THIRD
DRAFT
REPORT

VILLAGE OF WONDER LAKE

HANCOCK DRIVE PLAN
AUGUST 2008

THOMPSON DYKE & ASSOCIATES
The Hancock Plan was prepared with the help and guidance of the:

Village of Wonder Lake Planning and Zoning Commission
Jim Cavanaugh, Chairman
Bill Arnos, Jane Ratzlaff, Ken Such,
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Input Provided by:

Wonder Lake Chamber of Commerce
Dennis Palys, President
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Kathy Blum, Tom Cooper, Steve Hall,
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Consultant:

Thompson Dyke & Associates, Ltd.
**Purpose of Hancock Drive Plan**

The purpose of the Hancock Drive Plan is to anticipate inevitable Village of Wonder Lake growth and the likely annexation of unincorporated McHenry County property in the vicinity of Hancock Drive. These annexations must include verifying what special needs and challenges exist for commercial properties located on the East side of the Lake. Before substantial properties in the Hancock Area can be annexed in the future, the Village must be aware of and understand what types of uses exist and how they interrelate. This information is important because the Village is in a unique position to provide services currently unavailable to property owners, and the area has the potential to provide economic benefit to the Village through increased tax base. However, both of these benefits also represent costs to the Village and property owners.

**Hancock Drive Corridor Defined**

The Study Area is illustrated in Map 1 Existing Land Uses. It generally includes property located on both sides of that portion of Hancock Drive located between Wonder Lake on the west and the eastern property line of the large parcel east of East Wonder Lake Drive on the east. Also included in the Study Area are the properties located on the south side of South Drive between East Lake Shore Drive and East Wonder Lake Road. Various non-residential properties located on the east Lakeshore are also included in the Hancock Area Study Area.

*See Appendix 1, Map 1 Existing Land Use and Study Area Boundary*

**Plan Methodology**

In preparing this plan, in December of 2007, TD&A surveyed and photographed properties within the Study Area. The survey was intended to determine land use, number of units, assets and liabilities, property condition, signage, number of parking spaces, and front and side setback. In addition, a public input session was held at the Chamber of Commerce office on January 22, 2008 to elicit input from business owners within the Study Area to determine what the Village could do to make individual businesses more successful as well as what the Village could do to improve the Hancock commercial area (see Appendix 3.) Written input on these topics was also requested from the Chamber in a March 12, 2008 letter from Planning and Zoning Commission Chairman Jim Cavanaugh to Dennis Palys, President of the Chamber (see Appendix 3.) Written comments on this Plan were received in an e-mail from Chamber President Palys dated May 4, 2008. Mr. Palys’ suggestions include additional meetings and networking between the Village and Chamber, encouraging business-friendly zoning and tax incentives and reaching out to the trades and home based businesses. Lastly, the Commission reviewed data collected and discussed and considered various documents prepared by the Consultant which lead to the creation of this report.
As with numerous other areas of unincorporated McHenry County, the Hancock Study Area includes a diverse mix of land uses. Existing land uses include a variety of commercial uses, small offices, entertainment uses, quasi-governmental uses, industrial uses and single family dwellings. A few buildings contain multi-family units. Some of these individual land uses are outdated and conflicts between incompatible land use arise, such as where industrial uses are located adjacent to residential uses. In most instances there are no buffers (setbacks, landscaping, fences, etc.) between such incompatible uses.

Several key parcels were vacant when the land uses in the Study Area were surveyed in December of 2007. Vacant parcels include several located near the southeast corner of East Lake Shore Drive and Hancock, a parcel on the south side of Sunset, immediately north of an industrial use fronting on the north side of Hancock and a vacant parcel just south east of the western terminus of Hancock Drive and the large agricultural parcel located at the north east corner of Hancock and east Wonder Lake Drive.

Several vacancies also existed in existing buildings including: a restaurant/tavern overlooking the Lake and a relatively new shopping center on the south side of Hancock, west of Wonder Foods.

Existing County zoning in the Study Area typically reflects the underlying existing land use. However, there is no small office district contained in the County Zoning Ordinance that might be applied to a fairly substantial portion of the eastern Study Area. This area contains an abundance of small medical and law offices.

See Appendix 1, Map 2, Existing County Zoning

Other Study Area Planning Elements

The Study Area is currently in unincorporated McHenry County and could potentially be annexed into the Village of Wonder Lake. Another major force at play with potential to affect the Study Area is the 1,600 acre Thatcher Meadows development planned to the south and east of the Study Area. It is anticipated that this very large planned development will be developed over time and will bring new residents, additional commercial development, municipal sewer and water and added amenities to the entire Wonder Lake area. This anticipated growth in the area makes it even more important to preserve and bolster the traditional existing retail and office uses in the Hancock Study Area which now function as a “defacto” downtown for the Village of Wonder Lake, despite currently falling under unincorporated McHenry County jurisdiction.
Based on several “winshield” surveys of the study area and subsequent analysis of findings, the following Assets and Liabilities were identified within the Study Area:

**Assets**

1. The existing park with Lake frontage provides some residents access to the Lake. Located next to the marina, together, these elements could provide a recreation hub for the eastern portion of the Lake.

2. There are several small, well maintained business located along Hancock Drive. These are the building blocks of vibrant street and economic life. Many of these quality small businesses are well established and frequented by county and Village residents alike. They promise to keep up a steady stream of customer/pedestrian traffic along Hancock Drive.

3. Several redevelopment opportunities in key locations exist along Hancock Drive. If improved, these areas could provide key anchoring business and establishments along the Study Area, further improving the area’s economic viability. A building such as the former Dockside bar and grill could be renovated/redeveloped to create a restaurant/bar that could serve as a neighborhood icon, attracting clientele on a regional scale as a result of its location near the marina and park.

4. Modern convenience retail is beginning to crop up along Hancock Drive. This trend should be encouraged to provide residents with modern, convenient shopping opportunities. However, such uses are not pedestrian friendly and should be encouraged to locate only in non-pedestrian oriented locations. The newer Citgo and accompanying convenience store is an example of a modern development that fits within the smaller scaled development of Hancock Drive.

5. Along the western portions of Hancock Drive, on-street parking is available in front of most of the small office buildings. This allows denser development along Hancock Drive since large parking lots are not needed for most of the current uses.

6. A small office district has been established along Hancock Drive. It contains small law practices, doctor offices and various small businesses. This is an asset since the concentration of offices draws clients and patients to the area.

7. There are several examples of unique vernacular architecture along Hancock Drive. With new development happening in the area, it is important to preserve these existing unique buildings that give the area character.

8. Important civic buildings located along Hancock already exist including the MPOA headquarters, the Wonder Lake Fire Protection District offices...
and the Chamber of Commerce. These key organizations are important to establishing a streetscape and identity along the Study Area.

See Appendix 1, Map 3 Assets

Liabilities

1. While there is a Lake Front subdivision park in the Study Area, access to the park is restricted to subdivision residents and the entire area is fenced. Access to this park is generally limited to subdivision residents.

2. Much of the light industrial activity along Hancock Drive is unscreened. Semi trucks unload and forklifts transfer shipments in the street. This kind of activity is disruptive to pedestrians, interferes with a commercial/office uses and is unsightly. These types of activities would be better suited to a different area with more intense uses where such activities can be screened from the view of the street.

3. A concentration of entertainment uses exists along Hancock Drive. While potentially an asset, this area could become a noise and nuisance issue to surrounding uses if not managed properly.

4. Many of the larger parcels along Hancock Drive lack front yard landscaping and parking area landscaping. Even a small amount of plant material would help soften the appearance of the buildings and make the properties more attractive.

5. The Video Gallery strip center is in a prominent location with several tenants, however the center has a few key vacancies. It will be important to find long-term, quality tenants for this area in order to enhance its economic vitality.

6. The signage along Hancock Drive is haphazard and unattractive in many instances with large billboards in awkward locations and seemingly random placement of commercial signage. Visual clutter results.

7. Poorly screened storage areas lead to an unattractive view of the area from the street.

8. Small, shallow lots make consolidation difficult. Many developers prefer a larger lot configuration and find reinvestment difficult in a region with small, shallow lots and exiting small buildings.

9. High impact uses adjacent to residential lead to an incompatibility among uses in the study area.

See Appendix 1, Map 4 Liabilities

Much of the open space within the Hancock Study Area is privately owned. If the opportunity arises in the future, consolidation of parcels into a public park and/or central gathering area should be considered.
These goals and policies establish general guidelines for the eventual annexation and redevelopment of the Hancock Drive area. They are intended to serve as a starting point when annexation or redevelopment activities do occur. The ideas captured above are meant as a initial draft, and are expected to be modified and added to if a more intensive study is undertaken in the future or as development occurs. The Goals and Policies are also meant to capitalize on the assets of the area as well as eliminate or mediate the liabilities.

COORDINATE LAND USES

Encourage groupings of compatible land uses. In some instances incompatible uses exist adjacent to one another. In the future, encourage redevelopment/relocation of the light industrial uses to more appropriate areas.

IMAGE & IDENTITY GOAL

Establish a commercial center, downtown image for the Hancock Drive Study Area. This is the part of town people think of when they want to shop, go to office appointments and recreate. Part of this goal will involve developing unique street and way-finding signage and entry treatments.

DEVELOP CHARACTER & DESIGN STANDARDS

As a supplement to the image and identity goal above, in the future, character and design standards should be developed for the area in order to enhance its appearance and establish the Hancock Road corridor as a vibrant downtown area for the entire Wonder Lake region.

TAX BASE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Encourage uses within the project area that stimulate further economic development in the area as well as enhance the tax base for the entire Village.

IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION, TRAFFIC & CIRCULATION

Develop modern circulation patterns within the study area, increasing safety and accessibly to uses. Keeping the existing street parking can contribute to the feeling and function of a downtown district.

INCREASE PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIVITY

Enable pedestrians to park and walk from use to use and provide elements within the streetscape that encourage walkability of the Hancock Drive area. It is especially important to consider a pedestrian connection to Harrison School to the west of the Study Area along Hancock Drive.

A Prairie-style street light or trash receptacle could establish image, identity and character elements within the Hancock Drive Study Area.
**Study Goals & Policies**

**Manage Growth & Village Boundary Expansion**

Establish reasonable future Village boundaries and work with residents to make annexation as smooth and easy as possible by managing grown with an established plan.

**Develop an Annexation Strategy**

Establish a comprehensive strategy and process that involves an open dialogue between property owners and County and Village officials in order to annex the Hancock Drive area in as equitable a manner as possible.

**Redevelop Obsolete Uses**

Encourage the redevelopment of existing uses along Hancock Drive that are obsolete. Encourage new development (or renovation) that updates the area with an eye towards facilitating economic development with improved opportunities for modern uses to locate in the area and that incorporate modern design and safe automobile and pedestrian circulation.

**Screen Parking Lots with Landscaping**

Many of the parking lots along Hancock are unscreened, some are not paved and very few have any landscaping elements. A goal of this study is to update the look of the Hancock Study Area by encouraging the installation of attractive planting materials that serve to beautify the area as well as screen parking areas from view.

**Establish a Central Gathering Place**

With the concentration of entertainment, park, marina and civic uses on the Lake and along Hancock Drive, a central gathering place or Village green should be established in this area. Such a public gathering space could be used for public ceremonies, farmers’ markets, art fairs, etc.

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The above graphic depicts a potential Hancock Drive configuration cross section. Buildings represent existing development with angled parking instead of perpendicular parking. Sidewalks are shown at 10 feet but could be reduced. Roadway is kept at the current 24 feet.
**Specific Recommendations**

**Land Use**

1. Differentiate subareas within the larger Study Area to reflect prevailing development patterns (office, auto oriented and pedestrian oriented).
2. Prohibit auto oriented uses in pedestrian oriented areas, such as drive-in windows.
3. Consider zoning areas north of Hancock Study Area for commercial/transitional uses to encourage enlargement of the Hancock area and consolidation of lots so shallow lots can become deeper, but buffer such uses with landscaping.
4. Encourage the location of buildings on front lot lines particularly in pedestrian oriented areas with minimal curb cuts.
5. Consider mapping the Office District on the north side of Hancock where a coalescence of smaller offices has occurred.

**Public Improvements / Infrastructure**

1. Provide a public gathering space in the Hancock Area. One tentative location is the triangle on the west side of Hancock. This location could be improved with monuments, a flagpole, seating areas, etc.
2. Consider locations for a satellite Village facility to help anchor the downtown area and to provide a strong and visible Village presence. Such government oriented facilities could be provided jointly with quasi governmental uses such as the Chamber and the MPOA.
3. Use the availability of public infrastructure as an incentive to encourage annexation. Provide other incentives to those uses that reinforce the area's importance to the Village, draw people to the area and support other uses.
4. Begin planning and signing a “Route Around the Lake” that begins and ends in the Hancock Study Area.
5. Explore the possibility of a public dock that functions as a “boat parking lot” for those wishing to visit and shop in the area by boat and provide a sidewalk connection to this dock.
6. Provide connections to the Hancock Study Area when new development occurs.

**Streetscape / Beautification**

1. Provide continuous sidewalks the entire length of Hancock Drive, beginning at its western terminus and moving east. Continue sidewalks north on both sides of East Wonder Lake Road.
2. Install decorative pedestrian oriented street lamps along the full width of Hancock Drive matching those in more recent subdivisions.
3. Maintain and enhance the convenient on-street parking but not at the expense of encouraging pedestrian circulation.
4. Provide street trees to improve pedestrian environment.
5. Initiate beautification efforts by providing planters to each property owner and encourage participation through awards for the best planters each season.
6. Provide benches and bike racks at key locations.
7. Explore a facade improvement program that makes money available for facade improvements.

Corner bump-outs help make streets more pedestrian friendly, calm traffic and can provide an area for parking and hardscape elements to further streetscape beautification and landscaping initiatives.
Establish Character & Identity

1. Encourage an image for the area that is genuine and consistent with Wonder Lake’s heritage when new development occurs. Discourage designs that are not consistent with Wonder Lake’s heritage.

2. Formally designate this area as “Downtown Wonder Lake” and install directional/way finding signs from Rte. 120 and Barnard Mill Rd. identifying the limits of “Downtown Wonder Lake.”

3. Provide entry way icons at the three major entry ways to the area (north east and south) to reinforce identity and sense of place.

4. Encourage the relocation of industrial uses to more appropriate outlying areas.

5. In conjunction with the Chamber and MPOA, organize year-round “Downtown Wonder Lake” events such as concerts, sidewalk sales, outdoor movies, farmers markets, fishing tournaments, snowmobile and bike tours and holiday events to reinforce this identity as the center of the Village.

6. Provide seasonal lighting that reinforces major activities in the Downtown.

Encourage Smart Growth Strategies

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices to accommodate Community members of various income levels, ages and stages in life.

2. Create walkable neighborhoods/communities that encourage modes of Transportation other than the automobile.

3. Encourage community and stake-holder collaboration on all planning Decisions including annexation.

4. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.

5. Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective to the Community as well as to private developers.

6. Mix land uses to provide a vibrant and economically sustainable streetscape.

7. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental Areas.

8. Provide a variety of transportation choices.

9. Strengthen and direct new development towards existing built Environments.

10. Take advantage of compact development design.

See Appendix 2 for Specific Plan Recommendations
CONCLUSION

The Hancock Drive Plan was undertaken in advance of pending annexations in the Hancock Drive corridor. It is anticipated that the annexation of all of the property in the area will be forthcoming as the benefits of annexation to the Village are better understood and accepted. Nevertheless, if the goals and recommendations of the Hancock Drive Plan are considered in conjunction with annexation, the Village will be in a better position to encourage land uses, limited streetscape improvements and development/redevelopment actions that will enhance the Hancock Area for both businesses and surrounding residents. The result will be the establishment of the Hancock Corridor as a traditional, functional and symbolic “downtown” for Wonder Lake.
Appendix 1

Plan Maps
Appendix 2

Specific Plan Recommendations
Appendix 3

Minutes from Chamber of Commerce and Planning and Zoning Commission Joint Meeting
January 22, 2008

Letter to the Chamber of Commerce President from the Planning and Zoning Commission Chair
Dated March 12, 2008

Potential Benefits of Annexation