

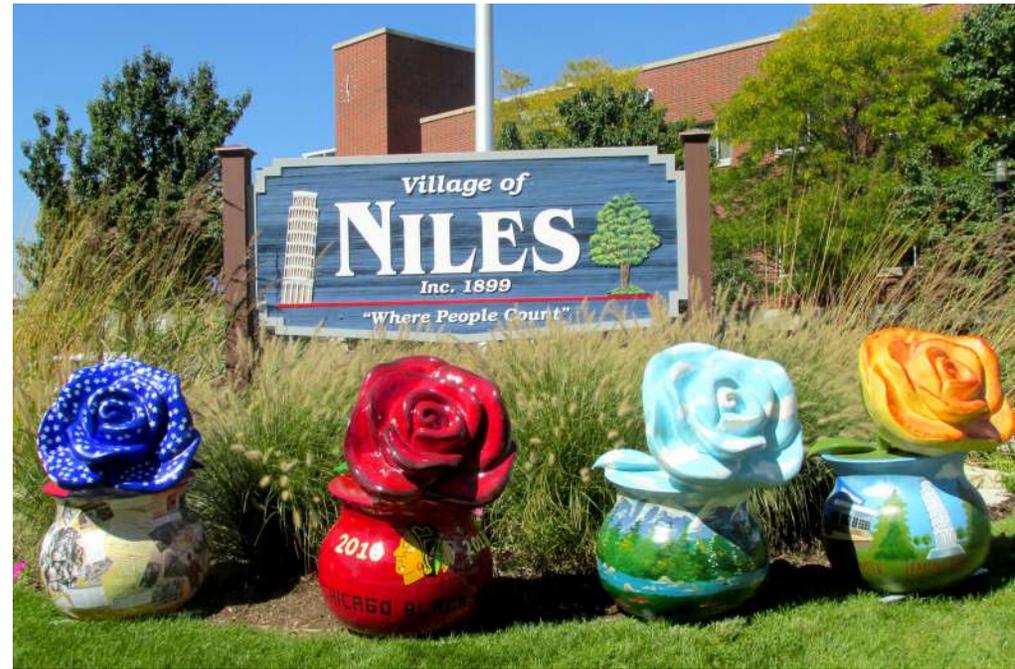
CHARACTER, DESIGN AND THE ARTS

CHARACTER, DESIGN AND THE ARTS OVERVIEW

A community's visual character and urban design encompasses its public realm — the roadways, sidewalks, and streetscape infrastructure — and the location of buildings along the streetscape environment, their exterior design and architecture, materials, and scale and massing. Beyond these key elements, gateways and public art, and parks and open space also contribute significantly to local sense of place, imageability and identity. High quality community design in both the public and private realms also enhances a community's economic competitiveness, increasing real estate values through new investments in business and residential development. Therefore, communities that build on and develop their unique urban design assets and qualities, especially within a large metropolitan region, are better able to distinguish themselves among others and become a prime destination for new jobs, residents, and wealth.

Along with public art and urban design enhancements, arts and culture activities, comprising the visual, performing, applied, literary and culinary arts, are vital and necessary means in which people can share experiences and common narratives, connect to past memories, support livelihoods and artistic ambitions, forge civic identity, and animate public spaces, neighborhoods and commercial districts. Furthermore, quality urban design and ample arts and culture opportunities support community authenticity, economic vitality, and cultural and social cohesion.

This section summarizes the key Village character, urban design and cultural arts assets within the Village.



Holly Jolly Market and Tree Lighting Festival



VILLAGE CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Although first settled in 1830s, the Village of Niles, like its neighboring communities of Park Ridge, Skokie, Des Plaines and Glenview, would not fully develop until after World War II when returning servicemen would spur the demand for new housing within proximity to Chicago and nearby employment centers.

However, Niles' urban form largely reflects the extension of existing street corridors emanating from Chicago and elsewhere — Milwaukee Avenue, Golf Road, Touhy Avenue, and Dempster, Oakton, and Howard Streets. These corridors set the stage for a diverse pattern of urban development, from a mix of urban traditional and strip commercial buildings along Milwaukee Avenue, to well-maintained neighborhoods of single-family Cape Cod and Ranch homes, to the larger regional shopping commercial strips and centers as exemplified by Golf Mill Shopping Center at Golf Road and Milwaukee Avenue, first constructed in 1960. Golf Mill's development personified Niles' arrival as a community complete with all the services and amenities one would expect to attract the growing number of people seeking the quintessential Post-Second World War suburban experience.

Given this varying development pattern, and as local stakeholders acknowledge, the extension of the Chicago-area roadway network into Niles led to the proliferation of commercial activities across the community and not in one defined downtown center, as found in neighboring suburbs for instance. This lack of a defined downtown district as the geographic, economic and social center of the community significantly diminishes Niles' imageability, legibility and cohesiveness.

This is further complicated by the location of Niles' main municipal services — its Village Hall, the Niles-Maine District Library, and the Niles Family Fitness Center and Senior Center — services typically

found in or near a traditional downtown business district, located near an auto-oriented retail center. As traditional downtowns often serve as a community's focal point for cultural and entertainment activities, the creation and adoption of the Touhy Triangle Master Plan in 2015 advances local community desires to host new entertainment facilities and supportive retail and arts-related businesses in a more centralized, purposeful location adjacent to the iconic Leaning Tower of Niles along Touhy Avenue. In addition to these corridors, other elements of Niles' urban design character include its residential neighborhoods, industrial districts, commercial zones, and parks and open space.

Neighborhoods

Although mainly a single-family residential community, Niles' residential design character and architecture reflects its time periods of development from the early 1900s to the present day. Niles residential dwelling types range from the distinctive Chicago Bungalow, mainly constructed in the 1920s and 30s and noted for its distinctive brown and yellow face brick with stone trim brick, low-pitched roof, and generous window openings, to the Cape Cods, Minimal Traditionals, Split Levels and Ranch homes of the 1950s, 60s and 70s — middle-class housing that characterizes most Niles single-family neighborhoods. The Ranch house is especially prevalent with varying floor configurations, Colonial Revival ornamentation and attached garages as its main architectural and stylistic features. Houses of the Post Second World War era lacked front porches for a new lifestyle preference of backyard patios. Tear-down activity is increasingly prevalent in many single-family neighborhoods. In addition to single family homes, three flats and multifamily apartment buildings constructed from the 1920s to the present are also representative of their respective time periods.

Village Neighborhoods

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Ballard Terrace | 13. Jonquil Terrace |
| 2. Bunker Hill | 14. Lawrencewood Gardens |
| 3. Bunker Hill Estates | 15. Oak Park |
| 4. Chesterfield Gardens | 16. Oakton Manor |
| 5. Concord Lake | 17. Oasis |
| 6. Courtland Park | 18. O'Shanter Estates |
| 7. Dutchmans Point | 19. Ransom Ridge |
| 8. Emerson Place | 20. Renaissance |
| 9. Evergreen Estates | 21. River Gardens |
| 10. Golden Acres | 22. Rivers Edge |
| 11. Grennan Heights | 23. The Terrace |
| 12. Highland Towers | 24. Washington Park |

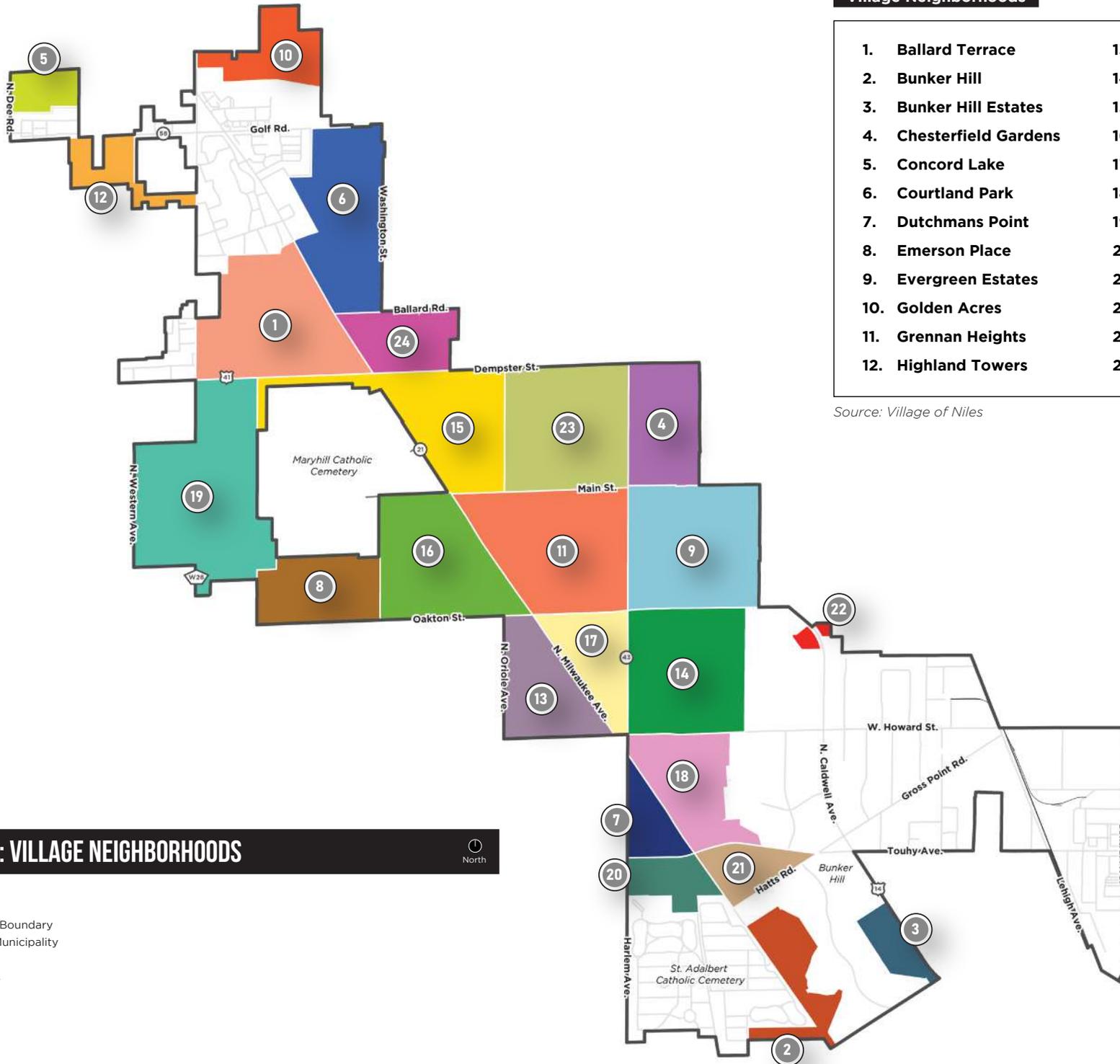
Source: Village of Niles

MAP 8.1: VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOODS



Legend

- Village Boundary
- Other Municipality
- Streets
- Railway



Shopping Districts

Niles' principal commercial areas and shopping districts include areas along Milwaukee and Touhy Avenues, Oakton Street and Harlem Avenue, and Golf Road and Milwaukee Avenue. Milwaukee Avenue, the principal commercial spine through Niles, consists mainly of one-story strip commercial centers noted for their front parking, varying street setbacks and building orientations — a development pattern that lacks a consistent visual unity and streetscape and pedestrian environment. Larger strip and shopping mall developments feature larger signage and more significant street setbacks and parking lot expanses, especially along segments of Touhy and Milwaukee Avenue, Oakton Street and Golf Road. These developments are typically one-story and of varying architecture and construction dates. Golf Mill Shopping Center is Niles' largest commercial development featuring a distinctive round office tower.

Industrial Districts

Niles' main industrial area, located between the North Branch of the Chicago River, Lehigh Avenue, Howard Street, and Touhy Avenue, consists mostly of one- to two-story utilitarian buildings of various sizes housing fabrication, office, and storage and warehousing functions with parking accommodated on-site. Loading docks and wide driveway aprons often front many industrial buildings. There are differing degrees of landscaping and buffering treatments depending on each building's setback from the street. Building signage is often minimal to non-existent in Niles' industrial areas, although monument signage typically identifies several of the more significant industrial building complexes.

Parks and Open Space

The Village of Niles contains a number of parks managed by the Niles Park District and open space recreational areas operated by the Forest Preserves of Cook County that serve Niles residents and those of neighboring communities. The Village's neighborhood parks are mostly within walking distance for local residents.

Historic Buildings

Niles' most significant historic building is the Cook County Sheriff's Station Building at 8970 Milwaukee Avenue, constructed in 1923 and designed in the Renaissance Revival style. The building now houses the Niles Historical and Cultural Center. The only structure within Niles currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the country's official and honorary list of buildings, sites, structures, and objects worthy of preservation, is the Leaning Tower. It was listed in April, 2019. The Village of Niles does not have an adopted historic preservation ordinance to landmark individual properties and districts, although any proposed Planned Unit Development project seeking an exception to underlying base zoning district requirements requires the preservation of existing "historic features" if present.

While most of Niles' building construction dates from the Post-World War II period, there is an increasing appreciation on part of residents on the design qualities of the Mid-Century housing stock, including Ranch homes, Cape Cods and Minimal Traditionals. Niles stakeholders desire increased investment and appropriate rehabilitation in the housing stock to maintain neighborhood appearances and to promote a diverse range of housing opportunities.



Niles Historical and Cultural Center at 8970 North Milwaukee Avenue

URBAN DESIGN INITIATIVES

The Village of Niles administers and directs several programs and initiatives designed to enhance both the public and private realms. These initiatives include:

Touhy Triangle Master Plan

Adopted in 2015, the Touhy Triangle Master Plan proposes the creation of a new mixed-use and arts and entertainment center in an area bounded by Touhy Avenue on the south, Gross Point Road on the north, and Lehigh Avenue on the east. A key aim of the Master Plan is to develop Touhy Triangle as Niles “true downtown area” that can provide opportunities for a variety of retail, employment, office, and arts and culture uses. A key element of the Master Plan is the design and development of a central green space that incorporates the existing Leaning Tower of Niles and surrounding plaza for use as a destination for festivals, concerts and community gatherings. In addition, the Master Plan also recommends a landscaped boulevard treatment for new interior roadways into the redeveloped Triangle area.

Milwaukee Avenue Streetscape Initiative

Spurred by recommendations made within the Milwaukee Avenue Corridor Plan, adopted by the Village Board in 2006, the Milwaukee Avenue streetscape initiative seeks to enhance Milwaukee Avenue’s streetscape and pedestrian environment and to promote a more cohesive visual appearance and built environment. The Village received Illinois Transportation Enhancement Program grant awards in 2006, 2009, 2010 and 2013 to complete the initiative in several phases. Streetscape improvements include new brick crosswalks and sidewalks, installation of brick pavers at various intersections, and new trees and various landscaping improvements. The initiative also includes streetlight modernization with LED installation to enhance pedestrian safety. Completion of the project remains ongoing.

Façade Improvement Grant Program

Administered through Village’s Economic Development/Community Development Department, the Façade Improvement Grant Program provides financial assistance to property and business owners seeking to enhance building facades, storefronts, signage, lighting, and other site and landscape improvements. The maximum grant award is \$5,000 offered on a matching basis. There is not a defined set of design criteria or design guidelines used for evaluating the appropriateness of façade enhancement projects.

Howard Street Improvement Project

The Village of Niles recently rehabilitated Howard Street from Oriole Avenue to Lehigh Avenue adjacent to the Touhy Triangle with new infrastructure, bicycle amenities, and pedestrian safety enhancements.

Sidewalk Enhancements

The Village of Niles maintains an ongoing program of sidewalk improvements and ADA accessibility enhancements mainly concentrated along roadways under state jurisdictions and funded through Illinois Department of Transportation grant programs.

Comprehensive Entrance/Roadway Signage Program

In 2016, the Village of Niles commissioned the design and development of a comprehensive signage program encompassing branded signage for streets, directional and wayfinding, and gateways. The Village anticipates a multi-year effort to fully implement the program.

ARTS AND CULTURE ASSETS

The Village of Niles has a number of arts and culture assets ranging from public cultural institutions, such as the Niles Historical and Cultural Center and the Niles - Maine District Public Library, as well as private cultural arts providers ranging from local dance companies, to live music venues and art galleries. Local elementary, high schools and colleges, including Oakton Community College in nearby Des Plaines, provide various performing arts and instructional facilities, and Niles' various religious institutions, along with the Village of Niles, are sponsors of many of the community's well-known festivals and special events. However, given that Niles does not have a stand-alone cultural and performing arts center, residents often visit and patronize nearby attractions, such as the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie, the Rosemont Theatre in Rosemont, Northwestern University's Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts in Evanston, and various arts and culture attractions in Chicago.

Key arts and culture assets in Niles include:

- **Niles Family Fitness-Senior Center.** The Village of Niles Family Fitness-Senior Center offers a variety of programs, services and events for Niles seniors, including classes in dance, painting, arts and crafts, and special musical performances.
- **Niles - Maine District Public Library.** Beyond serving its usual functions as a public library, the Niles-Maine District Library provides space for rotating art exhibitions, an auditorium for small performances and plays, and start-of-the-art facilities for video and sound recording.
- **Niles Historical and Cultural Center.** Located at 8790 North Milwaukee Avenue, the Historical and Cultural Center houses the archives and collections of the Niles Historical Society. The Center also hosts regular programs and tours.

Public Arts and Culture Advisory Council

In 2015, the Village Board of Trustees established a 13-member Arts and Culture Advisory Council to facilitate and pursue various arts and culture initiatives, including the installation of public art, the creation and coordination of special events and festivals, and the implementation of the Niles Arts and Culture Master Plan. The Council also administers a commercial building permit fee for express use in future arts and culture initiatives. Council membership includes the Niles Park District, the Niles-Maine District Library, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Niles Sister Cities Program, the Niles Historical Society, local schools, and various local artists and arts professionals.

Niles Arts and Culture Master Plan

Completed and adopted by the Village of Niles in 2017, the Niles Arts and Culture Master Plan outlines several planning priorities in advancing the cultural arts sector, including using the arts to enhance community identity, celebrating Niles' rich diversity of racial and ethnic groups, improving the conditions and settings for new arts activities to take place, and to forge new public-private partnerships in implementing new programs and initiatives that enhance local arts and culture opportunities. Several key planning initiatives include the creation of public art plan to guide public art installations throughout the Village, encouraging local resident participation in small-scale neighborhood art and placemaking projects, providing incentives in support of new arts-based business creation, and in optimizing the use of existing facilities in the production of arts programming. The Master Plan also recommends further study on the need and feasibility in developing a new performing arts and cultural center, perhaps located in the Touhy Triangle. Implementation of the plan is underway and ongoing.

