

CITY OF BATAVIA
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT

Introduction

Batavia has continually sought to protect its unique community identity, which has been influenced by its location, history and close connection to the natural environment. This unique identity and sense of place led to a balanced notion of the preservation of our existing natural resources and progress towards improving the quality of the built environment. The City's most prominent natural resource, the Fox River, serves as the centerpiece for our community. The Batavia Riverwalk celebrates the City's connection with nature. The new Donovan Bridge incorporates lookouts and pedestrian access to the Fox River, making it a structure that embraces the river, not just crosses it. The many miles of bike trails add enjoyment and recreation to our lives. Other important natural resources areas such as the Nelson Lake Forest Preserve and Braeburn Marsh contain a breadth of plant and animal life including at least five state endangered species.

Respect for the natural environment is an important consideration in decisions the City makes regarding its growth and development. Batavians and others need to be continually reminded that our actions can have local and global environmental consequences. With this realization, the City of Batavia includes in its Values Statement:

“We value the stewardship of our natural environment through the protection and conservation of natural resources.”

The City's Environmental Commission serves as a resource and advocate on environmental issues to City government and the community. The Commission develops and promotes ways in which residents, businesses and government can act in a more sustainable manner and be responsible stewards of our natural resources.

More must be accomplished than just a discussion of issues. Incremental, well-defined goals are essential to successfully implementing positive environmental changes in our community. This element outlines a strategy and a course of action in concert with the above Values Statement. This element provides formal recognition of our natural resources as important community assets. It establishes a path that takes Batavia beyond the minimums set by current environmental regulation. We strive to become a regional leader in the protection, preservation, enhancement and restoration of our environment while ensuring a prosperous economy and an excellent quality of life.

Background

Before settlement, the Batavia area included substantial wooded areas. The area also had a number of prairies and wetland areas, due to the presence of the meandering tributaries of the Fox River. Since its founding, Batavia has been influenced by the unique features

of its surroundings. The first settlers were drawn to the abundant resources of the “Big Woods” and the energy potential of the Fox River. The first factories and buildings to exploit this resource were constructed out of native limestone quarried from the Fox River’s banks.

While the City has long been known as an industrial center, the geographic focus of this industry has shifted away from the river’s edge to the industrial parks in the northeast quadrant of the City. At the same time there is a strong recognition of the Fox River as an environmental and aesthetic amenity. As the greater Fox River watershed ecosystem rebounds from damages caused by largely unregulated development in the past, a number of flora and fauna species have returned to the river. Improvement projects near the river, such as the Riverwalk, Fox River Trail, the Wilson Street bridge, and beginning in 2012, the Downtown Streetscape project, have elevated the prominence of this important community asset.

The City is involved in environmental issues from multiple perspectives; as regulator, educator, utility supplier, service provider, and consumer. The City must balance its environmental interests with economic and practical constraints as well as looking out for the best interests of its residents and businesses.

Issues

A number of issues have been identified as being essential for continuing to improve Batavia’s environment. These issues provide a basis for the development and refinement of the City’s environmental goals.

1. **Energy Conservation and Clean Energy Investments.** Over time, as energy costs rise, and the environmental costs of traditional electricity production become critical, the need for the City to emphasize conservation and investigate clean energy sources will intensify. As an energy consumer, the City of Batavia can use conservation practices to hold down costs. Also, investments in clean energy technology will be increasingly important. The City recently installed solar panels and energy efficient lighting at the Public Works facility.
2. **Brownfields.** Due to Batavia's industrial history, there are a number of older, obsolete, and abandoned industrial sites in the City. Many of these facilities operated and were abandoned before major environmental regulations were developed. Some sites remain with various forms of environmental contamination. This contamination may present an obstacle to redevelopment that will need to be overcome.
3. **Solid Waste Management.** There is an increasing need to reduce the amount of waste material going into landfills. Despite the City’s waste collection inclusion of recycling, a stronger effort will be required to divert recyclable material from landfills for resale and reuse. Because the City only contracts for residential recycling services, commercial, and industrial recycling efforts have the most ground to gain.

4. Natural and Historic Flora Preservation, Restoration and Enhancement. Batavia does not currently have a tree or natural area preservation ordinance, but landscape requirements are included in the Zoning Code. Tree preservation is growing in importance as redevelopment and infill development continue, putting some mature trees at risk. Dangerous pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer threaten large numbers of trees on public and private property. Existing natural areas such as wetlands and forests need to be protected and properly managed. Older neighborhoods can benefit from restoration and enhancement of open spaces and natural areas.
5. Water Conservation. The City has adequate resources and infrastructure to acquire water, and then treat and distribute it as potable water to meet customer demands. The City's water source is primarily from relatively deep underground aquifers. These sources can, however, be depleted. Unincorporated properties generally are served by individual wells, acquiring water from shallower aquifers that are more susceptible to contamination. Water availability can change at any given time, mostly affected by weather and, as evidence suggests, global climate change. It is important for the future of the community that water consumers do their best to conserve this valuable resource. Water suppliers, like the City of Batavia, must take a lead role in establishing policies and programs that encourage and regulate responsible water use. Unincorporated property owners served by private wells may encounter difficulty in acquiring acceptable quality water and, as a consequence, seek annexation to the City. The City needs to be prepared to serve these and other newly annexed properties.
6. Groundwater Quality. In a Facility Planning Area, properties with failing septic systems must connect to the sanitary sewer service provider, when practical. Septic systems that do not function properly can contaminate groundwater. Likewise, other pollution sources can and have contaminated shallow aquifers. Various other sources of groundwater contamination exist, coming from both agricultural and industrial sources.
7. Stormwater Management. The City has adopted the Kane County Stormwater Management Ordinance, including its technical manual on best management practices, and enforces it as an element of the City Code. Stormwater impacts of new development are addressed by this code. Many older parts of the City were developed with inadequate drainage facilities. A continuing effort is being made to correct drainage problems throughout the community, and to prevent future problems. In addition, the ownership and maintenance responsibility for existing storm water detention basins varies, making consistent best management of the City's total storm water facilities challenging. The Batavia Environmental Commission has a storm drain stenciling program to inform residents about potential water pollution from illegal discharges into storm drains.
8. Vehicle Emissions. Vehicle emissions are a leading contributor of greenhouse gases and air pollutants. Improvements to the City's non-motorized transportation infrastructure could cut down on citizens' need to drive to otherwise walkable or bikeable destinations. Additionally, improvements to the PACE bus system and other regional transportation opportunities could eliminate additional vehicle trips to more distant destinations. City fleet vehicle purchases

- are increasingly evaluated with consideration for environmental issues. The City has joined the state Green Fleet Program, administered by the Illinois EPA. The City has several gas electric hybrid vehicles in its fleet. Vehicle idling continues to be a major source air pollution at schools, commercial and industrial properties. The City has established a policy to limit idling of its vehicles.
9. Protection of Land Resources. The City of Batavia works with several local agencies for the protection of natural areas and resources. These agencies include the Batavia & Geneva Park Districts, the Kane County Forest Preserve District and the Kane/DuPage Soil and Water Conservation District. Many of the region's major open space land resources, such as Nelson Lake and Braeburn Marsh, are at least partially controlled by these agencies. In addition to these public agencies, a number of private agencies are involved with the protection and enhancement of unique land resources, including the Conservation Foundation. Opportunities exist for improved stewardship of these resources. Significant land resources are presented on the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Map. (Map EN A)
 10. River Corridor and Watersheds. The Fox River and its tributaries and streams have been significantly influenced by the patterns of development in the region. Within the planning area there are several tributaries of the Fox and DuPage Rivers. City ordinances and policies do not prohibit private ownership of property adjacent to streams. This has made consistent, best management of riparian areas very difficult. In some cases, conservation easements protect riparian areas. However, many of these easements do not provide authority or assign management responsibility to any one entity.
 11. Noise. There are a number of sources of noise that are troubling to Batavia residents. Transportation, including cars, trucks and trains, are the major noise source. Mechanical equipment such as air conditioning units, compressors or industrial machinery is also an occasional problem. Noise complaints also come from entertainment, generally amplified music. Ordinances, noise mitigation measures and enforcement need to be addressed to respond to current concerns.
 12. Lighting. Lighting is important for safety and security reasons, but unwanted light and glare, known as light trespass, is often a problem. It can range from an irritation to a safety hazard. New lighting technologies can limit light trespass and offer additional opportunities for energy conservation.
 13. Odors. Manufacturing processes often introduce odors into the environment. Manufacturing processes can include odor mitigation applications, but many facilities operate without them, often because they are unavailable. Detection and regulation of odors is difficult.

Goals and Policies

Goal 1. Protect and enhance the City's and the region's air, land and water resources

Policies

- a. Encourage the preservation and enhancement of valuable natural resources in their current form as an alternative to mitigating development impacts
- b. Encourage downtown redevelopment that provides environmentally sensitive public access to the Fox River
- c. Encourage the use of native plants and landscape materials in all development
- d. Preserve groundwater recharge areas and drainage and wildlife corridors
- e. Minimize erosion, stormwater runoff and pollution by requiring the use of best management practices, including limits on pesticide use, for all construction activities especially adjacent to wetlands
- f. Encourage other agencies, such as the Forest Preserve and Park Districts to acquire, develop, and expand accessible natural areas, such as Tanglewood Hills Park
- g. Reduce impervious surfaces through the use of permeable pavers and similar techniques, to promote the recharge of local aquifers and to provide natural pre-treatment of stormwater runoff

Goal 2. Be a leader in environmental issues and act as an example for others

Policies

- a. Incorporate environmental considerations into decision-making processes
- b. Allow innovative development design, such as conservation development, to protect natural resources
- c. Continue to support and promote the clean-up and redevelopment of contaminated and environmentally sensitive areas
- d. Ensure a gradual transition from the natural to the man-made environment
- e. Invest in and use clean energy sources whenever possible
- f. Support worthwhile programs initiated by other agencies to address local, national, and global environmental health
- g. Where practical, adopt reasonable and effective regulation of noise and odor generation.

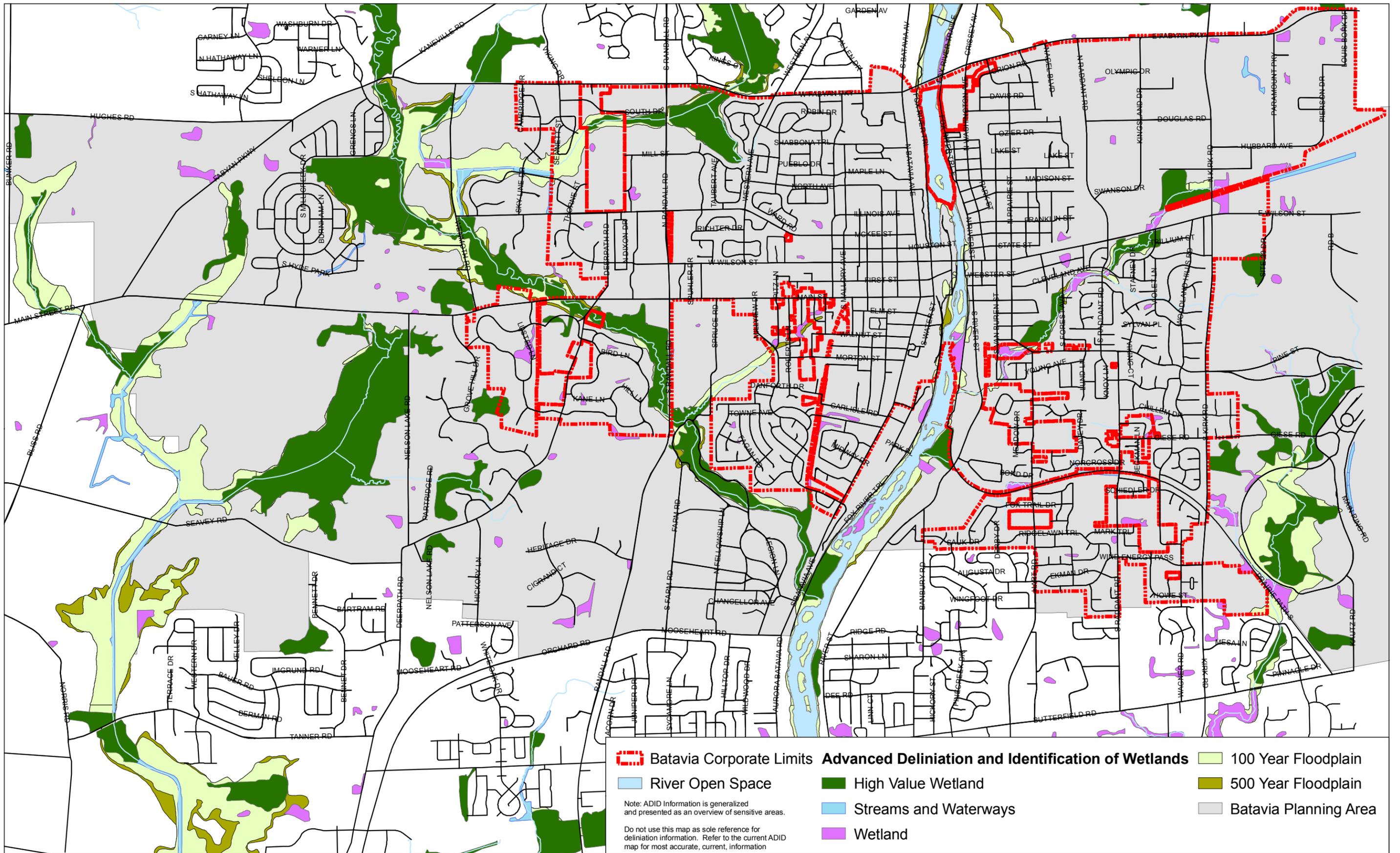
Goal 3. Encourage the responsible use of environmental resources and energy

Policies

- a. Encourage sustainable building practices in construction activities
- b. Promote water and energy conservation through public outreach and information programs
- c. Establish energy audit and retrofit programs for older homes and commercial structures

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- d. Educate residents, businesses, and visitors to increase awareness of environmental issues and programs
- e. Promote a walkable community by encouraging mixed use, infill and compact development patterns that reduce walking distances
- f. Promote a walkable and bikeable community as envisioned in the Batavia Bicycle Plan, incorporating multi-use trails and bike routes into new development
- g. Promote the use of public transportation by supporting upgrades to the PACE bus system, including sidewalk and bicycle path connections to new bus shelters
- h. Reduce the amount of material entering the municipal waste stream through environmentally responsible purchasing policies and expanded recycling programs



Map EN A - Environmentally Sensitive Areas

