



**Commitment to Diversity
Task Force**

Final Report

March 2001

March 6, 2001

RE: Final Report

Village Trustees and District 97 School Board Members:

On behalf of the Steering Committee of the Commitment to Diversity Task Force, we are presenting the Task Force report to the Village Board of Trustees and to the District 97 Board. A bit of history will help to put the report into context.

In 1984, the Village established the Racial Diversity Task Force, which made recommendations in the areas of housing, education and internal affairs. Several Village programs in housing, hiring and contracting have been put into place in response to the issues raised in that report.

By 1999, it was becoming apparent that many newer residents had no historical knowledge of the Village' programs and policies that have worked toward long-term diversity for more than thirty years. There was also an increasing concern about unbalanced diversity in the District 97 elementary schools.

In order to address these two areas, the Village planned and executed an all-day seminar in November of 1999. There were presentations by outside experts in the area of long-term diversity as well as by local people interested in diversity. It became apparent that more local discussion was needed and the Village began to plan for a new Task Force, which would examine the current support for long-term diversity as well as the will of residents to continue programs in place and suggest new ideas to continue the commitment to long-term diversity.

District 97 joined the Village to form a core leadership group and by June of 2000, the Task Force was in place and began the work. The Task Force was designed to cover the areas of housing, education and community life. Diverse leadership was recruited to head each sub-committee and to attract a diverse group of residents as members. It was challenged to complete the work in a timely fashion.

A major stumbling block from the beginning was the language. Much literature uses integration and diversity interchangeably. Many participants saw a great difference between the two words and saw much difference in what constituted a racially diverse community. It became clear over the many weeks of discussion that while maintaining racial diversity is a core value for the community, the question that is complex and difficult is how to implement policies to maintain a racially diverse community. Our challenge now is to continue the diversity process to demonstrate that a diverse community is better for all, and to find ways to continue this diversity for the long-term.

One very positive aspect of the report, to date, is that it has engendered much local coverage and community discussion. It proved to be a great opportunity to meet new people, to listen to varying points of view, to research facts and to make recommendations for ways to make Oak Park an even better place.

We are truly grateful to all members of the Task Force for the enormous amount of time they have contributed. We especially want to thank the six co-chairs – Max Dieber and Robert Rounds of Housing; Charles Whittaker and John Hedges of Education; Ozzie Bruno and Karin Grimes of Community Life.

The other members of the Steering Committee included Steve Huth and Dorothy Reid from District 97, Barbara Ebner and William Turner, Village Trustees; Dr. Jack Fagan, District 97 Superintendent, Carl Swenson, Village Manager; Rogene Hill and special thanks to Kimary Lee and Yara Prieto, the interns from Community Services. We appreciate their time and support throughout the process.

As you read these reports, you will see some specific recommendations as well as some issues that will require further discussions.

As the Presidents of the Village and District 97, we pledge to take up discussion of the report by each of our Boards promptly and move ahead with possible program or policy revisions and new initiatives.

Barbara Furlong, President
Board of Trustees
Village of Oak Park

Elizabeth Lippitt, President
District 97 School Board
Village of Oak Park

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY TASK FORCE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 2001

Oak Park embarked on a course that differentiated it from other communities of similar size and composition in the early 1960's when it chose to become known as a community that values racial diversity. In support of that core value, the Village and District 97 have each embraced many programmatic responses to the societal forces at work in the greater Chicago area. In the spring of 2000, the Village Board and the District 97 Board decided to jointly sponsor a citizen led task force to explore long-term diversity within the context of housing, education and community life, recognizing that each of these spheres is interdependent. The task force reviewed the programs and policies pursued by the Village and the District and their impact on the long-term diversity of Oak Park. Each subgroup concluded its deliberations with a set of recommendations to each taxing body.

The Commitment to Diversity Task Force Steering Committee was comprised of the Village and District 97 Presidents, two Village Trustees, two District 97 Board Members, the Village Manager, the Superintendent of District 97 and six individual citizens who co-chaired the three Sub-Committees. In their final report, each Sub-Committee describes its committee structure, membership, data sources and processes. Each report contains a set of recommendations accompanied by its rationale. These reports represent a huge commitment of volunteer hours by citizens wrestling with the complex, emotional and critical issues born of the intersection of race, class and community.

When the co-chairs shared their reflections and insights about the experience, they noted that finding common language to define concepts was challenging particularly, around such topics as community life and racial balance. They learned that there are many voices and perspectives and that without trust it is difficult to foster frank and honest discussions.

Some felt a lay committee might not be the best approach for such a complex topic for several reasons, one being the time commitment. Others felt it is important to get lay people around the table to talk and keep the community engaged. There was general agreement that Oak Park is doing a lot right.

There were also differences of opinion in the community as to whether Oak Park should just keep doing what it is doing, do more, or declare victory and abandon its efforts. In retrospect, the co-chairs all felt they needed more time, more experts, more resources and more community input. This sense of wanting to learn more may be one reason each team recommends continuing the task force process in some format. There was also a level of discomfort with the amount of input from the African-American community in particular.

The Steering Committee reviewed the recommendations of each Sub-Committee and noted some general themes:

- There is a need for continuing oversight of this issue by both the Village and District 97
- The Village and the District need improved data collections, trend analysis and broad community input
- There is a need for additional study of the inter-relationship of housing choice and neighborhood schools
- All governmental units need ongoing evaluation of the impact of their policies and programs on the long-term diversity of Oak Park
- Government should provide leadership in facilitating the inter-personal relationship building aspects of a racially diverse community
- There is a need to build trust and to develop the language and sensitivity necessary to continue an open dialogue

What follows is not a policy document, nor a plan of action, but a potpourri of ideas that could be crafted into a frame for the next set of conversations. A recent publication reports, “The debate about efforts to support racial integration continues to rage in academic journals, actual communities, and courts of law.” Oak Park is not alone in its efforts nor is it alone in facing the seemingly irreconcilable perspectives. What follows is a thoughtful compilation of the views of Oak Parkers and their recommendations to sustain a stable integrated Oak Park future.

Summary of Recommendations

By Sub-Committee

A. Community Life Sub-Committee Recommendations:

- a. Assert **Governmental Leadership** as a critical element in focusing diversity more on human relations
- b. Create a **Diversity Infrastructure** to institutionalize commitment to diversity
- c. Expand existing and create new **Programs and Activities** with emphasis on education and social interaction
- d. Develop **Creative Funding** approaches that emphasize relationship building
- e. **Market and Outreach** to underscore the importance of diversity within Oak Park, regionally and nationally
- f. Consider **Additional Institutional Roles** both governmental and non-governmental

The Community Life Committee expounded on each of these recommendations by adding specific actions that might accomplish the goal of each recommendation.

Government Leadership

Urge Oak Park taxing bodies to adopt the Statement on Diversity to set a Village-wide “tone”. Create Director of Diversity position to support and monitor efforts.

Diversity Infrastructure

Create an independent, not-for-profit Diversity Center, including a museum, research and education component, and resource center. Commission a long-term study on the development of social capital with respect to cross-group relations (because the committee believes that breaking down barriers and building a successful diverse community is dependent upon the depth, breadth, and quality of relationships).

Programs and Activities

Use traditional and creative ways to provide diversity education. Expand social interaction opportunities through: community dinners; cross-town block parties and second event block parties; multicultural parent groups and play groups such as, “Come to My House”; expanded diversity celebrations; teen events such as, “Lighted Park District”; and the exploration of diversity through the Arts. Create new common ground by promoting cooperatives for home maintenance, homework or childcare to provide an opportunity to work together. Develop a regional community service program for families to work together in service to others.

Creative Funding

Establish the Social Capital Fund to provide seed capital for innovative programs. Fundraising could be an opportunity for cross-class working coalitions to form and might attract funds from national foundations and others outside Oak Park. Fund ombudsman for the disabled and provide grants for groups to celebrate uniqueness.

Marketing and Outreach

Market diversity beyond black-white and aggressively encourage participation in civic and social activities, insist on power sharing, highlight diversity history. Provide childcare and transportation for events using public-private partnerships.

Additional Institutional Roles

Improve leadership and coordination of committees and commissions and reduce the number of commissions. Provide citizen training. Institute community dialogue forums, town hall meetings and annual forums for trustees to hear citizen concerns. Support small business and minority business in Oak Park. Provide tax abatement, business fairs and create an ombudsman for small business. Provide behavior enforcement through a youth court, repeal or enforce ordinances to ensure clarity and consistency. Improve partnerships with faith-based, social justice and social welfare organizations, create an umbrella for non-profits, recruit experienced retired citizens.

B. Education Sub-Committee Recommendations

Academic Equity

- Eliminate **academically** identified schools
- Strive for academic equity – add special programs when needed for underachievers
- Create/continue the Challenge Program for high achievers to attract full range of capabilities to every school
- Make all schools attractive to the full range of capabilities
- Invest in school readiness

Evaluate Policies

- Look at boundaries to see what makes sense, particularly at the north end and some other places
- Evaluate the impact of moving the 6th graders to the middle schools on the diversity of each school
- Evaluate every policy decision for its impact on diversity issues
- Insure that all Oak Park schools are equally attractive to all ethnic backgrounds
- Evaluate the transfer policy – impose strict limits and limit each transfer to one year, then welcome student back to home school
- Look at all of the “gap” issues

Outreach and Marketing

- Initiate new student orientation for students entering the system, the model from River Forest is recommended
- Provide outreach to parents, particularly parents of students who are falling beyond grade level. Use PTO and other district resources
- Promote a new way of looking at test scores – talk about gains vs. gap
- Market what the District does well, particularly to preschool parents

Research

- Do more census data analysis
- Create a task force to continue studying the issues and to review progress reports
- Do more research on who is coming into the district, who is going out of the district and where they are coming from or going to and why
- Conduct exit interviews

The Education Sub-Committee explained their recommendations.

Academic Equity

Make showcase schools of those schools that currently have the lowest academic scores. Make principals responsible and accountable, and intervene quickly when necessary. Provide teacher training on the role prejudices and biases play in academic achievement. Provide specialized programs at individual schools. Invest in school readiness programs and investigate methods of evaluating and assisting students transferring into the district.

Evaluate Policies

Examine school boundaries, the movement of 6th graders, and new census data, using a District 97 committee. Changes made to boundaries in years past may need to be reconsidered and new census data may inform such decision, as might the movement of 6th graders. Revise the transfer policy restricting the use of transfers and limiting them to one year. Evaluate every policy for its impact on the diversity of each school, and carefully consider gap issues as the district learns more about them.

Outreach and Marketing

Promote the successes of Oak Park schools both individually and district-wide. Enhance publications, web sites and other opportunities to describe the strengths of particular schools and the District. Target parents of preschoolers. Change the dialogue around test scores to focus on gains and not just gaps. Conduct a study on parental behavior and its impact on achievement, and then develop programs to empower parents.

Research

Policy makers need more trend analysis and other research for ongoing policy development. Create a task force to continue studying the issues and to review progress. Document who is coming into the district and from where and who is leaving and to where and why, by using exit interviews. Do a case study of Forest Park and possibly other communities that have undergone demographic changes in the last few years.

C. Housing Sub-Committee Recommendations:

- g. Promote Increased **Diversity in the Single-Family Market**
- h. Continue the focus on **Property Rehabilitation and Code Enforcement**
- i. Initiate **Neighborhood Planning and Action**
- j. Provide New Construction or Redevelopment of **Affordable Housing**
- k. Focus on **Marketing and Outreach to Other Communities**
- l. Address visual perception of unequal distribution of **Capital Improvements and Village Services**
- m. Continue to ensure **Fair Housing**
- n. Consider actions to impact **Schools and Housing Interrelationship**

The Housing Sub-Committee pointed to the many policy documents including the 1990 comprehensive plan and to the charts and other data in the appendix as important elements of understanding the housing issues and recommendations.

Promote Increased Diversity in the Single-Family Market

The Committee suggested creating private market incentives to increase white demand in the southeast and black demand in northwest Oak Park.

Focus on Property Rehabilitation and Code Enforcement

Use funds that are not constrained by income limits and other regulations to dramatically increase the rehabilitation of east Oak Park. Work to attract more buildings into the Diversity Assurance Program. Expand the neighborhood walk inspection so that it covers 25% of the Village each year. Market financial incentives and strengthen code enforcement function. Study the condominium conversion phenomenon and its impact on housing issues.

Initiate Neighborhood Planning and Action

Engage citizens at the neighborhood level and acquaint them with redevelopment, the comprehensive plan and diversity goals of the Village. Allow this process to inform the Village of local issue and village-wide concerns.

Provide Affordable Housing

Encourage redevelopment of economically marginal properties and new construction in east Oak Park with parking to be at a variety of price points. Encourage the redevelopment of economically obsolete or underutilized commercial or mixed-use parcels along North Avenue, South Boulevard and Roosevelt Road. Promote mixed income housing choices in all parts of Oak Park. Encourage high-end housing in east Oak Park. Partner with owners and others to provide parking improvements.

Marketing and Outreach to Other Communities

Market Oak Park to under-represented groups throughout the region. Use all means of mass communication to provide timely, accurate information about community life, housing and schools. Promote reinvestment with our neighboring communities and work on diversity issues in Austin, Forest Park, River Forest, Cicero, Berwyn, Elmwood Park and Galewood. Encourage leaders in metropolitan fair housing, affordable housing and sensible growth efforts.

Capital Improvements and Village Services

Address the perception of unequal service delivery and the visual perceptions of inequity created by special district and private investments.

Fair Housing

Continue to monitor the market and provide realtor training. Evaluate the impact of e-commerce on the real estate market.

Schools and Housing

The districts should examine their policies and actions to determine their impact on the housing market and to keep all parts of Oak Park attractive to all home seekers and renters. The racial makeup of each elementary school should approximate the racial makeup of the district as a whole. We cannot separate housing and schools into separate categories. Be sure all schools are welcoming. Study the impacts of the schools on housing choices. Approximate the racial make-up of the district in each school.

Diversity Statement

April 19, 1999, Adopted by the Village Board

The people of Oak Park choose this community, not just as a place to live, but as a way of life. Oak Park has committed itself to equality not only because it is legal, but because it is right; not only because equality is ethical, but because it is desirable for us and our children. Ours is a dynamic community that encourages the contributions of all citizens, regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, economic status, political affiliation, or any of the other distinguishing characteristics that all too often divide people in society.

Oak Park's proud traditions of citizen involvement and accessible local government challenge us to show others how such a community can embrace change while still respecting and preserving the best of the past. Creating a mutually respectful, multicultural environment does not happen on its own; it must be intentional. Our goal is for people of widely differing backgrounds to do more than live next to one another. Through interaction, we believe we can reconcile the apparent paradox of appreciating and even celebrating our differences while at the same time developing consensus on a shared vision for the future. Oak Park recognizes that a free, open and inclusive community is achieved through full and broad participation of all its citizenry. We believe the best decisions are made when everyone is represented in decision-making and power is shared collectively.

Oak Park is uniquely equipped to accomplish these objectives, because we affirm all people as members of the human family. We reject the notion of race as a barrier dividing us and we reject prejudicial behavior towards any group of people.

We believe residence in this Village should be open to anyone interested in sharing our benefits and responsibilities.

To achieve our goals, the Village of Oak Park must continue to support the Board's fair housing philosophy that has allowed us to live side-by-side and actively seek to foster unity in our community. We believe that mutual understanding among individuals of diverse backgrounds can best be attained with an attitude of reciprocal good will and increased association.

The Village of Oak Park commits itself to a future ensuring equal access, full participation in all of the Village's institutions and programs and equality of opportunity in all Village operating policies. The success of this endeavor prepares us to live and work in the twenty-first century.

It is our intention that such principles will be a basis for policy and decision making in Oak Park. The President and Board of Trustees of the Village of Oak Park reaffirm their dedication and commitment to these precepts.

The Community Relations Division (CRD) in the Community Services Department of the Village of Oak Park is designated by the President and the Board of Trustees of the Village to initiate steps to implement the diversity policies of the Village. The Community Services Department is also responsible for the enforcement of the Oak Park Fair Housing Ordinance.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss the goals and objectives of our community with you. Please stop by our office at 123 Madison Street and meet with the staff of the Community Relations Division. Our telephone number is 708-358-5423.

Thank you.



Steering Committee

Osbert (Ozzie) Bruno

Barbara Ebner

Jack Fagan

Barbara Furlong

Rogene Hill

Stephen Huth

Kimary Lee

Elizabeth Lippitt

Yara Prieto

Dorothy Reid

Carl Swenson

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Community Life

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Edy Burton
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Dean Christ
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Ray Johnson
Gus Kostopulos
Mary Ellen Matthies
Gloria Merrill
Carol Ann Olsen
Bill Planek
Denise Rose
Robert Rounds*
Agnes Stempniak
Bob Trezevant

COMMUNITY LIFE

List of Committee Members & Meetings Held

The subcommittee was co-chaired by Ozzie Bruno and Karin Grimes. Trustee Barbara Ebner attended several meetings. Other committee members were Jim Boushay, Lydia Gilbert, Hugh Helfer, Larry Higgs, Julie Kreiner, Rick Loudermilk, Robert Milstein, Sreemanth Pagadala, Jeff Weissglass, and Nile Wendorf. Short bios of committee members are attached at the end of the report.

The Community Life Committee held 14 meetings between June 26, 2000 and December 7, 2000.

Major Issues Addressed

There are many facets to community life that foster the Village's commitment to diversity. It is difficult to develop a simple definition that also includes the richness that results from a community committed to diversity. Based on citizen input the Committee concluded that a diverse community fosters relationships between and within groups throughout the community. It is not enough, therefore, to look only at Black-White relations. Diversity is an inclusive term that means we, in Oak Park, need to concurrently promote means to build a sense of community within each group, as well. Oak Park's diverse citizens helped the Committee to conclude that; the ideal dimensions of a diverse community life in Oak Park would include the following elements:

- Human relations between members of the community are constantly improving on many levels. By actively choosing to live and participate in Oak Park, we carry an increasing sense of obligation to each other and sensitivity to what makes us different and similar. We have the opportunity to develop more meaningful relationships with our fellow Oak Parkers. We move beyond mere acquaintances to a different level that can encompass a depth, richness and multi-layered breadth that is only available in a diverse community.
- Responsibility, civility, respect, shared power and leadership are all indicators of the degree to which our Village embraces and fosters its diversity.
- The benefits from diversity in community life are many. It creates a shared identification and pride with choosing our Village as our home. It actively provides increasing opportunities for interaction and a wider range of experiences with people similar and different to us across a range of dimensions, such as, race, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and disabilities. As a consequence of these opportunities, the Village is more vibrant, fears diminish, and mutual respect improves. The committee believes that our diverse community leads to

better civic leadership and solutions through our ability to draw from the broadest range of life's experiences to create solutions to our common problems.

The Community Life Committee also concluded that a focused effort to enhance diversity through community life initiatives provides the Village with a unique opportunity to move the conversation about diversity to a new and more robust plane. Historically, many diversity initiatives had at their core some assumption about an appropriate balance between different groups. This assumption inevitably leads to discussions about the counting and measuring the size of one group vis a vis some other group. The very nature of counting and allocating people inevitably leads to feelings of exclusion or inferiority on the part of one group. While those policies were probably appropriate at the time, they may have outlived their usefulness. The citizens of Oak Park and the Community Life Committee feel that a focus on the community life dimensions of diversity provides an avenue to foster and improve the current levels of diversity while overcoming the inherent limitations of the more numeric based policies of the past.

Against this definition of diversity, the subcommittee set out to determine how well are we doing as a Village and what recommendations could we make to improve our commitment to diversity within the context of community life.

Background and Methodology

The Committee relied upon multiple sources of information and community input to create its findings and recommendations. The major information sources and the following findings are derived from:

- A town hall meeting held on November 1st at Holmes School
- Sixty-seven on-the-street conversations with Oak Park residents from throughout the Village
- Small group discussions were held with five different groups within the Village of Oak Park. Five groups were chosen, due to the lack of time necessary to coordinate, ability to contact, and the manageability to hold this number of meetings. These five community groups were African-Americans, business owners, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (lesbigaytrans), senior citizens, and youth.
- Concurrent with the work of the subcommittee, the Village of Oak Park undertook a quantitative study of Oak Park citizens that included several questions on community life in Oak Park. This was released in November 2000 as the Oak Park Community Survey: Report of Results.

The Committee members also brought their experiences as residents of Oak Park to the deliberations. Notes were taken at all the separate meetings and brought back to the group in written formats. Discussion on the various pieces of information then ensued between the DTF Community Life Committee. Reports from the Town Hall meeting, on-the-street interviews, and individual reports written by the small group discussions will be included at the end of this report. There is also the handout from

the Town Hall meeting listing the questions. Though it is not included as an Appendix item, a copy of the Oak Park Village Diversity Statement (April 19, 1999) was also handed out to all participants at the Town Hall meeting and in various small group discussions.

The Committee devoted several meetings to developing a definition of Community Life that was based on the findings. The Community Life Committee of the Diversity Task Force began with this question and utilized the current Oak Park Village Diversity Statement, as its starting point.

The definition of "community" is broad-based and varied, and almost an esoteric intangible, yet we all function within this community and agree that a working, viable, enriching community is what Oak Park values. In addition, at the core of this definition, we also want the Village to be and remain diverse.¹

The interaction with the community was varied and lively, at times humorous and other times extremely thought provoking. Oak Park residents input is as diverse as the community. The scope of the Committee's work was defined and grew out of this conversation about what constituted community life. In its simplest form, the Committee dealt with issues outside the scope of the Housing and Education Committees.

In order to keep our discussions and findings consistent within the community, our inquiry focused on five core questions:

- 1) What are the opportunities in Oak Park that support diversity in community life?
A subset of that question is identifying the positive aspects and potentials that exist now and could be expanded in the future.
- 2) Given the opportunities identified, what could we do as a community to support or extend these opportunities?
- 3) What are the obstacles that exist in Oak Park that interfere with diversity in community life?
- 4) What are the recommendations for overcoming the obstacles?
- 5) What institutions, individuals, or organizations do you believe are responsible for carrying out the suggested recommendations?

¹ Oak Park Community Survey: Report of Results, Nov. 10, 2000, p. 1.

Findings

Opportunities and Interactions

What are the opportunities in the Oak Park community that support diversity? A subset of that question is identifying the positive aspects and potentials that exist now and could be expanded in the future.

The consensus is overwhelmingly that people WANT to keep Oak Park diverse. That is one of the main reasons people have moved and continue to live here, some emphasizing, "it's a cornerstone of why we live here."

They also believe that broadening the perception of diversity will make it a stronger and much more inclusive community. Though there is the respect that all groups have their own particular set of issues to resolve, people will always come together where there is "common ground" and where they feel safe.

Reactions varied from the general "some congregations such as Unity Temple" to specific organizations such as Project Unity, OPALGA, and the Housing Center from restaurants as diverse "gathering places" to the Oak Park YMCA and Park District programs. The Farmer's Market, "Day in Our Village," "Playtime Parents Time-Out," and "Black/White Dialogue." "

Children and their social/sport activities create more interactions that are diverse. They have been defined by some as more "color blind." For example, school activities for children are considered current, positive "diversity interactions, where adults of different backgrounds can also meet through their children.

While block parties were offered as a great form of interaction, it was also noted that there are areas within this Village where having a block party is impossible. Areas such as; blocks that border Austin and Harlem, higher density residential areas, etc. make it less feasible to shut down a thoroughfare. It was suggested at this time, that a Community or Diversity Center could provide necessary gathering space.

Supporting or Extending Opportunities

Given the opportunities identified, what could we do as a community to support or extend these opportunities?

Individuals have responded that we must "leverage" what is in place already. Whether it be the Village Diversity Statement and its inclusion as a Village-wide adoption, or just simply having more social interaction and celebratory activities.

Another significant idea came up within a few small group discussions and the town hall, and committee meetings. Oak Park should have a Diversity Center "like the Housing Center." A Diversity Center where diversity and its history, present and

future is shown as a "positive," a single place to "gather these groups and ideas all together," and "we need to celebrate it openly and together."

Additional supporting or extending suggestions:

VOP "Agencies" have an obligation to promote, support, and enable interactions between and within groups.

1. People want a community-gathering place that would be open "after dark" where people can safely gather whether recreationally or for groups.
2. Program times held in Park Districts are difficult for working parents.
3. Kids need more places to socialize outside of school activities.
4. Village events need to be more "celebratory of diversity." Offer "Oak Park" dinners, where all can attend to mingle, socialize, discuss, and overall – communicate.
5. Diversity requires both Intra- and Intergroup interaction to thrive

Obstacles

What are the obstacles that exist in Oak Park that interfere with diversity in community life?

Some individuals said the rising cost of housing would become a prime deterrent to living/moving into or out of Oak Park. Moreover, the higher cost of housing, rentals, and taxes would keep the "less affluent" and "young families with children" out of the Village. Higher rental values also affect the small-specialized retailers in this community that serve the diverse communities. As one participant stated, "the stores are smaller and lower in volume and therefore can't afford the high Oak Park rents."

Another significant and common feeling was that of "alienation, " a feeling of "fear of change or the unknown" when it came to diversity issues and populations. There is a feeling of being "singled-out" by the African American community regarding involvement and participation in Oak Park. Within the high school youth group, though, there is a "general desire on both sides for kids to become friends with other races." Though there isn't a mixture within school activities or groups of friends, people tend to "flock" to those who share the same interest and look for a degree of "comfort" with their interactions.

It has also been posited that there is an imbalance in the "power structures" still dominated by whites. This dominance creates a feeling of exclusion. This committee was told that the definition of diversity must be broadened. This feeling must also be evaluated through this "power structure" as pertaining to more than a race issue. Diversity, it was pointed out, is also a matter of gender, sexual orientation; special needs, etc. The power structure must be shared among the entire diverse community. In addition, with the willingness to share power there must be included a "willingness to listen."

The media, organizations, and committees need to help broaden the definition of the word "Diversity" to include more than a black and white issue. Feelings of alienation occur due to the lack of inclusion, while at the same time, a feeling of being "constantly singled-out" occurs. There must be a return to looking at the whole picture and how it affects the entire diverse community.

Additional obstacles:

1. Socio-economic/class issues bring to the diversity issue a whole new range of obstacles pertaining to social interactions
2. African Americans feel undermined and alienated by talk that there are too many of them in Oak Park or particular schools or neighborhoods
3. Differing perceptions between people of diversity make it hard to get at common ground. Barriers of trust and comfort levels between groups are not always present.
4. Communication style differences between cultural groups creates fears of misunderstandings and tend to reduce risk-taking between people
5. Physical obstacles, such as steps to entry, width of bathroom doors, and layouts too narrow to navigate for access.

Preliminary Recommendations

What are the recommendations for overcoming the obstacles?

The complete recommendations from the Committee on Community Life will be discussed in much further detail in the "Program and Policy Recommendations" section of this report.

The recommendations received from the citizen participants was to "leverage what's already in place" and expand on interactions and educational workshops or trainings. Again, the idea of "leveraging what's in place" and utilizing what Oak Park is known for, "it's wide-ranging diversity." The Village should maximize this information and highlight it in its local and national public presentations, and talk about the "benefits of diversity."

In relation to local government, the Village and Police do a "good job of practicing diversity," however, workshops to help encourage diversity education, which would include non-profits, small business, committees and commissions, would be recommended. For example the small business owner may look at all the start-up groundwork as "doing business," but to a minority-owned business, it could be construed as discriminatory.

Another common belief was that the Village of Oak Park is not an island. The Village needs to work with surrounding communities in the effort to achieve acceptance of all the kinds of diversity, which then achieves Community.

Additional recommendations:

- 1) Seven local governments must support and strengthen diversity
- 2) Improve human relations by offering more areas for inclusion rather than "representation"
- 3) Connection and coordination among various social justice groups is needed. "Break" Oak Park into different geographical areas and specific committees. These committees can then work together while discovering their different aspects and needs.

Who is Responsible?

What institutions, individuals, or organizations do you believe are responsible for carrying out the suggested recommendations?

It was agreed upon by some that the Village must be responsible for encouraging and promoting diversity. However, in some discussions, some residents suggested that "diversity" was not considered enough of a perceived problem" and that the Village can "handle it." This could lead to the reason some individuals in the Town Hall meeting described the dearth of volunteers as "a lack of incentive, thus a lack of energy and time." People don't have time or inclination to devote to diversity work, although they say it's important

It was also determined that individuals within this community must be encouraged to participate and take some responsibility. That a "personal" invite by friends and acquaintances works best to encourage participation (not just "representation") in groups, commissions or discussions geared toward change. This changes the dynamic from asking an individual to "represent" a certain group, as opposed to "participation."

Additional responsibilities:

- 1) The individual must not "abdicate" all responsibility to the Village.
- 2) Parents must demonstrate diversity to children
- 3) Schools, where diversity education must be enhanced and encouraged
- 4) Affinity groups, as there is a value of the group identity
- 5) Community organizations, congregations, etc. are not individually diverse

Summary

The discussion of what is "Community Life" began with individuals trying to explain and define what community is.

It came about, through all the varieties of investigation and discussion, that "common ground" was the most encapsulating definition. Community is a place where individuals, family, and friends could feel safe, valued, and respected.

A "common ground" that is defined as the acceptance of differences, and the gathering together of like-minds and hearts. Community life should offer a place where goodwill, civility, inclusion, mutual respect, and dignity of the individuals are the underlying belief and principle.

From our fact gathering effort and receiving input from Oak Park residents, this Committee on Community Life, recommends whole-heartedly, that there be a continuation of discussions among smaller "affinity" groups. Affinity groups where individuals of common minds would feel comfortable expressing their views, and that town hall meetings continue on perhaps a quarterly basis to encourage communication. There is a wealth of information, suggestions, and recommendations from residents. The Committee feels their ideas and views must be heard, and encouraged.

Policy & Program

Options & Recommendations

As set forth in the preamble, the Community Life Subcommittee (CLS) is urging Oak Park's public, non-profit, and private sector leadership to focus heavily on the role that improved human relations will play in the future of the Village. The success of Village programs over the last 30 years has given us an unprecedented opportunity to build a vibrant diverse community that will thrive for generations to come. It is time to move to the exciting business of learning how to live together.

The human relations side of diversity work is in many ways new and emerging. The vast array of ideas suggested by respondents attests to the possibilities for innovation. Our recommendations are presented with the hope that they will inspire public, private, and non-profit initiatives. We believe these suggestions can form the basis of Oak Park's leadership in a new era. We offer a wide range of ideas for consideration, organized around six broad themes. We highlight the committee's sense of the most promising starting points and then summarize them as priority recommendations.

The major themes are:

1. Assert **Government Leadership** as a critical element in shifting the landscape of diversity work to a focus on human relations.
2. Institutionalize our commitment through a new **Diversity Infrastructure** that will provide depth and permanence to the work.
3. Develop new and expanded diversity-focused **Programs and Activities**, with a particular emphasis on diversity education and increased opportunities for social interaction.
4. Develop **Creative Funding** approaches that integrate relationship building into the process of funding.

5. Raise the profile of the importance of diversity through **Marketing and Outreach** efforts within the Village, regionally, and nationally.
6. Consider a variety of suggestions for **Additional Institutional Roles** (both governmental and non-governmental).

Government Leadership

The Oak Park Village Government led the way in promoting diversity by passing the landmark Fair Housing Act in 1968, supporting the creation of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center and establishing the equity assurance program. In addition, by adopting its Statement on Diversity and establishing the Domestic Registry, Oak Park's Village government continues to show its leadership in setting policies to support diversity. The CLS sees government leadership at this time as critical to fostering renewed commitment among residents. Two key steps that we believe are likely to have a significant impact are:

- Urge all local governments to adopt the Statement on Diversity to establish a uniform Village-wide "tone".
- Establish a Village Director of Diversity position. The Director would be dedicated to working throughout the community to support and monitor efforts to achieve diversity.

Diversity Infrastructure

In addition to the Diversity Director, two ideas emerged for ways to specifically address the human relations aspects of diversity in a structural way. The committee sees these as among the first steps that should be taken.

Diversity Center - Creating an independent, non-profit Diversity Center could provide a place for activities dedicated to promoting the human relations that are at the core of a successful diverse community. The Center could include, for example, a diversity museum, a research and education component, and a resource center. It could support existing organizations and/or run programs suggested in the Program and Activities section below.

Monitoring Social Capital - The committee believes that the depth, breadth, and quality of relationships are at the heart of breaking down barriers and building a successful, diverse community. Important social science research has emerged over the last decade defining a concept of "social capital" that identifies and measures the extent and benefits of networks, or overlapping relationships, within a community. Oak Park might benefit from commissioning a long-term study to monitor the development of social capital in the Village, particularly with respect to cross-group relations.

Programs and Activities

Numerous ideas emerged for programs that could enhance understanding and bring area residents of diverse backgrounds together. At the same time, to attract people to the programs, we need to find common ground and to understand and respect the tremendous time pressures that many people feel. With this in mind, the program and activity ideas that emerged as most promising were:

Diversity Education - Educational opportunities include traditional and creative ideas. This work can be done in the schools, through community groups, private businesses, religious institutions, or government sponsored programs. They include:

- Diversity Training / Workshops and Programs
- Parent-Child Diversity Seminars
- Summer Camp with Diversity Dialogues

Expanded Social Interaction Opportunities - Social interaction continues to be one of the core approaches to getting to know people. By building more extensive networks we can provide the groundwork for breaking down barriers of misunderstanding. Ideas for creating more social action opportunities include:

- Community Dinners
- Cross-town block parties (N. block with S. block; E. block with W. block)
- Renew “Come To My House” program
- Develop multicultural parents’ groups and play groups for young children
- Expand existing diversity celebrations into a Diversity Fair
- Barbecue contest event
- Expand Day in Our Village activities to locations throughout the Village
- Offer expanded support to block parties
- Create second event in addition to block parties
- Provide “Lighted Park District” teen and adult activities in Park District buildings after hours

Additional program and activity ideas that the committee believes should be considered are:

Diversity Through the Arts - Breaking new ground often requires new structures. Increasingly people are recognizing the role that the arts can play in relating ideas and feelings across cultures and in helping all of us find new ways to view ourselves and our world. We can build on Oak Park’s strong arts infrastructure through a variety of new programs. We urge the arts community to lead the way in creating these approaches. Two ideas that the committee developed are:

- Creative Arts Network - Supporting the emergence of diverse artists and groups that provide the opportunity for residents to engage in creative efforts around writing, storytelling, music, dance, expressive arts, etc.

- Village centered events such as an “antique” auction along the lines of the TV show the *Antique Road Show*

Creating New Common Ground - The search for common ground raised the question of how we could promote diversity while meeting some common need or desire of residents. Two ideas are:

- Promote Cooperatives (e.g., home maintenance, homework, childcare, etc.) to provide people with an opportunity to work together while meeting particular needs they may have.
- Develop a Regional Community Service Program to provide opportunities for families to work together in service and for people of different backgrounds to work together on common projects. A service program might also link with diversity training programs.

Creative Funding

One of the barriers to the efforts we have described here is funding. Many of the programs cost money that is not currently identified. To accomplish the goals suggested here, however, new approaches should be seriously considered.

The committee views the most promising idea to be establishing an independent fund, which we call a Social Capital Fund. The Fund would provide seed capital for innovative programs developed by area non-profit and faith-based organizations and could provide capacity building grants to those organizations as well. The process of raising money for the Fund is also an opportunity to forge a cross-class working coalition that will be emblematic of the kinds of collaborative efforts that we need to establish throughout the Village. While much of the money could be raised within Oak Park, our standing as a model long-term integrated community will also provide the opportunity to raise funds from national foundations and from individuals outside the community who want to support and learn from our efforts.

A longer-term area to explore would be whether there are opportunities for new types of businesses or business services targeted to diverse communities. For example, educational activities by local bookstores could be encouraged, perhaps in partnership with community organizations. A seminar series could be developed in a for-profit environment. Multi-cultural performing arts presentations could provide chances for profit-making ventures consistent with bringing people together to explore diversity issues. The opportunities are not clear, but we urge the non-traditional entrepreneurs among us to consider the commitment to diversity in Oak Park (and many other communities) as a potentially untapped market.

Finally, the committee has two suggestions for direct government funding on specific diversity issues:

- Based on a Canadian model, provide modest grants for all groups to celebrate/promote what makes them unique.
- Fund ombudsman for the disabled through Village, Township, etc.

Marketing and Outreach

Complacency was identified as a major barrier to the ongoing work of maintaining diversity in Oak Park. In addition, many people told us that more participation by African-Americans in civic and social activities is needed. In prior sections we discussed particular programs that could attract more participation. We believe, however, that proactive steps should be taken to encourage and inspire increased participation by members of all under-represented groups. The marketing and outreach efforts to accomplish that must also encourage and inspire openness to power sharing and building relationships across group lines. **The outreach efforts must reach well beyond black-white lines to include the array of overlapping group identities that exist in the Village, including ethnic, religious, age, sexual orientation, physical ability, and socioeconomic status.** Specific ideas developed by the committee include:

- Formally market the broad concept of diversity to the Village and overall community.
- Create an aggressive effort to encourage participation in civic and social activities, particularly among members of under-represented groups.
- Insist on power sharing between groups.
- Highlight diversity history and opportunities to participate in material provided to all persons moving into the Village.

Core barriers to participation for many Oak Parkers are the need for childcare during events and transportation to events. Therefore, to make any outreach efforts successful, we urge a public-private partnership be developed to provide quality childcare and youth programming alongside the variety of programs and meetings that are adult focused. In addition, low cost transportation opportunities need to be developed and/or marketed.

Additional Institutional Roles

The various governmental bodies, community organizations, and religious organizations all have a role to play in promoting diversity as discussed above. This section suggests improvements and initiatives within these sectors.

B. Government

The Village and other governmental bodies have been day-to-day advocates of diversity throughout the last 30 years. With that in mind, the committee has several suggestions that the Village and others may adopt at this critical time.

Citizen Participation - Citizen participation in civic activities is a long tradition in Oak Park and represents a critical venue for power sharing and relationship building. Actions to improve the ways in which these functions can occur include:

- Recruit executive leadership to improve and coordinate committees and commissions to make participation easier and more worthwhile.
- Consider reducing the number of commissions in favor of more community dialogue as suggested below.
- Present citizen “training” sessions where people can learn about Oak Park’s government commissions and policies, as well as social, religious, and non-profit organizations.

Community Dialogue - To get better citizen input and communication, the Village and/or school boards, Township, Park District, etc. should consider:

- Quarterly (or more frequent) “Town Hall” meetings where citizens can relate directly and openly with one another and with elected officials on issues of importance to the residents and governments.
- Annual forums at which trustees listen and citizens speak.

Economic Development - Government’s role in supporting small businesses, especially minority owned businesses, could be enhanced in several ways:

- Create an ombudsman for all small businesses.
- Provide tax abatement for new businesses.
- Promote existing programs more effectively.
- Hold a periodic Business Fair.

Behavior Enforcement – The following ideas emerged:

- Create a Youth Court to permit sanctions to be imposed by the youth group itself.
- To achieve clarity and consistency in the treatment of all community members, repeal or enforce ordinances for which there is reluctance to enforce.

C. **Public (Non-governmental) Community Organizations**

The many community organizations and religious institutions operating in Oak Park play a significant role in promoting diversity. While partnerships are beginning to grow, a concerted effort to achieve better coordination and increased capacity among existing organizations is called for. Thus, the committee urges non-profit and religious institutions to consider the following:

- Develop new, improved partnerships among faith based, social justice, and social welfare organizations.

- Create an umbrella organization for non-profits.
- Recruit experienced retired citizens to build stronger, more effective organizations.

Summary of Priority Recommendations

As set forth above, numerous approaches could be taken in the effort to foster diversity through improved human relations. The committee recommends, however, that leaders in the public, private, non-profit, religious, and funding communities consider the following as the most promising recommendations.

- ◇ Assert government leadership through the establishment of a Director of Diversity and Village-wide adoption of the Statement on Diversity.
- ◇ Develop an independent Diversity Center and Museum dedicated to celebrating the Village's history of diversity, providing a central place for continuing work on diversity issues, and serving as a permanent research and educational institution.
- ◇ Expand diversity education programming, providing it through a wide variety of organizations.
- ◇ Expand opportunities for social interaction among people from different groups.
- ◇ Establish an independent Social Capital Fund to provide seed capital for innovative programs developed by area non-profit and faith-based organizations and to provide capacity building support to those organizations.
- ◇ Commission a long-term study to monitor the development of social capital in the Village, particularly with respect to cross-group relations.

**The Village of Oak Park
Commitment to Diversity Task Force**

COMMUNITY LIFE SUBCOMMITTEE

Co-Chairs:

Ozzie Bruno came to Oak Park from New York 18 years ago. He has been active in the community and has held positions on the Cable Access Commission, Citizens' Police Oversight Committee, Fire & Police Commission, YMCA, PTO and Boy Scouts. He is also on the Board of Directors of the St. Giles Parish Pastoral Council.

Karin Grimes is a 14 year resident of Oak Park. She and her husband have a son at Oak Park-River Forest High School and a daughter at Longfellow School. Karin was one of the co-founders of Project Unity in Oak Park and she also helped form the Cultural Diversity Committee at Pilgrim Congregational Church. She is a diversity trainer for and a board member of the Northeastern Illinois Chapter of NCBI (National Coalition Building Institute). She is a school social worker for the Chicago Public Schools and has a private practice in Oak Park.

Committee Members:

Jim Boushay is an activist for re-languaging the community based on the democratic values of mutual respect and civility. He is Senior Fellow in leadership development at *Resources Unlimited*, part of a networked consortium of public/private organizations focused on leadership for the future. He and his partner, Rickey Sain, are the authors of a book on re-languaging the community, *Feast of Word and Deed: Living a Language of Affirmation and Celebration*.

Gail Cruise-Roberson is a 5 year resident of Oak Park. She works for the Chicago Teachers' Center, part of the College of Education of Northeastern Illinois University. She helped introduce the S.E.E.D. (Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity) Program to the University 97 program of continuing education for District 97 teachers. She and her husband have two children in the Oak Park school system. She has been active as a Girl Scout leader in Oak Park.

Lydia Gilbert is a senior at Oak Park-River Forest High School. She is a member of the Executive Council of the Youth Advocacy Council of Oak Park Township Youth Services, a member of Student Council and a Peer Leader. She is also on the varsity field hockey team.

Hugh Helfer is a longtime resident and community activist in Oak Park. He is a former school board member of District 97.

Larry Higgs is a 15 year resident of Oak Park. He and his wife have a son who is a high school freshman and a daughter who is a 7th grader at Julian Junior High. Larry is involved with girls' baseball and AYO Soccer in the Village. He is also a member of the Oak Park Runner's Club.

Julie A. Kreiner is the co-chair of the Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Association. She is also an Executive Board member of the Village Manager Association, and on the board of the Oak Park Education Foundation. President of JAK Graphic Solutions, Inc., a web design/development company, Julie scrambles for more free time to spend with her partner, Harriet Coles, and their two dogs and two cats.

Rick Loudermilk is a consultant in the public health field. He has lived in Oak Park for 13 years. He is active in the local Sister Congregation Program.

Robert Milstein is an 18 year resident of Oak Park. He has served on the Citizen's Police Oversight Committee and the Community Relations Commission, which he chaired. He is on the Executive Committee of the Village Manager Association and is Executive Director of Tolerance, Inc. He works for Prevent Child Abuse America.

Sreemanth Pagadala has lived in Oak Park for 15 years. He is an engineer and runs his own company, Continental Engineering Corporation in Oak Park. He has three boys, one in college, one in high school, and one in District 97.

Jeff Weissglass is President of Project Unity, a community organization in Oak Park devoted to supporting diversity. He lives in Oak Park with his wife and three young sons.

Nile Wendorf is an 8 year resident of Oak Park. Professionally, Nile is a management consultant and operates his own firm from offices in Oak Park. The Commitment to Diversity Task Force is Nile's first foray into volunteering on a community-based committee or commission.

**The Village of Oak Park
COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY TASK FORCE
COMMUNITY LIFE SUBCOMMITTEE
TOWN HALL MEETING
November 1, 2000**

Please use this sheet if you have additional comments that you would like to share with the members of the Community Life Subcommittee of the Diversity Task Force.

The Village of Oak Park is a community that prides itself on inclusion of all citizens, regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or economic status.

In order to gather as much information as possible about what members of the public think about the current conditions in community life, the following general questions are to be explored. Please be as specific as possible in your answers.

1. (Identifying the positive aspects and potentials that exist now and could be expanded in the future) What are the opportunities that you see in Oak Park that support diversity in community life?

2. Given the opportunities that you have identified, what could we do as a community to support or extend these positive aspects or potentials?

3. What are the obstacles that you believe exist in Oak Park that interfere with diversity in community life?

4. What recommendations do you have for overcoming the obstacles you have identified?

5. Who (individual or group) do you believe is responsible for carrying out the recommendations you're made?

Commitment to Diversity Task Force
Community Life Subcommittee
Town Hall Meeting
Wednesday, November 1, 2000

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS: Ozzie Bruno

1. Places to interact:
 - Social organizations such as Project Unity, Black-White Dialogue; block parties, park district programs, churches, schools.

2. Kids:
 - Children in school and related activities were seen as a major source of interaction. However, there was concern about lack of interaction among black and white children once they moved from k-6 to junior high and beyond.

Challenge and support kids' attitudes:

Reasons:

 - children hang out with others who share common views, e.g. music, fashion.
 - parental attitudes have subliminal effect on children as they grow older and mirror what parents have been saying or acting.
 - children are color-blind, barriers come from parents.

3. Adults:
 - Get beyond superficial structure of saying that integration is tolerated.
 - Get to really know your neighbors of different races by inviting them to your home for drinks, dinner, coffee, etc.
 - Encourage kids to interact, either directly or through parents
 - Start with small groups.

4. Races:
 - Difficulty in talking with other races. ("How will I say something without getting the other race upset?")
 - Black people usually feel that they are being "sized up" when in the company of whites.
 - Most people feel uncomfortable interacting in an interracial group (75%).

5. Socio-Economic:
 - Socio-economic attitudes can foster or hinder interaction because people prefer to interact within their like socio-economic groups.
 - Educational level also affects interaction.

6. Interaction Barriers:
 - Too difficult, too much work, exhausting, risk, schedules, personal relationships, requires individual action.

7. Solutions to barriers:
 - Maximize potential of interaction with parents of elementary school kids; use local groups to solicit participation; use RBO groupings; use other organizations to discuss community issues; use capacity, not race.

8. Increase African-American participation:
-Reach out, talk outside of boundaries, get personal, have contact names; demonstrate shared power in meetings/organizations between black and white; whites tend to be race neutral, African Americans may not feel that way.
9. Housing:
-Matter of economics; does not putting out "For Sale" signs foster steering?
10. Oak Park's future:
-Don't be too smug about where we are today, keep working on betterment.
11. Disabled:
-Need for education, training; home inaccessibility hinders interaction.

-- Ozzie Bruno

Village of Oak Park
Commitment to Diversity Task Force
Community Life Committee

December 7, 2000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
ON-THE-STREET INTERVIEWS

A **total of 67 interviews** took place during the Saturday and Sunday of each of the last two weekends in October 2000. The purpose of the **on-the-street and at-random conversations at eight pre-selected locations** was to **gather and analyze information** in order to **shape and influence policy** on present and future initiatives in community life, integration, diversity.

The locations were (1) the library on Lake Street, (2) Downtown, (3) the AVENUE shopping area, (4) the Harrison Street area, (5) the south Oak Park area, (6) Madison Street at East Avenue, (7) Scoville Park, and (8) Field House at Woodbine Avenue and Division Street.

A majority of people interviewed (48 of 67) were **generally familiar with the Village's history** of--and institutional commitment to--fairness, diversity, and integration in **building community through better human relations**.

For 20 of those 48, their private understandings of the public commitment to improved equity were a **blend of the negative and positive**. Some favorably acknowledged the **Village's welcoming environments of customer service**, most frequently citing a superb library, excellent schools, friendly municipal offices, open public events, beautiful parks.

Others expressed dissatisfaction that at times their **personal experiences of exclusion** have been in painful contradiction to the publicly articulated realities of inclusion. Some recalled episodes in which municipal officials and community leaders were ineffective at **nurturing an all-embracing sense of how greater inclusion leads to community and civic improvements**.

What's more, a majority of those interviewed (41 of 67) seemed fairly relaxed, even eager to be interviewed. In fact, **many shared explicitly positive stories**, perceptions, thoughts, ideas about community life--past, present, future.

The remaining 26 of 67 indicated variously that the interview was an opportunity to reassert the **ongoing need for residents to step out of their comfort zones** as a means of **facing an increasingly interdependent culture**. They recommended a variety of renewed public re-assertions, valuing the ways citizens learn to engage **lived complexity** by confronting the **varying intersections of unique similarity and difference**. Expressions of public policy, they said, need to grow, changing to reflect **active awareness and understanding of newer complexities**, yet reasonably free of restrictive judgment and bias.

In general, the interviews indicated that unique expressions of equality and diversity are often affirmed by the **examples set through the customary sources of information and influence**. There are, they indicated, naturally **multi-layered conduits of influence** that both interrelate and stand-alone.

The **five most prominent influences** mentioned are:

- (1) **Knowledge** accumulated from lived experiences
- (2) **Information** in local/regional newspapers and other forms of mass media
- (3) **Involvements**, both ongoing and *ad hoc*, with faith-based, social welfare, and social justice organizations
- (4) **Conversations** with neighbors having attended or now attending local public or private schools, and
- (5) **Lessons learned** from observations of, and engagements with other citizens, including residents, friends, acquaintances, colleagues

Altogether, the **deliberately random series of one-on-one conversations** typically ranged from three minutes at the least to seven or eight minutes at the most (with one exception lasting 15 minutes). Some 65 percent of the total **interviews averaged four-to-six minutes**.

For 80 percent of all conversations--whatever the length--**verbatim notes and comments were immediately recorded** and written in notebooks or on clipboards that were out of view during the interview. In the remaining 20 percent of the interviews, comments and ideas were recorded within 5-10 minutes after closure. In one instance, interview results were recorded several hours afterward.

Thus interviews were conducted **without visible evidence of paper and pen**. The recording of comments and information occurred once the visit had ended and the citizen was offered a flyer inviting attendance at an upcoming public forum on community life.

During the **planning phase** for these on-the-street conversations, the six volunteer interviewers/recorders surfaced a **range of neighborly options to use**. More important, a potluck and at-random approach was used to generate reasonably **informal--sometimes spontaneous--conversations**. At the same time, given reciprocal feelings of risk, it was important **mutually to respect the people asked either to elicit or share confidential/private information**.

After initial pleasantries, citizens were informed that the information gathering experience would result in **sharing and analyzing the findings** through the structure of an *ad hoc* municipal task force composed of citizens intent on shaping and making new policies to **create a better community**.

The task force's purpose, residents were told, was to use the results as a means of **conceptualizing and undertaking new community life initiatives**. As many as 10 residents declined to participate.

The **democratic spirit** of the 67 total conversations was to listen, confirm, clarify, listen more, and then again re-clarify and re-confirm what was heard in a back-and-forth framework of **open-ended discourse**.

The environment for this kind of civic engagement elicited a range of **answers in response to three questions** about community life. The broad questions were developed in earlier meetings of the full community-life committee and in ongoing follow-up phone calls and e-mails.

The questions asked residents to comment on the **obstacles, opportunities, responsibilities, functions, and actions** of working cooperatively to embrace greater appreciation for **inclusion through improved human relations**. The answers routinely included more suggestions for encompassing activities.

Interview results are in **spreadsheet** format. Available also are the **comments, remarks, ideas, suggested actions, and face photos** of the 67 interviewed.

Time spent **conceptualizing, directing, and recording** the street effort was 36 hours. The follow-up effort to **gather, compile, organize, verify, confirm, reconfirm, format, and write** the results--was another 54 hours. The time spent in full committee deliberations has not been calculated here.

Thus the on-the-street component of the community life committee of the Diversity Task Force--from start to finish, from **conception** to **planning** to **execution** to **evaluation**--totals **90 hours** of labor.

Submitted by Jim Boushay

ON THE STREET INTERVIEWS
67 INTERVIEWS ARRANGED BY THE ORDER OF THE TIME CONDUCTED
(October 21,22 and October 28,29)

6 Interviewers

8 Sites

EXPLANATION OF COLUMNS: 1 through 10

--Library at Lake

--Downtown

--The AVENUE

--Harrison Area

--South OP Area

--Madison E of OP

--Scoville Park

--Field House

1 = First name

2 = Pic available Y or N

3 = Age range

4 = Interview location

5 = Live North or South of Lake

6 = Number of years as resident

7 = Live in a Condo House Apartment

8 = Status Married Partnered Single Divorced Widowed

9 = Community life on scale of 1-5, with 5 being most favorable

10 = Remarks on Diversity, Integration, Community Life, Problems, Solutions

#	Name	Pic	Age	Interview location	N/S	Yrs	Living	Stat	Scale
Comments and Remarks									
1	Howard	Y	65	Library at Lake	N	27	H	W	4
I know two people from another race; my bench in the park is great place to... see everybody getting along and having fun									
2	Marion	Y	65	Library at Lake	S	38	H	D	4
My grandkids love visiting; it's pretty crowded in their Chgo neighborhood... we know from the papers that integration is important here									
3	Jacky	Y	11	South OP Area	N	11	H	NA	3.5
Have friends in school, lots of different friends by my house... mom likes it when we play in the park in the summer									
4	Walter	Y	40	Scoville Park	N	4	H	M	3.5
My neighbors thought I was the gardener; my kids hang at OPRF with... kids who are black too; some nice people live in my block; some not									
5	Ronnie	Y	51	Scoville Park	N	18	C	M	3.5
Our block party is great; my church has no black members; the pastor talks... about "helping" poor people; seems he means black people									
6	Maureen & Child	Y	27	South OP Area	N	4	A	P	3.5
People say hello in my bldg; different people there--Asian, Hispanic, a dean... of college who is Indian, a black chiropractor, a gay couple									
7	Roxanne	Y	34	Downtown	N	7	A	S	3
Whites more bigoted in other towns; but waitress here gave the check to... my white friend; I was paying but waitress never asked us									
8	Lily & Cat	Y	49	The AVENUE	N	6	H	S	2.5
This town has worked hard to accept all people; adults & kids need to work... together; the kids seem like they don't notice color like adults do									
9	Timothy	Y	10	South OP Area	S	4	H	NA	3.5
Different kids in school; know names of the black kids but we just aren't... friends; lady on block thought this black kid stole a bike that was his own									
10	Joshua	Y	11	South OP Area	S	11	H	NA	2.5

	My math teacher gives extra help to all the kids--white and black; she talks... about how everybody's different; May Madness is fun; everybody together								
11	Kathie	Y	37	Scoville Park	N	12	C	M	4.5
	White kids walk together; black kids walk together; is that a real problem?... don't know; different groups hanging together is okay; just be nice								
12	Bruce	Y	10	Madison at East	S	10	H	NA	3.5
	They did this great food thing down the street; there were a lot of different... people there, even old people; my friends & me sometimes walk downtown								
13	Vaughn & Jody	Y	28	Library at Lake	N	3	A	P	3.5
	Hey, it's tough all over; we do okay; people kind of stare at us but nobody... bothers us; we want to be involved but don't know who to talk to about that								
14	Celia	N	41	Library at Lake	S	2	H	S	3.5
	My brother got beat up and they called him a chink; he's a smart engineer... he went to the police but they never were able to catch him								
15	Robert	Y	20	South OP Area	S	20	H	S	3
	Had black classmates at OPRF; it was good; but I don't have any black... friends now; I am looking for an apt in Chicago; like having different friends								
16	Ralph	Y	23	Downtown	N	11	C	S	3
	My family is close; my dad tells stories of people treating him like he is... not as good as others; my mom has different coffee friends in our condo bldg								
17	Elizabeth	Y	24	South OP Area	S	5	C	D	3
	OP is quiet and I like that; people nod at you and say hello as they pass... people seem friendly; no, I don't have friends here; they all live in Chicago								
18	Lynne	Y	65	Scoville Park	N	26	H to C	W	4
	Retired; I like to talk and meet people; my church has many members of... different backgrounds and colors; my kids are married; none of them live here								
19	Donald	Y	16	Downtown	N	16	H	NA	2
	Freshman at OPRF; know some white guys; i like them; not sure if they... are nice because the school kind of tells them to be or they want to be								
20	Margot	N		The AVENUE	S	13	H	M	4
	Deal all the time in my OP job with different people; i treat everybody the... same; yeah, on my block this Hispanic lady friend & I talk on the porch								
21	Jackie	N	31	Field Center	N	10	H	M	3
	Papers do a good job with diversity; they keep the issues in front of us... we need to keep reminding people that being good neighbors is the way to go								
22	Dolores	Y	25	Harrison Area	N	25	H	S	3.5
	I look forward to our block party every year; my boyfriend who is black... helped with the organizing last summer; all the neighbors met & liked him								
23	Jennie	Y	36	Downtown	S	7	A	D	3.5
	We have to think more about why we put people into a category; bias comes... just from not really thinking about the person in front of you								
24	Said	Y	58	Downtown	N	14	H	M	3
	Could tell you dozen of stories about how people think I'm stupid just from... my accent and color; still, i try to be nice and not say anything; I like OP								
25	Julio	Y	26	Downtown	S	6	A	S	3.5
	The money is good in my work; as long as they have the money to pay, who... cares?; kids from school come in here; all different kinds; they're good kids								
26	Linda	Y	28	Downtown	N	3	C	P	4
	I know a lot of talented people who want to be involved in some of the... different committees; they just don't know who to call to get things going								
27	Jonathan	Y	27	Downtown	N	3	A	S	3.5
	Race stuff seems worse now than ever when it comes to people just... talking and meeting; white people smile and all but you can tell they don't care								

28	Bobby	Y	21	Downtown	N	15	A to H	S	3.5	Pretty quiet neighborhood; don't think there are any other black folk on my... block or maybe the next block over; I still have white friends from OPRF days
29	Winston	Y	28	Downtown	N	6	A	S	4	People are pretty apathetic; I don't really know what they mean by diversity... diversity is a good thing if it doesn't push apart; there's a nice gay cop on my block
30	Joseph	Y	10	Field Center	N	10	H	NA	3	Except for our block party, we don't talk to people on our block; not a lot of... kids; in school the teachers say good things and make me happy to be in OP
31	Jacob	Y	10	Field Center	N	9	H	NA	4.5	Maybe 5 or 6 black kids in the whole school; when I ride my bike all over I... see a lot more people who are black; my mom and dad's friends live in Chgo
32	Georgie	Y	11	The Avenue	S	11	H	NA	3.5	We have some black or Indian friends on the block; I like them; everybody... seems friendly; my school has black teachers and kids too
33	Bruce	Y	11	The AVENUE	N	11	H	NA	3.5	My dad kinda hates this Spanish family on our block cause they have friends... over all the time; too many cars, he says; my mom's okay with all this
34	Michael	Y	12	The AVENUE	S	8	C	NA	4	We play ball in the park, all kinds of kids from around; some go to my school... i don't know their names, but we still play together; my teachers are cool
35	Antonio	Y	11	South OP Area	N	11	H	NA	4.5	No other Puerto Rican kids in my boy scout troupe; all the other kids are... white; the kids on my block are over my house all the time
36	Katrina	Y	22	The AVENUE	S	2	A	P	5	In Greece I am smart; here I'm stupid because of my accent; people repeat... again and again because they think I don't know; they talk like I am deaf
37	Brian	Y	28	South OP Area	S	4	A	S	5	Lot of talking about integration, but not doing a lot; people look away when ... they pass me; am I ugly or something?; OP summer weekend stuff is cool
38	Hesham	Y	32	The AVENUE	S	3	A	M	3	People in Village Hall are helpful; health dept allowed me to fix a problem... so that the restaurant wouldn't get cited...my kids like their teachers
39	Jeremy	Y	32	The AVENUE	N	2	A	S	4	The big shots come here to eat all the time; they say hello, and thanks... when they leave; we need things to bring black & white together more
40	Madeline	Y	51	Harrison Area	N	17	A to C	M	3.5	We just talk about it but we don't do anything; what happened to that foods... thing they did at Andersen Park; hundreds brought their potluck dishes
41	David	Y	51	Scoville Park	N	5	C	M	2.5	Lived here 5 yrs and don't know people in my bldg; we say hello; that's all... Americans don't know how to talk to people who come from somewhere else
42	Keith	Y	27	Downtown	N	5	A	P	3.5	What's the use of working hard?; it's all talk; I've been looking for an adult... softball team to play on and still haven't found one; my Irish girlfriend hates OP
43	Martha	N	56	The AVENUE	N	23	C	D	4	Lived in River Forest and OP combined in that time; know a lot of people... because I work in retail; nice people and things all around town
44	Laura	Y	31	Harrison Area	S	5	H	M	4	Friendly people come to the restaurant; we do lot of different things to help... people relax; we go out of our way to treat customer fairly, with courtesy

45	Jeannie	Y	65	South OP Area	S	22	H	M	3.5
My church keeps diversity in front of us; that's good; still, please more... doing and less talking on diversity; I don't even know what the word means									
46	Chuck	Y	56	Harrison Area	N	7	H	P	3.5
I'm involved in some great things here; people are trying, really; I feel bad... that I don't have any black friends and no black people live in my neighborhood									
47	Angie	Y	25	Downtown	N	2	A	P	3
You gotta be kidding; this place is stuck in the 40's; I can't remember last... time somebody came up just to say hello; I know it's my color; you learn that									
48	Rob	Y	36	Harrison Area	S	11	H	M	4
Go to the library for a real slice of difference; yeah, OP's nice place and it's... good for Village to openly try harder; my band sees mostly white audiences									
49	Flavian	Y	75	South OP Area	S	41	H	W	3
I'm still surprised when I see black or Hispanic people pictured in the paper... or on TV; hard to get used to how things change but I'm not hurting anybody									
50	Leigh	Y	19	Harrison Area	N	19	H	S	4
My dad and mom are cool about diversity; they came here to live and have... kids because OP is open; I have different friends hanging out at my house									
51	Jawid	Y	29	Downtown	S	2	A	M	3
I get respect by staring when somebody says something stupid about... people or immigrants; I use silence to tell people that I deserve respect too									
52	Carolyn	Y	42	The AVENUE	N	29	H	M	3.5
We have made great progress; more needs to be done to bring more people... into the process; I'm in touch pretty much with the current diversity issues									
53	Terry	Y	36	The AVENUE	N	11	H	M	4
We don't ask a person's color or religion when responding to a fire; we just... make sure we take care of the people needing our help; we protect all									
54	Perry	Y	65	South OP Area	S	19		H	4
I'm gay but usually don't tell anybody; what difference does it make?; we... all have to live together somehow; I don't like my noisy neighbors with 6 kids									
55	Gloria	Y	28	South OP Area	S	4	A	M	3.5
Important to find creative ways of inviting everybody; even if they don't come... we meant it when they were invited; my customers are all kinds and friendly									
56	Sondra-Jean	Y	13	Downtown	S	13	C	NA	4
Black kids hang together at school; the white kids do the same; everybody is... kinda friendly but somehow we don't know how to mix it all up									
57	Cathy	N	36	Field Center	S	14	H	M	3.5
We need to do better with diversity; i still don't know some of people on my... block; whites think blacks are biased; east side OP needs to get better									
58	Michelle	Y	39	South OP Area	S	12	H	M	3.5
I came here because this town has a good attitude about people trying to... get along; don't believe what's in the papers; we can't make everyone happy									
59	Ann	Y	42	Downtown	S	15	A	D	3.5
Sometimes uppity OPers won't talk to you; some of them do and are okay... we can do more things for the kids to all be in the same spaces having fun									
60	Hank	Y	44	The AVENUE	N	17	A to C	S	3
Education is the key; keep telling the stories of how we keep trying to make... things better; people get good messages here in OP; bad apples everywhere									
61	Lizzie	Y	5	South OP Area	S	5	H	NA	5
My dad and us come here for ice cream all the time; we have to wait to get... in because there are so many people who like ice cream									

62	Howie	Y	57	The AVENUE	S	14	H	M	3	We really don't bother anybody; my kids are all grown up and I have 5... grandkids now; they don't live here; my kids moved out years ago
63	Sayd	Y	63	Downtown	N	19	H	M	3.5	Look around; all kinds of people here in the mall; no, I don't read the papers; "diversity simersity"--what does that word really mean?; people are usually nice
64	Patricia	N	32	Scoville Park	N	9	C	S	3.5	Different people in my condo building; we don't talk much but we say... hello when we see them; they are quiet in my building; not many meetings
65	Dana	Y	36	Field House	S	4	A	P	3	Live on Austin near Lake; people coming and going all the time; my partner... rides the El all the time; nothing happens to her; of course she's careful
66	Hennie	Y	17	Madison at East	N	17	H	NA	3.5	OPRF is pretty cool about telling the kids to get along; I have a black teacher... who seems like he hates blacks; no, I don't have any African American friends
67	Tamara	Y	24	South OP Area	N	24	H	S	3	In graduate school; you know, some people just kinda talk down to you; . they think I'm poor and dumb because I'm Philippino

Age range	Interview location	Live North or South of Lake Street	Years living in Oak Park	Live in a condo, house, or apartment
5 to 18 = 14 19 to 30 = 18 31 to 50 = 21 51 on up = 14	Library = 4 Downtown = 16 The AVENUE = 13 Harrison = 6 South OP = 15 Madison = 2 Scoville Park = 6 Field House = 5	N = 38 S = 29	5 or less = 21 6 to 10 = 13 11 to 20 = 25 21 to 30 = 7 31 or more = 1	Condo = 13 House = 37 Apt = 17

Mate status	Rating Scale of 1 to 5, with 5 most favorable
Married = 21	Rating 1 = 0
Partnered = 8	2 = 4
Single = 16	3 = 42
Divorced = 5	4 = 18
Widowed = 3	5 = 3
NA = 14	

December 7, 2000

Village of Oak Park

Diversity Task Force

Community Life Committee

Summary of

125 ACTIONS & IDEAS

expressed by 67 residents

in interviews/conversations

Accommodating the culture
Acknowledging the effort
Actualizing the plan
Advancing ideas
Advocating for an idea
Affirming the work
Agreeing to disagree
Agreeing to help
Allowing for a new awareness
Answering questions
Appreciating capabilities
Appreciating values
Approaching the matter simply
Arranging in order
Arranging randomly
Asking questions
Assessing resources
Balancing the competing demands
Becoming the change that is sought
Brainstorming
Building awareness
Building consensus
Building the future environment
Building upon existing relationships
Centering ideas
Changing attitudes
Coaching
Communicating as things develop
Confronting change and growth
Cooperating as a team member
Creating an open environment
Creating change

Creating new relationships
Deepening understanding
Developing effective partnerships
Developing the project
Disagreeing
Dialoguing
Disseminating information
Embracing goodwill
Empowering yourself & others
Encountering people
Encouraging activities
Encouraging and sustaining an idea
Encouraging further discussion
Engaging the process
Engaging the relationship
Engaging the work to be done
Enriching understandings
Expressing yourself
Focusing on the end-product
Focusing on the issue at hand
Fostering goodwill and openness
Gaining new confidence
Gathering information
Getting to know someone
Growing in new knowledge
Growing issues organically
Guiding the activities
Holding a quiet conversation
Identifying goals
Improving dialogue
Improving the quality of life
Improving the work-ethic and atmosphere
Improving relationships
Influencing decisions
Leading with ideas
Leaving voice mails
Listening
Making a difference
Making decisions
Making organization better
Managing resources
Measuring standards
Offering different alternatives
Offering innovative possibilities
Offering thanks
Opening new ideas
Operationalizing the ideas
Overcoming an obstacle

Prioritizing
Producing a tangible good
Producing practical results
Promoting
Proposing an idea
Providing counsel
Provoking action
Recommending that it be done
Reinvesting in abilities
Relating anecdotes
Renewing a sense of mission
Reporting information
Reshaping the concept
Resolving a conflict
Respecting complexity
Respecting mutually
Revising
Revitalizing
Sending notes
Serving gladly
Setting group goals
Shaping decisions
Shaping policy
Sharing in leadership for results
Sharing information
Sharing knowledge
Spending time talking
Telling a story to make a point
Summarizing briefly
Supporting an activity
Supporting growth
Surfacing answers
Surfacing differences
Taking the time
Talking
Telling the story of what happened
Thinking out loud
Fine-tuning and adapting the approach
Understanding advantages and disadvantages
Understanding the dynamics
Watching and learning
Working as a team
Working with people
Writing ideas and materials

Submitted by Jim Boushay

December 7, 2000

**Village of Oak Park
Diversity Task Force
Community Life Committee**

**67 REMARKS & IDEAS expressed by 67 citizens
Arranged in alpha order with an ACTION WORD first**

Apologize publicly when you screw up; it's no big deal	Keep building on the accomplishments in integration
Attack no one's motives	Let the trustees out so we see who they are
Attract new business	Lower the taxes
Avoid asking someone what part of town they live in	Make connections between us and Austin
Be friendly with the neighbors; smile and say hello	Make Village employees more accountable
Be more aggressive about diversity in the schools	Mean inclusion when you say it
Bite the bullet and fix the parking mess	Recruit new people to get involved
Bring in a big hotel	Remember that diversity means many things to many people
Build multiculturalism into every academic program	Remind people that fun stuff goes on in town all the time
Call citizens stakeholders	Respect differences openly and that people are all different
Close off the street for the fun of it more often	Revive the potluck food thing
Communicate that here is a fun place to live	Schedule similar activities together; too much duplication
Create networks of youth and adults working together	Set up a job bank for retirees so they can still contribute
Criticize the idea, not the person	Set up schools within schools
Curb your dog please	Shop in town instead of on Michigan Avenue
Demand respect by giving respect	Smile when someone criticizes you
Develop an economic master plan	Sponsor more park district activities
Do less processing and more hard work	Start a newcomers group and keep building on it
Embrace change since it happens anyway	Stop talking so much about race issues
Encourage diversity more and more	Stop treating people with accents like they are dumb
Ensure that schools respect difference	Support the groups that help the homeless
Explain something so we understand it	Talk more about race issues
Figure a way to have the churches come together	Talk to young people about their civic involvement
Get the papers to tell positive stories	Tell the agencies not to mistreat their clients
Go outside your group to meet someone new	Tell the police to walk more and to say hello
Have a big all-Village sale day outside in July	Tell the president to smile more when she's on TV
Hear our concerns with more than lip service	Tolerate somebody who's really different
Hire gay people to work in government	Vote your conscience
Hold more community conversations	Wake up and realize that this ain't the 1960's anymore
Improve the historical museum	Work hard to keep parents involved in the schools
Increase communication	
Increase the black and Hispanic population	
Install more night lights in the parks	
Invest in relationships of trust	
Invite a neighbor to attend your church and vice versa	
Invite an elected official to supper and to meet your kids	
Invite people to something they usually don't go to	

Submitted by Jim Boushay

AFRICAN AMERICAN CONSTITUENCY GROUP

For this group we sought participants who were “not generally engaged in civic/political activities in Oak Park” and who represented “new voices” in the deliberations of the Diversity Task Force. Recruiting efforts included requests to 25 very active community members to help recruit the new voices. Through this effort we ended up with just four participants in the group. They had varying degrees of prior involvement, from very little to serving on positions on non-profit boards and on church committees. None had prior involvement in the DTF process. The group consisted of three African American females and one African American male. All were parents of school-age children. All worked outside the home at a range of working class, management level, and professional jobs. The following is an overview of their responses.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Living here in part because of the diversity (intentionality).
- Park District programs, including at school buildings after school.
- YMCA.

BARRIERS

- Park District program times difficult for working parents, which has a high impact on African American parents.
- Whites fear of blacks.
- Black acceptance of stereotypes (e.g. low expectations around academics).
- Too few African Americans in OP/RF (lack of critical mass of people with like mind and background).
- Lack of black role models for children in day to day life.
- Lack of black churches in individuals’ traditions.
- Feelings of isolation and of being put upon as a black person to participate and to be a “model black person” leads people to retreat from participation.
- Conflict between need for critical mass and view that too many African Americans will lead to a “tipping point.”
- White view that black honesty equals anger.
- “Missionary” feel of white relationship to blacks.
- Tone of conversation in press.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Individual Responsibility.
- Achieving scale in the African American community.
- Affinity groups to promote black culture building.
- Challenging stereotypes.
- Telling the African American story.
- Low cost reliable service to get kids to after-school programs

SMALL GROUP – BUSINESS OWNERS

Background

The group was held on November 21, 2000 at the First Bank of Oak Park. The final group ended up with 6 participants and the moderator. There were 5 no-shows. The participants included a senior bank officer, an owner of a real estate company, an apartment landlord/developers, a home base business service owner, a Mexican restaurant owner, and an advertising services owner. One person was female and one person was Hispanic. The one African-American and one Indian business owners were not able to make it.

Findings

1. Oak Park's diversity is important to the business community but it comes at a price (high taxes.)
2. High taxes penalize the small-specialized retailers that can serve the diverse community and provide an opportunity for other community members to purchase items (food, clothing, etc.) from another ethnic group. These stores are smaller and lower in sales volume. Therefore, they can't afford the high "Oak Park" rents.
3. The VOP could consider "start-up" business tax rates to lower taxes for these firms while they try and increase their store traffic to justify the rents.
4. Immigrant business owners are hard pressed to get involved on boards and other civic organizations. Limited staffing, and the need to spend long hours at their businesses are the reasons why they are not more involved. Some of these immigrant business owners also view their time in America as a temporary means to make money before returning to their homeland. For these people, civic involvement is less important.
5. It's tough for a small business to start in Oak Park because of the regulations. That's true for all small businesses. It is especially true if you're from an ethnic group with language issues. The forms and processes are very intimidating. The Village does not have a means to welcome and help these small businesses through the process. The regulations are OK; the problem is getting them completed properly.
6. Not all Village departments are friendly to the business community. White businesses owners look at it as the "cost of doing business." A minority business owner could interpret these actions as discriminatory. As a minority business owner, this is even more difficult. Need a mechanism to help/support/guide these people.
7. Oak Park has many programs to promote economic growth. It is very rare for minority persons to avail themselves of these programs. They probably don't even know that they exist. If they know, the programs are not necessarily presented in the best manner.

Oak Park could build a more diverse business community by targeting businesses in some of the ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago, as Little Village, Taylor Street, Milwaukee & Diversey (Polish).

VILLAGE OF OAK PARK
Commitment to Diversity Task Force:
Community Life Subcommittee

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) Small Group
November 16, 2000

This group was approached through outside contacts and through the Oak Park Area Lesbian and Gay Organization (OPALGA) membership list. The people contacted were those who were not as immediately and closely involved with either the organization or with the workings of Oak Park Village Commissions or Committees. We were looking for new, unvocalized thoughts.

25 people were contacted, and an article was published in the monthly OPALGA newsletter "Empower" calling for participants. They represented an age range from 20-60's. The people were either single, "partnered," or partnered with children. They represented all areas of the Village, varying socioeconomic levels, owned or rented their homes. One of the participants had identified as a "bisexual," and regrettably due to time constraints, there were no transgendered participants. I strongly urge that this focus group be conducted again, when all members of the LGBT community can be heard.

Five participants responded either by participating in the discussion (held in a home setting for 1-1/2 hrs) or by e-mail. Two were female, three male; 4 single, 1 of a couple; all were "white;" 3 own homes, 2 rent; none had children; 1 retired, 4 professionals; none were disabled. At the beginning of the discussion when they wanted to know what other groups were being contacted for these smaller focus groups, comments such as "we can fit into all of these categories," and from another "gay people are so diverse anyway...." was taken to mean, the participants can relate to more than the LGBT "label" or self-definition.

The following is the overview of their discussions and responses to the standard Community Life questions presented at the Town Hall Meeting.

Where do you see diversity happening or working:

- Within community organizations that redefine what a "family" membership means. It is not only a male/female family home.
- Within some of the local churches such as Unity Temple. Though "not as many African American" faces in the congregations, and Unity Temple is more LGBT family-oriented.
- Local restaurants display a gathering of diverse people.
- With the Village of Oak Park Domestic Partnership Registry, within the schools, the Police Department, with the Village's strong "attitude towards anti-discrimination."
- The Oak Park Realty Board presents a good description on what makes the Village diverse.
- The Oak Park Housing Center works as a good "welcome" to the diversity of the Village

Where do you see diversity happening or working: (continued)

- Being part of the LGBT community is a “non-issue” (in a positive way) according to one participant, who even compared it more favorably than New York City.
- Oak Park has a long history to build upon of people willing to get involved and make change, i.e., “the suffragettes, the masonics....”

Where do you see obstacles to diversity:

- Housing values continue to increase making it prohibitive for “less affluent” and “single people or young couples” to purchase property.
- If taxes continue to increase, again, making it prohibitive to purchase or maintain property.
- If the schools declined there would be less “diverse” people willing to live here. The schools were looked at as helping with the valuable “package” of Oak Park.
- It will “ultimately come down to economic diversity and accepting cultural differences.”
- “A vocal (though relatively small) minority whose sentiments run counter to the principles that form the bedrock [of] Oak Park's way of life. As for gay/lesbian life (specifically) - the lack of a visible community center that can act as a focal point for Oak Park and surrounding communities.”

Who is responsible or What can we do:

- The community attracts people who want it to be diverse, and as long as there is a strong commitment between the Oak Park community and the Village this can continue. One participant who had referenced the small vocal minority recommended, “Let them know that they are welcome to speak their minds, but also that the majority of Oak Park residents support the ideal of a diverse community.”
- From the same participant who mentioned that being a member of the LGBT community is a “non-issue” in Oak Park, the person continued, “however we have to continually make ourselves known -- we're invisible.”
- If the Village continues to maintain the “clarity on what Oak Park is about, it becomes self-perpetuating,” “Keep it diverse and they will come,” another, “We want people to become aware [of the LGBT community], but to ultimately make it an unimportant issue.” The Village should be even more “explicit.... Let it be known that Oak Park is a ‘Safe Space’ for diversity (in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) The Village of Oak Park PR “ Community Guide” could have represented the diversity within the community much stronger by photo and by description.
- OPALGA needs to keep a visibility within the Village, and there needs to be more visibility from the “bisexual and transgendered” community. Another person wrote that the “Village government (as elected by the people of Oak Park), with an advisory role from groups such as OPALGA [is responsible for carrying out the recommendations]. As for the lesbian/gay community center, this could be a partnership between government, businesses, and OPALGA.”

**SUMMARY OF ELDER CITIZENS' COMMENTS
DURING THE FOCUS GROUP ON OCTOBER 31**

The participants in general saw Oak Park's vision of diversity affected by outside forces and trends with which the Village will have difficulty coping.

- "Oak Park (O.P.) is allowing the housing stock to appreciate such that we are becoming a community of affluent and childless adults, primarily. They can afford the prices and the taxes for housing."
- "Project Unity is an opportunity to work for friendship and good community relations."
- "There are legal obstacles to trying to maintain balance among the races."
- "The permissive transfer policy within District 97 is allowing one race to predominate in the schools."
- "We are completely surrounded by non-diverse communities and O.P. is an island that may be hard to maintain."

The participants commented frequently that they thought diversity as a goal and process needed to be promoted and publicized much more vigorously.

- "We need to promote diversity as a positive thing and how it affects peoples' lives. We need to celebrate it openly."
- "The gospel concert coming up contains a diversity of music and choir members. We need to sensitize the newspapers to the need for publicity."
- "The Village, schools and the churches/synagogues need some communicator vehicle, newsletter that contains a column on diversity."
- "Keep the rental units by limiting the condominiums."
- "Design a website to promote diversity in the Village."

The participants were generally of one mind that the Village should be responsible for implementing the recommendations.

- "The Village should focus on, delegate and coordinate these efforts through volunteers."
- "The Village needs to create a separate commission for diversity affairs,"
- "We need a diversity center like the housing center."

COMMUNITY LIFE---YOUTH SMALL GROUP

General themes of November 12, 2000 meeting at the Oak Park Public Library:

Positive Diversity Interactions

- There was a general consensus that diversity is well maintained and working in Oak Park. It is normal to see interracial couples or two kids of different races playing in a park, and no comments are made.
- People feel good about living in an open community like Oak Park.
- Interactions are found on neighborhood blocks, Park District centers, and often in extracurricular activities. For example, one participant worked at Rehm Pool, and many kids of different races worked with her.

Obstacles to Diversity

- In school, there are not many interactions between most kids of different races. In the lunchroom, tables are almost “split down the middle” (divided between different races). However, not everyone agreed with this statement. There are many diverse lunch tables (and groups of friends). The achievement gap was discussed, and agreement was reached that honors classes at the high school generally lack African-Americans in number. This affects racial interactions at school.
- Also a part of school activities, sports are usually confined to certain races. Why? It is a mixture of what you like to do, and whom you feel comfortable with.
- On the social scene, African-American and white students do not usually go to the same parties. Only on rare occasions will kids be friends with two different racial groups, and/or comfortable enough to step out of their group of friends.
- Morps (school dances) are also racially divided – evidence that if kids of different races are placed into a social scene together, they will tend to flock to their friends for comfort.
- There is a general desire on both sides for kids to become friends with other races.

What Can We Do?

- Unfortunately, there is not much that we can do as a group – it is our individual initiative that will lead us forward. Not everybody has this initiative.
- This may just be a part of growing up. It seems as if the diversity “problem” is resolving itself now – younger generations are more “color blind” than we ever were.
- The Village can create small workshops (like this small discussion group) to create awareness, and foster interactions.
- Target small groups; they tend to be more malleable than larger groups, where friendships are already set in stone.

**--It should be noted that this group’s focus was mainly on black/white issues. The group did not include a full spectrum of diverse participants – only African-American and white kids participated, which may have influenced our center theme. There was some discouragement expressed after the meeting by a white male who had wanted to talk about other “diverse” issues. Time and lack of interest by others prevented this.

-- Lydia Gilbert

YOUTH CONSTITUENCY GROUP

Eight participants were guided through a discussion of opportunities and barriers to achieving Oak Park's goals as put forth in its Diversity Statement and were asked to provide recommendations for building on the opportunities and overcoming the obstacles. The group consisted of 2 African American females, 1 white female, 1 African American male and 4 white males. They were all juniors or seniors in high school. The following is an overview of their responses.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Diversity is viewed in Oak Park as inherently good and is intentionally sought.
- Openness to diversity is increasing generation by generation.
- Many neighborhoods are diverse.
- Park District activities, especially pools are diverse.
- YMCA, restaurants, and shopping areas are diverse.

BARRIERS

- Splitting out at school
 Excellent discussion about the dynamics of racial splitting in sports, honor classes, and friendships.
- Discomfort of being different as an adolescent
- Fear and safety concerns

POSSIBLE RESPONSES

- Individual Responsibility
- Give it Time
- Find Common Interests
- Promote Working Together on Projects
- Interrupt oppressive comments/actions
- Target 4th through 8th grade
- Create mechanisms/incentives for continuity in cross-racial relationships

-- Jeff Weissglass

EDUCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the final report of the Oak Park Commitment to Diversity Task Force Subcommittee on Education. The subcommittee, comprised of twenty Oak Park residents of varying ethnicity and backgrounds, has met since May of this year to review and make recommendations regarding “racial balance” in the Oak Park public elementary schools.

During that time, we have heard many explanations of why the Village of Oak Park and Oak Park School District 97 – but primarily the latter – should or should not adopt policies that would roughly equalize the Village’s K-6 schools by race. During these months, we have also explored a wide variety of issues that we came to believe affected not only the quality of education for Oak Park’s students, but also potentially the continued success of our goal of remaining a uniquely diverse and excellent place to live.

The subcommittee is not prepared at this time to recommend specific actions to be taken on the part of District 97 to racially balance the schools. Rather, we have put together a series of steps on a wide variety of issues that we believe should be gradually but steadily implemented in Oak Park schools. Some of them could have the effect of positively influencing diversity; some may not. But we strongly believe that if the overwhelming majority of our recommendations do become District 97 policy, the educational experience of our village’s students will be immeasurably enhanced. Among our recommendations:

- Although we are not recommending specific actions to “racially balance” Oak Park schools at this time, we believe that the trends in several schools toward their becoming racially identifiable institutions must be monitored and revisited within two years;
- Once the Census 2000 data becomes available, District 97 should appoint a committee representative of all of Oak Park which should examine school boundaries and improve the respective district lines;

District 97 should make a concerted effort to make Irving and Longfellow Schools into model institutions which exemplify the very best that the District has to offer;

- School principals – whom the subcommittee acknowledges have very difficult and critically important positions in our community – should nonetheless be held strictly accountable for the activities which occur each day at their respective schools; similarly, teachers in our public schools must serve as a constant example to their students of the values and standards which our community so strongly embraces;
- District 97's permissive transfer policy should be restricted in ways which will serve to enhance the racial balance of the schools – a stated policy of the district – as well as retaining involved parents and their children in all of Oak Park's schools;
- The District should develop “school readiness” and “new student orientation” programs which will seek to equalize the capabilities of kindergartners and transfer students just entering our school system and improve their chances of excelling;
- The District should implement specific efforts to better involve the maximum possible number of parents in the education of their children, taking into account the special needs and problems of some parents who have historically not been involved;
- Oak Park's schools must be marketed to a much wider audience, both inside and outside of Oak Park. A campaign to accomplish this goal should be designed with the assistance and support of the Village of Oak Park and area businesses;
- A reconstituted Task Force should be reconvened within a year after the submission of this report so that the issues that the subcommittee examined may be looked at again in light of new school developments, new census data, and the progress that District 97 and the Village of Oak Park will have made by then in implementing the recommendations contained in this report.

Through spirited public debate like that which has been conducted here during the past year -- continuing a tradition which spans four decades -- and through specific programs targeted at achieving this elusive goal, Oak Park is a unique success story. The members of the Oak Park Commitment to Diversity Task Force Subcommittee on Education hope that through their many hours of careful consideration -- talking, listening, and discussing difficult and sensitive matters of race, class and educational opportunity -- we have made a positive contribution to the long term continuation of the success story that is Oak Park.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR THIS REPORT:

Racially diverse schools are critically important to the overall quality of a positive educational experience and are a community value in Oak Park. Some of the schools here may be at risk of becoming segregated, and that is a matter of concern. Therefore the Village of Oak Park and School District 97 should work on fixing the educational issues that seem to work against diversity, and monitor trends with respect to integration/diversity. If, in two years, the current trends have not reversed, then we recommend that more direct actions be taken. **The members of the Oak Park Commitment to Diversity Task Force Education Subcommittee -- January, 2001**

INTRODUCTION:

“Schools play a key role in the attractiveness and viability of residential communities such as Oak Park. A high priority when families choose a place to live is the quality of the community’s schools. In a racially integrating community, the schools become the principal factor in determining whether that community can achieve stability while becoming integrated. High quality education services make a community attractive to both minorities and whites. However, maintenance of high quality education alone is not sufficient. Racial diversity within each school is necessary to make all parts of the community equally attractive to potential residents of all races.” Excerpted from the report of the Education Subcommittee of the Village of Oak Park Task Force on Racial Diversity (pp. 39-40)(May, 1984)

This observation, written more than sixteen years ago, is no less true today than it was then. The Education Subcommittee of the Commitment to Diversity Task Force was charged with discerning whether some of Oak Park’s elementary schools are in danger of becoming racially identifiable schools and with suggesting actions that will ensure that all of our schools will remain integrated well into the 21st century. We define “racially-identifiable schools as those “comprised almost entirely of children of one race, to the point that parents of children of another race -- black or white -- will not feel comfortable sending their children there.” As we have analyzed the data available to us and listened to members of our community, we have discovered that there are many interrelated issues that affect our children’s educational experience -- including their exposure to diversity, which we consider an important educational experience -- in Oak Park's public schools. This report looks at these issues and explains what the subcommittee examined, learned, and concluded during our deliberations.

MEMBERS OF THE OAK PARK COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY TASK FORCE EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE:

The committee has twenty members: twelve are white, eight are black, and one is Hispanic; eleven members are men and nine are women.

CO-CHAIRS

- **John Hedges** is a 20-year resident of Oak Park and the past director of the Village Park District.
- **Charles Whitaker** is a journalist and adjunct professor of journalism at Northwestern University who has lived in Oak Park for eight years. He and his wife have two sons at Longfellow School.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- **Lascelles Anderson**, an economist, is Professor of Education Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has lived in Oak Park for 11 years.
- **Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin** is a journalist who has lived in Oak Park with her husband for 11 years. They have two children at Irving School and she is an active community volunteer.
- **Cecile Keith Brown** is a museum administrator who is married and has two children. Her oldest child is a Hatch graduate currently attending Emerson Middle School. The Browns moved to Oak Park from Detroit, Michigan three years ago.
- **Sheila Carter** is the principal of Hatch School. She has worked in District 97 for 24 years.
- **Jim Gates** is a District 97 educator and Oak Park resident for 28 years. He is married and the father of three.

- **Daniel Hurtado** has been an Oak Park resident since 1989. He and his wife have a daughter at Mann School. Dan, an attorney, practices commercial litigation at the Chicago law firm of Jenner & Block. He is the immediate past president of the Hispanic Lawyers Association of Illinois.
- **Ron Lawless** has lived in Oak Park for three years. He is a community activist and chairperson of Tolerance, Inc.
- **Nancy Leavy** is a member of the District 200 School Board. A Realtor and active community volunteer, she has lived in Oak Park for 31 years. She is married and has two children.
- **Rebekah Levin** is a policy researcher and advocate at the Center for Impact Research. She and her partner have two children who attend Irving School. Rebekah attended Beye School and Oak Park-River Forest High School.
- **John Mayes** is an assistant director for Thresholds, a large mental health agency in Chicago. He and his wife have lived in Oak Park for 14 years. They are very active in Longfellow school where they have a third and a sixth grader.
- **Patricia McGowan** is a Realtor who has lived in Oak Park for 13 years. She has two children, one at Oak Park-River Forest High School and one at Emerson Middle School.
- **Tom Moher**, a former District 97 School Board Member, is a professor of computer science at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He and his wife Lynn Weiner have lived in Oak Park for 16 years. He has one son in college and one at Oak Park- River Forest High school, both graduates of District 97.
- **Jacqueline Moore** has lived in Oak Park for five years. She and her husband have twin girls who are a year old, and two boys who attend Mann School.
- **Andreen Neukranz-Butler** (Andy as she likes to be called) has lived in Oak Park for 14 years. Her young adult children attended Whittier School, Emerson Middle School and Oak Park-River Forest High School. She has worked in the field of affirmative action in higher

education since 1977 and currently is Diversity Director at National-Louis University in Chicago.

- **Dean Rogers** has lived in Oak Park since 1959. He and his wife have four children attending Mann School, where they are actively involved in the school.

- **Lynn Taylor** is a 12 year resident of Oak Park. She has three children who attend Julian Middle School and Oak Park River-Forest High School. She is a real estate agent for Pilgrim Real Estate in Oak Park.

- **Michael Uchitelle-Pierce** is a market research analyst who has lived in Oak Park for 15 years. He and his wife have a seventh grader at Julian Middle School and a fifth grader at Beye School.

- **Bob Walsh** is a third generation Oak Park resident. He chairs the Oak Park Community Relations Commission, works as a civil rights attorney, and is the divorced father of two small children at Keystone Montessori who will soon enter the Oak Park public school system.

BACKGROUND:

The Village of Oak Park and Oak Park School District 97 have a long tradition of working to achieve and maintain open housing and community-wide integration in Oak Park. These efforts have included but are not limited to the following:

1963: a citizen group begins lobbying for open housing legislation

1963: the Oak Park-River Forest Citizens' Committee for Human Rights sponsors events to attract black residents to both communities

1968: the Village of Oak Park forms its first official Community Relations Commission

1968: Oak Park adopts its Fair Housing Ordinance (ahead of the federal government)

1972: the Oak Park Housing Center opens

1972: the District 97 Board adopts its Policy on Human Dignity

1973: the Village Board adopts its first Racial Diversity statement

1973: the Village of Oak Park requires written leases for the first time

1973: a \$1.5 million housing bond is issued to support multi-family housing rehabilitation

1974: District 97 Board adopts its Policy Statement on Racial Balance

1974: the "Committee for Tomorrow's Schools" is formed and later formulates a plan to create two junior high schools in order to racially balance the schools here

1976: District 97 inaugurates a racial balance plan, which adjusts school boundaries

1976: the Oak Park Village Hall relocates to the east portion of the Village

1977: Oak Park initiates and hosts the Oak Park Exchange Congress to share racial diversity concepts with other communities

1978: the Village of Oak Park adopts its Equity Assurance Ordinance

1984: the Village of Oak Park convenes the Racial Diversity Task Force

1985: District 97 convenes its Committee on School Enrollment Concerns which recommends that minority enrollment in Oak Park schools should all contain minority enrollment of no more than 7-10% different from any other Village school

1987: District 97 changes school boundaries to promote racial balance in all schools

1991: District 97 adopts a diversity statement as part of a strategic planning process

2000: the Village of Oak Park and District 97 jointly form the Commitment to Diversity Task Force, including its Housing, Education and Community Life Subcommittees

OUR CHALLENGE:

At the beginning of its deliberations in the Spring of 2000, the Education Subcommittee adopted the following “Mission Statement”:

“The mission of the Education Subcommittee of the Village of Oak Park’s (Commitment to) Diversity Task Force is to examine the social and economic circumstances driving enrollment and housing patterns in the Village in an effort to determine whether District 97 is inextricably moving toward the formation of racially identifiable elementary schools. In addition, this committee is charged with taking the temperature of a large swath of Village constituencies in order to develop a widely accepted community standard for what constitutes “diverse schools” and to determine what fears, frustrations and socio-economic forces obstruct the achievement of that ideal. Finally, this committee should investigate the diversity efforts explored by communities similar to ours and use those models to develop a set of Oak Park-specific outcomes, objectives, and recommendations to be employed by the

Village's taxing bodies as they attempt to maintain and promote this community's vision of a diverse school district. At the end of this process we will produce a report that:

- Accurately captures the current community climate and perceptions about diversity in Oak Park public schools.
- Increases awareness of the complexity of the socio-economic issues that both contribute to and thwart diversity.
- Offers unique, community-sensitive recommendations that will help allay fears about resegregation and promote and maintain diversity within our schools.

WHAT WE LEARNED:

The following are short summaries of the information presented to the subcommittee by invited guests.

Dr. Jack Fagan, Superintendent of Oak Park Public Schools: Dr. Fagan reviewed his experience with desegregation, which to him mostly meant moving students. He discussed black/white achievement gaps and some of the current work by the Minority Student Achievement Network, a national organization to which District 97 belongs. Dr. Fagan stated that they were finding that none of the member school districts were able to make the achievement of students equal. He emphasized that the goal of the schools was to provide a quality education. He reported that there are several ways to artificially racially balance schools including: changing the boundaries of the individual schools, magnet schools or programs, partner or grade based schools. He felt these approaches have had mixed results in other setting, and that none of them had an impact on narrowing the achievement gap. The permissive transfer policy was described with discussion on its administration, purpose and impact. The largest category of transfers was for day-care reasons.

Dr. Ron Ferguson, Wiener Center for Social Policy, and John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University: Dr. Ferguson discussed the achievement gap between African Americans and whites. He presented several propositions that should be considered in narrowing the gap. These included support for more and better pre-school opportunities and help for teachers who may not have a strong understanding of the children's home cultures and may tend to accept stereotypical assumptions. He emphasized the need for broad community support so there are sufficient resources for quality educational experiences independent of the racial

balance of the schools. He also discussed the effect of racially identifiable schools on the housing patterns of neighborhoods and that his research showed that other factors such as purchase price and quality of the housing stock were more significant.

Stephen Huth, Board Member, and District 97: Mr. Huth presented the committee with District 97 enrollment statistics from 1972 to 2000. His comments were highlighted with following statements:

- The most rapid racial change in the schools occurred between 1976 and 1984;
- the effects of mandated changes in schools often is dramatic;
- racial change in Oak Park schools has been a product of and not a cause of housing patterns;
- recent racial change has come fastest at Mann and Hatch.

Mr. Huth also expressed concerns about issues relating to racially identifiable schools in that he believes that attitudes need to change from the 1970's. He suggested changes including: adjusting the permissive transfer policy to create incentives for students or parents to positively affect the racial balance of individual schools; stricter residency requirements; sharing individual school assets among the different schools including administration, faculty, classes and facilities.

Irving School Improvement Team: They reported that they did look at issues of race and ethnicity when evaluating Irving School. One of their conclusions was that they could not point to race in and of itself as a chief factor contributing to low achievement. Achievement was low across the board, regardless of race.

Daniel Lauber: Mr. Lauber feels that District 97 has a pivotal responsibility in keeping Oak Park a diverse community because if the schools become identified by racial groups, so will the surrounding neighborhood. He strongly urged that the subcommittee consider recommending immediate actions. These actions could include but are not limited to: magnet schools, changing individual school boundaries, partner schools or other reasonable approaches. He also urged the subcommittee to include "transportation" options in our deliberations.

Naomi Law, Director of Special Services, District 97: Ms. Law presented the subcommittee with information on the Individual Education Programs including: statistical information, the number of students who currently have IEPs, and current District 97 Board decision making processes on the redistribution of special needs programs. She discussed the issue of students being labeled too quickly and inaccurately as candidates for special education. She reported there are effective programs for teachers but that this is not enough. Ms. Law also warned that that the Board and the subcommittee should be thoughtful and careful when making recommendations.

Dr. Evan McKenzie, Associate Professor, University of Illinois at Chicago: Dr. McKenzie's written material and presentation to the subcommittee centered on his concern that immediate action needed to be taken by the community to correct the racial

imbalance in the District 97 Schools. He presented a history of the racial makeup each of the schools student population over the last thirty years. He summarized the actions of District 97 in 1976 and 1987. His recommended action was to devise and implement similar policies as soon as possible. These recommendations centered on changing the individual school racial make up by changing the boundaries of each of the schools, providing the necessary transportation and other structural changes in student attendance patterns.

Felicia Starks, Irving School Principal: Ms. Starks provided an overview of the problems that plagued Irving School at the time that she assumed the reins as principal two years ago. Irving was suffering from low student achievement, lack of student and community pride and social and behavioral problems. She and a team of outside consultants found that students and teachers were not spending enough time on key subjects and that student morale suffered because of negative community perceptions of the school. She and her team instituted sweeping changes in the areas of math, language arts, research papers for grades 4-6, use of calculators and dictionaries, summer math camp and the initiation of an honor roll. Areas that the school hopes to explore include bringing in a student assessment coordinator to evaluate new students to the school, linking families with existing social service resources, and hiring additional social workers to help in outreach efforts.

Students from Julian and Emerson Junior Highs: The students were asked to define diversity, tell what it looks like in schools, how it affects them, their school and their future. The responses showed a clear understanding of the definition of diversity. Almost all of the students were very positive about their experiences in a diverse school and felt the diversity complemented their educational and personal experiences.

Bette Wilson, District 97 Director of Multicultural Education: Ms. Wilson reported that a critical factor in the achievement was the relevancy of the curriculum. She commented on student reactions at a conference on academic achievement regarding barriers to success. Among common indicators was the emphasis placed on academic achievement in the home as well as the students' personal discipline.

Some Residents' Observations from Education Subcommittee's Town Hall Meeting (October 19, 2000 @ 7:30 P.M., Oak Park River Forest High School Auditorium)

Question # 1: "On what basis do you judge the Oak Park schools to be good or poor?"

- There should be fairness in providing special programs at the different schools. These special programs should be offered at all of the schools. I should not have to pay for these programs outside the schools. We need to make everyone comfortable. We need to define diversity better. We need better handling of diversity in the schools.

- The schools have good parts and bad parts. The expectations for blacks are lower in our schools. There should be equal expectations for all students. There should not be separate levels based on performance, because that follows you to junior high and then high school. Parents should be involved.
- Comments I have received in the community are that Mann School is better than the rest, but that is not necessarily the case. Beye is an excellent school. The Wednesday Journal and other media is where I hear about the schools. I also have judgments based on my experience as a parent. I hear rumors and discussion around town.
- My children have had a happy and rich experience in the Oak Park schools. The standards should be how well are the children prepared for life. Literacy has many dimensions including technology and diversity. Our goal should be concerned with equal opportunity and equality. Education should prepare children to deal with racial issues and instill feelings of self worth. Don't judge the schools by racial balance but by the quality of their product.
- My child has had a good experience at Lincoln School. People judge or rank schools based on what they read in the media. Articles are written negatively and parents judge schools on this. I also judge on what I personally see on a daily basis. I do not see enough teachers of color at Lincoln; it does not reflect the diversity of the community. Parents need to be oriented to the school community better.
- Children have had a great experience in the Oak Park Schools. They have developed great people skills and self-confidence. The schools do well but there are differences. Academically identifiable schools are more the issue than racial balance. If people think there are too many blacks living in Oak Park then they should not move here. You should broaden the focus beyond race. Schools are a critical component of the community.
- I came from a state where there was enforced racial balance; there were still complaints. Racial balance is not that important. We have had good experience with the schools. Parents need to take responsibility, work with the schools and stay involved.
- In comparing with schools in St. Paul, I was stunned by the performance by my St. Paul grandchildren. The time has come for this kind of boldness and innovation. There are different ways of teaching.

Question #2: “Do you have concerns about Oak Park having racially identifiable schools?”

- We rented in the Whittier area because of the all day kindergarten. We bought a house and found out there was not all day kindergarten in our new area. Every one refers to his or her schools as the best. We never looked at housing because of the

school. No one told us 'if you want a good school buy here'. Parents need to participate. Racial balance and standardized test results don't differ very much. People who go to the private schools say the public schools don't have the programs they want. It is not fair that some schools have special programs. The number of transient students and the quality of the schools they attend can affect test scores.

- We have to look at the schools in a larger social and historic context. We should not be naïve or too grand with our individual experiences. We need to be concerned about historic patterns. These are complicated issues. We don't want historical amnesia.
- District 97 should get credit for holding fast to the idea that educating all children is important. Having a cookie cutter approach to racial balance is not good. Educational enrichment is what it's all about. Our children had great experiences.
- We had ten racially identifiable schools when I went to school in Oak Park.
- Schools should be judged by the racial balance of the faculty. It is the attitude, behavior and competence of the faculty that is important. Schools become racially identifiable by the competence of the faculty
- I believe in dialogue. Nothing gets done without it. Statements should not be made that damages the ability to have dialogue.
- It bothers me that we have to talk about race. Reference to “racially identifiable” usually means the school is too black. We should concentrate on helping each child and not be concerned with race. We should look at the number of disabled students at Irving and see how that affects the racial balance at the school. Each child should be educated to his or her full potential.

Question # 3: “What is by this community's standards a racially balanced school?”

- There was a “sky is falling” scenario presented that Oak Park will fail as a long-term diverse community if action was not taken by last fall to racially balance the schools. Whites are a minority in the world and will be a minority in this country soon. Should we put up signs that there are enough blacks? We should be child-centered.
- I have never been confronted with discrimination. We need to work toward a population that strives to succeed. The schools need to work with the parents. Thirty percent of medical school enrollment is Asian. Does that mean there is an Asian problem?
- I grew up in segregated schools. I want my children to go to integrated schools. I like Oak Park because it is integrated and I hope it stays that way.

- I have studied Oak Park and historical racial change. It is hard to listen without a historic context. Have white attitudes changed or should we still be concerned with maintaining white demand? The schools and the Village need to work together. We must keep in mind why Oak Park became Oak Park.
- We researched the schools and found Mann to be the best. Economics has to do with racially identifiable schools. Schools should be equal but the perceptions are that the schools are not equal. We want Oak Park to remain diverse. We have great schools and it's a great place to raise children. I want my children to experience other cultures.
- One question that confronts us is should we attract whites and African Americans to all parts of the community? The answer is that all of the elected bodies need to use all of their energies to make sure that these outcomes come about. If you want segregation then do nothing. Unless there is action our future will be resegregated neighborhoods.
- The days of 'these are all great schools' are over. Change is constant. If we are going to survive, each child being educated is a given. The larger question is this community needs to survive. Allocate resources where they are needed. New people must move to any part of the community. New people and those in our community must understand that the work of living in a racially integrated community is not done, it continues.
- I believe there is a tipping point. The middle class will leave without quality schools. Action needs to be taken by the Village and the schools. There will be change in southeast Oak Park with an all black area. Real estate could remain strong but people will send their children to private schools as they do on the north side of Chicago.
- We treasure diversity. It would be wrong to be all white. It has been a long process to integration and we are not there yet. We are not at the same place as twenty years ago. Oak Park has taken great steps. Unfortunately it has not been fair to African Americans and I'm not proud of that. We need more short-term solutions. The world has not changed that much. We must do something. District 97 has more to do more than just educate our children.
- As Parents active in the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), we have not heard comments about racial balance or gender balance. Principals balance the classes racially and by gender. Neighborhoods determine the racial balance. Use the PTO's as an information resource.

The Subcommittee also obtained information and informed opinions during our many meetings that warned us that in dealing with these issues, we should remain aware of Oak Park's close proximity to the neighborhoods of the west side of Chicago. We were told that we should not ignore the well-documented "macro-environment" of the Chicago

metropolitan area in matters relating to racial and class separation, i.e. the area's historically highly segregated residential patterns. The subcommittee was implored not to ignore the biases and stereotypes held by persons who might consider moving to Oak Park and might then consider enrolling their children in our schools.

Finally, one of the members of the subcommittee, Lascelles Andersen, is a Professor of Education Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago. We have attached his "Notes Toward a Dynamic Theory of School Change of Diversity" to this report, as it is a very astute and valuable analysis of the situation in which Oak Park now finds itself. We have also attached his analysis of "representation ratios" which compare school populations.

OUR FINDINGS:

Although we originally focused primarily on the issue of racial balance between the eight Oak Park elementary schools, there were a large number of additional issues that came into play as the deliberations of the Task Force continued through the summer and into the fall. The sections that follow summarize our understanding of these issues, and our recommendations to the Steering Committee of the Oak Park Commitment to Diversity Task Force, which is comprised of representatives of both the Village of Oak Park and Oak Park School District 97.

ISSUE: RACIAL BALANCE: The Education Subcommittee (hereafter “the subcommittee”) set out to determine:

- the status of racial diversity in the Oak Park public schools;
- whether some of Oak Park’s schools are moving toward becoming segregated, and -- if so -- what to do about this development; and
- whether the District 97 School Board should share in the responsibility for dealing with these situations.

(Please note: the specific focus on black and white students stems from the fact that those are the largest groups in the Village, and is not intended to exclude other racial and ethnic groups, including multi-racial students.) This question mainly applies to the elementary schools -- currently K through 6 but soon to be K through 5 once the Village’s sixth graders are moved to the new middle school facilities. Oak Park’s two middle schools are -- by design -- nearly identical in racial make-up and there is only one high school in Oak Park.

What is “racial balance”? Historically, it meant that the student bodies in each school within Oak Park had approximately the same proportion of children of various races -- and ideally, the same proportion as the Village as a whole. Such a state of racial balance was meant to effectively remove race from the decision-making process when a family determines where to seek a new

home. Maintaining racial balance in the Oak Park schools in order to facilitate continued integration here -- promoting both white and black residents moving into every part of the Village -- has been the stated policy of the Village since 1973. Oak Park School District 97 first adopted their Policy Statement on Racial Balance in 1974, and in 1976 created two junior high schools in the Village in order to racially balance the schools here. The District also inaugurated a racial balance plan, which adjusted its school boundaries to obtain and maintain racial balance in both 1976 and 1987. District 97's 1974 Policy Statement on Racial Balance in Oak Park Elementary Schools, contained the following statement:

“It is essential that each of our schools continue to attract families of both white and minority backgrounds to the Village. Unfortunately, in American urban life, most white families are reluctant to move into a local neighborhood when its school has a high proportion of minority students. A racially-balanced school system is therefore a necessary if not sufficient prerequisite if residential resegregation is to be avoided.”

These policies were meant to influence the home buying behavior of people moving into Oak Park from somewhere else as well as that of Oak Parkers moving within the Village.

The Oak Park Commitment to Diversity Task Force was formed in the spring of 2000 after several Oak Park area urban scholars and activists raised their concern that Oak Park's elementary schools were beginning to segregate by race, threatening the Village's prospects for long-term diversity. That initial group included University of Illinois at Chicago Political Science Professor Evan McKenzie, Oak Park Housing Center founder Bobbie Raymond Larson, social scientist Dan Lauber, and former Oak Park Community Relations Commissioner and present Oak Park Plan Commission member Gloria Merrill. These individuals appeared before District 97, the Oak Park Village Board and the Oak Park Community Relations Commission because they were concerned about the long-term trends with regard to racial balance in some of Oak Park's elementary schools.

In November of 1999, the Village of Oak Park, the Oak Park NAACP, and School District 97 convened a day-long seminar entitled “Oak Park: An Integrated Community Now and into the 21st Century”. The keynote speaker for that conference was Professor Gary Orfield of Harvard University. Dr. Orfield -- considered by many to be the nation's leading expert on school desegregation -- described the beliefs held by him and many of his colleagues, including W.

Dennis Keating of Cleveland State University and Juliet Saltzman of Kent State University. Dr. Orfield stated that public schools are considered to be a leading indicator of racial residential trends, the so-called "killer variable". Dr. Orfield also related that although Oak Park may have some time to act to correct the apparent school enrollment trends, that time is not without limits. As Professor McKenzie demonstrated that day (the charts that he presented are attached as Figures 1-17), as a result of long-term loss of white students leaving District 97 coupled with relatively small increases in minority students, some of Oak Park's schools have or will soon have majority minority student populations. This development, he contended, could lead to some portions of the east side of Oak Park becoming racially segregated.

Since there has long been a commitment to integration here and to Oak Parkers' ability to continue to avail themselves of the many advantages inherent in living in our rare, successfully integrated community, it was determined that these issues must be explored in their entirety. The Oak Park Commitment to Diversity Task Force was convened to determine what policies – those of the Village of Oak Park and those of District 97 – might need to be more reflective of the reality of Oak Park in the year 2000 and beyond.

After having looked closely at this issue for over eight months, the members of the Education Subcommittee agreed that some of Oak Park's elementary schools are either at risk of becoming racially-identifiable or are moving further out of proportion to the District student population as a whole and may be moving toward racial segregation. There also was unanimous agreement that diversity is an educational value in Oak Park – in other words, that it is desirable for children to attend schools in which the various races that make up the Oak Park community are amply represented.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON RACIAL BALANCE: The more that the Education Subcommittee members learned about this issue, the harder it was for many of us to work with the concept of "racial balance." First, there was the unanswerable question about how far away from district-wide racial ratios a school had to be in order to be "racially unbalanced." Second, there was the troubling suggestion built into the concept of "racial balance" that it was the increase in the number of black students in certain schools that was driving the concern and the quest, by some, for "remedies." While the members of the subcommittee could not agree upon a definition of racial balance, there was consensus that any conversation about diversity in the schools should reflect not only the concerns about schools with increasing minority

enrollment, but also concern about the schools whose overwhelmingly white enrollments place them well outside the district's racial ratio, and, consequently, deprives its students of the multi-cultural educational experience we in Oak Park cherish. Third, there is the question of whether an increasing percentage of black students at a school were a reflection of housing patterns in Oak Park or of white flight from particular schools. Fourth, there was the question of whether it was morally appropriate to step in to alter the racial composition of a school in order to make it more attractive to white people. Fifth, there was the practical reality that any actions taken to deliberately alter the racial composition of the schools could widely be perceived as designed to ensure a white majority in perpetuity in Oak Park. Finally, there was concern that the remedies usually proposed to achieve "racial balance," most notably the reassignment of students to schools outside of their neighborhoods, might not be effective (if, for example, parents chose to leave the system rather than accept such reassignments).

For these reasons, most of the members of the subcommittee eventually agreed that we should focus more on the benefits of having our schools remain academically successful, racially diverse schools rather than on the threat of having any school become one race. In other words, we are offering actions that will be catalysts to improve the diversity that this Village holds as a value, and to make certain that the schools that are more diverse are healthy, attractive, safe learning environments so that they will continue to attract students of all races. There was also general agreement that the school enrollment numbers must be monitored after our proposed actions have been taken, and that these questions should be revisited again within the next twelve months and on an ongoing basis for the next few years. If, at that time, there is a continuing trend toward racial segregation, more deliberate actions -- such as significant redrawing of school boundaries or creation of magnet programs or schools -- may have to be undertaken. The subcommittee supports a renewed pledge by District 97 to take racial diversity into consideration when they make decisions by adopting official policies stating that racial and academic balance issues should be major factors that drive the decisions that district administrators, board members and educators make each year.

There were dissenting voices in this discussion and they must be acknowledged. Several committee members still maintain that the schools should look much alike in racial composition. This minority of the subcommittee also believes that there are several more significant actions – like immediately adjusting school boundaries -- which District 97 should now take to begin to move the schools toward racial parity. Taking such actions now, they believe, would almost certainly alleviate the necessity for much stronger and more difficult solutions in the future if the current school population trends continue in their present direction.

Moreover, the subcommittee grappled with the lack of diversity in the northwest corner of the Village at Mann School, where the issue is too few black students and too many white students. (The subcommittee's recommendations regarding school boundary changes to address this situation are detailed below on Page 18.)

ISSUE: SCHOOL BOUNDARY CHANGES: While the subcommittee is not prepared to recommend specific changes in school boundaries at this time, it does recommend an examination of all existing boundaries. It is possible that the racial diversity of some of the schools might be enhanced by relatively minor revisions of the present boundaries.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON SCHOOL BOUNDARY CHANGES: The subcommittee recommends that District 97 form a committee to examine all school boundaries for the following reasons:

- The subcommittee found the lack of diversity at Mann School to be of particular concern and believes that boundary changes between Mann and Hatch should be examined and reconsidered.
- Some existing school boundaries were created to enhance racial diversity twenty-five years ago and may have outlived any useful purpose. For example, the Irving School attendance area includes several blocks north of the expressway, which were formerly in the Longfellow School attendance area.
- The movement of sixth graders to the new middle schools in 2002 will result in newly available classroom space in the K-5 buildings, which may allow for boundary changes that would not presently be possible because of space considerations.
- The subcommittee recommends severely restricting permissive transfers (see section on Page 22), which should be taken into consideration as District 97 explores boundary reconfigurations.
- Census 2000 data soon will be available and should be used to inform decisions regarding racial diversity and the examination of existing and potential school boundaries.

The subcommittee also recommends that the new committee to review school boundaries should include administrators, faculty, and citizens from all eight attendance areas. The middle school boundaries are providing good examples of racial diversity, and the sub-committee noted that by

including sixth graders in the middle schools, a full 11% more District 97 students will be attending racially balanced schools within the next two years.

ISSUE: ELIMINATING ACADEMICALLY IDENTIFIABLE SCHOOLS: The

Subcommittee spent a considerable amount of time debating academically challenged/identifiable school issues. The subcommittee members believe that the schools in the southeast corner of the Village are currently the poorest in terms of performance and reputation. As they are also the most diverse schools in the District, and since we adamantly reject the notion of a causal link between race and performance, we absolutely must improve these schools. Otherwise, they will continue to lose parents (both black and white, but largely middle class) who fear that their children will not get a good education in a safe and nurturing environment. By "performance," we mean more than just standardized test scores. We mean that the students who are capable of doing high-level work must not be held back because these schools bear a larger percentage of struggling students. And, perhaps even more importantly, that there are adequate resources to ensure that the larger percentage of "disadvantaged" students have the maximum opportunity to overcome their disadvantages. These schools should be as well represented as the other elementary schools at district-wide and "West 40" competitions, and should produce similar numbers of winners and finalists. Teachers at the middle schools should not be able to see any distinctions between the academic preparedness of students from these schools and other schools. And by "reputation," we mean within the Village and outside, since both are crucial for a school's ability to attract and retain good students. District 97 has to convince parents that their children will be nurtured and challenged equally well at any school in the district. The more we allow these schools to degenerate, the harder they will be to turn around.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON ELIMINATING ACADEMICALLY IDENTIFIED SCHOOLS: The subcommittee members believe

that we currently have a choice between making showcases for our commitment to long-term diversity, or demonstrations of our failure to put into action the values that our Village embraces. We therefore recommend that District 97 make "showcase schools". In so doing, the District must make them the models of what all schools in Oak Park (and everywhere) should be:

- racially and socio-economically diverse
- safe, nurturing, innovative
- strong in academics
- offering a curriculum that reflects the nature of the community
- innovative, sensitive to the backgrounds and needs of all students and their families
- accommodating to students' varied challenges and needs

In other words, District 97 should determine what a model school is for this community, and implement their findings at the schools in the southeast corner first. The District's goal should be to make these schools attractive enough that parents who live within their boundaries will feel excited about sending their children there, and parents who live outside their boundaries will push their schools to adopt some of the programs and practices in place at those schools.

The subcommittee believes that it is also important for District 97 to focus on the cost of losing students to other schools – both to private schools within Oak Park and to public and private schools elsewhere – rather than the cost of implementing the programs that we need in order to retain them within Oak Park's school system.

ISSUE: MAKING PRINCIPALS RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR SCHOOLS: District 97 principals face extraordinary expectations. They are the chief executive officers of their buildings, responsible for the educational mission, operations, maintenance, safety, and a host of other tasks. But their influence extends well beyond the schoolhouse walls; in a very real sense, they are the "principals" of whole neighborhoods in Oak Park. As a result, the perception of neighborhood desirability is inextricably intertwined with the perception of the effectiveness of the principal in the local school. Effective principals serve as "insulation" against transient problems within schools and neighborhoods, allowing residents to take the time to look at the bigger picture. When a principal is viewed as ineffective, parents are more prone toward quick action, including seeking permissive transfers, placing their children in non-public schools, or moving within or outside Oak Park. Ineffective principals clearly have the potential to negatively impact diversity at a given school.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION ON MAKING PRINCIPALS RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR SCHOOLS:

The Subcommittee recommends that District 97, in partnership with parents and the community, develop and implement a more proactive program for:

- evaluating the performance of principals across their broad spectrum of responsibilities;
- intervening with appropriate support and training when a principal's performance threatens to erode community support, and
- in acute cases, terminating or reassigning principals in a professional but expeditious fashion. This program should include regular, systematic opportunities for constructive input from all of the District's stakeholders.

ISSUE: TEACHERS: The teachers of District 97 play a critical role in providing a quality education in a quality school and in Oak Park this extends well beyond academics. It includes understanding the assets and needs of students coming from a broad range of racial, ethnic and socio-economic households and how to teach, inspire and nurture them.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHERS: The task force welcomes and supports the increased diversity training of District 97 teachers since teachers are the most frequent and often most influential contact with the students in Oak Park's schools. Teachers must be aware of the special richness of a multicultural environment and avoid the usual prejudices and biases associated with particular ethnic groups. Teachers must also refute stereotypes with their actions and set a standard of excellence for all students as they work to engage each and every student. They should understand the complexities of the "achievement gap" and constantly work to eliminate it through positive encouragement of students of color and utilizing tools provided by the District. Teachers have the unique opportunity to demonstrate fair treatment to all students and become a constant reminder and role models to parents and students of the contributions and potential of each student.

ISSUE: PERMISSIVE TRANSFERS: Permissive transfers are a very complicated matter in District 97. The official District policy on permissive transfer states that they will not be granted in cases in which they work against the goal of racial balance (e.g. add a white child to a school that already has a higher white school population than the district as a whole). We have also noted that the district is generous in offering exceptions to this policy, and that in reality, the granting of permissive transfers has often worked against the goal of racial balance because they work contrary to the goal of enhancing neighborhood commitment to their home school. Granting of transfers can also allow problems to go unsolved, since concerned parents with legitimate issues that should be addressed simply send their children elsewhere.

In particular, permissive transfers have made it easier for parents who are not comfortable with the safety and quality of the school in their own neighborhood to send their children to another Oak Park school. Because the parents who apply for permissive transfers generally are ones who have a high degree of concern about their children's education, this has the negative effect of hastening the withdrawal of active parents and their kids (who tend to benefit academically from their parents' involvement) from the schools that are already struggling, which is detrimental to these schools.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PERMISSIVE TRANSFERS:

The subcommittee recommends that District 97 stop granting permissive transfers except in cases with extenuating circumstances, such as when a student requires special education services that are available only at a particular school. In cases in which a permissive transfer is requested for any reason, the student and parents should go through a rigorous IEP-like process with teachers and administrators to determine whether the transfer truly is necessary or whether the student's needs can be accommodated in his/her home school. If a child is already enrolled at a school that is not his/her home school, that child can stay but they will be sent a welcoming letter inviting him/her back to the home school and offering a meeting with the principal and the teachers at the grade level he/she would be entering so that the school can get to know the child and explain to the parents and student what the school offers. If a child moves out of the boundaries of the school

that he/she attends, he/she can finish the school year at that school but must then enroll in the school that serves the area into which he/she has moved. Any permissive transfers that are granted will be for one year only. The District must annually require students to offer proof of residency, and uphold the permissive transfer policy. The District must also keep records of all permissive transfers in a database that can be sorted by address, school moved out of, school moved into, and appropriate socioeconomic metrics.

ISSUE: SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAMS: Each year many children enrolling in kindergarten in District 97 enter without a preschool or home experience that would provide appropriate “school readiness.” These students enter without the social or academic preparation that typically leads to a successful kindergarten experience, which often affects their social and academic performance in later grades.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON SCHOOL READINESS

PROGRAMS: To ensure that all students entering kindergarten demonstrate a “school readiness” and the preparation that leads to a successful elementary school experience, the subcommittee recommends that all students entering kindergarten will participate in a “school readiness” program in the summer prior to entering kindergarten in September. This program would include assessments that measure both academic and social “school readiness.” Students who do not demonstrate a “school readiness” would not enter kindergarten in September, but would participate in a transitional kindergarten program. This would be a one-year program and would close any gaps in a child’s academic and social “school readiness” and lead to a successful kindergarten experience, the foundation for a successful elementary school experience. The specifics of this transitional kindergarten would be developed in a partnership between Oak Park Village Board of Trustees and the District 97 Board of Education.

ISSUE: NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION: Many members of the subcommittee believe that the influx of students from school districts outside of District 97, particularly students who are not prepared to do grade-level work, often has a draining effect on

school resources and teacher time. It is the consensus of the subcommittee that identifying those students' deficiencies early and getting them up to speed will help bridge the test score gap that leads to the perception that some schools are academically inferior and, as many on the subcommittee believe, that thwarts diversity. To counterbalance this, we believe that District 97 must make certain that students who enter its schools are able to perform at the grade level into which they are placed. The District must also make certain that these students are warmly welcomed into that school community, in a way that makes these students feel embraced by their community in general and by their new school in particular.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON NEW STUDENT

ORIENTATION: Using a model similar to that currently used by River Forest Elementary School District 90, District 97 should develop an orientation program so that all new students are evaluated, and so that those students who need it are placed in an intensive transitioning program for two to six weeks (depending on individual needs, such as pull-out programs) as they come into Oak Park's schools. This program would ensure that students who transfer into our schools are able to perform at the grade level into which they are placed. Transfer students should be tested on the full range of the curriculum. As part of their orientation, students would also be introduced to the overall culture, including discipline expectations, which exist at their new school.

ISSUE: SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS AT INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS: Specialized programs should be implemented in any school which has a disproportionate number of students, relative to the rest of District 97, who are struggling academically and/or unable to work at grade level. Whether such disproportions come about as a function of race or class was unable to be determined by the subcommittee, given the data currently being collected by District 97. But, regardless of the factors associated with the poorer performance of students in these schools, this concentration of struggling students has the effect of discouraging parents – black and white – who support their children academically and whose children are academically successful (which tend to go together) from sending their children to these schools.

These parents are concerned that their children will not be challenged sufficiently, given the demands on teachers and support staff to help those students who are having the greatest difficulty. As one teacher stated, "I have a whole group of students in my class who don't even know the difference between letters and numbers. I have to spend the bulk of my time with these kids, or they won't survive." And as these parents leave, the school is depleted of the academically strong students and their involved parents. Both losses damage the school.

Maintaining a diverse school population within each school and making sure that all the elementary schools are outstanding schools are primary goals of the Oak Park elementary school system. Therefore, the district must implement visible and high quality programs at its struggling schools to address the needs and concerns of their entire student bodies. If these programs are simply pull-out activities for a short period of the school day, either to provide remedial support, or give a daily dose of 'challenge' in an otherwise less-than-challenging environment, parents who are concerned about the quality of their children's educational experience at this school will not be reassured. This will not stem the tide that threatens to sweep academically strong students out of these schools, and the result will be schools that perform ever further below the district's standards.

Some of the parents with whom we spoke expressed a desire for the same curricular offerings to be present in all schools. We understand this to be an expression of a desire

for fairness and equity in our schools. However, after much assessment of District 97 schools, our subcommittee has concluded that fairness and equity cannot be established unless some of the inherent inequities between the schools are addressed. These inequities include several factors, including the socioeconomic status of the families sending their children to these schools, and the effects of the histories of some of these schools. District 97 has acknowledged the latter in its recent actions to improve the staff at Irving School, but has yet to address the basic underlying problem that our schools have become more socio-economically segregated and that this disparity leads to racial segregation and a general lowering of the quality of the schools perceived as least desirable by middle-class parents.

The subcommittee has concluded that the goal of establishing equity within District 97 is urgent, and that it cannot be achieved unless District 97 institutes special programs at schools that have fewer inherent resources. The District should not leave it up to the schools to use their individual, discretionary funds for this purpose, because these schools will not be able to fund and implement the kinds of programs that retain academically successful students while simultaneously living up to their commitment to offer extra programs to struggling students. Therefore, these funds must come from the District.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS AT

INDIVIDUAL SCHOOLS: The subcommittee recommends that District 97 should:

- Assess the educational needs of the children at its struggling schools, both for remedial work and extra challenge;
- Create a set of programs that addresses the wide range of student's skills and abilities;
- Publicize the existence of these programs so that parents will be attracted to come to these schools (whether they have pulled their children out of the public school system or not yet moved into Oak Park and are trying to determine where within District 97 to move) or so that parents whose children are currently in one of these schools will be reassured that they are receiving an outstanding educational experience;
- Set aside additional (compensated) time for teachers and administrators within each of the at-risk schools to meet and discuss their ideas for innovative ways to address the challenges and opportunities presented by their students and their families.

ISSUE: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT: Parents are the single most critical factor in the development of children as lifelong learners. During our deliberations, the subcommittee determined that there is a particularly urgent need for our Village to identify the parental behaviors that promote academic achievement and the impediments that reduce parental effectiveness as partners in the education of their children. Further, there is a need for our Village government to state its expectation that parents be actively involved in the educational process of their children.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT: The subcommittee recommends that:

- The Oak Park Village Board of Trustees and the District 97 Board of Education should direct a representative body such as the District Council of Oak Park (a representative committee of parents, District 97 certified staff, administrators, and board members) to draft a statement that pays homage to the inestimable role parents play in the education of the children of Oak Park and, at the same, delineates the specific educational responsibilities that come with the honored name of parent. Various standing community organizations could take on this task or work with the District Council of Oak Park to draft this statement. Again, the primary purpose of this statement would be to establish expectations for parents as the partners of District 97 in the education of their children.
- The Oak Park Village Board of Trustees and the District 97 Board of Education should select an outside agency to conduct a comprehensive study that identifies the parental behaviors that promote academic achievement and the impediments that limit the ability of parents to provide the type of educational home support that every child needs to reach his/her academic potential. Once these behaviors and impediments are identified, policies and programs must be jointly developed and funded by the Oak Park Village Board of Trustees and the District 97 Board of Education to empower and enable all parents to fully participate in the educational experience.

ISSUE: MARKETING OF OAK PARK'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS: There is an urgent need to “get the word out” on the many positive aspects of the entire district as well as our individual schools. Oak Park enjoys a wide reputation as a community, which has good schools, but both parents in Oak Park and those who might be considering moving here must be equipped with more information about our schools than is presently available.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION ON MARKETING OAK PARK'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS: the Village of Oak Park and area businesses should strongly support District 97 as they conduct a comprehensive marketing and public relations campaign to promote a keener awareness – both within and outside of the Village – of the quality of Oak Park schools. Ideas for this effort include, but are not limited to:

- Building on current printed publications to include enhanced web sites and other electronic opportunities as well as specific materials which describe in detail the strengths of particular schools in the District, and which should be made widely available to area Realtors for dissemination to persons within and outside of Oak Park who are considering moving.
- Communication with parents of all Oak Park pre-school students in order to make them feel welcome and to inform them of the many programs which their children could utilize if they enroll in Oak Park's public schools.
- Newspaper articles promoting the success of recent graduates and/or the excellence of our schools and/or the excellence of our teachers.
- Researching why students are leaving and determining how we can change that behavior. District 97 should initiate exit interviews (in person or via telephone) to gain this knowledge.
- Widespread dissemination of test score data, including extensive information on how those scores relate to those achieved in past years (please see the next recommendation regarding measurement and reporting of progress.)

ISSUE: RECONVENING OF THE TASK FORCE OR ANOTHER EQUIVALENT BODY; MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING OF PROGRESS: Over the course of our deliberations, it has become abundantly clear to the members of this subcommittee that our work, and therefore this report, are the beginning of a community process which must be an ongoing one. Oak Park's thirty-plus year "experiment" in promoting racial diversity has gradually evolved in many ways -- some anticipated and some not -- and the many factors which will determine its success or failure in the future must be monitored on a more regular basis than they have over the last ten or fifteen years.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON RECONVENING THE TASK FORCE OR ANOTHER EQUIVALENT BODY; MEASUREMENT AND

REPORTING OF PROGRESS: the subcommittee recommends that the Village of Oak Park and District 97 reconvene a second task force no later than one year from the submission of this report to the Oak Park Commitment to Diversity Task Force Steering Committee. This entity should meet at least quarterly in order to document the progress that has occurred as a result of this task force's efforts; the formulation of recommendations on how to continue or accelerate this progress should be the main deliverable expected of this new body. Specifically:

- Reporting on the Village and School District's progress in these areas should be an annual event. If the Village and/District 97 do not appear to be providing the community with objective progress reports in these areas, an independent task force should be appointed to undertake and manage this effort.
- As soon as metrics are available from the U.S. Census, this body should revisit some of these issues and chart the progress of the community in relation to the new data that will be available.
- District 97 should establish formal metrics that measure progress and/or regression in areas relating to racial and academic achievement balance between schools. These can include rate of change metrics and other metrics that will help the administration and Village government officials to identify and monitor relative differences between the 10 schools in District 97 in ways that facilitate decisions and actions to make proactive changes. Internal change and growth metrics would also be useful. In order to do this effectively, at least one professional staff person should be hired to focus solely on monitoring and assessing the relative differences between the ten schools of the district and surrounding neighborhoods. This person could also serve as the

District's and Village government's resource for monitoring how other diverse communities and school districts throughout the nation grapple with issues raised by this subcommittee. This person should have a strong background and demonstrated experience in social science measurement and research methodologies.

- The Village of Oak Park's Community Relations Department should be utilized as the responsible clearinghouse for all information that needs to be generated for the purpose of ongoing investigation and policy formulation on these issues.

CONCLUSION:

When we began this process, many Oak Parkers expected the subcommittee to suggest draconian actions to racially balance the elementary schools by moving black students out of the schools on the east side of the Village and white students out of the schools on the west. Although we agree that there is a valid concern about racial segregation in our schools, we would like to spare our community the pain that such actions would cause by first trying a variety of efforts to attract a diverse population to every school in the district, rather than compelling such an attendance pattern. If these efforts are successful in the next two years they will result in schools that are healthy in their diversity and also excellent in other ways -- safe, nurturing environments in which children at all academic achievement levels can thrive. If these efforts are not successful in two years -- if the current trends toward racial segregation continue -- then we believe that stronger and more direct actions may have to be taken, and that a new committee should be promptly convened to develop an appropriate strategy.

Please note: regarding the figure on the previous page as part of Exhibit 3, Professor Anderson offers the following explanation: “The note should be read as follows: arrows go from one variable state to another. The signs at the head of the arrows indicate that, for plus signs, as the variable state at the source of the arrow changes in some direction, the variable state at the head of the arrow changes in the same direction. For the minus sign, a change in the variable state at the source of the arrow changes the variable state at the head in the opposite direction. The large arrows in the diagram refer (the ones with the sign inside the curve of the arrow) indicate a positive or negative loop depending on the sign, + or -. If the sign is positive, the loop is a vicious cycle, increasing with time; if negative, the loop changes direction from the direction of the positive loop. The diagram demonstrates the overriding importance for both school quality and racial balance of the policy variable called desirable school quality.”

EXHIBIT 4: according to Professor Anderson, the representation ratios for the elementary schools in District 97 are driven by expressing the minority/majority ratios for each school as a ratio of the majority/minority percentages in the District as a whole. This means that representation ratios close to unity (one) identify desirable situations; those that are far away from unity are undesirable.

OAK PARK SCHOOL REPRESENTATION RATIOS (black: white students)

SCHOOL NAME	1999	2000
Beye	0.96	0.99
Emerson	1.12	1.08
Hatch	1.65	1.82
Holmes	0.76	0.69
Irving	1.72	2.02
Julian	1.13	1.099
Lincoln	0.706	0.72
Longfellow	1.517	1.488
Mann	.313	.0275
Whittier	1.03	0.978

HOUSING

Commitment to Diversity Task Force Housing Sub-Committee Report January 23, 2001

Preamble

Housing is more than a roof over our heads and a place to store our belongings. To us as individuals, it is “home” - a safe haven that helps to define and defend our families and us, it defines our relationship to the greater community in which we live. Most likely, it is also our central financial asset. To the community, housing is also an asset - one whose quality and value provide a measure of the community’s success. Some have said it is the Village’s most significant economic sector. From both perspectives and in the context of Oak Park’s goals for diversity and integration, housing also is a central element in the community effort to understand and build the relationships between Whites and African-Americans.

The Housing Sub-Committee was assembled by the Commitment to Diversity Task Force to explore housing’s role in diversity and integration as defined in 2000 in Oak Park. Our charge was to engage the community in this discussion, reveal the complexities of many of the issues, and, where possible, to provide recommendations to the Village of Oak Park and Elementary School District 97.

Several overarching goals have guided this effort. **Every part of Oak Park must share in the benefits of a local housing market that is open and fair, and has wide appeal to all who seek sound housing, good neighborhoods and quality community life. Each neighborhood of Oak Park must share in the capital investments made by private citizens, the public sector and the real estate development community. Every Oak Parker is responsible for these goals.**

Phrases such as a “unitary housing market” or “universal demand” have been used to describe these goals. In brief, subject only to the limitations of income and price, all parts of Oak Park should be equally attractive to Whites and all parts of Oak Park should be equally attractive to African-Americans. Resegregation of any neighborhood, whether to White or Black, must be discouraged. To accomplish this goal, all members of the community must participate in the governance of the community and its institutions.

A summary of conclusions is provided in Section II - Summary of Conclusions and Competing Perspective.

We approached our assignment through a series of committee meetings, presentations, readings, outreach sessions, as well as with the use of a questionnaire seeking feedback on housing issues and attitudes toward diversity and integration. These are described in Section III - Summary of Efforts/ Description of Process and Section IV - Analysis of Questionnaire Results.

Section V presents Findings and Section VI summarizes the Recommendations of the Housing Sub-Committee.

II. Summary of Conclusions and Competing Perspectives

A. Diversity as used in the Village's Diversity Statement means the inclusion of all persons in the life of our community. However, given the history of racism and racial segregation in the United States and in the Chicago metropolitan area, we understand that **one of the most critical forms of diversity to be achieved is Black Oak Parkers and White Oak Parkers living together in the same community.**

B. **Race relations are complicated by various economic and cultural differences** that exist in our community. Black and White residents are found in all economic classes and backgrounds and years of residency in Oak Park. Preconceptions and stereotyping are not useful.

C. Oak Park has also been a welcoming community to **many families and households having a mix of Black, White and bi-racial persons.** These families and households have been attracted to Oak Park because it is indeed a diverse and embracing community. To categorize these families and households statistically or stereotype its members by visual observation does not recognize the complex and pioneering lives of love and relationships shared in our mixed-race families.

D. The discussions we observed and the questionnaire and town hall feedback we have gathered suggest the following:

1) There is strong support for continuing efforts to promote racial diversity and integration throughout Oak Park

2) Black Oak Parkers tend to have a view of racial diversity that provides for significantly more Black presence and participation in Oak Park than White Oak Parkers. Often White Oak Parkers seem to say that some number of Black Oak Parkers is "too much" or that retaining White Oak Parkers as the majority racial group is essential.

3) Often the discussion of racial diversity seems to place the "onus" or "problem" on Black Americans when, in fact, the "problem" is initially one of White Americans not wanting to live with "too many" Black Americans or that Black Americans are faced with many closed housing markets.

E. We believe that **the year-long public debate over racial diversity and its meaning** and the discussions regarding the meaning of such words as integration and resegregation have been **a very useful dialogue. Participants seem to have a heightened awareness of the complexities of the issues and the emotions involved.**

F. We also note that continued **dialogue requires participation from increased numbers of Black Oak Parkers, and sustained efforts by White Oak Parkers to foster dialogue with Black Oak Parkers. In particular, inclusion of Black Oak Parkers is critical in all our local governing bodies and institutions.**

G. **We urge all Oak Parkers to be continually mindful of the segregating society in which we live.** Differences of economics, race and culture are used to divide rather than to create a vision that respects differences and builds upon shared values. **These forces are always pressing upon our housing market, our community life and our schools.**

H. **Some researchers of racial diversity say that when certain concentrated levels of Black Americans are observed in local schools and neighborhoods racial diversity is not achieved.**

I. **Today racial diversity in Oak Park requires heightened levels of mutual respect, understanding, awareness, and leadership among Black and White Oak Parkers not yet seen or experienced here or in the United States. We have the opportunity to prove conventional theories wrong!**

J. **Less anxiety about integration and resegregation and more leadership creating a positive vision of what it means to live together in community are needed.** And we need to spread this vision to our neighboring communities.

K. In the following pages we present data, findings and recommendations on the local housing market. We proceed from the premise that **every part of Oak Park must share in the benefits of a local housing market that is open and fair, and has wide appeal to all who seek sound housing, good neighborhoods and quality community life. Each neighborhood of Oak Park must share in the capital investments made by private citizens, the public sector and the real estate development community. Every stakeholder, whether a resident of Oak Park or not, is responsible for these goals.**

L. The Housing Sub-Committee has reviewed information from many sources regarding the impact of racially identifiable schools on an integrated housing market, whether majority Black or White. **The works of public policy experts suggest that housing trends are affected by both the quality and racial make-up of elementary schools. In particular, new home purchasers appear sensitive to the racial make-up of the schools.**

However, according to two local surveys, people currently living in Oak Park disagree on the question of whether a change in the racial make-up of their elementary school would influence their location decision, or whether racial balance in the schools is seen as a serious community problem or not.

III. Summary of Efforts - Description of Process

A. Sub-Committee Meetings

The Housing Sub-Committee met as the Committee of the Whole on sixteen occasions, beginning with the initial convening of entire Diversity Task Force on June 12, 2000. Subsequent meetings were held on June 19; July 6, 10, 17, 31; August 14, 28; September 18; October 2, 16; November 6, 20, 27; and December 11, 18. Minutes for each meeting were taken by a Village staff person and distributed to members. The active membership of the Housing Sub-Committee is listed in Appendix D.

B. Review of Past Body of Work

The Housing Sub-Committee examined two types of documents as background for its study. The first type was a compilation of scholarly materials related to integration, diversity, housing, and schools. The second type of material was a collection of official reports from the Village of Oak Park. The listing of these documents is provided in Appendix C to this report.

C. Presentations

The Housing Sub-Committee heard special presentations from the following:

Evan McKenzie on "The Politics of School Desegregation in Oak Park, Illinois," July 6

Barbara Furlong, Rick Kuner, and Carl Swenson on Village of Oak Park Housing Programs (Single-Family Rehabilitation--Amortization Loans, Emergency Loans, Home Deferred-Payment Loans, Deferred-Payment Loans; Multi-Family--Diversity Assurance, Security Improvement Grants, Voluntary Building Evaluation; First-Time Homebuyers--ASSIST and Illinois Housing Development Agency, Mortgage Credit Certificates; Equity Assurance), July 10

Dan Lauber on Ending American Apartheid, July 31

Rick Kuner, Ray Wiggins, and Village Code Enforcement Staff, August 10 (Subcommittee)

D. Outreach and Town Hall Meetings

Subcommittees of the Housing Sub-Committee met with the Oak Park Board of Realtors, the Building Owners and Managers Association, a Village-sponsored meeting of condo association presidents, and the Honorary Board and staff of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center. In addition, the Housing Sub-Committee held a Town Hall Meeting at Village Hall on November 15.

E. Compilation of Existing Data

The Housing Sub-Committee received and reviewed statistical data from the following sources:

Aggie Stempniak (Oak Park Regional Housing Center)--Oak Park Housing Center 1999 Rental Client Profile

Max Dieber (Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission)--Summary of 1990 Census Data for Village of Oak Park

Max Dieber (Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission)--Commitment to Diversity Task Force Housing Sub-Committee Data Summary

F. Compilation of New Data

In order to get specific new information, the Housing Sub-Committee developed and distributed its own questionnaire (see Appendix B). Questionnaires were provided to all attendees at the outreach meetings and the town hall meeting noted above. The questionnaire was also directed to the members of the Oak Park Board of Realtors.

IV. Findings from Questionnaire

The relatively small number of respondents must temper conclusions drawn from the questionnaire. How representative responses are of the Oak Park population in general and of specific groups within Oak Park is not an unimportant question. 69 surveys were returned - 58 of which contained information about both the race and household income of the respondent. Of this number 44, or 76% were White, 10, or 17% were Black. 44 respondents indicated household income over \$70,000; 18% of these respondents were African-American.

Furthermore, social science research (Racial Attitudes in America, Schuman et al, Harvard University Press, 1997) finds that, particularly among the well educated, respondents will report views about their racial attitudes as more liberal than what they actually believe.

Part 1 - Housing Issues

Respondents were asked to indicate the relative importance of 35 different actions or program areas. The candidate actions are listed in Appendix B. Respondents seemed to agree that several actions were of particular importance. These were:

- Increase efforts to maintain the existing housing stock
- Provide additional parking for multi-family housing
- Reduce overcrowding
- Continue efforts to combat housing discrimination

Promote racial balance across all schools in community so neighborhoods are not differentiated on basis of schools
Promote programs so schools are not defined by quality differences
Continue efforts to fight steering by out-of-town realtors
Fight perception of differences between east and west Oak Park
Combat gang activity throughout community
Combat predatory lending
Reduce the burden on building owners resulting from high property taxes
Sustain Village code enforcement efforts

In general, respondents suggested that other actions were of moderate importance. These were:

Provide additional housing opportunities for senior housing
Develop additional programs relevant to small or multi-use buildings

There seemed to be a consensus that two actions were relatively unimportant. These were:

Increase the number of 2 and 3 bedroom apartments
Increase the amount of Section 8 housing

Part 2 - Attitudes Toward Diversity

Question 1: What are the two or three most important things you think that the Village, the school districts, and organizations such as the Oak Park Regional Housing Center, can do to help achieve or maintain diversity and a stable racial balance?

There are clearly some themes that were presented through the responses to this essay question and they include the following statements:

Housing Themes

“...provide enhanced realtor training regarding steering of clients and/or self steering, provide affirmative marketing opportunities for condominiums, enhance programs for the maintaining of quality housing stock, ensure that racial diversity is proportional to the general population and is maintained throughout the entire Village....”

“...a stronger focus on affordable housing, continued support of the Oak Park Regional Housing Center programs - including the Apartments West program, work on regional racial integration policies, focus on a stronger partnership between the Austin/Chicago neighborhood and Oak Park, insure that all fair housing laws are abided by....”

“...stop counting racial groups because it’s degrading, increase parking for multi-family housing, slow down condominium conversions, maintain Black and White housing demand, increase the number of buildings in the Diversity Assurance Program, reduce the public misperceptions regarding east vs. west Oak Park....”

School Themes

“...maintain racial balance in the schools by stopping permissive transfers, achieving quality in all schools, setting a “minimum” number of minority students for each school....”

“...provide enhanced teacher training, hire more minority teachers, have diversity discussions in the schools, investigate improper school enrollments, review funding levels in all schools on the cost per student basis...”

Community Themes

“...insure equity and fairness with high quality services, increase civic participation with improved Village support of block parties, encourage more minority community civic participation, market and promote all positive aspects of Oak Park, leading institutions need to work together to support diversity and integration, add integration language back into diversity statement, expand the diversity discussion beyond Black and White....”

Certainly, some of what was provided is not new to the Oak Park discussion on maintaining a diverse community. In saying that, many Oak Parkers clearly value and respect the diverse community we have fostered and continued dialogue and understanding on these issues and what they mean to each of us is a worthy goal. Fostering the partnerships and dialogues for each resident’s voice is at a minimum, one of the greatest legacies we can leave behind for our children and grandchildren.

Question 2: The 2000 Census is likely to show that the approximate racial percentages of Oak Park’s largest racial groups will be 20-30% Black and 65-75% White. If the 2010 Census shows that there is a significant racial change in the make-up of Oak Park, how would that change influence your decision to live **in Oak Park** and what would that change have to be?

An analysis of the responses show that about 65% of the respondents wouldn’t move just because of a significant change in Oak Park’s future racial make-up while about 35% stated that racial make-up does play a role in their decision to remain Oak Park residents. For the former group there were 31 respondents, of which 24 were White, 5 were Black and 2 were Multi-racial. The latter group consisted of 17 respondents, of which 16 were White and 1 was Multi-racial. Overall, 81% of the respondents were property owners and 19% were renters.

In looking more closely at the data for the group that said a significant racial change in Oak Park’s make-up was not an influential factor, we found that some of the respondents offered a simple response such as “will stay.” For those that elaborated, a common thread binding their responses was “as long as the quality of life in Oak Park remained high they would stay in the community.” The examples they gave for what a high quality of life consists of were such items as quality schools and services, safety, economic viability, high property values and a good class of people.

In analyzing the data for those residents who indicated they might move if there was a significant change in Oak Park's racial make-up, we found that these respondents specifically mentioned the racial composition of Oak Park as an influential factor. A common thread in several responses was that racial diversity should be present throughout all Oak Park neighborhoods so that no area of the community becomes identifiable by race. Similarly, several individuals indicated that if they perceived that racial segregation was occurring, they would consider leaving Oak Park. There was some disagreement among respondents on what racial percentages seemed best to them. For example, one multi-racial individual said if Oak Park's racial make-up became like "Wheaton," she/he would move. Among White respondents, there were varying diversity preferences listed, ranging from a mix that was at least 70% White to one where Whites would be only a "small minority" of Oak Park. In other words, some Whites would be comfortable if the percentage of Black residents were around 30% while others felt that percentage could be significantly higher. The area of range that had the most support among White respondents was between 65-50% White and 35-50% Black

Question 3: Would a change in racial mix in **elementary school** influence your residential location decision?

58% of the respondents indicated that a change in the racial mix in their local elementary school doesn't matter or would NOT influence where they reside. About half of the people responding to this question stated that the real issue relates to the quality of the local elementary school. (Other statements indicate that this issue doesn't matter because their children attend private elementary schools.)

42% of the respondents indicated that a change DOES matter or WOULD influence where they reside. Many of these people indicated that the racial mix in the local school should be "balanced" or proportional to the racial mix of Oak Park. Specifically, there seems to be a concern if the Black make-up exceeded the 30-50% range or if any school were to become 90-100% White.

Question 4: Would a change in racial mix in your **neighborhood** influence your residential location decision?

58% of the respondents indicated that a change in the racial mix in their neighborhood doesn't matter or would NOT influence where they reside. Slightly more than half of the people responding to this question answered NO without any comments. This may indicate that they're satisfied with the current racial mix. There were also several references indicating that the real issue is the quality of life and property values/upkeep of property.

40% of the respondents indicated that a change DOES matter or WOULD influence where they reside. Many respondents indicated they value a diverse neighborhood and would be concerned if the Black population in the neighborhood began to exceed the 30-50% range or would become 90-100% White. There was also reference to the racial mix of the neighborhood reflecting that of the overall mix of Oak Park.

V. Findings

The findings listed below are derived from a variety of sources. Some are directly supported by information gathered during the discussions of the Housing Sub-Committee; some are based on the wealth of research that has preceded our efforts; and some are based on the experience and observations of individual members of the Team. The research efforts of the Team have not been of a rigorous scientific nature. But like all endeavors, the findings and recommendations of this report should be subject to continuing debate and refinement.

A. Since the 1950's the Chicago area's population has been dispersing. The impact on Oak Park, coupled with region-wide declines in the average number of people residing in each household, is seen in the 1970 to 1990 span. In this period Oak Park's population declined by 14%. In the most recent decade, the total Oak Park population appears to have stabilized, contrary to outsiders' projections; and may be increasing slightly, again contrary to outside expert projections. See Exhibit 1.

B. Oak Park must compete with all other communities in the metropolitan area for personal and investment dollars for housing, commerce, public infrastructure, and schools. If we don't grow our tax base that is highly constrained by geography and use type, we cannot maintain the high quality of schools, physical environment and community life we cherish. This competition is clouded by outsiders' generally negative perceptions about the interactions of race and income within a community or region.

C. Important Oak Park assets are its location in proximity to downtown Chicago, suburban job centers and the two airports, and easy access to mass transportation and highways.

D. In 1995 there were 2.12 million jobs within 10 miles of Oak Park.

E. From 1970 to 1990 the White population of Oak Park has declined steadily. It is expected that the 2000 Census will demonstrate a continuation of this trend.

F. See Exhibits 2, 3 and 4 regarding detailed racial change from 1980 to 1990:

The number of Black persons has sometimes increased and sometimes decreased on various blocks throughout the Village.

Blocks showing decreases of White population are observed throughout the Village. It is notable that a few blocks in the Austin corridor gained White population.

Black persons can be found living on the majority of blocks in Oak Park (81% in 1990).

G. We anticipate that the 2000 Census will show an increase in the number of Black Oak Parkers in homeownership throughout the Village and in residence in northeast and southeast Oak Park.

See Exhibits 5 and 6 for 1980 and 1990 Census data by elementary school attendance areas and by Census Tracts.

H. The multi-family housing stock in 1990 represented 56% of all housing units; 21% of the multi-family units were occupied by owners. Renters occupied four percent (4%) of single-family units. See Exhibits 7, 8, 9 and 10 regarding owners, renters and housing stock types.

I. From 1980 to 1990, home ownership among Black Oak Parkers increased by 120%.

In 1990 most White households (61%) were homeowners while most Black households (71%) were renters. Nonetheless, White renters were the vast majority of all renters, even though their number decreased by 20% from 1980 to 1990.

J. The density of single-family housing is greatest in northeast Oak Park and in the area south of the Eisenhower Expressway.

K. See Exhibit 11 regarding condominiums. Since 1990 the number of condo units has increased by over 25%. Condo units now account for approximately 13% of all Oak Park housing units. In 1990 about 26% of condo units were occupied by renters. A recent survey covering about one-third of the condos reported that Oak Parkers who are Black occupied 22%.

L. In 1990, married couples with children accounted for only 22.5% of all households. Families of all types, with children, accounted for 30.5% of Oak Park households. One-third of all households were composed of one person living alone. See Exhibit 12.

For every 10 married couples with children, there were nearly 4 single-parent families. Single-parent families were identified as 47 % White and 50% Black.

Seventy-seven percent (77%) of all households were headed by White persons and eighteen percent (18%) were headed by Black persons.

M. In the 44 month span, from January 1997 through August 2000, private expenditures for housing improvements, excluding garages, as reflected in the value of housing permits, totaled \$49.5 million, over \$1 million per month. These housing improvements were distributed fairly evenly across the Village. See Exhibit 13.

Visual observation, though, would suggest that there are pockets of the Village where small property rehabilitation is not as prevalent and neighborhood improvement strategies are required.

Ninety-two percent (92%) of the permits were for single-family units. This might suggest the need to monitor the rate of repair for multi-family rental and condo housing.

N. There are approximately 8900 rental units in Oak Park at this time with hundreds of owners. These include single-family rental, 2 flats to 4 flats, 6 flats, and larger buildings.

The bulk of rental units are in larger buildings that are a significant industry, tax generator and positive physical component of Oak Park. Village programs over the years have focused much attention on the multi-family rental sector. There are a number of rental property owners with large portfolios of units who are either area residents and/or very involved in Oak Park and concerned about quality rental property. There are also numbers of owners and their investors who are governed purely by profit motives and find it generally unattractive to invest substantial amounts of money and energy in older apartment buildings and racial diversity.

O. Based on an analysis of the changes in assessed value in housing with structures containing four or fewer units from 1990 to 1999, the market seems to be demonstrating relative confidence in all parts of Oak Park except one sub-area that is lagging. The northeast corner of the Village shows both a median value lower than the Oak Park average and a rate of change that lags behind the Village as a whole. See Exhibits 14 and 15.

P. In 1990 the distribution of households by income shows that Oak Park is very similar to suburban Chicago as a whole. From 1980 to 1990 Oak Park actually “outperformed” other suburbs because its percentage of households with incomes less than \$30,000 actually fell to about 33% from the more typical suburban 40% of households earning below \$30,000. The implications are that fewer households can afford to live in Oak Park. See Exhibit 16.

Q. Recent survey results from the Oak Park Development Corporation suggest that Oak Park household income and educational levels are higher than the statistical projections of researchers who provide data to retail and commercial investors.

R. Recent data we have reviewed reveals interesting information about the reasons people move and about attitudes toward diversity in Oak Park

From a survey of Board of Realtor members:

- recent sellers leaving Oak Park have indicated major reasons for leaving were transfers, retiring, or the need to upgrade to a larger home; diversity was not identified as a reason
- new buyers have been attracted by the “progressive nature of the community,” proximity to work, and Oak Park’s established, mature character

From the recently completed Village-wide survey:

- people move here because of the schools, diversity and proximity to Chicago
- more Whites than Blacks think Oak Park is open to people of diverse backgrounds
- 71% of all respondents feel diversity is very important, up from 50% in 1988
- 78% feel it is very important to promote diversity compared to 67% in 1988
- non-Whites feel more strongly that it is necessary to promote diversity
- east-side Village residents felt more strongly about the need to promote diversity than did west-side Village residents; southeast area Oak Parkers feel the strongest, 86%, that it is necessary to promote diversity
- 26% of respondents thought racial balance in the schools was a “moderate” problem, while 9% thought it was a “major” or “extreme” problem.

VI. Recommendations

Goals, Objectives and Policies of the Adopted 1990 Village Comprehensive Plan: Chapter II - Housing

We believe that for the interim, this one page of the currently adopted Plan provides a useable framework to guide policy discussion and program development. Our specific housing recommendations are made in the context of and in addition to the Summary of Conclusions and Competing Perspectives stated earlier in Section II and the various other data findings and inquiry conducted by the Task Force.

We highlight twelve statements from the Plan that we believe are particularly relevant today. These are the statements we seek to augment with our specific recommendations that follow.

Objective A of the 1990 Plan

- To support integration throughout Oak Park and prevent resegregation in any part of the Village.

Policies:

- Promote strong multi-racial demand for housing in all parts of the Village.
- Promote an open, unitary housing market throughout the metropolitan area to expand the choice for homeowners.
- Review all major proposed governmental actions, including, but not limited to, zoning, development, schools, and public works proposals, to identify their impacts on promoting integration and preventing resegregation.

Objective B of the 1990 Plan

- To support an economically diverse housing stock for all income groups and age groups living or working in Oak Park.

Objective C of the 1990 Plan

- To enhance and maintain the quality of housing stock for all income and age groups living or working in Oak Park.

Policies:

- Continue the Housing Code enforcement program for multiple-family and single family dwelling units.
- Continue the Village's active role in encouraging the rehabilitation of multiple-family and single-family housing.
- Support high-quality management practices, and create an understanding of the rights and options of tenants.

Objective D of the 1990 Plan

- To maintain and enhance the residential character of existing residential areas.

Other Housing Policies from the 1990 Plan

- Encourage the selective construction of multi-family residential buildings. The size of the units-in terms of the number of bedrooms-should meet the needs of households not served by existing housing.
- Permit the development of higher density residential buildings at reasonable intervals in accord with the development principles in (the adopted) plan.

Recommendations of the Housing Sub-Committee

Promote Increased Racial Diversity In The Single Family Market - High Priority

We think the most important and difficult tasks relate to the private sector single family housing market, traditionally an area left totally to market forces and the real estate profession.

A. Black households are under-represented in the demand for higher end housing in northwest Oak Park and for other homeownership opportunities in west Oak Park. Create private market incentives to increase Black demand for ownership in northwest and west Oak Park.

B. White households may be under-represented in the demand for the smaller, owner occupied homes in eastern Oak Park, especially northeast and southeast Oak Park. Create private market incentives to increase White demand for ownership in eastern Oak Park.

Property Rehabilitation

C. Dramatically increase the rehabilitation of homes, small residential properties, condominiums, and townhomes in eastern Oak Park, unconstrained by the income limits of federal funds. Utilize local lenders as the center of this activity.

D. Continue and extend efforts to provide incentives to the owners of apartment buildings to make long-term capital improvements to their properties when an owner makes a long term commitment to racial diversity and sound property management.

The Village's Diversity Assurance program provides an example and should be expanded to attract more buildings into the program. While it may not be necessary to tie the Security Improvement Grant (SIG) program directly to the racial diversity practices of building owners, the SIG does encourage capital improvements and enhance marketability throughout the Village.

Redevelopment, New Construction and Affordable Housing

E. Encourage redevelopment of economically marginal homes and small properties along Austin Boulevard with planned new construction townhome developments that include parking and are sold at a variety of income levels. New construction is good for Oak Park and will stimulate healthy demand from both Black and White buyers. A neighborhood planning process may identify other areas suitable for new construction.

F. Encourage redevelopment of economically obsolete or underutilized commercial or mixed-use parcels along North Avenue, South Boulevard and Roosevelt Road. Redevelopment, whether residential, mixed use, or commercial, must have good design, parking, be sensitive to neighbors, and be geared for long term marketplace success.

G. Promote affordable housing for economic diversity in all parts of Oak Park.

H. Promote the construction of higher income housing in eastern Oak Park.

I. Village government should partner with multi-family rental owners, and possibly condo owners, to locate, design and finance parking improvements which will maintain the marketplace attractiveness of our apartment and condo buildings.

Neighborhood Planning and Action

J. Oak Park is not the same everywhere! Village government should establish a practical "neighborhood" planning process which allows for the identification and resolution of local issues and concerns, and links those issues which are larger in scope with similar issues in other neighborhood areas and Village-wide concerns. The issues of property rehab, redevelopment and new construction could be dealt with in this manner.

At the same time the neighborhood planning process in Oak Park would also be geared to assist all Oak Parkers to come to terms with the meaning of the adopted Diversity Statement and the Comprehensive Plan's goals and objectives for their area.

Code Enforcement

K. Expand and strengthen the use of the annual house walk inspection as the key vehicle for improving the exterior quality of homes and small properties, such as two-flats and three-flats, storefronts, and garages. The house walk should cover one quarter of the Village each year.

L. Adequately staff and manage the code enforcement function, and apply consistent and high standards of inspection.

M. Strengthen efforts to inform residents of potential ways to finance improvements.

N. The entire question of the impact of condominiums within a large portion of Oak Park's housing stock requires further attention and analysis: quality of conversions, increase in homeownership, impact on racial diversity, ability of new condo owners to govern themselves and maintain the buildings, renter occupancy of condos, impact on the availability of rental housing, etc.

Marketing

O. Continue the public-private partnership in marketing rental units throughout Oak Park to under-represented groups in our marketplace and its sub-markets.

P. Promote Oak Park throughout the Metro area and the U.S. as a great place to live and do business. Provide timely, accurate information about our community life, housing and schools through the use of the Internet, VOP-TV, Village newsletters, the partnership agencies, and media campaigns.

Capital Improvements and Village Services

Q. Village government must always deliver its services equally throughout the Village. Staged capital improvement plans are appropriate, as are special programs to deal with special conditions. Officials must be able to demonstrate to residents that the eastern end of town does not get short shrift, which seems to be a common perception.

Building Bridges of Good Will Between People and Communities

R. We encourage the neighbors of residents along Austin Boulevard and other commercial streets, with assistance from the Village, to invite and facilitate the inclusion of these Oak Parkers in block parties and other civic events.

S. We encourage Oak Park investors to join with residents in the Austin neighborhood and responsible developers to promote reinvestment there.

T. We encourage Oak Parkers to work on racial diversity issues with our neighbors in Austin, Forest Park, River Forest, Cicero, Berwyn, Elmwood Park, and Galewood.

U. We encourage Oak Park's business, real estate, institutional, and governmental leaders to participate in metropolitan fair housing, affordable housing, and sensible growth efforts.

Fair Housing

V. The Village should continue efforts to promote fair housing choices for all persons. Efforts to analyze and eliminate housing discrimination in Oak Park should be an ongoing practice and these should include random testing.

W. The Village should continue and enhance the training of the real estate profession regarding fair housing, affirmative marketing and racial diversity.

An important issue in this era of e-commerce is the changing role of the real estate professional and the application of fair housing laws to everyone in the marketplace.

Schools and Housing Diversity

X. District 97 and District 200 have a responsibility to examine their policies and actions so that their policies and actions promote a housing market in each and every part of Oak Park that has wide appeal to all home seekers and renters.

Y. In order to promote a diverse housing market, the racial makeup of each elementary school in District 97 should approximate the racial makeup of the student body of the District as a whole.

Sustaining Further Dialogue on Diversity

We do not intend that only Village government implement these recommendations. Most of these recommendations require coordinated action by concerned citizens, local business, institutional and civic leaders, not-for-profit organizations, along with the participation of elected Village and school officials.

Z. Continue and sustain a broadly based racial diversity task force which will be a forum for dialogue, listing of practical accomplishments, and mutual accountability.

We recommend that our neighbors from adjoining communities be invited to participate.

An integral part of this dialogue is to creatively reach out and include African Americans and persons from other minority communities through town hall meetings and forums held in various neighborhood locations throughout the Village.

The cultivation of relationships and dialogue can best be fostered within residents' own neighborhoods and when the residents feel connected to the process. Getting feedback directly from neighborhoods by using park district, library or school district space or through organizations primarily serving the different population groups in Oak Park will foster a feeling of inclusiveness. In addition, issues impacting housing, neighborhoods and population groups within the community will surface more quickly when the dialogue has a closer link to the people who are affected.