



MEMORANDUM

Date: August 29, 2018

SENT VIA EMAIL

To: John Strerret, Planner
Village of Glen Ellyn

From: Michio Murakishi, Senior Associate

Re: Stakeholder Meetings Summary

On August 21, 2018, Houseal Lavigne Associates conducted three focus groups with prominent community stakeholders (the “stakeholder meetings”) at the Village of Glen Ellyn Civic Center. These groups included (1) the Business Community, (2) Local Service Providers, and (3) Village Commission Chairs, with a total of 25 participants across all three meetings. Each participant was asked to share their thoughts on issues facing the Village, as well as its greatest strengths. There was evident overlap between ideas, though the top issue between groups differed. Below, we summarize the feedback received, organized by focus group. The information shared will be highly useful in gaining insight from a local perspective and will be valuable as we work towards updating the Comprehensive Plan.

Group 1: Business Community

Representatives from the following business agencies and organizations were in attendance: Alliance of Downtown Glen Ellyn, Chamber of Commerce, Glen Ellyn Historical Society, Metra, and Union Pacific Railroad.

Issues and concerns

Group 1 prioritized the lack of Downtown parking for commuters, retailers, and businesses as the most pressing issue. Within Downtown, participants also called to attention the need to enhance amenities, expand and draw foot traffic both eastward and westward, construct a new grocery store, and increase business retention and attract additional shoppers. The lack of grade-separated crossings to allow pedestrian access to commuter trains, station improvements, declining Metra ridership, traffic issues caused by freight and commuter train delays, and traffic congestion due to train crossings were other issues shared.

Participants also voiced their concern about the lack of parking communication and signage, inadequate parking at Forest Glen Elementary School affecting businesses at Stacy’s Corners, high property taxes, the inability to retain downsizing residents, and the lack of personality along Roosevelt Road. The effectiveness of current historic preservation efforts was discussed as participants expressed caution about the protecting against the potential loss of valuable historic structures and its impact on the Village’s existing character with new development. It was also mentioned that a more extensive Wi-Fi infrastructure is needed to allow for easy and accessible communication within the community and a brief discussion related to noise issues caused by plane traffic over residential areas of the Village. It was also noted that the Village should make sure community events are staying current, work harder to attract millennials, and ensure that diverse populations are properly served. Additionally, participants advocated for an increase in community engagement and improvement in the relationship between residents and the Village through enhanced and wider-reaching communication efforts to promote community consensus.

Community strengths

Regarding the strengths of Glen Ellyn, the first group listed resident engagement and passion, volunteer involvement and opportunities, entrepreneurial drive, acceptance of diversity, and an abundance of community events as strong points. One participant shared that the Village’s government group supports its citizens and is persistent in ensuring positive change in a constructive way, particularly for urban planning or when working with Metra. In addition, Glen Ellyn’s history, vibrant downtown, small businesses, excellent schools, downtown charm, and library were identified as other strengths. Some noted that the Village also has a high drop-off mode of access to the Metra station, which decreases the need for Downtown space required for commuter parking. Furthermore, there is a prevalence of walking and biking to the train station and a reverse commute market due to the presence of the College of DuPage. Lastly, one individual mentioned the strong newcomers club for the residential community.

Group 2: Local Service Providers

Representatives from the following local service provider groups were in attendance: DuPage County Department of Transportation, Glen Ellyn Public Library, Glen Ellyn Park District, Glen Ellyn Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, Glen Ellyn Volunteer Fire Department Company, Glen Ellyn School District 41, and Glenbard School District 87.

Issues and concerns

Group 2 voiced the inability to identify and execute ambitious Downtown plans as the top issue. For example, with the growing population, there is an increasing demand for multi-unit housing developments in the Downtown. However, historic preservation requirements, building height constraints, and residents' resistance to change have inhibited previous Downtown plans. It is important to know how to get past such hurdles while keeping the Village image in mind. Downtown preservation, as well as renovation for economic growth, were goals mentioned, attainable by developing an appropriate mix of retail, residential, and office uses. The lack of Downtown parking and affordable housing for all were other issues stated.

The wish to connect Glen Ellyn as one community—as opposed to one divided north and south of Roosevelt Road—was shared. The need for pedestrian and bus accommodations on Roosevelt Road was also mentioned. Participants suggested better incorporation of incentives and utilization of available resources to promote development within the Village. One individual indicated that there is a perception that the Village could be more cooperative with other jurisdictions. Other concerns mentioned were high property taxes, a deficient supply of affordable housing for downsizers, congestion on Roosevelt Road, regional trail access and connectivity (particularly the completion of the East Branch DuPage River Trail), a declining retail base, the lack of a grocery store, and the need to provide more aid to the homeless population. The demand for commercial development at the south side of Glen Ellyn and the unwillingness to include unincorporated areas into the Village's emergency response zone were also expressed as issues.

Community strengths

Group 2 agreed on Glen Ellyn's schools as its best asset, including the College of DuPage. Other strengths listed were the Glen Ellyn Public Library, the Police and Fire departments, local volunteerism, community tradition; the multi-generational population, walkability (particularly to the train station), and the contained Downtown area with residential neighborhoods nearby. Train access to Chicago and proximity to the Interstate were other strengths mentioned. The Village's natural areas were highly praised, including the Park District, Forest Preserve, Lake Ellyn, Willowbrook Wildlife Center, and Churchill Woods. A point was made that such environments need continued enhancement and preservation. The Environmental Commission was commended for its passionate efforts.

Group 3: Commissioners and Board Members

Representatives from the following Village Commission Chairs were in attendance: Plan Commission, Historic Preservation, Zoning Board of Appeals, Fire and Police Commission, Environmental Commission, Recreation Commission, Building Board of Appeals, and Capital Improvements.

Issues and concerns

Maintaining the quality of infrastructure (e.g., roads and sewage lines) was voted the most important issue by Group 3. Like the two previous groups, they voiced a concern that there is a high residential tax burden. Participants shared that the tax base needs to be diversified, revenue needs to be properly allocated, and residents should be better informed about the value of taxes for the community. The development of the Downtown area was another popular issue, which tied strongly with the existing perception of lack of parking and need to design new developments with consideration given to the Village's existing character. The need for historic preservation, an automobile bridge or tunnel at the railroad tracks to aid traffic flow, and proper tree canopy maintenance, preservation, and diversification were other concerns stated. Participants also noted that projects need to be better prioritized, a recycling program should be created for businesses, and long-term residents should be able to age in place by ensuring a variety of housing options. Lastly, participants stated that attention needs to be called to how ComEd is managing their power lines, and that it would be best to place the lines underground, when practical.

Community strengths

The strengths of Glen Ellyn shared by Group 3 included the prevalence of residents who care about their community (e.g., high levels of volunteerism and donating), the existing volunteer, non-partisan government, as well as the school system, library, quality restaurants, lack of vertical development, and diversity of architecture. Recreation was another strength mentioned, including Lake Ellyn, golf courses, and baseball diamonds. Participants also mentioned the Village's location as an asset, as it is situated along a Metra line, is close enough to major roadways without being disrupted, and one can easily travel in all directions via the roadway network.

Next Steps

The input received in the three Stakeholder Meetings, along with the Kick-Off Meeting input, will serve as a foundational element of the issues and opportunities memorandum. As preliminary planning recommendations are developed, the feedback received will help formulate priority goals and issues that need to be addressed within the Plan. As Glen Ellyn moves forward in assessing the issues and opportunities of the community, the noted concerns and strengths will call to attention specific Village concerns that will require careful consideration.