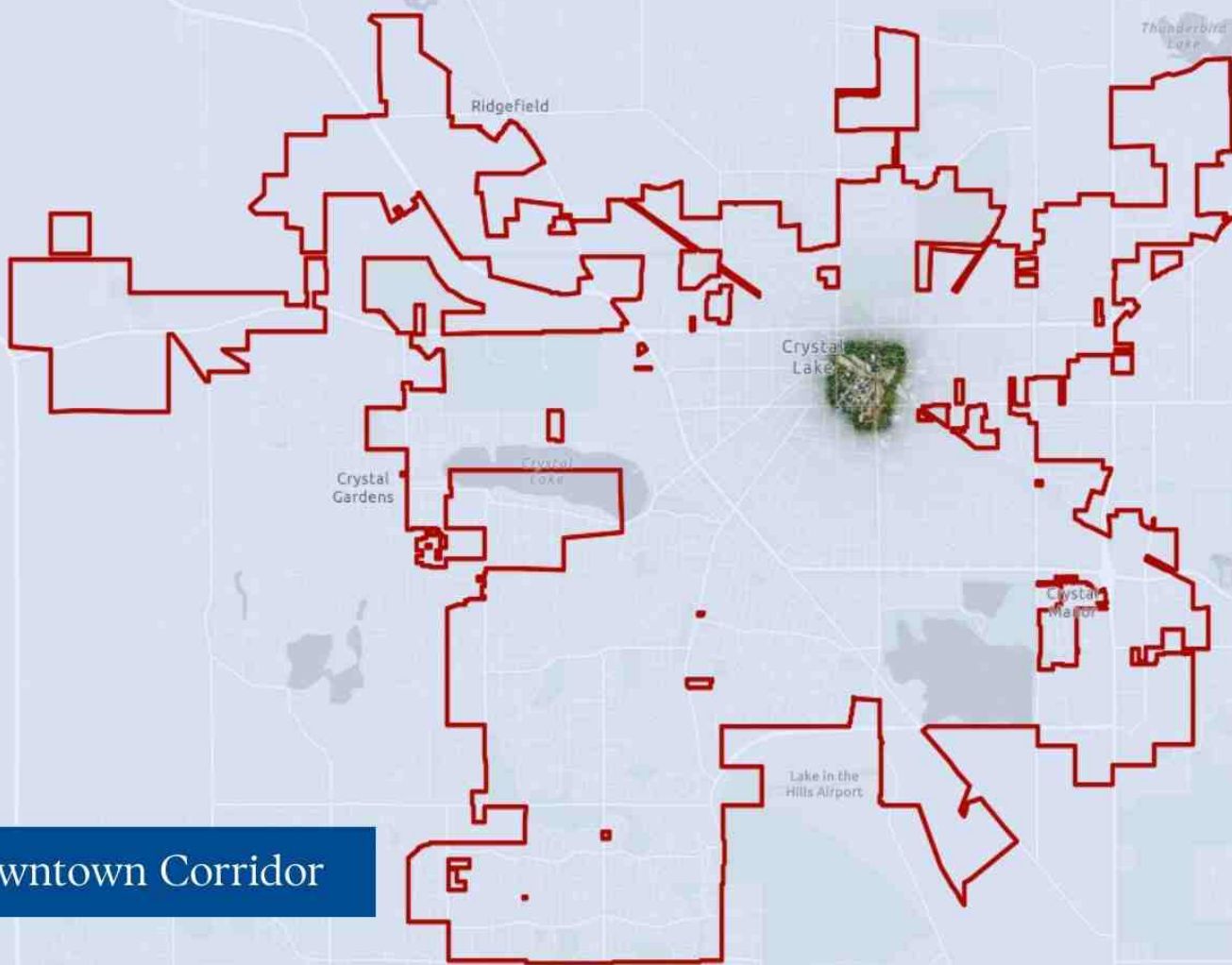
## Northwest Corridor

### Key Corridor Initiatives

- Attract residential development and commercial or office along the major routes.
- Develop destination retail.
- Create innovative conservation design for properties in the Crystal Lake watershed.

### Corridor Description

This is a unique span of land that joins the City of Crystal Lake with Woodstock. This area is a future growth area in Crystal Lake . The filling of the key commercial area along Route 14 and Virginia Street generates an opportunity .in this corridor. For this portion of the city, the vision is an innovative and unique combination of both conservation of open space, medical, office, light manufacturing and residential uses. Development in this region will also include a mixture of destination retail and grocery stores.that joins the City of Crystal Lake with Woodstock through mostly farmland. This area is a prime developable area in Crystal Lake as the key commercial area along Route 14 and Virginia Street only has a few infill opportunities remaining. For this portion of the City, staff envisions an innovative and unique combination of both conservation, farming, medical, and residential uses. Development in this region could also include a mixture of destination retail.



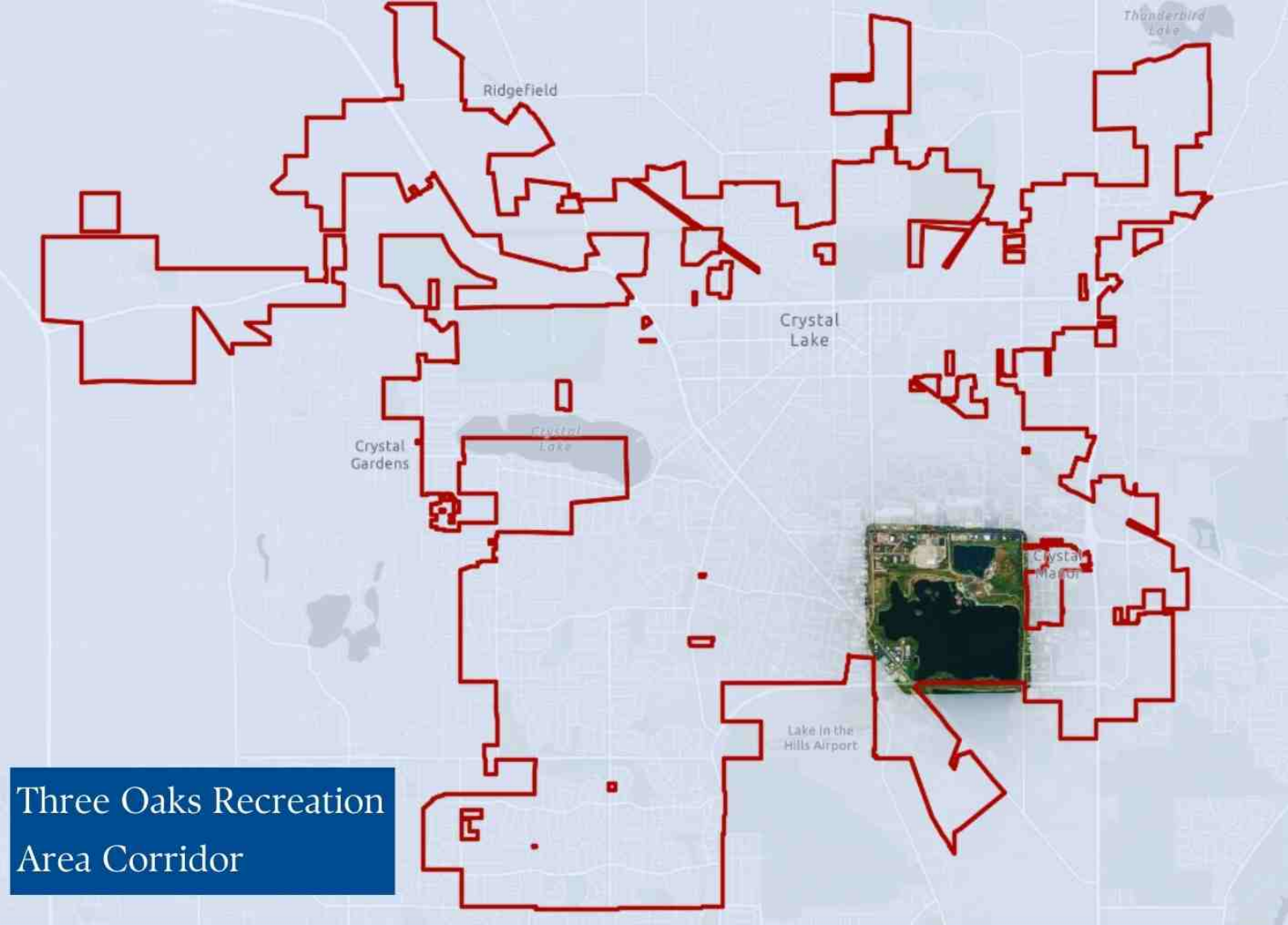
Downtown Corridor

## Key Corridor Initiatives

- Enhance public spaces to promote the area as a destination.
- Increase density with residential development to help support businesses.
- Encourage vertical mixed-use development for key properties as highlighted in the Crystal Lake and Pingree Metra Stations Strategic Action Plan.

## Corridor Description

The Downtown Corridor is the heart of Crystal Lake and is a vibrant and lively area. This corridor has little to no vacancies and is filled with unique restaurants, retailers and salons. It is also a key tourist destination and is a stop along the Union-Pacific Northwest Metra line. Downtown is home to the Farmers Market, parades, Johnny Appleseed Festival, Santa's House and multiple community events throughout the year.



## Three Oaks Recreation Area Corridor

### Key Corridor Initiatives

- Encourage restaurant, entertainment and retail uses.
- Create innovative development designs that incorporates Three Oaks Recreation Area.
- Attract mixed-use development for properties within the corridor.
- Development should include features and amenities that complement the district's recreational and pedestrian-friendly character such as bike racks, sidewalks, and outdoor seating areas.

### Corridor Description

The Three Oaks Recreation Area Corridor is intended to maintain and enhance the character of the Three Oaks Recreation Area park. Three Oaks is a high-quality public recreation facility that serves as a destination within the City of Crystal Lake, attracting thousands of visitors per year. The City promotes orderly and high-quality development in this area that is compatible with the character and use of the Three Oaks Recreation Area, consistent with and complementary of the area's recreational uses, amenities, and supportive of a strong and stable tax base.