Vernon Hills’ new growth options are limited
By Mick Zawislak
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With the days of big growth done, the focus in Vernon Hills will shift to maintaining and improving what’s in place, according to an update of the village’s long-range plan.

That’s not to say there aren’t selected opportunities for bold statements in terms of development, such as the northeast corner of Milwaukee Avenue and Route 60.

And there also are a few firsts, including a section dealing with renewable energy and green building practices, as well as a suggestion the village pursue boundary agreements with Lincolnshire and Buffalo Grove.

But the first update of the comprehensive plan in nine years, which will be considered later this month by the village board, recognizes there is limited space for new projects.

“The underlying theme of this plan, in many respects, is that Vernon Hills is a maturing community now,” said John Kalmar, assistant village manager and director of community development. “There’s a lot less vacant property available now, which tends to limit your new development activities.”

That means an end to large-scale single-family residential development. And because there is less demand for larger homes, teardowns are not expected in older neighborhoods.

But the village should be mindful of the need for continued investment and revitalization in those areas, according to the plan.

It recommends using building codes, particularly in terms of maintenance and overcrowding, to ensure that happens.

There is potential for some multifamily projects, notably along Milwaukee Avenue on a portion of the Loyola University Cuneo Mansion and Gardens property, but any plan would need to be carefully reviewed.

“Due to the historical nature of the site and the continuing function of the remainder of the site, the village will need to take great care with the development of this overall property,” the plan reads.

Harmonious architecture and unique site design and character would need to be incorporated, the plan recommends.

For existing multifamily units, the village is urged to be proactive in enforcement of maintenance codes, with particular attention to overcrowding.
On the commercial side, the focal point for retail activity will remain in and around Route 60 and Milwaukee Avenue. The “crown jewel” in that area is at the northeast corner. The plan suggests a mixed use development to include a full-service hotel and life-style retail center with a mix of residential uses.

Other guidelines for the property, which borders the Des Plaines River on the east, should include day-and nighttime draws.

One alternative could include a plan with a central greenway and linear water feature to incorporate the natural features.

A new section of the plan lists 38 goals and objectives regarding so-called sustainability issues, such as solar and wind power.

Among them are increasing the number of clean-fuel vehicles used by the village, support for fueling and charging stations for alternative-fuel vehicles, and possible rebates or fee reductions for those who use energy-reducing or renewable practices.