

# 2 Community Context

## Definition

"Community Context" is the identification of the physical, demographic, and economic features of the Village as it relates to the Downtown, the Village as a whole, neighboring communities, and the region.

## Overview

The Village of Glen Ellyn is a suburb approximately 20 miles west of Downtown Chicago. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the total population is approximately 27,000 people, with a median age of 37 years. Forty-eight (48.8%) of the population is male, and 51.2% is female. The ethnic make-up of the Village includes 89.5% white, 4.7% Asian, and 2.1% black. The median household income is \$74,800, and the median value of a single family home is \$274,800. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the working population drives alone to work, while 12% takes public transportation. Fifty percent (50%) of the households have two vehicles, 33% have one vehicle, 13% have three or more vehicles, and 5% have no vehicle. The largest proportion of the Village's housing stock was built between 1940 and 1959 (22%). There are 6,742 single family owner-occupied homes Village-wide.

Although the Glen Ellyn area was first settled in 1833, the Downtown area didn't become the center of the community until the Danby Train Station was constructed in 1852 after the railroad was constructed in 1848. Historically, the Downtown has been an anchor for shopping, and over time it became surrounded by single family residential neighborhoods. In general, the Downtown has evolved from stores that met the daily needs of the community (department- and "five and dime"-types of retail) to services and specialty stores (restaurants, boutiques, etc.) The Downtown is supported by a passionate citizenry and has a loyal group of shoppers. In addition, the Downtown is impacted by newer regional shopping centers such as Danada Square East Shopping Center in Wheaton, Yorktown Mall in Lombard, local shopping corridors such as Roosevelt Road, and older community-based centers such as Downtown Wheaton. Currently, the Downtown is in another transition due to surrounding competition, efficient regional retail shopping centers, a recent nationwide economic downturn, and a lack of a cohesive economic strategy.

Downtown Glen Ellyn is traversed by a rail corridor. The Union Pacific Railway (UPRR) owns the rail right-of-way, where the rail infrastructure is both a divider and a connector for the community. It is a divider because approximately 180 freight and passenger rail trains pass through the Downtown on a typical day, resulting in the disruption of the flow of pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile traffic, and dividing the Downtown into north and south halves. It is a connector because the Glen Ellyn train station is a stop on the Metra/UP-West Line, connecting the community to Elburn to the west and Downtown Chicago to the east.

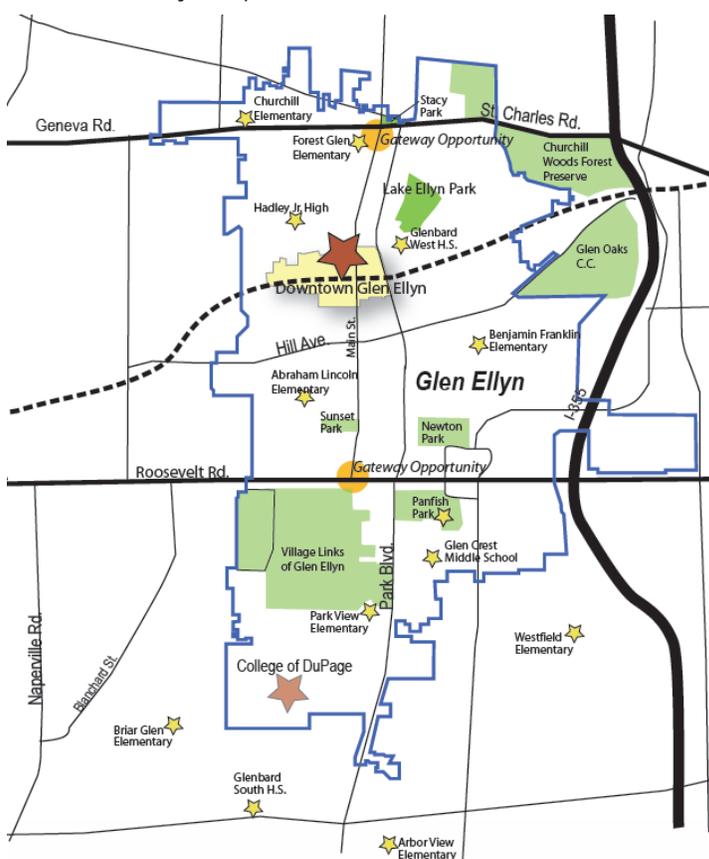
Roosevelt Road is also a divider and a connector for the greater Glen Ellyn area. It is a divider with an average annual daily traffic volume of 43,700 vehicles, resulting in a pedestrian-, bicycle-, and automobile-unfriendly corridor, where someone – if given the option – may choose not to cross if it wasn't necessary. Also, there is a higher social status associated with the homes and neighborhoods north of Roosevelt Road compared to the homes and neighborhoods to the south of Roosevelt Road. Roosevelt Road connects the Village to other local communities, and regionally through a connection with the interstate system.

Community-based organizations in the Village include the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Corporation, and Go Downtown!, to name a few. In addition, the College of DuPage is willing to partner with the Village of Glen Ellyn on Downtown projects and initiatives for the mutual benefit of both parties.

## Neighboring Communities

Glen Ellyn's immediate neighbors along the Metra/Union Pacific Line are Wheaton to the west, and Lombard to the east. Other neighboring communities include Carol Stream and Glendale Heights to the north, and Lisle and Downers Grove to the south.

Greater Glen Ellyn Map



Wheaton and Downers Grove are experiencing active downtown reinvestment levels. Wheaton's downtown is the future home of First Trust Portfolio's headquarters, and Downers Grove's downtown is home to many mixed-use and multiple family developments. Both have newer parking structures in their Downtowns as well.

In Wheaton, the central business district is a focus of the community representatives. The Courthouse Square development – which honors the history of Wheaton – will provide more than 200 dwelling units in the downtown when all phases are completed. The Wheaton Property Partners' retail, commercial, and parking garage development will be home to First Trust Portfolio, and provide approximately 20,000 square feet of retail space and 400 parking spaces in the downtown, resulting in more foot traffic for local merchants.

In addition, the City of Wheaton hired a retail consultant to work with City staff and Wheaton business groups to recruit and retain businesses in the downtown.

Other priorities for the City of Wheaton include a pedestrian underpass in the Central Business District, affordable housing, (for senior, young family, and other households), green initiatives, and revenue-enhancement alternatives.

Former Downers Grove Mayor Krajewski was very instrumental in bringing reinvestment into his downtown, had a developer-friendly attitude, encouraged the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds for redevelopment, and recently spoke at a Go Downtown! membership meeting. The TIF funds have primarily been used for subsidizing infrastructure improvements.

The Village of Downers Grove established an Economic Development Corporation in 2006; however, the focus of this group is on the community outside of the downtown area. The Downers Grove Downtown Management Corporation focuses on downtown issues and is funded by the Village.

Downers Grove recently completed a development “pattern book” (an existing conditions book of the downtown buildings), which will serve as a guide to the creation of Design Guidelines (expected to be adopted in January 2009).

There has been a lot of interest in housing in Downers Grove downtown area, including buildings with a potential building height of six to seven stories, townhouses (with an estimated value of \$400,000-700,000), and senior housing. A parking deck was recently constructed behind some downtown buildings (it is approximately 2.5 years old) and has helped with some of the downtown parking issues. Currently, the Village is focusing on public plazas and greenspaces in the downtown area.

Both of these nearby communities – and other communities such as Lisle – can serve as resources and inspiration for the Village of Glen Ellyn as it pursues future reinvestment in the Downtown.

## Community History

From Babcock’s Grove in 1833, to DuPage Center in 1834, to Stacy’s Corners in 1835, to Newton’s Station in 1849, to Danby in 1851, to Prospect Park in 1874, and Glen Ellyn in 1891, the community has changed with its names and the times. The original settlement location for the Glen Ellyn area was at Stacy’s Corners. The center of the Village relocated when the railway was constructed and Danby Station was constructed. In 1891, Glen Ellyn was advertised as Chicago’s newest suburb and health resort. In the 1920s, the Village’s Plan Commission influenced architectural standards with Old-English Tudor and Half-Timber as the preferred architectural styles. The Downtown has transitioned over the years from a rail-oriented trading post to a full-service Downtown with retail anchors such as Sears to a struggling community shopping center that competes with auto-oriented shopping centers such as Danada Square East Shopping Center at Butterfield Road and Naperville Road in Wheaton.

## Current Community

The Village of Glen Ellyn is a desirable community in which to live. The high-quality housing stock and school districts, with convenient access to neighboring communities and the region, are key features that families look for. In addition, the Downtown is a major selling-point for those who choose to buy a home nearby.

Most customers of Downtown retailers and restaurants originate from within Glen Ellyn, Wheaton, or other nearby communities. As described in the main report, more than 80% of those responding to the Downtown Glen Ellyn merchant survey indicated that they traveled fewer than ten minutes to reach their destinations in the Downtown. More than 70% of respondents reside within the Glen Ellyn zip-code (60137). The primary market area for Downtown retail uses is estimated to extend two to three miles from the Downtown, generally bounded by North Avenue and Butterfield Road to the north and south and I-355 and Naperville Road/Main Street – Wheaton to the east and west.

The perception of a parking shortage – and the reality of a less-than-ideal public parking arrangement – affects the Downtown. It keeps potential customers from considering the Downtown as a potential shopping destination, or – for those who do visit the Downtown – they may choose to shop elsewhere because there is no available parking space

within a preferred distance from their desired destination(s), they are unaware of all the off-street parking lot locations available to them, or they are unaware that they are able to park in some lots after 11:00 a.m.

The Downtown has serviced the community for over 100 years; therefore, interior and exterior maintenance of – and upgrades to – the older buildings are necessary to service the community now and for future generations. The streetscape has many positive qualities – street trees in the core area, continuous sidewalks, on-street parking, and street furnishings, to name a few items; however, it also needs to be maintained and enhanced through additional street trees outside of the core area, regular pavement safety checks, a coordinated snow removal and ice prevention system, and more frequent trash and recycling collections.

The existing vision for the Downtown in the 2001 Comprehensive Plan includes an “active, pedestrian-oriented area containing an exciting mix of shopping, entertainment, public, and residential uses”. In addition, a new commuter rail station, protection from through traffic, and safety and convenience for pedestrians and bicyclists are envisioned. A full-time “champion” of the Downtown is needed in order to infuse this vision into the Downtown.

Youths and stay-at-home-moms are primary consumers in the Downtown. Requests made during the Main Street Design Studio and Charette event included shops with basic necessities at affordable prices (including children’s clothing), men’s stores, and after school activities and events for children (especially when they have half-days off).

Downtown’s commercial competition within the community is located along Roosevelt Road and Stacy’s Corners.

Roosevelt Road is the primary commercial corridor in Glen Ellyn. It has approximately 720,000 square feet of retail, with an Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) for the Roosevelt Road corridor of 43,700 vehicles.

Stacy’s Corners is the first commercial center in Glen Ellyn. It has approximately 28,000 square feet of retail, with an Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) for the St. Charles/Geneva Road corridor of 18,500-19,200 vehicles.

Downtown is the heart of the community of Glen Ellyn. It has approximately 255,000 square feet of retail, with an Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) for the Main Street corridor of 9,500 vehicles.

The Downtown has many advantages, which include:

- A central location and preferred destination for the affluent and loyal residents of Glen Ellyn.
- Proximity to I-355 and its associated transportation linkages.
- A Metra station, which enhances accessibility and stimulates some demand for retail goods and services from commuters.
- The Illinois Prairie Path, connecting the Downtown to other communities with other modes of transportation.
- Glenbard West High School located just outside the Downtown area.
- Historic architecture.
- A growing number of eating and drinking establishments, a grocery store that attracts frequent visitation of local households, and a variety of unique, specialty merchants and service providers with loyal followings.

While the Downtown has many advantages, there are several trends that indicate a downturn. Recently, Downtown Glen Ellyn has experienced increasing store turnover and increased vacancy rates. Over 40% of the vacant retail space in Glen Ellyn is located Downtown. Downtown’s share of Village-wide sales decreased to 19% in 2005 from 20% in 2000 and a high of 21% in 2004. A shift in the Downtown commercial establishments – in which retail stores and associated employment opportunities are being replaced with service businesses and associated employment opportunities – is consistent with regional and national trends.

## Community Organizations

The Village has many community organizations that are passionate about the success of Glen Ellyn, and for some, the health and vitality of the Downtown is its primary focus. Those organizations and other entities are willing to help the Village implement its Downtown Strategic Plan once it's adopted.

### Chamber of Commerce

"The purpose of the Glen Ellyn Chamber of Commerce is to foster and promote the business and professional interests of Glen Ellyn and adjoining areas, and to promote the welfare of the Glen Ellyn Community." (Source: [www.glenellynchamber.com](http://www.glenellynchamber.com))

### Downtown Glen Ellyn Alliance

"Glen Ellyn's downtown business district, with its independent retailer base, faces enormous competition from surrounding options for shopping in metro Chicago. To help offset this competition, the Village of Glen Ellyn, the Glen Ellyn Economic Development Corporation, the Village of Glen Ellyn Central Business District Retail Merchants and the Glen Ellyn Chamber of Commerce came together in 2006 to create a central business district retail partnership, also known as the Downtown Glen Ellyn Alliance. The Downtown Glen Ellyn Alliance is a separate entity from the Village of Glen Ellyn whose goal is to increase foot traffic and sales in the central business district by planning events and heightening awareness and visibility of downtown Glen Ellyn as a destination for shoppers and diners. To reach this goal the Downtown Glen Ellyn Alliance is working with the entire central business district community to (plan events that) market and promote (Downtown) Glen Ellyn. The Downtown Alliance is also in the process of creating additional downtown events to attract additional customers in the downtown." (Source: Downtown Glen Ellyn Alliance.) A commitment to fund the Downtown Glen Ellyn Alliance was made for a temporary period of 2006 through 2009, with an option to extend its funding and responsibilities thereafter.

### Economic Development Corporation

"The mission of the Glen Ellyn Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is to provide an environment that is conducive for attracting and keeping business in Glen Ellyn." (Source: [www.glen-ellyn.com/edc](http://www.glen-ellyn.com/edc))

### Go Downtown!

"A resident-based organization dedicated to celebrating and supporting Glen Ellyn's historic downtown commercial district." (Source: [www.downtownglenellyn.com](http://www.downtownglenellyn.com))

### Historical Society

"The purpose of the Society is to investigate and study the history of Glen Ellyn and vicinity." (Source: [www.glen-ellyn.com/historical](http://www.glen-ellyn.com/historical))

### Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation

The mission statement for the Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation is:

"We are a group of citizens who want to safeguard the distinctive character, history and architectural integrity of the Glen Ellyn community through historic preservation, planning and sensible growth.

"The members of *Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation* came together because of their concern about the number of teardowns in the Village of Glen Ellyn, the types of buildings targeted for teardowns and the size of the structures replacing those buildings.

"We believe that Glen Ellyn can preserve its cultural history and built-environment just as other cities, towns and villages are doing throughout Illinois and the country. Our goal is not to stop teardowns altogether, but encourage the Village government to reduce the rate of teardowns of homes and buildings that are historically and architecturally significant.

"We believe that citizens joining together can make a difference and that we can bring another point of view to the Village government." (Source: [glenellynpreservation.org/site/about.html](http://glenellynpreservation.org/site/about.html))

It is recommended that these organizations be assessed and reorganized to improve their effectiveness to champion Downtown issues. These organizations can affect the business climate, create a customer-friendly place to do business, facilitate Downtown reinvestment, and organize promotions and marketing. In addition, all efforts need to be coordinated with the Village of Glen Ellyn.

## **Public Resources**

In addition to the community organizations, other public resources protect the community, educate the students, and provide recreational opportunities for all members of the Village of Glen Ellyn.

### Department of Planning and Development

"The Department of Planning and Development administers codes associated with development and building safety. The Department is responsible for coordinating, reviewing and monitoring private and public developments, primarily through the interpretation and administration of the Zoning Code, Building Code, Electric Code, Plumbing Code, Subdivision Regulations, Grading and Stormwater regulations, Appearance Review Guidelines, and Sign Code." (Source: [www.glenellyn.org/plandev/plan.htm](http://www.glenellyn.org/plandev/plan.htm))

### Glen Ellyn Police Department

The Glen Ellyn Police Department is "committed to providing a high level of law enforcement services to our residents, businesses and visitors." (Source: [www.glenellyn.org/police/police.htm](http://www.glenellyn.org/police/police.htm))

### Glen Ellyn Volunteer Fire Company

"The mission of the Glen Ellyn Volunteer Fire Company is to provide timely, professional, and safe emergency service for the preservation of life and property. Minimizing fire loss and the patient's best interest are always first priority with the Glen Ellyn Volunteer Fire Company."

"We are committed to continuous improvement in providing 'state-of-the-art' fire suppression/prevention and patient care for all we serve. To that same end, we are committed to the advancement of our members while continuing our history of quality service to the community." (Source: [glenellynfire.com/index.shtml](http://glenellynfire.com/index.shtml))

### Glen Ellyn Library

"The mission of the Glen Ellyn Public Library is to provide information, an extensive collection of materials, and programs which enrich and enhance the quality of life in the community. The Library endeavors to furnish open access to both print and electronic sources to foster life long learning and the cultural life of patrons." (Source: [www.gepl.org/library/atl\\_m.html](http://www.gepl.org/library/atl_m.html))

### Glen Ellyn Park District

"The Park District's mission is driven to foster diverse, community based leisure opportunities, through a harmonious blend of quality recreation programs, facilities and open space which will enhance the quality of life into the future. The Park District is celebrating 85 years of meeting that mission and will continue to provide excellence in our programs and our parks for future generations." (Source: [www.gepark.org/boa\\_board.htm](http://www.gepark.org/boa_board.htm))

### Milton Township

"The mission of the Assessor's Office is to assess all properties in a manner that is fair, accurate, and equitable to all." (Source: [www.miltontownshipassessor.com/](http://www.miltontownshipassessor.com/))

## Schools

Glen Ellyn is served by three public school districts and the College of DuPage.

### *Glen Ellyn School District 41*

"It is the mission of District 41 to advocate for students enabling each one to optimize his/her potential within a culture of continuous improvement." **Vision:** Exceptional Learning in a Respectful and Supportive Environment. (Source: [www.d41.dupage.k12.il.us](http://www.d41.dupage.k12.il.us))

### *Glenbard High School District 87*

"Glenbard District 87 is a school community where all students are empowered to become self-directed learners who contribute to our world and are inspired to pursue their dreams." **Motto:** Inspire...Empower... Succeed. (Source: [www.glenbard87.org](http://www.glenbard87.org))

### *Community Consolidated School District 89*

"The mission of Community Consolidated School District 89 is to prepare our students for a successful future through continuous improvement of learning, satisfaction, and resource utilization." **Motto:** Learning for Life. (Source: [www.ccsd89.org](http://www.ccsd89.org))

### *College of DuPage*

"The mission of College of DuPage is to be at the forefront of higher education, serving the needs of the community. The college will be the first place residents turn to for the highest quality educational and cultural opportunities. The college will serve as a model of distinction for community college education." (Source: [www.cod.edu/mission\\_priorities/mission.htm](http://www.cod.edu/mission_priorities/mission.htm))

It is recommended that these resources be recruited to be more involved in the Downtown events and activities. In addition, all efforts need to be coordinated with the Village of Glen Ellyn and other community groups.

## Other Resources

In addition to the community organizations and public resources, other entities are providing their resources to help the Glen Ellyn community.

**How to grow your own business...**  
a 6 part series for small business owners

Second Tuesday of every month  
6-8 p.m. Beginning May 13, 2008  
Glen Ellyn Public Library  
400 Duane St  
For questions and registration, contact:  
Tracy Kirchoff, Harris Bank Glen Ellyn  
(630) 547-5711

**Part 1:** The first steps in starting a business  
**Part 2:** Marketing How to  
**Part 3:** Legal advice for business owners  
**Part 4:** Financing Options  
**Part 5:** Bookkeeping and Software  
**Part 6:** Business plans

**From planting the seed to nurturing for success.**  
Free seminars are presented by:

**SCORE**  
Counselors to America's Small Business

**HARRIS**  
We're here to help.

**Let us help you grow your business!**

### Harris Bank/SCORE

Harris Bank, in cooperation with SCORE (Counselors to America's Small Business), has developed a six-month free seminar program to help small businesses get started and grow. The sessions are held at the Glen Ellyn Public Library on the second Tuesday of each month, from May 13, 2008, to October 14, 2008.

### DuPage Public Action to Deliver Shelter (PADS), Inc.

The mission of DuPage PADS is "to end and prevent homelessness in DuPage County." This organization was mentioned many times throughout the public participation process. As of the writing of this report, the Glen Ellyn Police Department is investigating the homeless situation in the Downtown area.

## Media

There are numerous media outlets that support communication in Glen Ellyn and the surrounding communities. These outlets need to be a part of the overall promotion and communications efforts for the Downtown. A "brand" for the Downtown should be determined during the planning process or right after the adoption of the Downtown Strategic Plan during the early stages of implementation. The brand name should be simple and have positive qualities.<sup>1</sup> Many of the Downtown stores and organizations currently utilize the "Glen Ellyn Style" logo and imagery. A new focus for the Downtown may result from the strategic planning process; therefore, this brand should be revisited if it doesn't emulate the new Downtown vision.

<sup>1</sup> The Importance of Branding – Can it Really Make a Difference? [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Charles\\_Fuchs](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Charles_Fuchs).

### Internet – Village Website

www.glenellyn.org

### Cable

"Glen Ellyn Television" is the Village's public access cable channel on Channel 17 (via Comcast and Wide Open West). Local interest programs such as community news, local sports, and entertainment are Glen Ellyn Television broadcasting examples. The community is allowed to make programming requests.

### Local Print

Daily Herald

Chicago Tribune - DuPage Editorial Bureau

The Glen Ellyn News

Glen Ellyn Sun

Courier (College of DuPage Campus Newspaper)

Danby - Glen Ellyn Life Magazine

The Business Ledger

The Glancer Magazine

School News

### Local Radio

WDCB Radio (College of DuPage Radio)

WHTN Radio (Wheaton College Radio)

## **Key Thoughts**

The Village of Glen Ellyn has a strong history from which to build upon. It is recommended that the roots of the community be nurtured and incorporated into the branding of the Downtown; the historic character of the Downtown be maintained, enhanced, and complemented by future development; the events be enhanced to draw more residents and visitors into the Downtown, as well as be supported by the Downtown merchants; and the community organizations coordinate and/or merge with each other to streamline the communication and interaction between the Village, the merchants, the residents and the visitors, as well as eliminate duplication of efforts. These recommendations will be further refined and examined later in the full report.