



**VILLAGE OF OAK PARK**

**BRAND UPDATE : RESEARCH**

**JANUARY 25, 2024**

## Listening in.

When creating or updating a brand, you can't just jump in and start designing. You need to do your homework – find out what's wrong, what's right, and what's what from the people closest to it.

That's just what we did. Through surveys and interviews, we gleaned a wealth of information from those inside the Village of Oak Park, and the residents it serves. A lot of it was inspiring. Some of it was cynical. But all of it was eye-opening in that it helps us see just what we need to do.

**Branding a village is a  
very subjective process,  
so gathering input is crucial  
and also subjective.**

Know what we mean?

## OUR PROCESS

# 12 interviews

In-person and video conference interviews were completed. Each was between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviewees were suggested by VOP, and the final participants were determined by availability.

# 50 surveys

The survey was sent via email to 75 people in the Oak Park area, with 50 completed. The survey was made up of 11 questions, blending multiple-choice, ranking and open-ended text responses. The survey took an average of five minutes to complete.

## OUR PROCESS

### Areas Explored via Interviews

Through a series of 12 multi-part questions, we chatted very openly and candidly with participants. We captured answers in real time, allowing us to review responses. Each participant had a very close relationship with the Village Hall.

Current relationship to Oak Park

---

The heart and soul of Oak Park

---

What has drawn visitors, residents and businesses to Oak Park

---

Personal hope for Oak Park 10 years from now

---

Influence on / by Oak Park

---

The vibe, feel and atmosphere of Oak Park

---

The image portrayed by Oak Park

---

How Oak Park represents / is represented by residents

## OUR PROCESS

### Areas Explored via Surveys

The survey asked a lot of open-ended questions to allow participants the freedom to fully share their thinking. In questions that offered pre-filled answer options, we kept options evenly weighted for positive and negative responses.

Top three things residents mention about Oak Park

---

Top three things non-residents say about Oak Park

---

Adjectives that capture the personality of Oak Park  
Oak Park is \_\_\_\_\_.

---

Personal hope for Oak Park 5 years from now

---

What only Oak Parkers know about Oak Park

---

Describe the current Village logo

---

What are you most excited to share about Oak Park

---

Feelings associated with the Oak Park logo

---

What the Village could do more / less of

---

OVERARCHING THEMES WE HEARD

Diversity & Integration

Referenced extensively. This took on a sense of “treating people right”, relaying a sense of “feeling safe here” and also being attracted to children “growing up in this environment”.

Businesses = Shopping & Restaurants

In referencing “business” there was typically a connection to shopping or restaurants, not other types of industry/business types.

Progressive & Opinionated

"Progressive" came up often, as well as "opinionated" in both a positive (engaged, informed, active) and negative (inefficient, always objections) ways.

Beautiful & Architectural

The overall beauty of Oak Park was often cited as a reason for affection. Frank Lloyd Wright and the architectural uniqueness of Oak Park was often mentioned as well.

A “Test Lab” or potential “Model City”

Many saw OP as a test lab for larger/national problems to be solved. “We are building the model in real time.”

Location

Many moved here (if not born here) because of the location — proximity to the city, the public transportation and airports. Many love the short commute if working in the city and the "urban suburban" feel.

**Our Quick Take:** In many ways interview responses were in line with information contained in the brief. However, there were more personal stories, and personal perspectives on the benefits of Oak Park such as schools, proximity to Chicago, etc. Frank Lloyd Wright was nearly always mentioned, but in terms of drawing outsiders in.

## TOPLINE THEMES

# Common Oak Park Positives

Frank Lloyd Wright is considered an historic gift that carries tourism and national recognition. There is an overall beauty of OP which is boosted by its walkability. There is a renewed sense of optimism with new Village Manager and Board and the broad perception is that this is a very civically engaged community. People who come here, stay here because it fits them, and they fit in. There is an acceptance of all people to live here and be themselves. Another important positive residents called out was safety and quality of life. Oak Park is seen to be a safe place to live and raise children as well as having quality schools. And, almost so obvious it is missed, the convenience of the location and proximity to Chicago was cited frequently as a perceived value of Oak Park.

---

**Our Quick Take:** Residents find the positives as a point of pride and personal values. It's rare and inspiring to live in a town that exudes similar values as most residents and continues to push itself to do more and be better without changing too much of what makes it great.



## TOPLINE THEMES

# Common Oak Park Negatives

It was acknowledged that affordability was a looming concern. The perception of local wealth, and a gap in what are seen as "established families vs. newcomers/future newcomers" gives an indication of a struggle between old OP and new OP. While diversity was touted as a top characteristic of Oak Park, some felt it's not as broadly inclusive as it claims to be. There were mentions of Oak Park's history and that there could be a deeper focus on other aspects of Oak Park history beyond Frank Lloyd Wright. Engagement in "small politics" (intense opinions on singular/personal issue when it arises) drew many mentions. Also a frequent subject is that while Oak Park is family-friendly, it's is not the most lively place after 7:00pm, leaving people to travel nearby for more established entertainment and dining options.

---

**Our Quick Take:** While much of this can't be addressed or solved via a new brand identity, this information is helpful to see both sides of the coin. It's not much for inspiration from a design and messaging perspective, but it can inform us when we are making foundational branding approaches.

## TOPLINE THEMES

# Common Perceptions of Village Hall

Some respondents suggested that the Village was, “not supportive internally,” “outdated,” and “hard to open businesses.” There is a high-opinion of the new Village Manager, and a new sense of leadership pushing for a standard of civility and the personal power games receding to allow for the “people’s work” to be the focus. There is more of a servant leader mindset, as evidenced by a wide concern for representing and reflecting the people who voted the new board in. The physical building of Village Hall came up a few times, in regard to it creating a frustrating visitor experience, and the overall tone it sets. Often mentioned was the difficulty in acquiring permitting for construction, though there was mention of this being alleviated.

---

**Our Quick Take:** The community's enthusiasm for the Village is there — however, the experience versus perception hasn't quite aligned yet. The website is also a sore spot with misalignment, not feeling easy to navigate, simple and aligned with the forward-thinking energy of the village.

## Informative Comments on Government

**"...the Village really wants to help the people."**

"Sometimes I have to sit back and just reflect on how progressive our government is, like our village government. I mean, we're doing amazing climate change stuff. We're having a racial equity. We've got an inclusive statement of values. We are housing migrants.

When all these other villages are passing these ordinances, no buses stop here. We've now got low income parking rates. Those are just examples of things that the Village does that really represent."

**"And so, yeah, in terms of Village Hall specifically, I think sometimes the vibe you get going in there maybe kind of touches on the same thing related to the architecture that is there. It still feels very 1970s over there."**

**"This group of people is amazing...there's so much expertise in Oak park."**

---

**Our Quick Take:** Lots of pride in the amount of progress the VOP has been able to make on initiatives really important to residents. Awareness that the Village cares about the community as well as the unique group that makes up the town and the local government. Extremely people-focused.

## Informative Comments on Vibe

"Not as universally progressive as people think – change is still hard for people even in the name of progress. Lots of traditions that DOOPers want maintained."

**"Block parties are a big deal."**

"I'd say the heart and soul of Oak Park is our history. Be it architectural, be it our diversity, be it our parks and recreation. We have a really strong history as a community and as a village and that will be, you know, we stay grounded in that then looking forward will be.... historical fabric"

**"Where you are in the community, like geographically, can really change how you feel."**

"I think [Oak Park] influences me to be more authentic and true to myself because I don't fear I have to fit into any box. So to me it encourages that individualism that other communities don't because I grew up in a community that didn't."

---

**Our Quick Take:** Lots of pride in the foundation and the people. Awareness and appreciation of the "pockets" that exist around town. Overall, there is a love for the locale and all that it means to each individual.

## Inspiring Comments Overall

"I think the community is making really good strides in moving towards [its] ideals... it kind of tries to present itself that it's already kind of done all these things rather than they continue to be works in progress."

"What you put out is what you bring in, and like how the Village kind of continues to do that."

"I'd say the heart and soul of Oak Park is the intentional realization of its values"

"We're an extremely resourceful community, be it our local government, be it our nonprofit agencies, our people."

"...diversity, equity, inclusion, innovation, sustainability, just a model city and community and in so a destination in that regard, an example for America. Yeah. But we can't do everything that a lot of larger cities can do, but we can definitely believe in all those areas..."

"The community really likes to come out and get together and do events together. That's pretty cool."

---

**Our Quick Take:** There's an overall sense of community pride in Oak Park. The constant focus on striving to do better – and be a better example – often comes back to the community and Village Hall working on these issues as a whole.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE LOGO / A REBRAND

Excitement

Burn the whole thing down!

Time for an update! But everyone will complain!

Nostalgia

Familiar/comforting that it hasn't changed in a while

It's an Oak Tree, it's outdated but has a special place in my heart

Time for a Change

Behind the times / outdated

Stuck in the 70s

1960s/70s vintage. the graphic is fine...that font is yucky

Indifference

Boring

Meh

Who cares

Confusion

It's got kind of a weird circuit board/tech vibe

Need to look close to get it, looks like electrical currents

Like it means something but I don't know what the something is

Resistance

It feels familiar and should not be changed again

Nothing wrong with it!

Yes...it is 100% fine

**Our Quick Take:** The logo can't do all the explaining (and frankly shouldn't) but it does set a tone. How it's received is always subjective, but all this feedback is informative. Our next step is to determine how much change is necessary (if any) to support a new Village positioning.

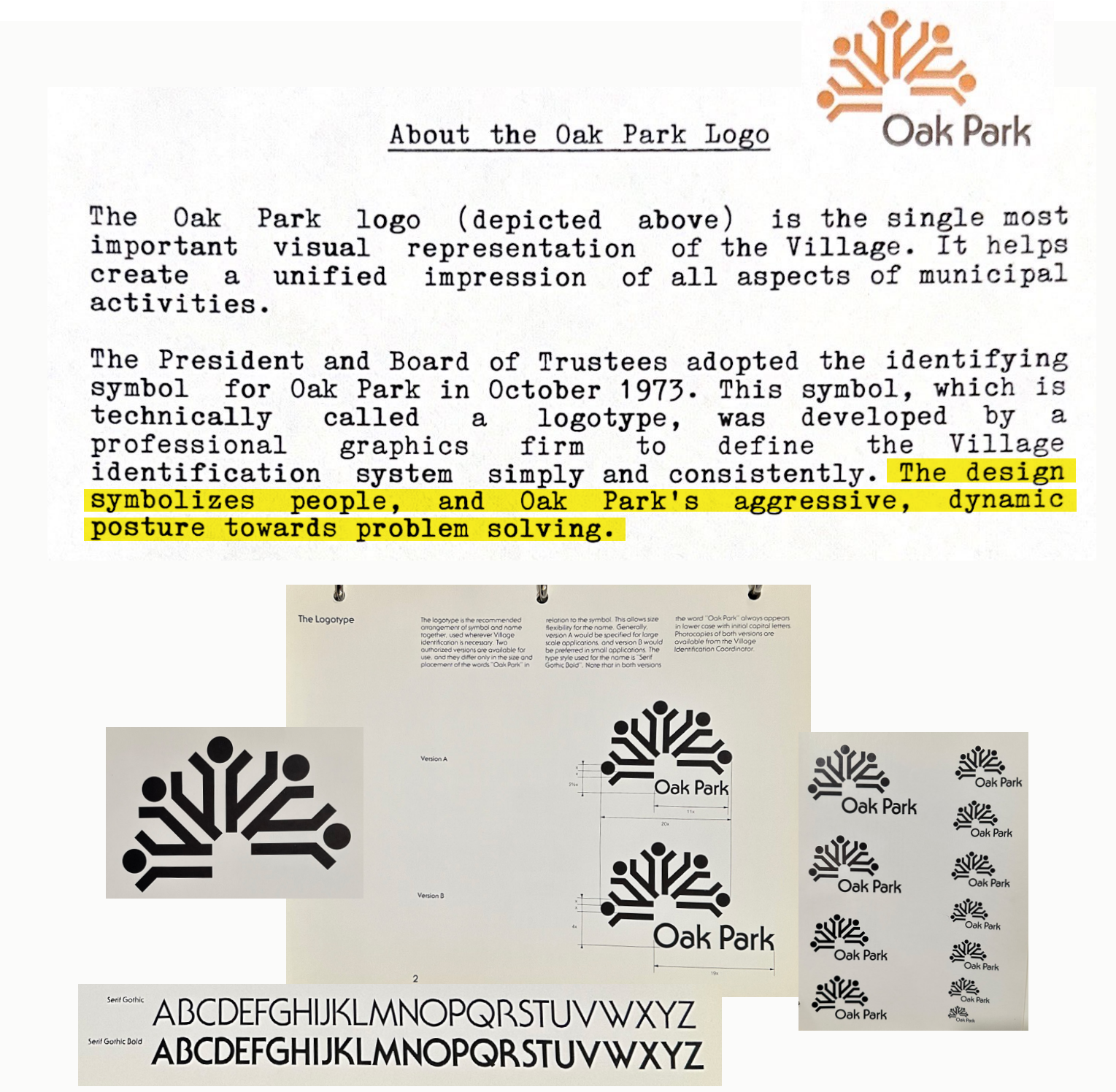
[View Full Survey Results](#)



# Looking back to 1973

We pulled some interesting elements out of the 1973 brand standards for the original VOP logo. Most interestingly, it seems not much has changed in the core of who Oak Park is and what the symbol represents still stands...

Look at that! A lot of people we talked to wanted to make sure Oak Park "maintains" being Oak Park – maintains a desire for change, for continuing progress, for betterment, forever. The original logo represented a shared purpose around these ideals, and still does.



# Now what?

Based on the background, intake, research and results, we feel it's time to review what is missing from VOP's existing brand and where moments of opportunity to build out the brand fully could arrive.

From what we've gathered, most of these items are missing or in need of refinement / development for wider use.

## A Typical Brand Includes:

- Brand Idea / Position & Character
- Brand Mission / Motto, Vision & Values
- Tag Line / Descriptor Line
- Voice Overview / Key Messaging
- Logo System
- Typography Set
- Color Palette
- Visual Assets (Illustration, photography, icons...)
- Brand Guide



OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROACH TO BRAND

Approach 1

Preserve and Build

Existing logo remains

Fill in missing parts of brand

Lean into logo’s 50th anniversary as a reason to preserve the VOP's heritage and reinvest in where it’s headed

Pro: Don't need to change logo placement anywhere.

Con: Missing out on an opportunity to update with a fresh, visual look for residents to rally around.

Approach 2

Modernize and Expand

Existing logo is updated, exploring new use cases and arrangements

Explore / modify typeface for logo

Expanded brand package

Pro: Preserving some of existing logo to honor the past while updating to represent current state.

Con: New look will need to be applied to all materials, but slowly will work as look will be similar.

Approach 3

Fresh New Start

Completely new logo icon & type

New brand materials

Pro: Fully represents new attitude of village hall — new board, progress, forward-thinking, modern approach.

Con: Loss of nostalgia and continuity with the community. New logo mark will need to be updated and applied to all existing instances in a timely manner for roll out.

**Our Quick Take:** The full brand needs to be expanded and built upon. We have a lot that needs to be discussed and addressed. But, we felt the overall options for approaches fell into these three categories. We would like to talk with your team more about the effort and outcome each of these approaches represent.